

Mother Earth:
A Global Myth for a Planet in Crisis

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“The only myth that is going
to be worth thinking about
in the immediate future is
one that is talking about
the planet...and everybody
on it...This might be the
symbol, really, for the
new mythology to come.”

~ Joseph Campbell

TIMELINE: A SPIRAL



The koru, which is often used in Māori art as a symbol of creation, resembles an unfurling fern frond. Its circular shape conveys the idea of perpetual movement, and its inward coil suggests a return to the point of origin.

To

Will Star Heart Taegel

elder, mentor, teacher, friend

and the embodiment of Mother Earth's wild heart

Acknowledgments

So much gratitude to the Great Mother in her infinite forms, who has birthed, nourished, enriched and supported life's astounding journey; and to my own mother, Mary Lou Rawlings, who has done the same for me in so many countless and unforgettable ways.

I love you.

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Abstract

My dissertation rests on two presuppositions: That myth is an inherent aspect of human society, and that we are a global society without an adequate universal mythology. Examination of the evolution of Myth and Science reveals how each informs our relationship with Earth and highlights my underlying premise: *If humanity hopes to survive amidst our growing planetary devastation, we need a universal mythology, inspired by our ancient and indigenous myths and current scientific thought, which embraces Earth as the Divine Feminine archetype.* Further, climate change is initiating the birth of this global mythology. Through Organic Inquiry, through a unique synthesis of mythological and scientific perspectives, and reflections of my own personal journey culminating in my Earth Ministry Ordination, we discover society awakening to what humans have always known: that all things are interconnected, sacred, and part of a greater whole, a consciousness desperately needed for a balanced and healthy planet.



You are meandering down a dirt path, with a great meadow stretched out on either side of you. These are the last days of winter, and the meadow is brown and wet with snowmelt. The sky is gray overhead, a full moon rising above the horizon. You see an old, gnarled tree, alone amongst the grasses, and the path you are walking leads to it.

You greet Grandmother Tree, and She offers a greeting in return. Sitting on the ground, you place the back of your heart against her bark, feeling her through the soft cloth of your shirt. You tip your chin skyward, lifting your gaze, and see the barren branches sprawl against the gray sky. You hear the call of Crow from the tree canopy. You listen more closely... Curiously you understand him! He is saying something to you... instructions.... Telling you to look down between the wide roots of the tree, where they fork outward. In the crevice, underneath the dried leaves, you notice a rabbit-sized hole. You kneel and begin to move the leaves out of the way, and the hole is wider than you realized at first... in fact, it is just a bit wider than your shoulders. You notice a rough stony staircase leading downward. You look up, thank Crow for showing you, and with a deep breath, you descend.

Each step leads you down further into the dark earth. You smell the damp soil, feel the cold dirt walls; your head dips below the earth, and there is darkness all around, though the light still shines from above. As you carefully continue walking downward, it grows even darker and quieter; the cawing of the crows is gone, the light from above disappears. Your heart is beating fast, the air is cold, but you are not afraid, only curious. Where does this staircase lead?

You feel the stairs end and feel the mossy stone walls of a long tunnel winding its way underground. Your hands follow along the walls, the stones slick with moisture. Soon, up ahead, you see a dim light. You walk towards it, your eyes beginning to see the details around you. You hear the trickle of water, you smell wet stone, the air is cleansing. Soon the tunnel opens into a small domed room. Red ochre paintings of deer, moons, suns, hares, flowers, spirals, circles, trees, and birds cover the walls.

An old woman is weaving by a small fire, her hair silver and long, her skin deeply wrinkled and white as snow. She is weaving with golden thread, and you watch her gnarled hands move deftly, weaving the tapestry of the world, weaving the stories of all the souls who once danced on this earth. There are baskets overflowing with bones scattered about the small underground womb like cave. A hare with long ears and whiskers sleeps by her feet on a small round braided rug, and a cauldron bubbles over the fire, filled with seeds and roots and all the ingredients for new life.

She has been here since time began. She is the collector of bones, the keeper of stories, of memories, of wisdom. She is Bone Mother, the Old Hag of Winter, Grandmother Spider, Deer Mother, the Crone, the Cailleach. She weaves memories, she stirs the cauldron, she feeds the fire, in a never-ending cycle of existence... Bone Woman does not look up, but nonetheless calls to you. "Come here, Child, sit by my wheel and warm yourself by the fire. I have a story to tell you..."

~ re-interpreted from the Slavik myth "Bone Mother."

PREFACE

“The Goddess in all her manifestations was a symbol of the unity of all life in Nature. Her power was in water and in stone, in tomb and cave, in animals and birds, snakes and fish, hill, trees, and flowers.”

~ Marija Gimbutas

All rivers flow back toward the Primordial Mother Ocean, out of which all of life has come forth, as well as the stories that speak of this creation. Like the tides that come and go, that birth new lands and reclaim them in an infinite cycle of existence, we arrive now in this time and place on the precipice of change. A spiritual recalibration is being called for, one where humans and nature are in harmony. With it, a new story, inspired by our ancient and indigenous myths as well as our newer sciences, is arriving on our shores once again. It is a story that has been carried through the morphogenetic field¹ of time whose ancient patterns and codes are forming and informing a global myth that may save the planet as we know it: Earth as our Mother.

My Doctor of Ministry dissertation offers an overarching view of the span of the human story as it relates to the Divine Feminine and our relationship with Earth. It is interwoven with mythologies and scientific philosophies from across the globe and throughout time. The myths I share draw upon my personal experiences through my global Goddess Pilgrimages, as well as from my impressions of the places I have visited and the people I have met on my travels: the guardians of the land, medicine men and women, priestesses and druids, healers and midwives, poets, storytellers, archeologists, anthropologists, philosophers, mothers and Goddess devotees. Further, the scientific, societal and technological revolutions I share here are those which have, for a multitude of reasons, presented themselves in my life's path in some way. Thus, the two modes,

¹ The morphogenetic field is the field which contains patterns that govern the development of forms, structures and arrangements. Fundamental in the early twentieth century to the study of embryological development, it was first introduced in 1910 by Alexander G. Gurwitsch and brought to the forefront in recent decades by British biologist Rupert Sheldrake.

myth and science, diverge and intersect in the pages to come, forming a caduceus² staff whose two serpentine energies twist and turn around the axis mundi³ and eventually meet at its pineal head, the mystical place of balance, healing, and our infinite Oneness.

I have used Organic Inquiry⁴ as my approach in the pages that follow, developed by Clements,⁵ Ettling⁶, Jenett⁷ & Shields⁸ (1998). This method allows the researcher to move beyond any linear constraints of traditional methods. It embraces the individual's intuitive and interactive experiences, including a blend of research and spiritual inquiry. Within this approach, I incorporate qualitative and historical research methods, reading and synthesizing other scholars' research and professional publications about my topic as

² The caduceus is the traditional symbol of the Greek god Hermes and features two snakes winding around an often-winged staff. It is often used as a symbol of medicine. Similar symbols include the ancient Hindu chakra energy system in the human body.

³ The axis mundi (also cosmic axis, world axis, world pillar and center of the world) is a symbol representing the center of the world where the heaven (sky) connects with the earth.

⁴ Organic inquiry, developed by Clements, Ettling, Jenett & Shields, is an emergent qualitative methodology that approaches research as if it were sacred. The fundamental technique of organic inquiry is listening to and telling stories. In resonance with heuristic and narrative inquiry, it is a method that includes an invitation for transformation on the part of not only the participants and readers, but of the researcher as well.

⁵ Jennifer Clements (1960-) is one of the co-creators of the Organic Inquiry approach. It is an outgrowth of work done by Clark Moustakas (1990) and Bruce Douglass (1985) on heuristic inquiry and represents a transpersonal feminist approach to inquiry.

⁶ Dorothy Ettling (1940-2014) was the founder of the University of the Incarnate Word and the co-creator of the Organic Inquiry approach to research which seeks to allow for the presence and utilization of ways of knowing beyond the merely rational.

⁷ Dianne Jenett (1947) was on the faculty and was co-director in the Master of Arts in Women's Spirituality Program at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology (now Sofia University) and New College of California. She is a co-creator of the Organic Inquiry approach which invites and incorporates archetypal experiences, both transcendent and immanent, spontaneous and intentional, liminal and spiritual experiences that are beyond ego.

⁸ Lisa Shields (d.o.b. unknown) is a co-creator of the Organic Inquiry approach, one in which the sacred feminine might be included and in which the positive values of cooperation and interdependency were appreciated, where diversity would make us equals rather than causing a separation into leaders and followers.

a means of building and supporting my thesis. I also use Organic Inquiry to draw upon my own personal experiences and gleanings throughout my life and from my time with The Wisdom School/Ubiquity University.⁹ This culminates with the birthing of my Earth Ministry degree as evidence of the new feminine and earth-based mythology emerging through the eco-field.

This dissertation is presented as “three spirals.” First, I offer an academic synopsis of the evolution of the Divine Feminine through myth, of the severing of myth and science, and of the recent merging of the two schools of thought. Second, I present the above perspective through the actual retelling of myth itself, across time and culture. Third, I offer my personal myth, my journey as founder of a spiritual community rooted in the feminine and earth, as leader of a global Goddess Pilgrimage¹⁰ travel organization, and of the birthing of an Earth Ministry ordination program through The Wisdom School, as testimony to the re-emergent Divine Feminine in our world.

In this way, my dissertation offers an overview of humanity’s intimate relationship with myth, with consciousness, with the Divine Feminine, with our planet, and with ourselves. It is a “bird’s eye view” of our humanity, and it touches upon a vast array of topics which eventually are woven together to give us a clear picture of *who we once were, of what happened to our relationship with earth, and of what I believe we need to do in order to save life on our planet as we know it.* Drawing primarily upon my

⁹ The Wisdom School was founded in Oakland, CA in 1996 by Matthew Fox, PhD, a world-renowned educator and writer, as a non-profit graduate school called the University of Creation Spirituality. In 2005, Jim Garrison was recruited as President, renaming the school to Wisdom University and subsequently to the Wisdom School of Graduate Studies at Ubiquity University. The school continues to embrace a global learning community based on holistic learning aligned with the larger ecology and natural systems of the Earth.

¹⁰ Goddess Pilgrimages, established in 2012 by Jennifer Sundeen, is a global travel organization based in Boston, Massachusetts whose pilgrimages include journeying to sacred sites of the Divine Feminine.

personal experiences as well as extensive research about myth, it offers the lens through which I personally see and experience our world, an oculus through which I continually traverse both our physical outer and deeper inner landscapes.

I do not in any way mean to over-simplify such a wide undertaking, nor do I mean to reduce our wisdom throughout the ages to just a few scarce pages; indeed, any one of the topics below could be, and has been, unraveled and investigated in greater detail. Further, I do not attempt to debate the presence or non-presence of a singular transcendent God, Goddess or Creator; nor have the page limits allowed me to fully untangle the role of the Divine Masculine throughout time and place.

I do, however, wish to illuminate the ever-evolving role of the Divine Feminine archetype in the shaping of human society and in humanity's relationship with our Earth. Additionally, I highlight, after millennia of attempted obliteration, the necessity for women, as well as men, of recognizing the Divine Feminine once again within *all of us*. This recognition is a consciousness which is critical for our times, for *the Feminine archetype is intimately connected to Earth itself*: through her cycles, her interconnectedness, and her life-giving and nourishing aspects. Thus, because we are connected, as we remember, awaken and celebrate the Divine Feminine archetype within ourselves, not only do we make our way towards individual wholeness, we also help to heal a planet in crisis.

Throughout this dissertation, I refer to the Divine Feminine by many names, and they are often used interchangeably: Goddess, the Great Mother, Divine Mother, the Great Mystery, Magna Mater, Mother Goddess, and Primordial Mother. Intricately tied with the resurgence of the Divine Feminine archetype is an embracing of the

philosophical idea of pantheism; this acknowledges the existence of what the Hindus call *shakti*, which is the active, creative and dynamic life force, the divine spark which sources the Universe and is found *within* all of creation. For some, this life force may mean an intelligence, a consciousness, or perhaps even a Divine spirit or energy; for others, it is simply unnamable; whatever we call it, it is the *recognition and reverence for shakti* which I believe must, and is, rising again.

Thus, through the interweaving of myth, science and my own personal lens, I offer a tapestry that illustrates my wild-heart quest for saving our planet, and for the resurrection of the Great Mother archetype whom, after being suppressed within the human psyche and culturally for many thousands of years, is already re-birthing herself in so many magical and miraculous ways.



The story of the Mother Goddess belongs to all genders and cultures. She has always been an accessible deity: the warmth in our hearth, the fire over which to cook, the river whose water we drink, the soil that grows nourishment. Throughout time we have seen her revealed through a myriad of myths and faces. She has been revived, recast, and renamed throughout the ages, and her infinite aspects have evolved into a vast array of personalities and stories. However, the primary role of the Goddess has always remained fixed: that of the Great Mother.

The Great Mother archetype lives within *all* of us, both men and women. Her heartbeat is found underneath the layers of worldly living, underneath the stories; her face is that of every face we see, everything we touch, the ground we walk upon and the air we breathe. Having long preceded a male God, she symbolizes the Great Mystery of

existence. Rather than an airy, hierarchical deity altogether separate from ourselves, as is the case in the Abrahamic monotheistic religions, she is found inside of us and in the physical world around us. She is not, nor has she ever been, separate.



In October of 2021, on a Goddess Pilgrimage to the Isle of Lewis in Scotland, my friend Jill Smith¹¹ and I stood beside an enormous Grandmother Stone that has sat, since time immemorial, high on a grassy hill overlooking the sea. Jill is a Priestess and a caretaker of the wild marshes and undulating hills of this magical Scottish island. The ancient Grandmother Stone had a small “womb-like” cavernous space at her front; she also appeared to have two hugging arms, and a smiling head looking tenderly down from above. If one were to gaze out from inside the rock belly, the observer would have a clear view of the Callanish Standing Stones, an ancient circular lunar observatory, about 100 feet ahead. My mind was searching for possible connections of how the whole landscape was connected and why, and I began to compare the old Grandmother Stone to similar ones I had seen in many places across the world, such as on the hill of Uisneach in Ireland and in the woodlands of New England.

“Jennifer,” Jill gently admonished, “it is easy to want a scientific explanation as to why things exist. In fact, our new technological age demands it of us. However, the nature of the Divine Feminine is to trust your intuition and your heart for explanations, and to listen to the stories that have come through the ancient grandmothers to us. That is

¹¹Jill Smith (1942-) was born in London, England and is now living in Uig, Isle of Lewis, Scotland, UK. Jill is a Priestess, artist, and performer. Her published books include *The Gypsy Switch and Other Ritual Journeys*, *The Callanish Dance*, and *Mother of the Isles*. Additional offerings of Jill’s can be found in numerous magazine articles, art exhibitions, slide shows, talks, Goddess workshops in the UK, and more throughout the last fifty years.

how history, and the mysteries of the cosmos, have always been told: From grandmother to mother to daughter to granddaughter, at least until recent times when men began to write and interpret history for themselves. Women know, intuitively, there is a different approach, and no less right or wrong; just different. And if we hope to shift the way we are doing things on our planet, then for everyone's sake we better start listening to her again."

