

JUMP START TO THE DIVINE----FEMININE!

July 14, 2013, 10:30 am

with Ellen Dionne

I'm going to talk this morning about some Divine Feminine Archetypes. Archetypes are not something we come at intellectually, however much Jung and Campbell you read, they are something we all literally carry with us—we *embody* them, we *feel* them. They tingle in our skin, thump us in the solar plexus, radiate in our hearts and loins. They are cross-cultural supernovas of human experience—and we deny their existence and their power to our peril. The Divine Feminine dances in male and female psyches—read that “souls”—with gender egalitarian impartiality. So men, don't think this is a service in which you can tune out—that it's all about “her”. And even if it were, which it's decidedly not!—you are all familiar with the archetypes of Mother, Grandmother, Damsel, Prostitute, and Witch. They live in your women and in your souls. Which one of those most glitched your gut?

I think this sermon subject is the hardest one I've ever had to get a handle on and condense for a twenty minute talk. I've been studying and reading and fretting and living with Goddesses and the Ancestors and my feminine and masculine relatives, and my own ban sidhe (literally in Irish, “faerie woman”), my own ban sidhe-screaming inner Divine for weeks as I try to shape the magnitude of this into something with which you might awaken. Because unlike the masculine (and let me be clear right from the beginning this is not limited to “male” as the divine feminine is definitely not limited to “female”)—unlike the masculine, head and thought oriented religious approaches, the divine feminine wants your passion, your feelings, and your body—all of it!)

Sera Beak, Harvard Theological School grad and scholar of comparative religions, writes this in her book, RED HOT & HOLY, “According to many spiritual beliefs, the Divine Feminine *is* life force—a cosmic force that streams and streaks through every living thing. But unfortunately orthodoxy has never approved of streaking. Teri Degler tells us that the twentieth century Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin ‘perceived this force in the rocks, stones, and cliffs of his native Auvergne and called it the “*crimson* glow of matter and the “divine radiating from the blazing depths of matter.” He even saw the pulsing, creative force as a feminine one. Much to the consternation of the Church, he even came to call it “the eternal feminine: and to write about it extensively.

How did the Catholic Church respond to de Chardin's heretical declarations? They banished his ass to the farthest reaches of Mongolia. The twelfth century female Catholic mystic Hildegard of Bingen courageously sang love songs to this luminous force sometimes called the Holy Spirit in Christianity....

Yep, the D.F. is the Creative Oomph of the Universe that is right here, right now rushing through your veins, shaking Her sparkly pompoms and hollering “Go, Baby, Go!!!” But all Her fire and spice and not everything nice can’t stream through us full force on Earth if we’re up in the clouds counting spiritual sheep.”

So let’s start with Eve archetype. Good old Judaic creation story. Eve’s story of her betrayal of God’s trust and her seduction of Adam resounds punitively in every western woman’s and every girl-child’s soul. The power of what was supposedly Eve’s shame pervades the very molecules of every western *person’s* holistic experience—body/mind/heart and spirit. From how many pulpits on this holy day is that insidious lie being preached as gospel? How many women this week will be abused by how many men given permission by that myth to further defile and shame? How many women will be told by male clergy they must submit?

The early Christian leader, Tertullian, says to women: “You are the Devil’s gateway.” This dictum informs how every woman feels about her body, her heart and her spirit—no matter how her intelligent mind may rationalize otherwise. And as an aside, the Eden creation myth doesn’t do much for serpents or snakes either. It’s no accident that in ancient times in many cultures Snakes were associated with divine feminine wisdom, with priestess prophesying, and with women’s potent and transformational sexuality. And later, they along with women themselves, were demonized.

The myth of the Female destruction of a male-created Paradise seeps into our pores—becoming an interior “pore-tal” to self-abasement and cosmic guilt. We are here to please men, and in that process to stifle our sacred knowing. Period. Or should I say, “menses”? (I’m coining a new word here: pore-tal—those doorways through our very pores that we know in goose bumps, osmosis, knowing what we don’t know we know....pore-tal!)

There is one early Christian exception: the Gnostics. The Gnostics regarded Eve as a liberator, a source of deep spiritual awakening. Elaine Pagels who wrote *The Gnostic Gospels* quotes the ancient texts which say Eve was the “perfect primal intelligence” who is the bearer of “spiritual illumination”. The Gnostics were of course declared heretical by leaders like Tertullian.

But it isn’t Eve that bears the archetype of the Great or Holy Mother Goddess. While She comes to us by many names and from virtually every culture, I am going to focus on two of her divinities this morning: the Hindu Kali and the Christian and Islamic Mary.

