

Our Mothers; Our Goddesses: Celebrating the Power of the Feminine

by Nick Gier

One night several years ago I had a very vivid dream about my mother. I had invited her to my Moscow home, and she appeared in the front yard in the full bloom of her womanhood. Dressed in her casual jeans and checkered blouse, she and her beautiful red hair shone in the morning sun.

We went into the backyard and, looming over “University Ridge,” was a snow-capped peak. We looked to the left and there was another beautiful mountain. I said to my Mom: “Let’s go take a look.” I took her hand and we flew up into the air, just like Mary Poppins. As we approached the mountain, we started to lose altitude.

In desperation I said: “Let’s flap our arms!” It was no use, but some gentle force allowed us to make a soft landing in a meadow.

“She makes me lie down in green meadows, beside the still waters, She will lead.” (Bobby McFerrin’s 23rd Psalm dedicated to his mother.)

“Whoa,” you say, “there’s no Goddess in the Bible!” Yes, there is, but Hebrew patriarchs nearly succeeded in erasing her from the text. “Yahweh (Jehovah) and his Asherah” is found in at least two ancient inscriptions, and Jeroboam, Rehoboam, and Jezebel promoted her worship (1 Kings 14:15, 23; 18:19). Celebrating the Goddess, the people of Judah baked “cakes for the Queen of Heaven” (Jer. 7:18).

(For more check out *The Hebrew Goddess* by Raphael Patai and William Dever, *Did God Have a Wife?* Dever’s publisher is Eerdmans, an evangelical Christian press.)

Returning to my failed flight to the mountains, my own beloved, a goddess in her own right, reminded me: “You are a student of Hinduism, and you know that the Himalayan peaks are goddesses.” Unlike the Hindus of Nepal, the Buddhists of Bhutan keep a respective distance from the Goddess (Mom and I did not), and their kings always banned mountaineering in their own Himalayas.

Male gods such as Jehovah play a zero-sum game with power: they have all of it and we have none. The Hindu Goddess is significantly different: she shares power with all beings, and she is the power behind all beings, including the gods.

The male gods Shiva and Krishna admit this. Here is Krishna’s confession to his consort Radha: “Without you, I Krishna am inert and am always powerless. You have all powers (*shakti*) as your own form; come into my presence.” Similarly, Shiva admits to his wife Parvati: “With you I can create all things. Without you I am powerless and like a corpse.”

Women express *shakti* power more directly and openly. They are the nurturers and the healers. They are generally more expressive of their emotions, while men have been taught to conceal their feelings, even though they express shakti power in their intellects, sports, business competition, violence, and war.

More fundamentally, of course, women gestate and give birth to new human beings, and most males have always been afraid of that power. Some scholars have found, for example, a connection between Asherah and Eve as “the Mother of the all the Living” (Gen. 3:20).

Just like the Force in *Star Wars*, each one of us can take our shakti power to the dark side. My mother had many dark moments, and I have come to better understand why this was so. She was a very talented woman who had many aspirations. She could have been a very

successful business woman if given opportunity and support. Those were absent in the prime years of her life.

One of the most provocative interpretations of the Hindu Goddess Kali, the most terrifying expression of Shiva's wife, is that she is the incarnation of the pent-up rage, frustration, and resentment of Indian women who have been, and continue to be, oppressed for thousands of years.

Male Hindu priests still control the Goddess temples and the worship that occurs there. And tragically, there is still far too much bride burning and honor killings by Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim males.

In my study of the world's religions I have found only two spiritual masters who have given clear preference for women and the feminine. The first is Laozi and the second is Jesus of Nazareth.

Laozi, purported author of the Dao De Jing, explained how the feminine Yin in flowing water eventually triumphs over the male Yang in stone. He writes that "the Dao is the Mother of the World" (chap. 25), and "the gateway of the Subtle Female is the source of the Heaven and Earth" (chap. 6).

Jesus clearly favors the women in his life over the men, who are sometimes clueless and cowardly. It is the women who stay with him until the end, and Mary Magdalene is the first to witness the Risen Christ.

Even the great Christian patriarch Augustine called Mary Magdalene "the Apostle to the Apostles." Paul traveled with women and they were treated as equals in his missionary work. The first churches were in women's homes where there is pictorial evidence of them officiating at the Eucharist.

Ideally, we should seek to balance the Yin and Yang (it is basis for Chinese medicine), but the Yang has dominated far too much in all cultures. I therefore join Jesus and Laozi in emphasizing the feminine until Yin takes its proper place in nature and society.

For this Mother's Day I propose that we bow to our mothers and say: "I salute the Goddess in you and may your shakti power bless and makes us whole." We may also want to bake a batch of cookies for the Queen of Heaven.

And guys, when you wake up next to your beloved, tell her that you think she is a goddess. I can assure you that will make her day and may well improve your relationship.

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