I knew Jill was right, and in that moment, I realized my whole sense of history, of science, our explanations for who and why and how we came to be and where we are going, was exactly as she described. "His" story is merely one perspective, and one that came from a time in which traditionally only men were allowed a formal education, whose words were printed, whose discoveries were celebrated. Even many of the myths themselves that we know and treasure were scribed by monks and male scholars and interpreted through the lens of patriarchal cultures. While some of the major scientific contributions have been made by women, because we have had such a male-centered approach to science, some of the names of these pioneering women are not even known.

I realized, as we look back to our earliest beginnings, we have very little of Her-story, whose intimate relationship with and connection to the Divine and to the earth itself was most likely sung, told as bedtime stories, passed down around the hearth fire, celebrated in ritual and custom, enjoyed around the kitchen table. However, there is a danger in leaning too far in the other direction. For example, in the past few decades, there has been a trend to view eco-feminist scholars as biased, willing their finds into a model in which the Divine Feminine shapes the world. Though the pendulum is swinging in the other direction in recent years, we see decades of criticism in the works of scholars

such as Marija Gimbutis,¹² Riane Eisler,¹³ Monica Sjoo¹⁴ and Barbara Mor.¹⁵ Others see the recent sciences as reductionist and wedded to the current world myth of capitalism and consumerism, all of which have dictated humanity's trajectory and led us to our planetary crisis.

How, then, to approach a dissertation on The Mother Goddess, myth, science, history, and the possible return to a world of connection and intimacy with the earth and each other? How, if we are moving towards a more interconnected and feminine mythological consciousness as I propose in this paper, might I present my hypothesis? Science, while in many ways is simply another form of myth or explanation about the Great Mystery of our aliveness, lays its foundations on evidence and fact, tests and measurements. Mythology, on the other hand, has been severed from these scientific

¹² Marija Gimbutas (1921-1944) was a former Professor Emeritus of Archaeology at UCLA, contributing to what is considered to be one of the most significant academic moments in women's studies with her archeological and philosophical work on Neolithic culture and religion. A Lithuanian-American archeologist, she is best known for her research into the Neolithic and Bronze Age cultures of "Old Europe," a term she introduced. Her discoveries took on great symbolic importance for feminists across varied disciplines who found, in her vision of a peaceful, egalitarian, nature-revering society, a sense of hope for the future based on this foundation in the distant past. Unintended to her, Marija Gimbutas' impact was so great that it reached beyond the scholarly community and helped fuel the women's movement in society at large. Her works include *Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe* (1974/1982), *The Language of the Goddess* 1989/1991), and *Civilizations of the Goddess*, (1991) and *The Living Goddesses* (1999).

¹³ Riane Eisler (1931-) is a cultural historian, systems scientist, futurist, internationally renowned keynote speaker, and president of the Center for Partnership Systems. She is best known for her 1987 book *The Chalice and the Blade*.

¹⁴ Monica Sjoo (1938-2005) was a Swedish author, artist, and radical eco-feminist who was an early proponent of the Goddess movement. Her works include *Towards a Revolutionary Feminist Art* (1971), and she co-authored the book *The Great Cosmic Mother* (1987) which covers women's ancient history and the origin of religion and is one of the first books to propose that humanity's earliest religious and cultural belief systems were created and first practiced by women.

¹⁵ Barbara Mor (1936 -2015) was an American poet, editor, and Feminist of the twentieth century Goddess movement. She became most widely known for *The Great Cosmic Mother*, a cross-disciplinary study that cites numerous archaeological, anthropological, historical and mythological texts and artifacts as evidence of women's role as creators and first practitioners of humanity's earliest religious and cultural belief systems.

requirements; it is, instead, based on belief systems and, in some cases, may be well beyond the scope of our current cognition and understanding (Sharma, 2021).

What I have presented, therefore, is both sides of the cowrie shell, a double helix of both myth and science, of right and left hemispheres of the brain, of the feminine and masculine. I give both a perspective intuited from metaphor, folklore and myth, and one which is rooted in science and evidence. It is my intent for the reader to experience these two approaches as differing but nonetheless equally important pathways to receiving and assimilating information. Neither can we dismiss the scientific *nor* the intuitive, for I believe together they both hold the key to our future.



Since 2010, I have led groups of women and men to sacred sites across the world to honor the Divine Feminine. In order to once again understand ourselves as sacred interconnected beings of Mother Earth, we must expose into the light of day that which has been repressed and obscured both culturally and as ancient myth. *I believe we cannot become whole, cannot make our way back towards recognizing our Oneness, until the Divine Feminine reclaims her place and is fully embraced in the consciousness of humanity.* A Goddess Pilgrimage to her holy places can make this understanding possible.

On a Goddess Pilgrimage, we activate and travel into our ancient collective memory, the morphogenetic field or, as some might say, to Carl Jung's¹⁶ "Collective

¹⁶ Carl Jung (1875-1961). A Swiss psychologist and psychiatrist who founded analytic psychology. Jung proposed and developed the concepts of the extraverted and the introverted personality, archetypes, and the collective unconscious. His work has been influential in psychiatry and in the study of religion, literature and related fields.

Unconscious.”¹⁷ The images of the Primordial Mother archetype still linger in our psyches: her spirals, triangles, circles, the ebb and flow of her moons, and her watery womb of existence. Her sacred dwelling places include caves, mountains, oceans, rivers, streams and waterfalls, under the canopy of sacred groves, temples built by devotees, open fields under the moonlight, and stone circles (Tate, 2006); I can attest they are areas of profound peace! She is reflected in our eyes, and simultaneously her infinite aspects are a reflection of the vast miracle that is all of creation. Though many today might not remember the Divine Feminine archetype that exists around and within us, we are intimately connected with the ancient life-giving Mother, and to Pilgrimage to her is to remember our interconnectedness.

Thus, within this dissertation, I invite the reader on a unique Goddess Pilgrimage, to step into ancient mythological realms of the Primordial Mother where anything and everything is possible, to bear witness to our global departure from the Divine Feminine, and to share in her resurrection. After all, a Goddess Pilgrimage is a journey where past and present merge to shape and create our future. A pilgrimage to the Mother Goddess is a remembering of who we are: the dreamer, the weaver, the connector, the creator, the keeper of mysteries, the healer, the wise one. As the Wiccan¹⁸ saying goes: “As without, so within.” While together in this paper we will travel outward through time and greet

¹⁷*Collective Unconscious* is a term introduced by psychiatrist Carl Jung to represent a form of the unconscious (that part of the mind containing memories and impulses of which the individual is not aware) common to mankind as a whole and originating in the inherited structure of the brain. It is distinct from the personal unconscious, which arises from the experience of the individual. According to Jung, the collective unconscious contains archetypes, or universal primordial images and ideas.

¹⁸ Wicca is a predominantly Western movement whose followers practice witchcraft and nature worship, and who see it as a religion based on pre-Christian traditions of northern and western Europe.

her, ultimately, we need to only look within to find the Cosmic Mother from whom we have never been separate.

CHAPTER I

Mythology: An Overview

“I believe myths and legends are largely made of truth”
~ J.R.R Tolkien



Once upon a time, the daughter of the Sun, Akanidi, lived in the skies. Her radiance shone as the sunbeam she was, and she brightened the Earth and all the creatures upon it. Akanidi loved to watch the animals below: the reindeer in the pastures, the forest animals, the fish in the sea; and the animals could feel the warm light coming from the heart of Akanidi. Though she understood the language of the animals, she was not so sure about humans, for they were sometimes happy, but sometimes sad or angry.

Because Akanidi was kind, she wanted to find a way to help the people to be happy all of the time. She asked her mother, the Sun, if she could go to Earth to help the people. Her mother was reluctant to let her go; after all, the skies provided all the room Akanidi needed to play, to sing and to dance. Nevertheless, she relented, and Akanidi was sent to live on an isolated island, in a small hut, with an old man and woman who did not have children of their own.

Eventually Akanidi grew to become a beautiful young woman, and her parents surrounded her with love, and made her beautiful clothes. She was filled with joy and danced and sang with happiness. This filled her parents' hearts with love and joy, too. But they knew they could not keep Akanidi to themselves, and one day they told her, "Akanidi, you have so much happiness in your heart. It is not right that we keep all the happiness here in our small hut. You must go be with other people and share your love and joy. You must warm the hearts of others."

Her father took her to another village and left her in a hut there. The people of the village came to see the beautiful stranger, and they were drawn to Akanidi's light and warmth. She showed the people how to decorate their clothes with many patterns and

colors. She showed them pictures of the stars and of all the animals, and she taught them the hunting songs, the sea songs, and the sun songs. She was happy, and she showed the people how to be happy.

Unfortunately, there were some people who were envious and did not want the happiness to spread amongst the village. Some of them plotted to get rid of Akanidi. One day, when she was in the hut teaching the children, the envious ones came into the hut and threw a large stone at her. Akanidi saw what was happening, and she quickly began to sing. As she finished the last lines of her beautiful song, she turned into smoke, disappearing through the hole in the roof and returning to the skies.

She was never seen again, but the people remembered her songs, her dances, her pictures. And they taught them to their children, who taught their children, and the people are still sharing Akanidi's songs and dances and art even today, and when they do, they are filled with warmth and happiness.

~ Goddess Pilgrimage to the Arctic Circle, 2014,

(Grandma-in-Lapland, 2014)

Definition of Myth

Mythology can be defined as a body or collection of stories, revered as sacred or embraced as truth, told by a specific culture that seeks to explain existence. Myth offers us answers to the origins of the world and its people, and to what happens when life ends. It defines how people relate to each other and the world around them. It provides a society's beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and rules, and expresses a culture's relationship to their deities, to good and evil, to suffering and joy. Myth defines and separates the sacred

from the profane. It tells the stories of our ancestors, explains events in nature, the cycles of the seasons, the reason for the stars, sun and moon in the sky. Myth is willing to acknowledge and embrace the unknowable, unproven and unexplainable as a dynamic force in the manifest and unmanifest universe, such as the supernatural powers of a great Creator, goddesses, gods and heroes. Ultimately, myth provides a container for connection and cohesion, and gives purpose to individuals and a like-minded society as a whole.

Mythology is “society’s story,” the shared belief system and fabric of a culture, and it has played a part in every civilization throughout the world. We see evidence of myth in ancient cave paintings, standing stones, and carved effigies that existed long before the written word. Regardless of the culture or time period out of which it arises, myth is often perceived as “Truth” for the society and also for the individual within that culture who bears witness to it. Myths play a profound sociological role, helping us to understand ourselves, our world, and our place in it.

On a personal level, myth provides the individual with an understanding of one’s place in context to the larger whole. It has the potential to take us by the hand and lead us into the limitless space in between the manifest and unmanifest world. Here in this soft space where form and the formless dance, the veil thins; through myth, we enter a dreamlike vastness where anything is possible, where time and space dissolve, where interconnections reveal themselves, where animals can communicate, where heroines and heroes walk or fly, and stars sing. It is a liminal space where miracles occur, where we are allowed to see and be in a different way, a place of aliveness where the magical and mundane worlds merge, and we come to understand we are part of a greater cosmos.

According to psychologist Carl Jung, the reservoir of the human psychic system that births our myths, dreams and imagination is called the Collective Unconscious. It is a part of our psyche that is not constructed of our personal but rather of our *collective* experiences since the dawn of time. It is expressed to us in the form of archetypes, which are universal symbols that give rise to our unlearned and instinctive patterns of behavior. Carl Jung noted that these images, which we inherit, are impersonal and identical in all individuals, which is why we often see recurrent themes in myths across the world. (Jung, 1936;1971)

Jung identifies many archetypes that dwell in the Collective Unconscious which include the mother, father, wife, husband, lover, fool, devil, shadow, hero, savior, and many others. However, some scholars have subsequently found his descriptions limiting and confining. Since Jung's time, Feminist Archetypal Theorists¹⁹ have built upon his work and provided examples of archetypes that are far less gender-limiting. In her search for Divine Feminine archetypes that informed her own life, author Christine Downing²⁰ shares in *The Goddess: Mythological Images of the Feminine* (1981):

I soon discovered that my search was not mine alone, that in recent years many women have rediscovered how much we need the goddess in a culture that tears us from woman, from women, and from ourselves. To be fed only male images of the divine is to be badly malnourished. We are starved for images which recognize the sacredness of the feminine and the complexity, richness, and nurturing power of female energy. We hunger for images of human creativity and love inspired by the capacity of female bodies to give birth and nourish, for images of how humankind participates in the natural world suggested by

¹⁹ Feminist Archetypal Theorists challenge the Jungian tendency to prize "the Feminine" and its various images while ignoring women's actual experience. Feminist archetypal theory confronts the ongoing exaltation of socially constructed experience as archetypal, a mental habit that turns traditional stereotypes into absolutes and puts men in a false position of authority.

²⁰ Christine Downing (1931-) is a scholar, educator, and author in the fields of mythology, religion, depth psychology, and feminist studies. She is the author of many publications about women and myth including *The Goddess: Mythological Images of the Feminine* (1981).

reflection on the correspondences between menstrual rhythms and the moon's waxing and waning. (Downing, 1981, pp. 4-5)

To acquire a sense of the diversity of the Divine Feminine attributes, we need only glance at some of the countless myths throughout time and across cultures which we shall do in the following pages. As we shall discover, the imprints of her archetype as Mother, left to us through the ages, include birth, nourishment, connection, flow, unconditional love, protection, and so much more. The Divine Feminine has come to symbolize Earth itself.

Both the myths of society and our individual myths are ways of entering into a wider universal body of knowledge and wisdom, of tapping into the infinite and the mysteries of the universe. Our myths are tapestries of stories woven through generations, across lands, and throughout time. There is often a dreamlike, lunar, magical quality to myth; edges blur, time dissipates, and the sense of the human self and the larger Soul merge, as though we too have joined the circle of our ancient brothers and sisters around the sacred fire, drumming and dancing, storytelling, singing, keeping the wisdom alive.

In *A Short History of Myth* (2005), Karen Armstrong²¹ reminds us that myth is not inferior to science; rather, it helps us to glimpse new possibilities. It asks the question "What if?" Myth contains the seeds from which new scientific, philosophical and technological theories and beliefs have sprouted. While myths (both the stories and belief systems behind them) are usually taught by parents, learned at school and preached at church, the portals into our personal and collective myths are available to us all in so many myriad ways: during celebrations and rituals, rites of passage, with the passing of a

²¹ Karen Armstrong (1944-) is a British author and commentator of Irish Catholic descent known for her books on comparative religion. A former Roman Catholic religious sister, she went from a conservative to a more liberal and mystical Christian faith. Her numerous books and articles on comparative religion and history include *A History of God* (1993) and *A Short History of Myth* (2005).

loved one, the birth of a child, a change in life's circumstance, an illness, on pilgrimage. Doorways into myth also open in our daily moments should we choose to allow them: a visit to the ocean, watching a sunset, seeing the love in a dog's eyes, sitting at a table filled with friends, a crackling fire on a cold winter's night.