Why do you suppose every man I know, if he admits it, quakes at the name, not to mention the sight of, Kali? And why do you suppose every woman I know and have done deep work

with greets Kali with gut gnawing discomfort? Because of her fearless revelation of the totality of the transformational feminine qualities of the Great Mother Creatrix—and, yes, Destroyer. Kali, the dark goddess, dancing naked, blood-dripping from her lolling tongue, the severed head of a man in one of her many hands, a clattering necklace of skulls draped over her luscious breasts. In an aside here, I have to say that the adage giving advice to the little woman “the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach” distinctly didn’t come from Kali. She obviously must have believed that to cut off a man’s head eliminated the means to the stomach and without “rational mind” he was open to be present to his bleeding heart. Let me say that again.... And I remind you, somebody’s heart has to bleed! Here is the Mother each of us knows—the one who brought us in, and the one, in every molecule of our Inner Child beings we secretly, dreadfully know can take us out. Here for men is the Divine Feminine who can and will most assuredly kill you, and for Everywoman is the stark reality of what she is capable of doing. Kali is ancient and while in the Hindu pantheon, is a universal divine energetic force. There is no hidden Shadow here—Kali brings it all nakedly right out there! To mature spiritually and emotionally, to inwardly heal from whatever the wounds our human mothers inflicted, we must have the wisdom to surrender to Kali. To say, yes, I know you. Yes, I am mortal—yes I know this warrior woman Mother who, some psychologists, myself included, believe is the *real* power behind the Oedipal myth: for Oedipus, long before sexually desiring and unknowingly married his mother, had been set out *by her!* to die of exposure. Yes, every infant knows in her utter dependency that her Mother brought her in, and she is at her Mother’s mercy to determine whether she will survive. And every boy-child wrestles psychologically with his desire to possess his mother, and every girl-child confronts the reality that she becomes her mother. “Mirror, mirror on the wall, I am my mother after all!” Powerful stuff these divine women. Powerful stuff your human mother.

Kali is also a warrior goddess, perhaps the most ancient among many—Athena in Greece comes to mind, and in the Celtic pantheon we know of Scathach, for whom the Isle of Skye is named and who, as with many Celtic gods and goddesses, is probably based on an historic figure—as Celtic scholar Caitlin Matthews says, “Most cultures view their myths historically, the Celts view their history mythically.” Scathach was a dark goddess who trained Celtic warriors on her island of Skye, both men and women—the Celts were a truly egalitarian culture; the Roman legions were terrified when they first encountered the Celts in battle because they swept into battle naked, wielding weapons and screaming a hair-raising battle cry—which later became famous here as the Rebel yell when immigrants from Ireland and Scotland fought on the side of the Confederacy in our Civil War. Most western women got tamed before the Romans ruled the western world, but not the Celts. And it took many

centuries for the Roman Catholic Church to bring the fiercely independent, gender-egalitarian Celtic Christian Church under its dominion.

But I digress—though not far....not far....

Let's take a look at another, more familiar Mother Archetype—that of Our Lady, Queen of Heaven, Star of the Seas, Mother Mary whose actual roots go back to Ishtar, the Babylonian-Sumerian Great Goddess, and Isis, the Egyptian deity. Madonna Mary's story brings us the archetypes of The Great Mother, The Divine Child, The Virgin Birth, and The Dying God.

China Galland in her book, *Longing for Darkness: Tara and the Black Madonna*, says "...whether it's condoned or not, the worship of Mary is practiced by many people, acknowledging a reality in Mary much greater than is admitted by the institutional church." What she is talking about here is worship of a powerful, intercessory, divine, Great Mother, not the pathetically sweet and all-suffering, weakened Mary both the official Catholic and Protestant churches have devised. I confess I myself am a Mary worshipper. And she came to me in a most surprising way—especially for a third-generation UU. But then, Jesus and the Holy Spirit and Teilhard de Chardin's God, "the diaphany of the divine at the heart of the universe on fire" came intimately to me that way, too. Spiritual back doors and molecular pore-tals are mysterious, the insistence of the visitations whelming. But I digress, sort of, again....

In March 2000 I planned a solitary, deeply spiritual pilgrimage to ancient sites and to certain cathedrals in England and Wales. It was daunting, and it was a spiritual imperative. I had never been abroad, had never rented a car by myself, had never booked a room by myself, had never, obviously driven on the other side of the road, and had never traveled alone for two weeks. All of which were required of me. I had no set itinerary and was to be out of touch with Arthur, who kept the home fires literally burning in our mountain home in Vermont.

In the weeks before my departure I had two vivid archetypal dreams that informed my pilgrimage. In the second I was walking beside Pope John Paul II in the formal gardens of the Vatican. We walked slowly, he in his white papal robes with his hands clasped behind his back. He stopped walking and I, too, paused. He looked at me with great wise tenderness and said, "You must reverse your betrayal of Mary." I was stunned. I had no idea what he meant! I opened my mouth to speak, but he turned then and continued walking ahead, leaving me standing bewildered on the garden path. I woke immediately knowing this was a profound spiritual message. The innate gentleness and authentic goodness of this pope was palpable to

me, and though I was not Catholic I felt humbled by his presence and his message. But what the hell did it mean?!

