

The Ninefold Sisterhood

The Maiden, Mother and Crone Aspects of Maiden, Mother and Crone.

In the early 1970's a change in Western culture and awareness took place. This modern revolution brought Feminist thought and Earth based Spirituality together and into the light of popular culture. Feminist Spirituality, Women's Spirituality and Womanist Spirituality all came out this melding of the women's movement and the rise of alternative religions and spiritual forms which honored the Earth and all Her children. Women around the world began to reach out to this new way of expressing what was deep within their very being. With the work of authors such as Marija Gimbutas who explored the archeo-mythology of Goddess worshipping peoples of the Paleolithic era and Robert Graves' collection of Celtic mythic poetry which showed an image of a Triple Goddess of the moon, an image was formed of a Goddess who was the counter point to the Monotheistic, patriarchal One God of the Judeo-Christian world. This Great Goddess had three aspects that corresponded with the three phases of the moon – waxing, full and waning. Many saw in her cyclical nature, the cycles of a woman's life from birth, to death and rebirth and from child to bleeding woman to life giver, to mature wise woman. "The moon," says Hilda Ellis Davidson in her book Roles of the Northern Goddess, "linked the goddess with measurement of time and with the tides, as well as with women's menstrual periods and the nine months' growth of the child in the womb. It has been suggested that the three faces of the moon, the new moon, full moon and waning moon, could correspond with the three aspects of the goddess in later times."¹ In her ground breaking 1979 book The Spiral Dance; A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess, author and Feminist witch Starhawk crystallized these thoughts of a Great Triple Moon Goddess into the image we are most familiar with today, that of the Maiden, Mother and Crone. "The Moon Goddess has three aspects: As She waxes, She is the Maiden; full, She is the Mother; as She wanes, She is the Crone."² One compelling image / archetype / Goddess mirroring the three phases of a woman's life that correspond with the three ever changing and renewing phases of the moon.

As a priestess and modern witch I have worked with this image of the Goddess for many years. I have worked with this Triple Goddess as metaphor, seeing value in the distinction of each phase and using the defining aspects of the Maiden in my personal growth and healing. I have worked with Her as an immanent and transcendent Divine form, walking the Maiden's path and relishing my own Maidenhood. Yet six months before the day I was to be married, and leave my Maidenhood behind forever, I found myself face to face not with the Triple Goddess, but with a Goddess who had nine faces. I found myself, as Maiden on the verge of meeting the Mother, standing before a mirror of three Maidens, and staring down a hallway at rooms with three Mothers, and three Crones.

At the time of my discovery I was a Maiden who had delved deeply into the act of being, living, working and serving my community as a Maiden. At 26 I had created for myself a ritual to honor and recognize my Maidenhood. A few months later I took an oath of celibacy to learn the deeper meaning of a Maiden as "one alone unto herself". I became a woman defined by no man. I was living 3,000 miles away from my father, had no lovers and

¹ Davidson, Hilda Ellis, *Roles of the Northern Goddess*, Routledge, London and New York, 1998. Page 6.

² Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, HarperSanFrancisco 1979, 1989. Page 92.

no brothers to answer to. I became my own embodiment of the Maiden Goddess. Five years later, I was no longer an innocent Maiden just taking her first steps on the road to womanhood. I was deeply in love with my partner, and very involved with planning my wedding to this man. I was becoming a woman bound up with a man and the partnership we were establishing. I was also at a place of endings. I had just completed 4 years of graduate work, I had moved out of a house and a family which had been a nurturing and healing place, and starting my own house with my partner. I was saying good bye to what I had been, experiencing in many ways, a death of myself.

As a Maiden Priestess I experienced all three faces of the Triple Goddess over the course of several years. I was the innocent maiden, alone unto myself, living beyond any man's house, and exploring the wonders of my new "adult" life. I was the mother/lover giving birth to a theater company, a play and a master's thesis, in deep partnership with my lover and irreverent exploration with my brother. I was the crone cutting the ties of one phase of life to make way for a new set of experiences, closing the door on my years at school and saying goodbye to loved ones. Yet I was always the Maiden. On the eve of my wedding I was entering the Mother phase of the Goddesses cycle, but I was not a mother. I was neither Maiden in full form, nor Mother in full function. I did not know what I was or where I stood in relation to the Goddess/Woman cycle that I had been working with.

In order to understand, or at least give words to, what I was experiencing, I was forced to look beyond the metaphor and the Goddess that I was used to, to see the metaphor and Goddesses beyond. Behind the Triple Goddess of Maiden, Mother and Crone there lies a Nine-fold sisterhood of Goddesses, or nine reflections of one Great Goddess. For each phase of the Goddess that Starhawk named Maiden, Mother and the Crone, I found a Maiden aspect, a Mother aspect and a Crone aspect. Each of these sub-phases augments the qualities and actions of the main phase. This can be represented for the Maiden as the Maiden-Maiden aspect, the Mother-Maiden aspect and the Crone-Maiden aspect.

While we each define our interaction of the Triple Goddess in our own terms and understand Her three faces in the light of our mirrors, there are commonalties which have been defined by scholars, priest/ess and writers over the years.

Common themes surrounding the Maiden aspect of the Triple Goddess are: the color white, the waxing phase of the moon, young woman, youthfulness, individual, bound to no man/partner³. Goddesses commonly associated with the Maiden are Diana, Brigit, Kore, and....

(Supportive documentation)

Common themes surrounding the Mother aspect of the Triple Goddess are: the color red, the full moon, the married or relationally bonded woman, motherhood, giving birth to children, projects, or ideas. Goddesses commonly associated with the Mother are Demeter, Persephone, Hera, Frigg, Sif, and...

³ While this phrase is generally stated in or from a heterosexual context, the concept is applicable to any sexual orientation if we define this as "bound to no partner", the core concept being that the Maiden is not legally or emotionally bound to another person, man, woman or child.

(Supportive documentation)

Common themes surrounding the Crone aspect of the Triple Goddess are: the color black,

The Three Maidens

Maiden-Maiden

The Maiden phase of the Maiden is the youngest of all the faces of the Goddess and of womanhood. This is the girl child who has just bled for the first time, just had her Maidening ritual, and just been welcomed into the world of women. She is wild and free, excited by the possibilities ahead of her. Everything but childhood is waiting for her now. She is the innocent Kore who hasn't yet seen Hades' flower.

Mother-Maiden

The Mother phase of the Maiden is a more experienced woman. She has probably begun to have an active sex life. She will be deeply involved with the creative forces flowing through and around her. She is centered in the richness of herself and her experience, and she is enjoying the fullness of the moment. She is Kore dancing in the fields.

Crone-Maiden

The Crone aspect of the Maiden is the worldliest of the Maidens. She has seen and experienced the freedom and diversity of Maidenhood. She has enjoyed her unattached status, and is now ready to be a partner, to put her experiences to work as a consort and a parent. She is the Goddess choosing to become a Mother. She is Kore accepting her fate, and picking the Narcissus.

“The function of the goddess must, to a certain extent, reflect the function of the woman, and her most potent and striking characteristics. The emphasis laid on the various spheres over which the goddesses presided must, of course, vary according to the economic organization and geographical situation of the different tribes, but the spheres of influence themselves must be universal. For example, there is no trace of a Celtic goddess of love, but all the goddesses share in having marked sexual characteristics, and no matter what their individual departments of influence sexuality and maternity are their fundamental concerns.”

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⁴Ross, Anne *Pagan Celtic Britain; Studies in Iconography and Tradition*, Academy Chicago Publishers, Chicago, 1996. Originally published in 1967. Page 265.