In his book, *The Power of Myth*, Joseph Campbell²² writes that mythology is the literature of the spirit; it is the “song of the universe, the music of the spheres” (Campbell, 1988, xvi). Myths harmonize our inner and outer worlds, and infused within them are themes that have supported human life, built civilizations, and informed religions. They correlate to our deepest inner problems, mysteries and passages. Campbell believes that a myth is society's dream, and a personal dream is a private myth. Further, he believes if one dreams in accordance with society's dream, one will find harmony. He reminds us that heaven and hell, the gods, the worlds, all are within us and are manifestations in image form of the energies of the body in conflict and attempting to find balance. We can have actions on the human physical plane, but when we listen to or read myth, it puts our human actions into context within the spiritual world. (Campbell, 1988)

The word “myth” has its origins in the Greek language and is possibly even pre-Greek; it comes from the word “mythos” meaning “word,” “tale,” or “true narrative,” and thus denotes the belief of an underlying Truth. It is closely related to the Greek word

²² Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) was an American writer and mythologist. He was a professor of literature at Sarah Lawrence College who worked in comparative mythology and comparative religion. His work covers many aspects of the human experience. Campbell's best-known works include *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), in which he discusses his theory of the journey of the archetypal hero shared by world mythologies, called the “monomyth.” Campbell's widest popular recognition followed his collaboration with Bill Moyers on the PBS series *The Power of Myth*, which was first broadcast in 1988, the year following Campbell's death. The series discusses mythological, religious, and psychological archetypes. A book, *The Power of Myth*, containing expanded transcripts of their conversations, was released shortly after the original broadcast.

“*myos*” which means to teach or initiate into the sacred Mysteries. Moving beyond the world of language, myth is not simply a story, nor a simple literary device, but rather a mode of thinking whose presence in everyday life informs a particular social construct of reality (Levy-Bruhl, 1922;2008).

Myth as a Field of Study

Myth has, since time immemorial, been told through story, song, poetry, art, music and dance. It has been in-scripted and painted on shells and bones, imprinted in bronze and pottery, shared by shamans and troubadours. With the advent of writing in Mesopotamia,²³ myth was no longer left to oral tradition. It began to be recorded by scribes and poets, mythographers and monks, the earliest of which included the Babylonian²⁴ myths *Enūma Eliš*²⁵ and *The Epic of Gilgamesh*²⁶ and the stories within the Hindu *Rig Veda*,²⁷ all of which date back to at least 2,500 BCE. Around 1200 BCE, *The*

²³ Mesopotamia is a historical region of Western Asia situated within the Tigris–Euphrates River system, in the northern part of the Fertile Crescent. Mesopotamia occupies modern Iraq. The historical region also includes the head of the Persian Gulf and southeast Turkey, west Iran, northeastern Syria and northern Kuwait.

²⁴ Babylonia was a state in ancient Mesopotamia. The city of Babylon, whose ruins are in present-day Iraq, was founded more than 4,000 years ago as a small port town on the Euphrates River. It grew into one of the largest cities of the ancient world under the rule of Hammurabi.

²⁵ The *Enuma Elish* is the oldest known written Creation myth. It is composed of close to one thousand lines of cuneiform script that feature a great battle between gods Marduk and the goddess Tiamat, which results in the creation of the Earth and humankind.

²⁶ The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is an epic poem from ancient Mesopotamia, regarded as the earliest surviving notable literature and the second oldest religious text.

²⁷ The *Rig Veda* is an ancient Indian collection of Vedic Sanskrit hymns. It is one of the four sacred canonical Hindu texts known as the Vedas. The *Rig Veda* is the oldest known Vedic Sanskrit text.

*Old Testament*²⁸ began to unfold in written form, though it is now thought parts could be thousands of years older. By the 7th to 8th centuries BCE, we have Homer's²⁹ *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, and Hesiod's³⁰ *The Theogony*. By the 4th century BCE, we see mythological collections from China such as *Shan Hai Jing*³¹ and Hindu texts such as *The Mahabharata*³²; and around 100 BCE, *The Ramayana*³³.

Well-known collections of myths in the new millennium include *The New Testament*,³⁴ whose books were written in the first century by Christians; *The Qu'rān*³⁵ in the 7th century; Japan's *The Kojiki*³⁶ recorded in 702 CE; *Metamorphosis* by Ovid³⁷ and

²⁸ *The Old Testament* (also known as the Jewish *Tanakh*) is the first, longer portion of the Christian Bible. It is the term used by Christians to refer to the Jewish scriptures, or Hebrew Bible.

²⁹ Homer (8th century BCE) was an ancient Greek author and epic poet. He is the reputed author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the two epic poems that are the foundational works of ancient Greek literature.

³⁰ Hesiod (8-7th century BCE) was an ancient Greek poet and philosopher. He is generally regarded as the first written poet in the Western tradition to regard himself as an individual persona with an active role to play in his subject. His works include *The Theogony*.

³¹ The *Shan Hai Jing* is a 4th century Chinese classic text and a compilation of mythic geography and beasts.

³² *The Mahabharata* was originally composed in Sanskrit sometime between 400 BC and 400 CE. With one hundred thousand stanzas of verse, it is one of the longest poems ever written. It narrates the struggle between two groups of cousins in the Kurukshetra War and the fates of the Kaurava and the Pāṇḍava princes and their successors.

³³ The *Ramayana* is an ancient Indian epic, composed sometime in the 5th century BCE, about the exile and then return of Rama, prince of Ayodhya. It was composed in Sanskrit by the sage Valmiki.

³⁴ *The New Testament* is the second division of the Christian biblical canon. It discusses the teachings and person of Jesus, as well as events in first-century Christianity.

³⁵ The *Qu'rān* is the central religious text of Islam, believed by Muslims to be a revelation from God.

³⁶ The *Kojiki* is Japan's oldest surviving narrative from the eighth century. It chronicles the mythical origins of its islands and their ruling dynasty through a diverse array of genealogies, tales, and songs that have helped to shape the modern nation's views of its ancient past.

*Beowulf*³⁸ in the latter half of the first millennium. In 1138, Geoffrey of Monmouth³⁹ introduced the world to King Arthur in *The Historia Regum Britanniae*; *The Mabinogion*⁴⁰ arrived in the 11-12th centuries CE; and Snorri Sturluson⁴¹ gave us Norse myths in the 13th century's *Prose Edda*. The 14th and 15th centuries offered the Turkish *Book of Dede Korkut*,⁴² Thomas Mallory's⁴³ *Le Morte d'Arthur*, as well as countless others.

Beginning in the 18th century, the new Age of Enlightenment⁴⁴ ignited a whole new fascination in the field of mythology. As the globe began to expand with exploration, colonization and scholarship, myths and folklore from across the world began to be collected, transcribed, and reimagined in systematic and integrated ways. Amongst such

³⁷ Ovid (43 BCE-17/18 CE) was born Publius Ovidius Naso in Italy. Considered to be one of the most influential poets in Western literary tradition, he wrote several important works, including his most famous *Metamorphoses*.

³⁸ *Beowulf* is an Old English epic poem in the tradition of Germanic heroic legend whose story is set in pagan Scandinavia in the 6th century. It is one of the most important and most often translated works of Old English literature.

³⁹ Geoffrey of Monmouth (1095-1155 CE) was a British cleric and one of the major figures in the development of British historiography and the popularity of tales of King Arthur, including *The Historia Regum Britanniae*.

⁴⁰ *The Mabinogion* is based upon a 14th century manuscript known as 'Red Book of Hergest.' The work is a collection of eleven tales of early Welsh literature and draws upon the mystical words of the Celtic people intertwining myths, folklore, tradition and history.

⁴¹ Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241 CE) was an Icelandic historian, poet, and politician. Sturluson authored portions of the *Prose Edda*, which is a major source for what is today known as Norse mythology.

⁴² *The Book of Dede Korkut* is an early record of oral Turkic folktales in Anatolia. The stories carry morals and values significant to the social lifestyle of the nomadic Turkic peoples and their pre-Islamic beliefs.

⁴³ Thomas Mallory (1405-1471) was an English writer, the author or compiler of *Le Morte d'Arthur*, the classic English-language chronicle of the Arthurian legend, published in 1485.

⁴⁴ The Age of Enlightenment was an intellectual and philosophical movement that dominated Europe in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries with global influences and effects.

legacies are the Grimm Brothers,⁴⁵ with their vast folk and fairy tales, along with writers such as Thomas Bulfinch,⁴⁶ Lord Alfred Tennyson,⁴⁷ Lady Augusta Gregory,⁴⁸ William Butler Yeats,⁴⁹ and Sir James George Frazer.⁵⁰

Similarly, scholars, anthropologists, scientists, psychologists and archeologists began to pursue myth as an interdisciplinary field of study. A great nineteenth century feminist, early scholar and linguist of myth was Jane Ellen Harrison.⁵¹ She was a Cambridge Ritualist⁵² and defendant of the cultural necessity of myth. In her collection of essays, lectures and letters *Alpha and Omega* (1915), Harrison conveyed how myths are the living fabric of our society and not necessarily something that can be intuited from language alone:

⁴⁵ The Brothers Grimm are Jacob (1785–1863) and Wilhelm (1786–1859). They were German academics, philologists, cultural researchers, lexicographers, and authors who together collected and published folklore. They are among the best-known storytellers of folk tales such as “Cinderella,” “Little Red Riding Hood,” and “Hansel and Gretel.”

⁴⁶ Thomas Bulfinch (1796-1867) was an American writer born in Newton, Massachusetts, best known for *Bulfinch's Mythology*, the posthumous combination of his three volumes of mythologies.

⁴⁷ Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) was one of the most renowned poets of the Victorian era; his works included well known tales such as “The Lotos-Eaters,” “The Palace of Art,” and “The Lady of Shalott.”

⁴⁸ Lady Augusta Gregory (1852-1932) was an Irish dramatist, folklorist and theater manager. With William Butler Yeats and Edward Martyn, she co-founded the Irish Literary Theater and the Abbey Theater and wrote numerous short works for both companies.

⁴⁹ William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) was an Irish poet, dramatist, writer and one of the foremost figures of 20th-century literature.

⁵⁰ Sir James George Frazer (1854-1941) was a Scottish social anthropologist and folklorist influential in the early stages of the modern studies of mythology and comparative religion. He is best known as the author of *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, first published in 1890.

⁵¹ Jane Ellen Harrison (1850-1928) was a British classical scholar and linguist. Harrison is one of the founders, with Karl Kerényi and Walter Burkert, of modern studies in Ancient Greek religion and mythology.

⁵² The Cambridge Ritualists were a recognized group of classical scholars, mostly in Cambridge, England.

It may also be that the (myths)...cannot be put into language without being falsified and misstated, that they have rather to be felt and lived than uttered and intellectually analyzed; yet they are somehow true and necessary to life. (Harrison, 1915, p.176)

However, Harrison aligned with many other early scholars of myth at the time who built their perspectives on evolutionary theories: Edward Burnett Tylor,⁵³ who considered myth as a failed attempt at science; Max Muller,⁵⁴ who thought of myth as a “disease of language”; and James Frazer, who took a hierarchical view with myth more primitive than religion and science (ISI, 2014). The primary perspective of these Social Evolutionists⁵⁵ at the time was that culture developed in a progressive manner; just as species evolved into more complex beings, so too did society, culture and myth (Long & Chakov, 2022). Once science became the accepted majority, myth, according to many scholars, was no longer necessary; many fell victim to reductionist theories and did not embrace the deeper need and function of myth to the human psyche.

The early decades of the twentieth century gave us Ruth Fulton Benedict,⁵⁶ who was considered by many as America’s first anthropologist; Benedict’s study of myth greatly contributed to our understanding of cultural diversity. This time period also saw a revolutionary shift in the fields of psychology and mythology with scholars such as Carl

⁵³ Sir Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917) was an English anthropologist and the founder of cultural anthropology. Tylor's ideas typify 19th-century cultural evolutionism, viewing human development as unilinear from primitive animism through organized religion, into a world of scientific and technological understanding.

⁵⁴ Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900) was a German-born philologist and Orientalist, who lived and studied in Britain for most of his life. He was one of the founders of the western academic disciplines of Indian studies and religious studies. Müller wrote both scholarly and popular works about Indology.

⁵⁵ Social evolutionists identified universal evolutionary stages to classify different societies as in a state of savagery, barbarism, or civilization.

⁵⁶ Ruth Benedict (1887-1948) was a pioneering anthropologist who became America's leading specialist in the field. She was best known for her book *Patterns of Culture* (1934) and theory, which revolutionized anthropological study, igniting the work of the culture and personality movement within anthropology.

Jung, along with his contemporary and colleague Sabina Spielrein.⁵⁷ Their theories and findings offered new ideas about myth, most importantly that it connects us to the “Collective Unconscious,” the part of the mind that contains memories of humankind that include universal archetypes, primordial images and ideas through which we can receive a greater knowing and understanding of the workings of the seen and unseen universe. For Jung, the infinite unknown has a mysterious, holy, and powerful quality to it, and mythology is imbued with this *sacred presence* which is available to all people if we know how to connect to it (Segal, 1988). Decades later, scholars Leach⁵⁸ and Fried⁵⁹ would concur: this Great Mystery is one of humanity’s earliest psychological reactions to the universe and the environment, and it is the foundation of almost all religion and mythology (Leach & Fried, 1984).

By the mid 20th century, scholars and writers began to give old myths a fresh perspective, such as classicist Edith Hamilton.⁶⁰ Robert Graves⁶¹ began to champion the

⁵⁷ Sabina Nikolayevna Spielrein (1885-1942) was a Russian physician and one of the first female psychoanalysts. She was in succession the patient, then student, then colleague of Carl Gustav Jung.

⁵⁸ Maria Leach (1892-1977) was an American writer and editor of books on folklore of the world. A noted scholar, she compiled and edited a major reference work on folklore and was the author or editor of thirteen books for adults, young people, and children. She co-authored *Funk & Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend* (1950) with Jerome Fried.

⁵⁹ Jerome Fried (d.o.b. unknown) scholar and co-editor of *Funk & Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend* (1950).

⁶⁰ Edith Hamilton (1867-1963) was an American educator and internationally known author who was one of the most renowned classicists of her era in the United States.

⁶¹ Robert Graves (1895-1985) was a British poet, historical novelist and critic. He was a Celticist and a student of Irish mythology. Graves produced more than 140 works in his lifetime, including the controversial *The White Goddess; A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (1948) in which he argues the existence of an all-important religion, rooted in the remote past but continuing into the Christian Era, based on the worship of a goddess.

Goddess. Philosopher, author and speaker Alan Watts⁶² brought Chinese and Hindu myths to the mainstream West by popularizing philosophies such as Zen Buddhism,⁶³ Taoism⁶⁴ and Hindu⁶⁵ beliefs and practices. In his *Essential Sacred Writings from Around the World*, Mircea Eliade⁶⁶ gave his rich interpretations of myth overlaid with ritual and ceremony, a guidebook on how to make sense of, relate to and participate in society through myth (Eliade, 1967).

Mythology pioneer Joseph Campbell built an additional layer upon the former ideas about myth: not only does it tell the story of our origins and answer questions about earth, humans, the universe, and the relationships amongst them; it also provides humankind with a sense of awe, it provides a religious cosmology, it gives an order or structure to society, and leads individuals on the path toward enlightenment. According to Campbell, myth is not so much the search for the meaning of life, but rather myth gives us clues to the potential of what we can experience: through our outer world and within

⁶² Alan Wilson Watts (1915-1973) was an English writer, speaker and self-styled "philosophical entertainer," known for interpreting and popularizing Indian and Chinese traditions of Buddhist, Taoist, and Hindu philosophy for a Western audience.