So, with no intent or design on my part, Mary became a part of my pilgrimage. I quested with her, held her in my heart, wondered about her and the weird message constantly. I took her to the Chalice Well in Glastonbury, one of the holiest places I have ever been, and prayed and sat with her there. Joseph of Arimathea is supposed to have hidden the Holy Grail at that well. With me, Mary became that Holy Grail. On impulse, because I had time, I decided to travel from Chalice Well to the small city of Wells a few miles away. I walked down the ancient streets where water overflowing from the sacred wells gurgled down the channeled stone gutter—I followed the flow upstream to the grand cathedral on the central green. The immensity of its presence was staggering. I can feel its energy as I write this. The towering wooden doors were open and I entered the shadowy narthex throwing my head back to gaze at the enormous ancient beams that held the sanctuary aloft. I felt a nudge at my shoulder and a man—a docent I thought—handed me a pamphlet. I absently thanked him and went back to open-mouthed gazing. Then a gentle, firm hand at my elbow and a gesture that I was to take a seat in a pew. It was only then I realized I had entered as a service was about to begin, and the cathedral held about 2,000 worshippers. There was nothing decent or mannerly for it, but to do as I was guided. Great! I thought! Now I'm stuck in some stuffy Anglican mass.

Wrong. I looked at the program I'd been handed and saw it was the Easter service, and the Wells Cathedral School choirs would be providing the music. And it was virtually all American Negro Spirituals! My Mary about doubled over with wickedly gleeful delight. Her story. Her Son. Her motherly endurance of the worst a parent can know tied to the suffering of the African American slaves. Hello! "You must reverse your betrayal of Mary." I fell into her embrace and wept through the most rich and vibrant and sorrowful and glorious and utterly redemptive worship I have ever attended.

Mary—Beloved Mary—mentor, guardian, goddess, teacher, holy woman, Mother, yes, Mother and friend. Mary of Sass, Mary of Courage—YOU get told at 14 you are going to bear the Holy Child in a land where you know that means you will be pursued and hunted and your precious baby stolen from you and killed—Mary of Joy, Mary of Sun, Moon and Stars, Mary of Infinite Patience—YOU deal with a precocious, genius, heretical Son!, Mary of Ultimate Acceptance, Mary of Grace, Mary of Mercy, and yes, Mary of Unconditional Love.

In March of this year I learned that my youngest child, beloved Son Franklin, has a rare form of bone marrow lymphoma for which he has received many rounds of chemo—his own tortures.

Mary has been with me every step of the way. It is Mary who has held me and rocked me, Mary who has knelt beside me, her hand stroking my hair, when I could not rise from the floor,— Mary—She Who Understands, for She has been here, too. So, yes, I have been a closet UU Mary devotee for 13 years now. Mary is in my garden, indeed it is for Mary I create gardens, from the archetype of She Who is The Fountain greening deserts. Mary has sown and watered and cultivated my inner deserts. And it is Mary who will be at my deathbed. I know this.

And there is another Mary I cannot leave you without celebrating: Mary, Our Lady of Guadalupe. Mary the Dark Mother, lustrous, glowing brown-skinned goddess birthed from the ancient Mayan and Aztec Creatrix goddesses. Some of us white folks were more perfectly mothered, especially in the adoring, nurturant archetypal sense, by women with beautiful brown skin than we were by our birth mothers. The book and movie “The Help” present us with this Divine Mother archetype. And I remember vividly from my earliest childhood my tall, dark and dignified surrogate mother, Martha, she whose pure white embroidered Sunday linen handkerchief I profusely bloodied when she cradled and cooed to me in her lap after my tooth pierced my lip when Daddy suddenly braked the car—while my own mother told me “You can be hurt without crying.”

Our Lady of Guadalupe embodies the nurturance and the deep sorrows of the oppressed peoples of Mexico and Central America. And she harks back to the great cultures from which those peoples came. It was a Nahuatl man, the Spanish called them Aztecs, whose Spanish name was Don Diego, but whose Nahuatl name is translated Speaking Eagle, who saw the vision of Our Lady of Guadalupe—this divine, dark Mary who has become a most beloved icon. Yes, this Divine Mother is merciful and humble, but she also, as Clara Pinkola Estes says, “does not encourage her sons and daughters who have been broken to walk as weaklings in the world.

“Rather she calls for those broken to walk as warriors. For those who are devoted to speak *of her* and *for her* in this world, she asks that they enact her holy heart by unfurling the ancient virtues of strength and sheltering, speaking up, standing up, taking action, and creating works in her name and in the name of the God of Love she brought to Earth, and especially, intervening for the sake of goodness and mercy.” This persona of the Divine Mother born of the culture of some of the most oppressed peoples on the planet, those who survived the greedy, murderous ravages of the Spanish Conquistadores.