⁶³ Zen Buddhism is a mixture of Indian Mahayana Buddhism and Taoism. It began in China in the 5th century CE and spread to Korea and Japan. It became very popular in the West from the mid 20th century. The essence of Zen Buddhism is achieving enlightenment by seeing one's original mind (or original nature) directly; without the intervention of the intellect.

⁶⁴ Taoism (also spelled Daoism) is a religion and a philosophy from ancient China that has influenced folk and national belief. Taoism has been connected to the philosopher Lao Tzu, who around 500 B.C.E. wrote the main book of Taoism, the Tao Te Ching and emphasizes living in harmony.

⁶⁵ Hinduism is an Indian religion and dharma, or way of life. It is the world's third-largest religion, with over 1.2 billion followers, or 15–16% of the global population, known as Hindus.

⁶⁶ Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) was a Romanian historian of religion, fiction writer, philosopher, and professor at the University of Chicago. He was a leading interpreter of religious experience, who established paradigms in religious studies that persist to this day. His most famous works include *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (1957) and *Essential Sacred Writings from Around the World* (1967).

ourselves. Myth, with its themes, symbolism, and outward expression of the human psyche, has the potential to invoke the “rapture of being alive” (Campbell, 1988, p.5).

Towards the middle of the 20th century, numerous female scholars, psychologists, anthropologists, historians, poets, writers, and mythologists emerged with critical examinations of older patriarchal-based myths. These women brought forth fresh ideas regarding myth’s function in our ever-evolving world. As the Feminist Movement took root towards the latter part of the century, female scholars such as Luce Irigaray,⁶⁷ in her *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974;1985), stepped to the forefront and challenged the traditional role of women and the feminine in the “fathering” of western myth by male philosophers such as Descartes,⁶⁸ Plato,⁶⁹ Kant⁷⁰ and others. These new eco-feminist scholars challenged the world where, for countless centuries, myths portrayed women as submissive, powerless, even evil, and men as strong, protective, heroic, and good, archetypes that gave rise to how women were viewed in society (Rozells, 2020; Sanchez-Pardo, et. al., 2018).

The last fifty years would see a radical shift in the contributions to the field of mythology, ecology, literature, women, science and the earth. “Revisionist mythmakers”

⁶⁷ Luce Irigaray (1930-) is a Belgian-born French feminist, philosopher, linguist, psycholinguist, psychoanalyst and cultural theorist who examined the uses and misuses of language in relation to women. She is a prominent author in contemporary French feminism and Continental philosophy and is known for her book *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974), one of the most important works in feminist theory.

⁶⁸ René Descartes (1596-1650) was a French philosopher, mathematician, scientist and lay Catholic who invented analytic geometry, linking the previously separate fields of geometry and algebra.

⁶⁹ Plato (429-347 BCE) was a Greek philosopher born in Athens during the Classical period in Ancient Greece. He founded the Platonist school of thought and the Academy, the first institution of higher learning in the Western world.

⁷⁰ Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was a German philosopher and one of the central Enlightenment thinkers. Kant's comprehensive and systematic works in epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics have made him an influential figure in modern Western philosophy.

would include anthropologist Jane Goodall⁷¹ and conservationist Rachel Carson⁷²; authors such as Marion Zimmer Bradley,⁷³ Clarissa Pinkola Estés⁷⁴ and Hélène Cixous⁷⁵; archeologists such as Marija Gimbutas; poets such as Sylvia Plath⁷⁶ and Maya Angelou⁷⁷; cultural historians such as Riane Eisler; and mythologists such as Monica Sjoo and Barbara Mor.

By the turn of the twenty-first century, we hear the voices of revisionist mythmakers growing louder and in larger numbers, reminding us of our interconnectedness and our current planet in crisis, from botanists such as Robin Wall

⁷¹ Dame Jane Goodall (1934-) is an English primatologist and anthropologist. Seen as the world's foremost expert on chimpanzees, Goodall is best known for her 60-year study of social and family interactions of wild chimpanzees since she first went to Gombe Stream National Park in Tanzania in 1960, where she witnessed human-like behaviors amongst chimpanzees. In April 2002, she was named a UN Messenger of Peace.

⁷² Rachel Carson (1907-1964) was an American marine biologist, writer, and conservationist whose influential book *Silent Spring* (1962) and other writings are credited with advancing the global environmental movement.

⁷³ Marion Eleanor Zimmer Bradley (1940-1999) was an American author of fantasy, historical fantasy, science fiction, and science fantasy novels, and is best known for the Arthurian fiction novel *The Mists of Avalon*, which portrayed the story of Arthur and Guinevere from the outlook of women.

⁷⁴ Clarissa Pinkola Estés (1945-) is a first-generation American writer and Jungian psychoanalyst. She is the author of *Women Who Run with the Wolves* (1992), which remained on the *New York Times* bestseller list for 145 weeks and has sold over two million copies.

⁷⁵ Hélène Cixous (1937-) is a professor, French feminist writer, poet, playwright, philosopher, literary critic and rhetorician. Cixous is best known for her article "The Laugh of the Medusa," which established her as one of the early thinkers in post-structural feminism.

⁷⁶ Sylvia Plath (1932-1963) was an American writer and poet whose best-known works, including the poems "Daddy" and "Lady Lazarus" and the novel *The Bell Jar*, starkly express a sense of alienation and self-destruction that has resonated with many readers since the mid-20th century.

⁷⁷ Maya Angelou (1928-2014) was an American author, poet and civil rights activist. She rose to prominence with the publication of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* in (1969). Angelou was honored with the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2010 by President Barack Obama.

Kimmerer⁷⁸ and Margaret Atwood,⁷⁹ or musicians such as Heilung⁸⁰ and Anais Mitchell.⁸¹ Feminist revisionists have made a place in the mythological annals over the past few decades, rewriting ancient myths from a feminine/goddess perspective. We now see the main character/hero as female, empowered, courageous, and wise rather than as a victim, the virgin, the prostitute, the witch, or evil as in the tales of old. Authors such as Judith Butler,⁸² Anne Carson,⁸³ and Madeline Miller⁸⁴ stand out as shining examples of the new female-empowered narrative which continues to dramatically shift our world's mythology.

⁷⁸ Robin Wall Kimmerer (1953-) is an American Distinguished Teaching Professor of Environmental and Forest Biology, and Director of the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry. An enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, she is the author of numerous scientific articles, and the books *Gathering Moss: A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses* (2003), and *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (2013).

⁷⁹ Margaret Atwood (1939-) is a Canadian poet, novelist, literary critic, essayist, teacher, environmental activist, and inventor. She is best known for her book *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), a dystopian novel set in New England in the near future, which posits a Christian fundamentalist theocratic regime in the former U.S. that arose as a response to a fertility crisis.

⁸⁰ Heilung is an experimental folk music band made up of members from Denmark, Norway, and Germany. Their music is based on texts and runic inscriptions from Germanic peoples of the Bronze Age, Iron Age, and Viking Age. Heilung describes their music as "amplified history from early medieval northern Europe."

⁸¹ Anais Mitchell (1981-) is an American singer-songwriter, musician, and playwright. Mitchell has released seven studio albums, including *Hadestown*, a retelling of a Greek myth set in Hell.

⁸² Judith Butler (1956-) is an American philosopher and gender theorist whose work has influenced political philosophy, ethics, and the fields of third-wave feminism, queer theory, and literary theory.

⁸³ Anne Carson (1950-) is a Canadian poet, essayist, translator, classicist, and professor. Trained at the University of Toronto, Carson has taught classics, comparative literature, and creative writing at universities across the United States and Canada since 1979. Carson has published translations of the ancient Greek poets Sappho, Simonides, Aiskhylos, Sophokles and Euripides.

⁸⁴ Madeline Miller (1978-) is teacher of Latin and Greek, and an American novelist and author of *The Song of Achilles* (2011) and *Circe* (2018).

In her doctoral thesis “Three Sibyls on a Tripod: Revisionary Mythmaking in the Poetry of H.D., Sylvia Plath and Adrien Rich,” Özlem Görey⁸⁵ writes,

Revisionary mythmaking is not simply the task of re-telling old stories from the female point of view, neither is it restricted to exchanging the roles of the male and female characters of the story. It is a strategy which creates an opportunity for women to redefine themselves and to undermine the foundations of the imaginary truth concerning women, which consequently extends to changing the social and political structures of the patriarchal world. Mythological symbols and tales are used to open up new possibilities for imagination, new ways of seeing this quest. (Gorey, 2000, p. 5)

The feminist Jewish poet Alicia Ostriker⁸⁶ defines the term ‘revisionist mythmaking’ as “the old vessel filled with new wine, initially satisfying the thirst of the individual poet but ultimately making cultural change possible” (Ostriker, 1986, p. 213). Angela Carter,⁸⁷ well-known for her feminist and surreal novels, went even further to describe this process when she said that she is “all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode” (Carter, 1983, p. 69). Indeed, as we step fully into the 21st century, a more connected and intimate relationship with myth, the Feminine, the earth, and each other has begun to emerge.

Mythology as an Inherent Quality of Human Society

It is believed that every culture has had a mythology of some kind; in fact, it has been rarely disputed that myth is an inherent quality of human society. Humans are, and

⁸⁵ Özlem Görey (d.o.b. unknown) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Western Languages and Literatures at Boaziçi University, Turkey.

⁸⁶ Alicia Suskin Ostriker (1937-) is an American poet and scholar who writes Jewish feminist poetry. She was called "America's most fiercely honest poet" by *Progressive*. Additionally, she was one of the first women poets in America to write and publish poems discussing the topic of motherhood.

⁸⁷ Angela Olive Pearce (1940-1992), who published under the name Angela Carter, was an English novelist, short story writer, poet, and journalist, known for her feminist and magical realism works. She is best known for her book *The Bloody Chamber*, which was published in 1979.

always have been, seekers of meaning, and our imagination has provided us with the means to have experiences that cannot be rationalized. Belief in this invisible reality or other planes of existence has informed the rituals, religions, political and social aspects of all societies, however small or large, from the very beginning of human existence. In every phase of humanity, myth can be found (Berk, 2016). Author, former nun and religious historian Karen Armstrong reminds us that human beings have always been mythmakers, and myths are an integral and necessary aspect to society (Armstrong, 2006). According to Janet Catherine Berlo,⁸⁸ art history professor at University of Missouri, myths provide a model for living in *all* human societies; they offer relationships between humans, the supernatural and each other, and they model appropriate pursuits for society (Berlo, 1993).

Countless other renowned scholars, scientists, psychologists and sociologists throughout time concur. French Socialist Georges Sorel⁸⁹ claimed that myth is a “powerful force” inherent in human society (Schechter, 1994, p. 29). Rubin Gotesky⁹⁰ believed it highly probable and convincing that all societies create and value their own myths in order to maintain and value a culture against disruption and destruction (Gotesky, 1952;2009). Myths have existed and continue to exist in all cultures and among all peoples. Belief in supernatural agents and the rituals that express them occur in virtually all human cultures (Brown, 1991; Johnson, 2005; Murdock, 1965; Murdock and

⁸⁸ Janet Catherine Berlo (1952-) is an American art historian and academic, noted for her publications and research into the visual arts heritage of Native American and pre-Columbian cultures.

⁸⁹ Georges Eugène Sorel (1847-1922) was a French social thinker, political theorist, historian, and later journalist. He has inspired theories and movements grouped under the name of Sorelianism, which opposed bourgeois democracy.

⁹⁰ Rubin Gotesky (1906-1997) was an American author, philosopher and educator at Long Island University; his published works included *Human Dignity*, which he co-authored with Ervin Laszlo in 1970.

White, 1980). The renowned anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski⁹¹ believed that myth is essential for the perpetuation and maintenance of social processes, and that myth is a living reality and a “vital ingredient of human civilization” (Malinowski, 1926;2013, p. 82; Malinowski, 1948).

In his treatise on mythological archetypes, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949; 2008), Joseph Campbell discussed a “monomyth,” the similarities of themes, characters, purpose and narrative progression of mythologies across cultures and throughout time. The common thread: giving meaning to our “mundane” existence, a purpose or greater meaning for our lives. Campbell writes:

Throughout the inhabited world, in all times and under every circumstance the myths of man have flourished, and they have been the living inspiration of whatever else may have appeared on the activities of the human body and mind; It would not be too much to say, that myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation. Religions, philosophies, arts, the social forms of primitive and historic man, prime discoveries in science and technology, the very dreams that blister sleep boil up from basic magic ring of myth. (Campbell, 1949;2008, p. 3)

Further, many believe society cannot even exist without myth. In an interview in 2016, mythologist and author Devdutt Pattanaik⁹² stated,

No society can exist without myth. Humans cannot function without myths, because myth creates notions of right and wrong, good and bad, heaven and hell, rights and duties. Marriages, monogamy, peace, salvation non-violence, are all concepts based on myth; they do not exist in nature. All religions, all nations, all tribes, all ideologies, all ways of life, are based on myth. Human rights are based on the myth of equality. Only a world without humans is a world without myths. (Pattanaik, 2016)

⁹¹ Bronisław Malinowski (1884-1942) was a Polish-British anthropologist whose writings on ethnography, social theory, and field research have exerted a lasting influence on the discipline of anthropology.

⁹² Devdutt Pattanaik (1970-) is an Indian mythologist, speaker, illustrator and author, known for his writing on Hindu sacred lore, legends, folklore, fables and parables. His work focuses largely on the areas of religion, mythology, and management.

A society's myths can include atheism, science, philosophy; in fact, any of the ideologies of the larger community. To reiterate, *mythology is a culture's shared story or belief system*. Buddha⁹³ himself rejected a creator god. Buddhist mythology, then, is the story of the seeker King, his journey to enlightenment, and the tenets, philosophy, and actions one can and should take on the Buddhist path. Many schools of thought in India have followed a similar path: The Jain, for example, believe in the reincarnation of a soul, they do not have a divine creator god. In the 6th century BCE, the Carvakas of India were atheists who believed there only existed the physical world with nothing beyond the material here and now, no afterlife, no soul apart from the present body, no gods or supreme Creator. Similarly, Ajivikas in the 5th century BCE did not differentiate between good and evil or have a concept of sin. The Samkhya and Mīmāṃsā Schools in India have no belief of a higher god, along with the 2.9 million atheists that are said to live in India today. Yet, each of these groups has a central belief system to tie them together; this, then, becomes the mythology of their society, their storyline which defines their role and place in this life (Cohen, 2019).

A look at the Pirahã⁹⁴ people of Brazil, a hunter-gatherer tribe of about eight hundred members, is one of the only examples of a society that we know of without either a traditional deity or mythological history. They live solely in the present moment; they concern themselves with direct experience and thus there is no living memory of a

⁹³ Gautama Buddha, popularly known as the Buddha, was an ascetic, a religious leader and teacher who lived in ancient India from 563 - c. 483 BCE. According to legend, He was a Hindu prince who renounced his position and wealth to seek enlightenment as a spiritual ascetic, attained his goal and, in preaching his path to others, founded Buddhism in India in the 6th-5th centuries BCE.

⁹⁴ The Pirahã are an indigenous people of the Amazon Rainforest in Brazil. They are the sole surviving subgroup of the Mura people and are hunter-gatherers. Their culture is concerned solely with matters that fall within direct personal experience, and thus there is no history beyond living memory.

history. However, their governing belief system *is* their mythology. The Pirahã people's relationships are that of nature around them, and of nature's role in their survival. There is no hierarchy, and its social structure includes a small kinship family. Theirs is a world without abstraction, based on the present.

In the late 1970's, linguist Daniel L. Everett⁹⁵ went to Brazil as a missionary to convert the Pirahã people to Christianity. He spent years with them, learning their language, their culture, their philosophy and ways of living and being. Everett found that their entire focus was on what could be immediately experienced in the present moment and found they had no interest whatsoever in a foreign god from a foreign land. The concept of Jesus, a man from ancient history, made no sense to them (Everett, 2005).

Though some since Everett's time have escalated the Pirahã as proof of an example of myth as not being universal, even Everett himself writes of the Pirahã's world as being full of spirits: sky spirits, forest spirits, evil spirits, and nearly everyone in their society claims to see them. The primary difference is the Pirahã do not have discourse about them, they are just a given fact of their reality. This, perhaps, is not altogether unlike our earliest human animist myths and goddess cults as depicted in the following pages.

⁹⁵ Daniel Leonard Everett (1951-) is an American linguist and author best known for his study of the Amazon Basin's Pirahã people and their language. Everett is currently Trustee Professor of Cognitive Sciences at Bentley University in Waltham, Massachusetts.

CHAPTER II

The History and Evolution of Myth

“It is said she was born of the water and the earth, and that is why your blood shall return to the earth and your spirit to the waters of the sacred dream...”

~ Agnes Whistling Elk



Once upon a time, before there was even a beginning, there was Nothing at all. No stars, no sun, no moon, no earth, no wind or fire, not even thought. There was only unfathomable darkness, which was neither hot nor cold, dead nor alive. It was simply Nothing. And this Nothingness floated upon the invisible waters of Time, a mighty infinite river, with neither source nor mouth, without beginning or end.

Then suddenly, one day, Time desired Nothingness, a yearning that was perhaps the First Thing, and they found union together, and they birthed a tiny living spark of Fire. The little spark looked around and was delighted at its Aliveness, but it was also so painfully lonely, full of utter despair in the unbearable cold and dark Nothingness. It sputtered and flew wildly, thinking: I must either grow bigger or I will be consumed by this dreadful, lifeless Nothingness. So, because there was nothing to feed upon, it ate itself.

As it did so, it grew and it grew. Nothingness saw Spark, and was angry, and decided to destroy it. Nothingness tried to smother it in darkness. It tried to put it out with Cold. But the Spark kept growing hotter and larger until it became Fire and eventually it grew to equal the size of Nothingness itself. Then, Fire began to consume the Nothingness until, with a great flash of light, the Nothingness was devoured. "I am what I am," Fire boasted.

The River of Time, however, was quite upset at the events that had taken place, so it sent a Cold Spirit to quench the Fire. Thus began a great battle between Fire and Cold, and the flaming tongues of Fire danced across the skies as it tried to melt Cold's Spirit. The wet icy breath of Cold tried to extinguish Fire, but only a bit of it was dampened and

turned to ash. The battle waged on and on; they are fighting even today and will do so for all eternity, for all of life depends on it. The Universe is kept in balance in this way; otherwise, it will either be consumed by Fire or frozen with Cold.

One day, after many, many eons of Fire and Cold battling each other, a great Being was born from the ashes of Fire: The Great Mother. Ma. All-knowing, all-seeing, all-loving. She was the first Self-created Goddess of Human Shape, brought into being by the will of the Great Spirit Nkulunkulu, who was angered by the war and destruction brought about by Fire and Cold. Ma would surely bring Order to the Chaos that existed.

Ma created all Else: the heavens, the sun and moon and stars, the oceans, and eventually, the Earth itself. She also passed feelings onto humans and animals alike: anger, hunger, jealousy, misery, love, lust, and craving good food. Then Ma, exhausted after all of her hard work of creating, rested on top of the Great Mountain of Iron, Tamba-Zimbi at long last...

~ African Creation Myth

Goddess Pilgrimage to Africa, 2017 (Mutwa, 1999)

Our Primordial Beginnings

Two and a half billion years ago, life began in the watery existence that moved in rhythm to the moon tides. The earth's primordial ocean was simultaneously the Great Mother and the womb, creating and reproducing life. Charles Darwin⁹⁶ believed the menstrual cycle originated here by the mother waters, along "a shore washed by the

⁹⁶ Charles Darwin (1809-1882) was an English naturalist, geologist and biologist, best known for his contributions to evolutionary biology. His proposition that all species of life have descended from common ancestors is now widely accepted and considered a fundamental concept in science. *On the Origin of Species* (1859) is a work of scientific literature by Darwin that is considered to be the foundation of evolutionary biology.

tides,” and that because our earth was dominated by water and marine forms that reproduced without sex organs, that the female principle was the original essence (Darwin, 1876, p. 161). In other words, there only existed the Feminine who reproduced itself within a larger female body, a term called parthenogenesis⁹⁷ (Sjoo & Mor, 1987).

The existence of the Feminine on the planet is cons older than the Masculine; in fact, it was not until approximately two hundred million years ago that the Masculine arrived as life and found its way to land, and newer and more complex life forms began to evolve. Similarly, within the human body, fetuses begin as female. In 1961, renowned psychiatrist Mary Jane Sherfey⁹⁸ discovered the “inductory theory”: all mammalian embryos are anatomically female during the early stages of fetal life, until they are hormonally induced to become male, and it is not until the eighth week that genitalia begin to form (Sherfey, 1966). In essence, the Feminine is intrinsic to all animals.

Fast forward several billion years from our oceanic beginnings: The historian and philosopher William Irwin Thompson,⁹⁹ founder of the philosophical Lindisfarne Community¹⁰⁰ in New York and champion of a new spiritual world order, pointed out that human evolution occurred in six major stages: Hominization, Symbolization,

⁹⁷ Parthenogenesis is a natural form of asexual reproduction in which growth and development of embryos occur without fertilization by sperm.

⁹⁸ Mary Jane Sherfey (1918–1983) was an American psychiatrist and writer on female sexuality. In 1961, Sherfey's interest in female biology was intensified when she came upon the “**inductor theory**,” which demonstrated that the human embryo is female until hormonally “induced” to become male. Many of her findings appear in *The Nature and Evolution of Female Sexuality*, which initially took form as an article contesting the existence of vaginal orgasm, published in the Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association in 1966. Further, Sherfey introduced the concept that “female sexuality was an insatiable drive that had been repressed for the sake of maintaining a civilized agrarian society” and helped to explain why knowledge of the clitoris had been ignored or forbidden for over three hundred years.

⁹⁹ William Irwin Thompson (1938-2020) was an American social philosopher, cultural critic, and poet. He received the Oslo International Poetry Festival Award in 1986. He was the founder of the Lindisfarne Association, which proposed the study and realization of a new planetary culture.

Agriculturalization, Civilization, Industrialization, and Planetization, all of which are discussed in depth below. According to Thompson, the first three major stages (Hominization, Symbolization, and Agriculturalization) were developed by the human female (Sjoo & Mor, 1987; Thompson, 2002).

Let us look first to our earliest ancestors where, amidst the rising and receding glaciers of the Ice Age which began 2,500,000 years ago at the onset of humanity, the seeds of mythology were birthed. It should be noted that at this point, we cannot truly know the belief systems and sociological organizations of our First People, and while we often take what little we find and use these unique discoveries as stereotypical Truths in the context of our own current worldview, we still have no clear answers. However, today we base much of our knowledge from studying indigenous peoples across the world and throughout time, as well as from recent discoveries of ancient burials and art, and even more recently, from genetic technology. Much of the history of our origins of mythology, as described below, is rooted in these current methods.

The Origin of Myth in the Paleolithic Era (2,500,000 - 10,000 BCE)



She is withered, hunched, spindly, her wrinkles as deep as time itself, etched with the secret wisdom of the universe. She is fearsome to behold, with wild white untamed hair and razor-sharp teeth. Her eyes hold black pools as deep as night and can turn

¹⁰⁰ The Lindisfarne Association (1972-2012) located in Ithaca, New York, was founded by William Irwin Thompson. Its ideology included a long list of spiritual and esoteric traditions.

humans to stone. Her long nose rattles as she sleeps. Singing, she sprinkles the sacred waters over the bodies of the dead so that they can be reborn.

Baba Yaga's hut is in the deep moist center of the earth, in a forest of birches whose wood represents beginnings and endings. Built of human bones, it is held up on large chicken legs which occasionally can be caught spinning round as it runs through the forest, screeching and hollering until a magical spell brings it still and silent! The perimeter fence, meant to keep intruders out, is inset with skulls whose eye sockets blaze with light, illuminating the unknown dark.

The Old Grandmother travels through the forest in a mortar, with her knees pushed up to her chin, pushing herself with her pestle. The gusty winds accompany her, tossing this way and that, and a whole chorus of spirits howl and shriek as she passes by. Baba Yaga uses her silver birch broom to sweep away any evidence of her movements, for she is quite a private and secretive old lady. Occasionally she straddles the broom and rides through the skies.

Despite her terrifying outward appearance, Old Grandmother is kind to all who are pure and true of heart. In fact, she has no power over those who are surrounded by love or a mother's blessing. Often, she gives advice, herbs or magical gifts to the good souls who need her help, for she sees and knows all. Wild and untamable, Baba Yaga is Nature itself. She stands at the threshold of life and death, helping those whose Time has come to move back and forth through the worlds of the dead and the living.

~ Baba Yaga, the Slavic Goddess (Billbin, 2013)

Belief in supernatural agents, and the ritual practices that express them, occur in virtually all human cultures. Human beings have always been makers of myth; for humans in the Paleolithic era, myth would have been as necessary for survival as the hunting skills and weapons they would develop. So crucial, in fact, that their myths would arrive, albeit in fragmented form, many thousands of years later in the mythologies of literate cultures (Armstrong, 2005). History Professor Fatih Mehmet Berk¹⁰¹ writes, “A human world without myths should not be imaginable...” (Berk, 2016).

But how and when was myth born, and by whom? What was it, exactly, that our earliest peoples believed? What created the societal structures through which a community, however large or small, birthed, performed ritual, created art, hunted, gathered, ate, celebrated, lived, thrived, died? Anthropologists, archeologists, paleontologists, geneticists, biologists, linguists and other scholars have turned to *symbolic thought* as a clue to the origins of mythology: the ability to think about objects and events that are not present within the immediate environment. Symbolic thinking involves the use of signs, symbols, concepts, and abstract relations, and is evidenced by language, numbers, art, and ritual; its presence allows us to transcend the present, and to imagine, create, and alter our environment.

While new discoveries are made each year as to the timelines and locations of the origin of our species, and theories are in some cases both contentious and highly discrepant, I will attempt below to give a brief summary, as the evolution of humanity is directly linked to the birth of myth. By no means, however, do these timelines suggest that there is a linear evolutionary hierarchy to how humans arrived, changed, adapted,

¹⁰¹ Fatih Mehmet Berk (d.o.b. unknown) is an Associate Professor of Ancient History at Necmettin Erbakan University, in Konya, Turkey.

and became the upright animals that we are today. I like to imagine it, on the contrary, as a spiral timeline, as evidenced in my concluding pages.

It has been thought by many that humans split from our oldest living ancestors, the apes, around six to eight million years ago, perhaps even as far back as thirteen million years ago or beyond, to become *Homo sapien*. Yet it was not until two hundred to three hundred thousand years ago that, according to many longtime studies by the renowned evolutionary linguist and Brown University professor Philip Lieberman,¹⁰² et. al. (1969), the larynx descended lower in the throat of *homo sapiens* than in any other animal. This descent, called LDT or Laryngeal Descent Theory,¹⁰³ signified for decades by many experts in the field, the birth of language as we know it.

A recent study by Louis-Jean Boé¹⁰⁴ et al. (2019), however, claims that the throat shape and anatomical components to pronounce vowels were with us as long as twenty-seven million years ago. While animals do make sounds, human language's complexity, flexibility and integration of speech and language is far greater than in any other species and, according to their study, it has been with us from the time of our shared primate ancestors (Boé, et al., 2019). Currently, many leading scholars of the evolution of language believe it most likely developed around six to seven million years ago when we

¹⁰² Philip Lieberman (1934-) is a cognitive scientist at Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, United States. His career has focused on topics in the evolution of language, and particularly the relationship between the evolution of the vocal tract, the human brain, and the evolution of speech, cognition and language. In 1990, Lieberman gave the Nijmegen Lectures of the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics under the title 'The evolution of language and cognition.' He has authored numerous works including *On the Origins of Language* (1975).

¹⁰³ The Laryngeal Descent Theory, which emerged in the late 1960s, posits that some 200,000 years ago, human ancestors' larynxes dropped, enabling their ability to make contrasting vowel sounds and so develop speech. This in turn enabled them to develop language. Today this theory is shifting with new data arriving in the field.

¹⁰⁴ Louis-Jean Boé (d.o.b. unknown) is a speech and cognition researcher at the University of Grenoble.

split from the genus *Pan*, our African ape relatives; and even Lieberman himself now concurs (Gutman, 2019).

Yet, regardless of its developmental time frame, language is undisputedly one of the quintessential embodiments of symbolic thought. Approaching the origins of myth and its correlation to symbolism and language proves extremely difficult, because the soft tissues of the larynx, tongue and throat do not fossilize. However, burials and art do, and by examining finds from both the burial rituals and the artistic expressions of our earliest ancestors, we can obtain a material record of what might have been spiritual or meaningful to our earliest ancestors (Madison, 2018).

The idea that modern humans evolved out of a single cradle of civilization in Africa is no longer perceived as true. While current humans are the only living species left in the genus “*Homo*,” other species of *Homo* once existed. In fact, to date we know of at least nine human species from the last one million years, located not only in Africa but across Eurasia and even on a small island in the Philippines; many of these earliest ancestors of ours are showing evidence of symbolic thought, the necessary ingredient for mythmaking.

In 2013, just outside Johannesburg in South Africa, an exciting find led by Lee Berger¹⁰⁵ and his team revealed a new early form of the human species. Referred to as *Homo naledi*,¹⁰⁶ the fossils are dated between 335,000 to 236,000 years ago; they were found deep inside a cave system called “The Rising Star,” where a burying chamber,

¹⁰⁵ Lee Rogers Berger (1965-) is an American-born South African paleoanthropologist and *National Geographic* Explorer-in-Residence known for the discovery of the fossil skeletons of *Australopithecus sediba*, a primitive hominin species that some paleontologists believe is the most plausible link between the australopithecines and humans.

¹⁰⁶ *Homo naledi* is a species of archaic human discovered in 2013 in the Rising Star Cave, South Africa dating to the Middle Pleistocene 335,000–236,000 years ago.

called the Dinaledi Chamber, was located. This archaic graveyard could only be reached by a small twisting vertical passage only twenty centimeters wide; it required *purposeful* crawling and climbing in order for these ancient ancestors to inter the dead. This intentional burial chamber provided evidence that the Homo *naledi* had symbolic thought and practiced ritual behavior, leading researchers to hypothesize that they held some kind of mythological or complex belief system about death (Madison, 2018; Smithsonian Institution, 2021).