Hola!, mia Madre! Gracias, gracias, gracias...!!

And last this morning, the Great Earth Mother—Grandmother Earth of our First Nations, known by many names in every round rim of our planet. Mother of Paradise, The Great Mother Goddess whose very spirit is embodied in the rivers, mountains, forests, and oceans of this blue-green globe. As do aboriginal peoples around the world consider themselves children of this Great Mother, so did the Celts, and even though Celtic peoples have adapted to the influence of their conquerors—the Romans and Anglo-Saxons, there remains the deep ultra-terrestrial reverence for this precious planet, for the land itself, through which the spirit of our Mother sings. There are amazing similarities between the spiritual sensibilities of the Celts and the Native Americans. Their cosmic view, their shamanistic approach to the universality of Spirit and their reverence for every minute expression of the Life of the Earth Mother persists in spite of, in both cases, the influence of western religion, predominantly Catholicism. In both cultures, and by virtue of the fact we inhabit Indian Land—land imbued for millennia by the First Nations-- and because in so many millions of us Celtic blood flows I am using these up close and personal examples—offerings are made to features and spirits of the land—to stones, wells, rivers, lakes, mountains and trees. We worship at our Mother's breast and celebrate her lifeblood—the waters of this sacred home we call Earth. No diabolis. No separation. She is us. We harm Her, we injure and poison ourselves. The most current quantum physics tells us the devotees of the Great Cosmic Mother are, and have for eons, been right. We are One. The Big Bang was a SheBang!

In the coronation ceremony the monarch of England is wedded to the land—yes! Married to the land! This from the pre-Christian Celtic belief that if a ruler's spouse is the land, the monarch will then protect and preserve her. Imagine if in our Inauguration ceremonies we performed a ceremony in which our President and Vice-President, yes, and in our case, throw in the Congress, too!--not only took oaths to uphold the Constitution, but symbolically married the *Land*! How then might we see examples of reverence and preservation rather than the blasphemy of rampant exploitation and rape of our planet?

We live in times of great peril—and of opportunity for luminous transformation. People in Europe in the Middle Ages lived in times of great peril that ended with the great Renaissance. Why do you suppose during those centuries of unending war and conquest, the Crusades and the Great Plague, in a mere 150 years, over 500 magnificent gothic cathedrals were built? And every single one of them dedicated to Mary.

We've all heard of Darwin's survival of the fittest, and we've all heard that embedded in our ancient lizard brains—the amygdala we all intellectually like to think we don't have—is the instinct when presented with a threat to flee or fight. Well, folks, interestingly there is a divinely feminine approach that may trump those archetypally masculine ways of being.

Decades *before* Darwin a scientist named Lamarck proposed that evolution was based on successful *cooperation* within a species, not competition. Oh, Mama! Glory hallelujah!! Let's tell the US Congress that!! Have you noticed it's Republican and Democratic *women* in Congress who are cooperating across party lines?! Republican Senator Susan Collins, by the way, from a long line of Maine UUs. I digress—but only slightly.

And now I want to remind you about the behavior of the woman in the Jumper Cable reading. In studies with girls and women who are presented with a threat we find a distinctly different response from fight or flight—and folks—that divinely feminine response has been named the mend and tend response. How about that?! Yo! Mama!! Where oh where might we be, dear friends, if we gave the Divine Feminine a chance? If we gave values of cooperation over competition and mend and tend over fight or flee a chance? If we loved the Cosmos as our Divine Mother? If we honored equally the divine wisdom, named Sophia, by the way, of Mary and Jesus equally—and if ever there was a man who was in touch with his inner divine feminine it was Jesus! If we embraced each other in this congregation at this critical juncture in our corporate history with mending and tending instead of fighting or fleeing?

We UU's need to mend and tend to the spiritual homelessness that reviling and ignoring the Divine Feminine has wrought. The Divine Feminine insists that we keep our messy humanity, and She aches for us, as Mother and Lover. She asks that we open the very pores of our Beings to become pore-tals—to open to our passionate physicality and our emotional attachments and longings. She yearns for us to be in deep, physical, conscious relationship with Earth—with our souls *and Earth*, not from a remote, transcendent spirituality, but from a hands on, down and dirty in the Garden of Paradise, for goddess' sake! awareness of our whole, wild, and immense possibilities—through our sensual, embodied spirituality.

Oh, Divine One, Great Cosmic Birther and Deather, Merciful Healer, Tender and Mender—we need your wisdom. May we make now, of the deserts we have created, in our hearts and on our precious planet, gardens watered by your Grace.

Blessed Be.