The oldest art we have found to date are petroglyphs in the Auditorium Cave in Bhimbetka, Madhya Pradesh, India; a total of eleven cup-shaped hollows, carved onto a boulder, are estimated to be at least two hundred and ninety thousand years old, but perhaps at least as old as 700,000 BCE. A second site was found at Daraki-Chattan, near Tehsil Bhanpura, Madhya Pradesh, India; there, a small deep cave contains two vertical panels covered with four hundred and ninety petroglyphs (similar cup-shaped hollows as the Auditorium Cave), along with the hammer-stones used to create them. It is estimated that these petroglyphs date from between 400,000 to 1.8 million years BCE.

Discoveries of the use and processing of pigments including red ochre at Pinnacle Point in southern Africa reveal the potential skills of art, communication and thus complex symbolic thought amongst anatomically modern humans from as early as one hundred sixty-five thousand years ago (Marean et al., 2007; McDougall et al. 2005; Watts, 2010). Similarly, In Southern Africa, in Blombos Cave, we find evidence of carved geometric symbols, and patterns painted with red ochre, as well as perforated shell beads dating back to some of our early ancestors, seventy-five to a hundred thousand years ago. The idea and use of complex imagery is evident, and many assert that as we

evolved anatomically, so too did we develop the cognitive and communicative skills to possess a religious or mythological belief system (Peoples, et al., 2016).

Some of our earliest evidence of symbolic thought and mythology can also be seen in our studies of the Neanderthal¹⁰⁷ people. Neanderthal fossils have been found dating back to at least four hundred and thirty thousand years ago. While the early *Homo sapiens* were in the process of evolving in Africa, the Neanderthal peoples (*Homo neanderthalensis*) thrived in Europe and Asia until about forty thousand years ago, living in small communities and families across Europe and parts of Asia, and perhaps even elsewhere across the world. We know from evidence as far back as three hundred thousand years ago that they were skilled at making tools and art, as seen through jewelry and pigmented symbols on the walls of caves. They had large brains compared to today's humans; they communicated with each other and developed the ability to make fire. They hunted large animals at close range, caught seafood, captured birds, perhaps even made clothes, and they looked after their sick (Humphrey & Stringer, 2018).

It is the Neanderthal burials that give us the greatest indication of having held some kind of belief in a life beyond death, or at the very least lived according to a belief system that incorporated ritual, which is usually inseparable from myth. Mortuary rituals are a key example of symbolic thought, with the idea that deliberate treatment of the dead and mourning represents abstract thinking about the past, present and future (Madison, 2018). The Neanderthal species were conscious of their mortality and created and

¹⁰⁷ Neanderthals, our closest extinct human relative, are an extinct species or subspecies of archaic humans who lived in Eurasia until about 40,000 years ago. While the cause of their extinction remains "highly contested," demographic factors like small population size, inbreeding, and random fluctuations are considered likely factors.

performed rituals to support this awareness. They buried their dead with care, often in the fetal position and accompanied by an animal sacrifice (Armstrong 2005).

Mythologist Joseph Campbell believed that during the Neanderthal period, ancient people turned their landscape into a place of spiritual relevance by mythologizing the land and animals upon it. In one of his many interviews with Bill Moyers,¹⁰⁸ Campbell says that where we have found “animal sacrifice buried with the dead, surely mythology had begun, an idea, thought or story of something that comes afterward, or a plane of existence beyond this one” (Moyers, 1988, ep. 3). Similarly, History Professor Fatih Mehmet Berk asserts that the burial rituals of the Neanderthal indicate a belief in an afterlife similar to our own (Berk, 2016).

The human species would spread upward and out of Africa, where we would continue to breed with several, or perhaps many, species like our own who lived in various parts of the world, hunting, gathering, communicating, making tools and art, and crossing continents; eventually we would become the *Homo sapiens* we are today. Yet whether Neanderthal, *Homo sapien*, or an altogether new or different human species, whether from France, Siberia or Africa, it appears that from our earliest days, humans have always been creators of myth. Though the modern human may be a patchwork of crossbreeding and migration circles, we are now learning that although prehistoric people lived in different places and times and ways, our earliest ancestors demonstrated thoughts

¹⁰⁸ Bill Moyers (1934-) is an American journalist who began his career as an Ordained Minister and served as Special Assistant to President Johnson, later becoming his Press Secretary. Moyers then turned to journalism, and was especially known for his television programs that aired on the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) including his 1988 PBS documentary with mythologist Joseph Campbell; this documentary would comprise the content of their co-authored work *The Power of Myth*, published posthumously in 1988 after Campbell died.

about an existence beyond their seen world; and they expressed this symbolic and abstract thinking through their language, art, and ritual burials.

Animism in the Paleolithic Era



Once upon a time, at the beginning of Dreamtime, four Giant creator beings were sent by the Great Creator to make and shape all the infinite features of the land. The four Giants arrived at a secret location just south of Lake Condah (Kerup, or Koon Doon), in the country of the Stony Rises.

The Giants took the shape of men and became the very first of a long line of magical Dreamtime/Law/Lore men, who had special spiritual and ceremonial powers and responsibilities. Their descendants, throughout the ages, would also have these powers and continue to perform their special duties. Eventually three of the original Dreaming/Law/Lore men moved to the north and the west of the country. However, the fourth man, Budj Bim (High Head) stayed there in the South. He crouched down, and his giant body was transformed, becoming the peaks of Tappoc and Budj Bim.

When Budj Bim erupted molten lava and stone over 30,000 years ago, the people realized it was the fourth Giant creator being, revealing himself in the land. His forehead was the mountain peak, his teeth that spat from his mouth were the rocks that flew through the air, and his hot blood was the lava that flowed to the sea.

~ Australian Aboriginal Gunditjmara creation story, said to be the oldest story in the world dating back to at least 37,000 BCE (Lovett, 2016)

If language, art and ritual are indeed indicators of symbolic thought, and if symbolic thought correlates to the origin of myth, what exactly did our early human ancestors believe and practice? While we may not know the exact origin and location of our species, it seems most experts agree that our first mythologies most likely came from a time when humans perceived existence solely as the sacred; the profane, the absolute opposite of sacred, did not exist (Eliade, 1987).

A quick look at these two opposing forces seems worthwhile here. Descriptive words such as “holy” and “supernatural” denote the word *sacred*; it alludes to the awareness of the divine nature of things. *Profane* is that which is mundane or ordinary, not special, a daily action without intention or thought, or simply, the lack of the sacred. It is likely that, for our ancient ancestors, all of creation was sacred: humans, animals, insects, plants, the landscapes, the elements, the skies, and the seasons, *and contained within them was an intelligent, communicative life force or spirit/soul*. The Celtic Druids¹⁰⁹ call this spiritual life force *Nwyfre*, the Algonquians¹¹⁰ call it *Manitou*, and the Haudenosaunee¹¹¹ (Iroquois Confederacy) call it *Orenda*. Ralph Waldo Emerson¹¹² and

¹⁰⁹ A *druid* was a member of the high-ranking class in ancient Celtic cultures, generally residing in the ancient lands of Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, Isle of Man, and Brittany. Druids were religious leaders as well as legal authorities, adjudicators, lore keepers, medical professionals and political advisors. Though the ancient Druids left no written accounts, a neo-druid tradition continues today.

¹¹⁰ The Algonquian are one of the most populous and widespread North American native language groups. They were prominent along the Atlantic Coast and along the Saint Lawrence River and around the Great Lakes.

¹¹¹ The Iroquois or Haudenosaunee are an Iroquoian indigenous confederacy in northeast North America. They were known during the colonial years to the French as the Iroquois League, and later as the Iroquois Confederacy. The English called them the Five Nations, comprising the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca.

¹¹² Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) was an American essayist, lecturer, philosopher, abolitionist, and poet who led the Transcendentalist movement of the mid-19th century.

his Transcendental¹¹³ circle would use the term *Oversoul*, and Plato, in his 4th century BCE work *Timaeus*, would call this life force *anima mundi*: “This world is indeed a living being endowed with a soul and intelligence, a single visible living entity containing all other living entities, which by their nature are all related” (Plato, 4th century BCE;1937).

A recent theory is that life for our earliest people was infused with spirit, and this sacred life force was both imbued in all of existence and it *connected* all things, an invisible web of which all matter and spirit danced and merged. Human existence would have been the interplay between the physical and spiritual, both existing simultaneously. Further, the interior and exterior worlds were most likely not separate either. In other words, intimacy with life and death was ever present and demanded an awareness of the sacred in all things manifest and unmanifest (Eliade, 1987). In modern English, and in current times, we have given this belief system, the recognition of the universe as the Divine itself, of which we are a part, a term: *Pantheism*. Proponents of the current philosophical view of *panpsychism* claim that this unified force is consciousness itself. *Panentheism*, on the other hand, is the recognition of an external transcendent Creator and a life force that emanates from this Creator.

Animism is closely related to pantheism, and some even use the two interchangeably; however, for many, animism further recognizes an *individual* soul or spirit in all of the manifest and unmanifest worlds. Animism has its roots in the Latin word “anima” and means breath, spirit, life. First termed by anthropologist Sir Edward

¹¹³ Transcendentalism is a philosophical movement that developed in the late 1820s and 1830s in New England. A core belief of Transcendentalists was in the inherent goodness of people and nature; they saw divine experience inherent in the everyday, rather than believing in a distant heaven. Transcendentalists saw physical and spiritual phenomena as part of dynamic processes rather than discrete entities.

Burnett Tylor in the 19th century, animism, like pantheism, describes many indigenous peoples' view of the world: that everything is imbued with a divine spirit, interconnected, and any one thing affects and is supported by all things. Within animism, invisible worlds coexist with the visible world; these worlds, which include trees, rocks, humans, animals, water, weather, and sky, have consciousness and can communicate; and spirits, according to many cultures who hold animism as their core mythology, can include demons, fairies, fates, even angels.

Turning to the indigenous and/or hunter gatherer people of our current day gives us a window, or at the very least, a few clues into the way our ancient ancestors might have lived. In Matt J. Rossano's¹¹⁴ book *Ritual in Human Evolution and Religion: Psychological and Ritual Resources* (2021), he shares studies about the !Kung San¹¹⁵ of southern Africa, the Vedda¹¹⁶ of Sri Lanka, the Andaman Islanders¹¹⁷ of southeast Asia,

¹¹⁴ Matt J. Rossano (1962-), PhD, is Professor of Psychology at Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond, LA. He is the author of several books including *Ritual in Human Evolution and Religion: Psychological and Ritual Resources* (2021).

¹¹⁵ The !Kung are a bush people living in the Kalahari Desert in Namibia, Botswana and in Angola in Africa. As a hunter-gatherer society, they are highly dependent on each other for survival. Hoarding and stinginess are frowned upon, and the !Kung's emphasis is on collective wealth for the tribe, rather than on individual wealth. The !Kung people of southern Africa are both animistic and animatistic, which means they believe in both personifications and impersonal forces.

¹¹⁶ The Vedda people of Sri Lanka were that island's aboriginal inhabitants prior to the 6th century BCE. They adopted the Sinhala language and now no longer speak their own language. Ethnically, they are allied to the indigenous jungle peoples of southern India and to early populations in Southeast Asia.

¹¹⁷ The Andamanese are the various indigenous peoples in Southeast Asia. The Andamanese are among the various groups considered Negrito, owing to their dark skin and diminutive stature. All Andamanese traditionally lived a hunter-gatherer lifestyle and appear to have lived in substantial isolation for thousands of years. It is suggested that the Andamanese settled in the Andaman Islands around 26,000 years ago.

and the Australian Aborigines¹¹⁸; they are all believed to represent humanity's ancient populations. Through them, we see how the belief in animism gave explanation to our earliest ancestors about the activities, events and changes that were happening all around them. Graham Harvey,¹¹⁹ Professor of Religious Studies in London, studied current and past animistic beliefs and practices of Native Americans, the Maori, Aboriginal Australians, and eco-pagans for many years; he has come to the conclusion that we have always been animists. Harvey found that across culture, time and place, one of the common threads of these four groups is the idea that nothing is inanimate; there is no separation between the human world and all else as most "western" cultures now practice and believe (Harvey, 2019).

Today some use the term *totemism*¹²⁰ to describe this mystical relationship between humans, animals and plants; others use the term the *native mind*. In their book, *Wisdom of the Elders* (1993), David Suzuki¹²¹ and Peter Knudtson¹²² give us a clearer

¹¹⁸ Aboriginal Australians are the various Indigenous peoples of the Australian mainland and many of its islands, such as Tasmania, Fraser Island, Hinchinbrook Island, the Tiwi Islands, and Groote Eylandt, but excluding the Torres Strait Islands.

¹¹⁹ Graham Harvey (1959-) is an English religious studies scholar. He specializes in modern Paganism, indigenous religions and animism. He has written extensively about indigenous religions and animism, producing the monograph *Animism: Respecting the Living World* (2005) and the edited volume *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism* (2013).

¹²⁰ Totemism is a system of belief in which humans are said to have kinship or a mystical relationship with a spirit-being, such as an animal or plant.

¹²¹ David Suzuki (1936) is a Canadian academic, science broadcaster, and environmental activist. Suzuki earned a Ph.D. in zoology from the University of Chicago in 1961 and was a professor in the genetics department at the University of British Columbia from 1963 until his retirement in 2001. He is the co-author of *Wisdom of the Elders* (1993).

¹²² Peter Knudtson (1947) is a nature writer and former wildlife biologist. He received his master's degree from California State University and his bachelor's degree in premedical zoology from the University of California. He is the co-author of *Wisdom of the Elders* (1993).

sense of how an animist might see the world:

The Native Mind sees all life as inherently holy; is not concerned with exerting dominion over nature; recognizes a Divine Being who permeates the cosmos and sanctifies it; heartily accepts responsibility for living harmoniously with the earth; makes sacrifices; expresses gratitude; sees the universe and all things as alive, dynamic, changing and animated by a universal life force; understands the circular nature of time; accepts mysteries of life; finds kinship and empathy with all creatures...and finally, the Native Mind celebrates joyfully its personal life that the Greater Life of which it is an integral part. (Suzuki & Knudtson, 1993)

In their research on the early evolution of religion, scholars Peoples, et al. (2016) attempted to pinpoint the origins of myth/religion. For their study, they used an array of phylogenetic (i.e., specific physiological similarities and differences) and linguistic comparative methods to examine a total of 33 hunter-gatherer societies across the world. They examined traits of animism, shamanism,¹²³ belief in an afterlife, and ancestor worship.¹²⁴ Their findings concluded that *animism*, present amongst all the hunter-gatherer tribes, was active before all other traits and was likely the oldest belief system held by our ancient ancestors. Belief in an afterlife emerged, followed by shamanism and ancestor worship. The researchers also concluded that ancestor spirits or high gods who were active in human affairs were absent in early humans, suggesting a deep history for the egalitarian nature of hunter-gatherer societies. (Peoples, et al. 2016)

The term “animism” entered scholarly vocabulary around 1871, when the “father of anthropology” Sir Edward Burnett Tylor used it in his book *Primitive Culture* to refer to the seeds of religious development, believed and practiced by “primitive” cultures and

¹²³ Shamanism is a religious practice that involves a practitioner interacting with what they believe to be a spirit world through altered states of consciousness, such as trance.

¹²⁴ Ancestor worship is the veneration of the dead, including one's ancestors. It is based on love and respect for the deceased. In some cultures, it is related to beliefs that the dead have a continued existence and may possess the ability to influence the fortune of the living. Some groups venerate their direct, familial ancestors.

their belief in the supernatural. His work was radical for the time, for he brought forth the novel idea that perhaps “heathen” non-Christians may have had religious or spiritual practices after all. However, Tylor simultaneously brought an evolutionary hierarchy to the idea of animism, with animistic cultures appearing at the bottom of the evolutionary totem pole, a “stage” through which cultures would pass as they “progressed”; polytheistic practices would follow, monotheism would follow next in terms of a more evolved practice, only to eventually look to science itself at the very top. (Tylor, 1871;2010)

In the mid 20th century, Irving Hallowell¹²⁵ once again shifted our modern perception of animism and the communities and cultures who practiced it. He had spent significant time with the indigenous Ojibwa¹²⁶ and Abnaki¹²⁷ nations in southern central Canada beginning in the 1930’s. There, Hallowell studied aspects of kinship, social organization, economics, technology, ecological relationships, medicine, religion and folklore, and wrote at length on the effect of Native American culture on Euro-American culture, as well as their “worldview”: the lens through which the Ojibwa viewed the outer world, and how they saw themselves in relation to all else, both topics that had rarely been broached in scholarly circles. (Hallowell, 1960)

¹²⁵ Alfred Irving "Pete" Hallowell (1892-1974) was an award-winning American anthropologist, archaeologist and businessman. He is known for his work with the North American Indians, especially the Ojibwa, and was responsible for helping to change previously held perceptions about the First People of North America.

¹²⁶ The Ojibwe are an indigenous Anishinaabe people in what is currently southern Canada, the northern Midwestern United States, and Northern Plains.

¹²⁷ The Abenaki are an Indigenous people of the Northeastern Woodlands of Canada and the United States. They are an Algonquian-speaking people and part of the Wabanaki Confederacy.

Hallowell learned that the concept of “persons” was not solely for humans; rather, all things held within them the potential for spirit, and in fact, these “other-than-humans” often transcended the human realms. For the Ojibwa, there was no such thing as an “inanimate” object; all things held the possibility of inhabiting spirit-energies. In an exchange between an Ojibwa Anishinaabe Elder in Manitou, Canada, Hallowell asked the Elder if all the rocks around them were alive. The old man paused for a long while, then responded, “No! But some are.” The Elder smiled. Sure enough, Ojibwa members shared with Hallowell that they had seen stones move and talk; further, all things in their environment, such as thunder, the rivers, bear and turtle, sun and moon held such potential and were often considered relations in their worldview. (Hallowell, 1960)

Many are still offended by Tylor’s old use and subsequently held universal beliefs of animism as “primitive.” However, the term in its more current-day form has continued to gain attention, respect and a sensitivity to the practices of our indigenous brothers and sisters. Today, animism as a belief system is growing (as discussed in Chapter VI), and animists continue to live in large numbers across the world, including tribal communities in the Americas, Africa, Australia, and Asia, providing the thread that weaves us all to our most ancient of families.

Her-story: The Mother Goddess in the Paleolithic Era



Once upon a time, before all time, there was only the sea. Nothing else existed at all, no moon, no sun, no stars, not time, not space, not plants, not people, not animals. Only the sea, swaying back and forth, back and forth amidst the unfathomable darkness.

And the sea was the Mother, who was nothing and nowhere. And her name was Gaulchováng. The essence. The unborn. The eternal. She was the ocean, and the ocean was Mother. The Mother of Songs. She was all there was. There she sat, in the deepest of the deep, underneath it all.

After many eons, the beautiful large black-haired Mother of Songs found herself lonely, and so she birthed All-things. She became the rivers and pools, the waterfalls and singing streams. She birthed the nine worlds, all the beings, all actions. She birthed maleness from her own form, and then birthed a child. Then a jaguar. Then the humans and the ancestors and the heroes. She birthed nine daughters who were the different soils of the earth, and swallowed half of the oceans so there would be land.

One day, one of the ancestors whose name was Sintána decided he wanted a wife, and he demanded that Gaulchováng give him one. She offered eight of her daughters, but her daughter Black Earth was the most powerful and Gaulchováng wanted to keep her daughter from him. Alas, Sintána kidnapped Black Earth and ran off with her across the earth. The people say that wherever Black Earth placed her foot, the most perfect fertile soil for growing crops appeared. Though Black Earth was never reunited with the Mother of Songs, the first couple became the beloved ancestors of the Kogi People.

~ A Colombian Creation Myth

Goddess Pilgrimage to South America 2018

(Monaghan, 1988;2014, p. 355)

While it may be impossible to prove that a Great Mother deity existed in our Paleolithic past, I share below the work and findings of many researchers from the

twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This includes eco-feminist scholars, archeologists, anthropologists, psychologists, historians, and authors, such as the highly respected and much revered Dr. Marija Gimbutas, who was an archeologist, a prolific author, excavator, expert on European folklore and mythology, and reader of over twenty languages.

The idea of a Primordial Mother is often a highly contentious and debatable subject in academic circles. Some claim the findings of the Great Mother or Goddess supporters are not “scientific enough,” and that they are merely trying to fit a female deity into a patriarchal system in order to shift to a newer and more gender-inclusive paradigm, though critics respect the work of Gimbutas and others and agree that speculation and intuition are essential to scholarly progress (Steinfels, 1990). However, countless scholars over the past fifty years have examined early art, rituals, burials, indigenous communities past and present, and most importantly *the myths that have come to us from antiquity*; from their findings, along with new genetic technology, it seems both possible and plausible that the existence of a primordial Great Mother figure or essence was once worshiped by our ancient ancestors, as Gimbutas claimed.

It is theorized that the concept of a Mother Goddess had a profound place in our consciousness as far back as 200,000 BCE, or perhaps even as early as our earliest tool-making humans two million five hundred thousand years ago (Tate, 2006). It thus comes as no surprise that the earliest temples were caves that simulated the womb and tomb of the Great Mother, with paintings of blood red upon her walls. Housing the ancient mysteries, they would have been a place of regeneration, a symbol of birth as we come from the darkness and into the light, then back to the darkness of earth in death. Many

modern-day scholars believe that the first mythologies were that of a cosmic spiritual-physical energy, a kind of celebration of the ecstasy of life, a dance of the true merging of body, spirit, and the Great Creator. This does not in any way suggest that our earliest people lived in an idyllic state; rather, their mythological world and living reality most likely occurred simultaneously.

My experiences with my indigenous friends at Teotihuacan,¹²⁸ with the Priestesses of Glastonbury, England, with the deeply ritualized lives of the Balinese, and my personal visits to the Sri Lakshmi Temple¹²⁹ in Ashland, Massachusetts are all glimpses of this possibility of how our First People might have experienced the world, where one can witness divinity, myth and the living world occurring simultaneously.

Just as it is often surmised that animism was the primary mythology and belief system in the earliest hominid communities, so too many believe our ancient ancestors also had a sense of Source, of a Great Mother Earth who birthed, nourished, sustained, and renewed through death all of life. Though the details still escape us, here is what many have extrapolated: the Great Mother Creator was female, born of herself, the foundation of all beings. She was all giving, all taking, the source of renewal, birth, life, nourishment, nurturing, cycles, and eventually the dark fertile soil to which all life would return. She was beyond merely a fertility goddess; she was Life manifest, whole and complete. The Primordial Mother formed herself out of the chaos into the world itself *as* the world itself. She was not a *separate* deity but rather there was most likely an

¹²⁸ Teotihuacan is a vast Mexican archaeological complex northeast of Mexico City. Running down the middle of the site, which was once a flourishing pre-Columbian city, is the Avenue of the Dead. It links the Temple of Quetzalcoatl, the Pyramid of the Moon and the Pyramid of the Sun.

¹²⁹ The Sri Lakshmi Temple in Ashland, Massachusetts, also known as the New England Hindu Temple, Inc., is New England's first traditional Hindu temple. The temple was inaugurated in 1990 by priests from India, the United States, and Britain.

understanding that we were one with the ancient life-giving Mother of the cosmos (Campbell, 2013; Eisler, 1988; Gimbutis, 1999; Leeming & Page, 1996; Sjoö & Mor, 1987).

Earth undeniably performs the same functions as the female: birth, nourishment, protection, power, cycles. Thus, for the earliest years of human evolution, it seems natural that there would have been a close identification with mothers, Mother Earth, and the Cosmic Mother. While the role of the male in conception would not come to light until the birth of agriculture (as discussed below in Chapter 2, “The Neolithic Era”), it made sense that women, who grew pregnant with, birthed, and nourished new life, were intimately connected to Spirit and Source (Sjoö & Mor, 1987; Tate, 2006). The Great Mother held close associations with lunar worship, as the moon’s cyclical rhythms mirrored that of womanhood and the menstrual cycle (Frazer, 1890;2012). Echoes of the Great Mother and her association with the moon would be heard in mythological goddesses across the world for thousands of years to come: the goddess Astarte¹³⁰ from Syria, Ishtar¹³¹ from Babylonia-Assyria, Isis¹³² from Egypt, Hekate¹³³ from Greece,

¹³⁰ Astarte, along with Asherah and Anath, was one of the three great goddesses of the Canaanite pantheon. Astarte is well known as a goddess of sexual love and fertility but also has associations with war.

¹³¹ Ishtar (Inanna in Sumerian sources) is a primary Mesopotamian goddess closely associated with love and war. This powerful Mesopotamian goddess is the first known deity for which we have written evidence.

¹³² Isis is a goddess in Egyptian mythology known as the goddess of the moon. As goddess of life and magic, Isis protected women and children, and healed the sick. Closely linked to the throne, she was one of the greatest goddesses of Ancient Egypt.

¹³³ Hekate was the Greek goddess of magic, witchcraft, the night, moon, ghosts and necromancy. Hekate assisted Demeter in her search for Persephone, guiding her through the night with flaming torches.

Diana¹³⁴ from Rome, The Blackfoot's Ko'komiki'somm,¹³⁵ Southern California Cuillah's Manily,¹³⁶ China's Chang'e,¹³⁷ Hina¹³⁸ from New Zealand, and countless more.

The activities of the women would most likely have been closely associated with the spirit of the Great Mother, sacred and infused with her divine spirit. Most of our early ancestors' nourishment came from women's food gathering, and many of the oldest and most primal tools were digging tools used by women. It is believed that our earliest women were inventors, visionaries, shamans, scientists, sexually and physically active women who were not ruled by aggressive dominant men, or society would not have progressed. Women's roles throughout our early history would probably have included weaving, ceramics, textiles, hunting small game, food gathering, cooking, tanning, dyeing; they studied medicine, were probably the first users and domesticators of fire, and would eventually be the first to discover and understand agriculture and animal domestication. They were the creators of ritual, gave us our first calendars, and the origins of astronomy (Eisler, 1988; Gimbutas, 1999; Sjoo & Mor, 1987). Eventually the Primordial Mother would take on many different faces and names, each associated with a

¹³⁴ Diana, in Roman religion, goddess of wild animals and the hunt, identified with the Greek goddess Artemis.

¹³⁵ Ko'komiki'som , also spelled Komorkis, is the indigenous Blackfoot's goddess of the Moon, second eldest of the sacred Sky People. She is the wife of the sun god Natos and mother of the stars, of which the most important is Morning-Star. She is said to be the grandmother of several heroes of Blackfoot legend, such as Star-Boy.

¹³⁶ Menily is the Cahuilla goddess of the moon, who brought the arts to the indigenous Cahuilla people.

¹³⁷ Chang'e is the Chinese goddess of the moon, best known for stealing an elixir of immortality from her husband, Hou Yi.

¹³⁸ Hina is the New Zealand goddess associated with phases of the moon under the names *Hinatea* (Fair Hina) and *Hinauri* (Dark Hina). Hina is typically the name assigned to a number of Polynesian deities. The name Hina usually relates to a powerful female force.

specific woman's role such as the Greek goddess Hestia¹³⁹ of the hearth, Artemis¹⁴⁰ the hunter; and the Mayan goddess of healing and midwifery, Ixchel.¹⁴¹

Many believe these early societies exhibited *partnership* amongst men and women, an equal sharing of responsibilities and roles in community. There would not have been a ranking of one over the other, but rather men and women were, as Eisler called it, "linked" and would not be equated with either inferiority or superiority (Eisler, 1987, p. xvii). It is also believed that kinship systems were matrilineal, for throughout the ages only the mother would most likely be known as the true parent of a child. Identity and inheritance were passed along female bloodlines. These early mothers would profoundly shape social structures across the globe.

Ancient society was most likely not built on dominance principles like we see today, but rather decisions were made that supported the survival of the people. Further, it is believed our earliest societies were likely based on communal bonding and gift exchange rather than a competitive or profit-making system like most of the countries and cultures we see in modern times. (Gimbutas, 1999; Martin & Vorhees, 1975; Sjojo & Mor, 1987).

¹³⁹ Hestia is the virgin goddess of the hearth, the right ordering of domesticity, the family, the home, and the state.

¹⁴⁰ Artemis is the Greek goddess of the hunt, the wilderness, wild animals, the Moon, and chastity.

¹⁴¹ Ixchel was the Mayan goddess of the moon, of love, of gestation, of medicine, and of the textile arts.

In *The Mother Tongue* (2012), Dr. Will Taegel¹⁴² reminds us that ancient and indigenous peoples had direct access to the “Primal Presence.” Through that presence, they were able to tune into the information coming toward them from all things and could simultaneously give information back to all things. This interplay between all things human and not-human, which lies dormant in the cells of our current global civilization, created an intimacy with the cosmos for both our indigenous and ancient peoples (Taegel, 2012).

With that in mind, some have theorized that women were the first to develop language, probably from their proximity to childbirth, childcare, food preparation, and more. Women most likely would have had to stay in collective groups, and they probably had to communicate with each other and the world around them, giving us our first and original language, a dream body-language such as Taegel described which would have included a holistic ~ physical, mental, emotional, spiritual ~ way of communicating with the land, animals and people (Sjoo & Mor, 1987). Great Goddess myths, perhaps, grew out of the workings of these first mothers; simultaneously their work and artistic expressions grew from their spiritual stories, the two nourishing and supporting each other.

It makes sense that ancient industries that were essential to human culture, such as tools, arts, medicines, and alchemical processes, did not arise solely from the logic centers of the brain, but were the “products of dream-thinking, of holographic thinking,

¹⁴² Dr. Will Taegel (1940-) is the former dean of The Wisdom School and founder of the Earthtribe Community. Taegel is the author of several books concerning earth-based consciousness including *Wild Heart* (2011), the *Mother Tongue: Intimacy in the Eco-Field* (2013) and *Walking with Bears: On Bridges to Earth's New Era*. (2017). He walks in two dimensions: One reflects his lifelong connection with the Indigenous Mind/Heart, and the other his psychological and scientific research. While both of his doctorates concentrate on the synergy of ecopsychology and the matrix of field physics, he counts his shamanic training described in *Walking with Bears* as the most important of his life.

of mythic, ritual, and poetic communication between women and their environment” (Sjoo & Mor, 1987, p. 41). This theory may have its roots in the fact that young girls in general develop language earlier and more easily than boys and have been found to have higher FOXP2 proteins,¹⁴³ a gene that is central to the acquisition of speech and language in humans, and the fact that young women are the leaders in linguistic changes (Bowers, et al., 2013; Terttu & Raumolin-Brunberg, 2003).

Modern day indigenous nations and communities across the globe give us, perhaps, an indication of the societal organizations of matrilineal cultures from which we might acquire a vague sense of our earliest societies. For example, in India, we can look to the Khasis,¹⁴⁴ one of the last existing matrilineal societies in the world. They live in close-knit extended families or clans. The birth of a daughter is celebrated; children receive their mother's last name; husbands move into their wife's home; and the youngest daughters inherit the ancestral property. The Bribri¹⁴⁵ of Costa Rica are an indigenous tribe with an estimated twelve to thirty-five thousand members; here, land is handed down from mother to daughter, women are revered, and they are responsible for sacred

¹⁴³ FOXP2 is a protein enclosed in the FOXP2 gene. It is found in many vertebrates, where it plays an important role, such as in the mimicry of birds and echolocation in bats. *FOXP2* is also required for the proper development of speech and language in humans. Initially identified in 1998 as the genetic cause of a speech disorder in a British family, *FOXP2* was the first gene discovered to be associated with speech and language and was subsequently dubbed "the language gene."

¹⁴⁴ The Khāsi are the people of the Khāsi and Jaintia hills of the state of Meghālaya in India. The Khāsi have a distinctive culture. Both inheritance of property and succession to tribal office run through the female line, passing from the mother to the daughter.

¹⁴⁵ The Bribri are indigenous people of the Talamanca region, living in the mountains and Caribbean coastal areas of Costa Rica and Northern Panama. The clan system is matrilineal; that is, a child's clan is determined by the clan his or her mother belongs to. This gives women a very important place in Bribri society since they are the only ones that can inherit land and prepare the sacred cacao drink that is essential for their rituals.

rituals such as preparing the cacao. In Ghana, the Aklan¹⁴⁶ people are also matrilineal and matriarchal; identity, inheritance, politics and wealth are decided by women, though men also hold places of leadership. The Musuo¹⁴⁷ are China's last surviving matriarchy; this Tibetan Buddhist community is forty thousand strong, lineage and property are passed through the female line, and while women may choose to have a partner, they live separately. The Haudenosaunee of North America and Southern Canada are also a matrilineal society; a child's clan is passed down through the mother, and a husband lives in the wife's lodging after marriage. The Haudenosaunee have enjoyed equality; women have held positions of leadership, raised and taught the children, and had great political voice. The women choose leaders, create laws, and decide whether to go to war (Madus, 2019).

Jihan Gearon,¹⁴⁸ an indigenous climate and women's activist, writes:

Matriarchal systems not only actually existed but were practiced as essential aspects of our cultures... indigenous cultures have survived in large part due to the strength of Indigenous women, and it is women who continue to lead today... (Gearon, 2021)

¹⁴⁶ The Aklanon People are the ethnolinguistic group of people who lived in the province of Aklan in the Philippines. The Aklanons are descendants of the Austronesian-speaking immigrants who came to the Philippines during the Iron Age. Most Aklanons engage in agriculture while those in the coastal areas engage in fishing. They also make handicrafts. Music, such as courtship songs or kundiman, wedding hymns, and funeral recitals, as well as dance play a large part in the culture of the Aklanon People.

¹⁴⁷ The Mosuo is an ancient matrilineal tribal community of Tibetan Buddhists living in Yunnan and Sichuan Provinces in China, close to the border with Tibet. Here, women are treated as equal to men, and everything follows the maternal bloodline. Both men and women have as many, or as few, sexual partners as they like, free from judgment; marriage does not exist, and extended families bring up the children and care for the elderly.

¹⁴⁸ Jihan Gearon (d.o.b. unknown) is Navajo and Black from the Navajo Nation. She is a graduate of Stanford University with a Bachelor of Science in Earth Systems and a focus in Energy Science & Technology. She is the Executive Director of the Black Mesa Water Coalition, and a board member of Sustainable Nations Development Project. Gearon is an Indigenous feminist, painter, writer, organizer, and leader in Indigenous environmental justice. She is Diné Nahííí and comes originally from the community of Old Sawmill, Arizona, which is on the Navajo Nation.

As humans spread outward from Africa to the Fertile Crescent¹⁴⁹ of the Middle East, to the Mediterranean and beyond, and as they met and bred with Neanderthal and perhaps other similar races, so too would the Great Mother's stories and symbols migrate the world over. These early peoples would eventually become global mariners and traders; they settled as far north as Ireland and possibly as far west as the Americas, bringing the Mother Goddess with them.

In his studies of Paleolithic art from some sixty excavated European caves, paleontologist Leroi-Gourhan¹⁵⁰ concurred that our Paleolithic ancestors had an early religion in which the Feminine played an important part. From the representations and symbols found in these caves, he observed that characteristically, the female figures and symbols were usually located in primary locations of the cave, whereas the masculine symbols were either on the periphery or were arranged around the female figures and symbols. These early representations of the Great Mother and ritualistic drawings and carvings are the oldest known to humankind; flourishing as far as we know from sixty to seventy-five thousand years ago (Leroi-Gourhan, 1961).

Examples of these Mother Goddess archetypal symbols include vulvas such as

¹⁴⁹ The Fertile Crescent is a crescent-shaped region in the Middle East, spanning modern-day Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, Jordan, and Northern Egypt, together with the northern region of Kuwait, southeastern region of Turkey and the western portion of Iran, and sometimes including Cyprus.

¹⁵⁰ André Leroi-Gourhan (1911-1986) was a French archaeologist, paleontologist, paleoanthropologist, and anthropologist with an interest in technology and aesthetics and a penchant for philosophical reflection. Beginning in 1933 he held various positions at museums around the world, taking care of works evacuated from the Louvre. He also participated in the French resistance, earning several distinguishing medals. In 1956 he succeeded Marcel Griaule at the Sorbonne, and from 1969 until 1982 he was a professor at the Collège de France.

those found in the cave of Abri Castanet,¹⁵¹ in southern France, and in the cave of Chufin¹⁵² in Cantabria, Spain. Her form is found in the megalithic temples such as those from Malta and Gozo.¹⁵³ Ancient engravings of yonis and flowers with petals opening into bloom, and hundreds of small Mother Goddess figures have been discovered in hearths, graves, and rock crevices across Eurasia and even from Siberia from Paleolithic times. Yet whether temple, idol or carving, most of these representations have been invariably fleshy, curvy, pregnant, fertile and abundant.

Further evidence of this universal Mother Goddess can perhaps be seen in the discovery of figurines as early as forty thousand years ago during the Upper Paleolithic time, or the Late Stone Age, such as the one carved from woolly mammoth ivory found in a cave in Schelklingen, Germany. Over several hundred figures have been discovered over the past few centuries depicting the female figure with exaggerated sexual

¹⁵¹ Abri Castanet is an archeological site in the Vezere valley in the Dordogne region of southwestern France - was first excavated way back in the 1900s. Abri Castanet is home to the earliest art in France, and this discovery illuminates the creative capacity of anatomically modern humans (40,000-25,000 BCE). Archaeologists have dated an engraving of a vulva found on a one-and-a-half-ton limestone block at Abri Castanet, a collapsed rock shelter in France, to about 37,000 years ago.

¹⁵² The cave of Chufin is in the town of Riclones in Cantabria. Situated at the confluence of the Lamasón and Nansa rivers, several caves ornamented with rock art - which include animals, a vulva, and more - pock the steep slopes above the water.

¹⁵³ The megalithic temple sites on the islands of Malta and Gozo are the oldest Goddess temple sites in the world, dating to over 5,000 years BCE. They are also some of the most complex. It is well known that the temples were deliberately shaped to form the body of a woman, or as a living reflection of the Goddess. This can be seen most clearly in Ggantija on Gozo. This anthropomorphic temple is the oldest one to be dated: the top part was built around 3600 BCE and the bottom one added in around 3200 BCE. Mnajdra on Malta is also an early site, and the same characteristic shape can be seen in the Central Temple, though here the head area is rather small and the thighs are larger. Other sites obviously started out this way, such as Hagar Qim and Tarxien, but were then added to and modified over the years. Nevertheless, the same classic shape can still be seen in the Central Temple at Tarxien.

characteristics. Nicknamed “Venus”¹⁵⁴ figures, their discoveries have, for many decades, reflected the social and political contexts of the time of which they were discovered, often being sensationalized as sexual idols or even ancestral pornography. Although we do not know their true meaning, or if they were carved by men, women, or both, many scholars are leaving old paradigms behind and beginning to agree they most likely represent a belief system that embraces the awe and reverence for a life-giving Primordial Mother (Norwell & Chang, 2014).

A recent Goddess Pilgrimage to Scotland offers another clue to this ancient ideology. In October of 2021, I went in search of the Old Grandmother of Scottish myth, the Cailleach,¹⁵⁵ believed by many to be an echo of the Primordial Mother and whose legends are said to be at least as old as the Ice Age itself. In fact, she is said to have created the land of Scotland, and numerous rivers, lochs, mountains and stones across the country derive their names from this ancient Grandmother. On the Isle of Lewis, in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland, our hosts, a Cailleach Priestess named Jill Smith and a Druid

¹⁵⁴ The term Venus figurine is used to describe the more than 200 small statuettes of voluptuous female figures that have been found at Upper Paleolithic sites across Europe and some parts of Asia. The so-called Venus figurines date from between about 40,000 BCE and 10,000 BCE. They are generally quite small with sizes typically ranging from 2.5 cm to 10.2 cm though a few examples as large as 24 cm have been found. The most common material used to carve these statuettes is mammoth tusk, but teeth, antlers, bone, and stone were also used. A very small number of sites produced clay figurines, which are among the earliest known examples of ceramic art. The figures are usually voluptuous female nudes. Some of their features, such as their breasts, hips, stomachs and pubic areas, are greatly exaggerated while other characteristics are absent or downplayed. It is quite common for the figurines to be faceless with poorly defined arms and legs and a silhouette that is tapered at the top and bottom. The carvings often lack defined hands and feet. Given that the creators of these carvings were separated by 30,000 years and hundreds of miles, it is remarkable that so many of them share the same traits.

¹⁵⁵ The Grandmother-Creator goddess known as Cailleach in Scotland and Ireland is the embodiment of the dark mother, the harvest goddess, the hag or crone entity. She appears in the late fall, as the earth is dying, and is known as a bringer of storms. The word *cailleach* itself means "veiled one" or "old woman."

named Les Mac an Uiltaigh,¹⁵⁶ took us to a ring of seven stones (known today as the Callanish stones) made of “Lewisian Gneiss”¹⁵⁷ found almost exclusively on the small Scottish island. Jill and Les, along with many others, believe the rocks serve as priestesses to the Old Grandmother, luminous guardians who stand at the portal between the present physical world and the world of spirit. The stones shimmer and radiate a special light, especially at dawn or sunset, and it is said at midsummer, the middle stone or Shining One, walks the central corridor through the circle.

There on the Isle of Lewis, the ancient Grandmother is reflected, too, in a remarkable mountain called the Old Woman of the Moors or ‘na Mointeach; she appears as a sleeping Goddess when seen from the circle of stones. Every eighteen years, the moon appears to rise out of the Goddess’ legs, along her body, by her breasts, then reappears inside the circle at the foot of the tallest stone. This powerful presence of the Primordial Mother and her relationship with the physical landscape harkens back to our earliest days where humans, the landscape, the cosmos, and the Primordial Mother were once inseparable.

Echoes of this harmonious and intimate relationship with Mother Nature can be heard in many other mythological stories, such as in the early days of the Garden of

¹⁵⁶ Les Mac an Uiltaigh (d.o.bo. unknown) is a druid living in Balallan, Isle of Lewis, Scotland. Graduating from the University of Dundee in 1990, he gives tours to sacred sites on the Isle of Lewis and throughout the United Kingdom.

¹⁵⁷ Lewisian Gneiss is the oldest type of rock in Britain and was created about 3,000 million years ago.

Eden,¹⁵⁸ in the Greek Elysium Fields,¹⁵⁹ or in Queen Guinevere's and King Arthur's Avalon.¹⁶⁰ Again and again, we see clues to an early form of worship in which the Feminine, with her life-giving and nourishing powers and her cycles that mirrored the seasons and the moon, played a primary part. Though the Great Mother Goddess would remain for millennia as a primary divine force, eventually, the world would witness a radical shift in ritual, art, myth, culture, and society with the onset of agriculture and the Neolithic Era.

The Neolithic Era (12,000 - 5,000 BCE)



Once upon a time, Goddess Mother Demeter of the Grain stopped for a short rest in Eleusis, not far from Athens. She had been searching desperately for her beloved daughter Persephone, who was kidnapped while picking flowers and taken by chariot to the Underworld by the god Hades. Demeter was exhausted, and her sorrow was a weight deeper than the sea. Demeter's parents, Cronus and Rhea, were no help, and her pleas were ignored by Persephone's own father, Zeus. Demeter felt if she could perhaps lay her

¹⁵⁸ In Abrahamic religions, the Garden of Eden or Garden of God, also called the Terrestrial Paradise, is the biblical paradise described in Genesis 2-3 and Ezekiel 28 and 31.

¹⁵⁹ Elysium, also called Elysian Fields or Elysian Plain in Greek mythology, was originally the paradise to which heroes on whom the gods conferred immortality were sent. In Homer's writings, the Elysian Plain was a land of perfect happiness at the end of the Earth, on the banks of Oceanus.

¹⁶⁰ Avalon is the island to which Britain's legendary King Arthur was brought for the healing of his wounds after his final battle; some believe Queen Guinevere and King Arthur were both buried there. It is first mentioned in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* (1136 CE), while the same author's *Vita Merlini* (1150 CE) described it as "the island of apples called fortunate." It was said to be ruled by the enchantress Morgan le Fay and her eight sisters, all of them skilled in the healing arts. Avalon has been identified with Glastonbury in Somerset, and this may relate to Celtic legends about an "isle of glass" inhabited by deceased heroes.

weary body down for just a while, she could renew her energy here in this little village of Eleusis, for it was filled with kind strangers. Then she could continue her search refreshed.

She had disguised herself as an old woman, and the people of the village, not recognizing her, welcomed the elder woman warmly. The sun was a soft light, drawing subtle shadows upon the whitewashed buildings. The air hummed with the satisfied work of busy bees and the gentle breeze carried the fragrance of orange blossoms. Fruit spilled out of wooden carts, young women in white dresses carried baskets full of grain, and chickens and pigs roamed the streets freely.

Eleusis quickly became a sanctuary for Demeter. She befriended the royal family and, at the Queen's behest, agreed to raise the royal son whom Demeter grew to love and secretly vowed to make immortal. She joined the women of Eleusis in their daily comings and goings and taught them all she knew about the Mysteries of birth, death, and healing. She taught them the rites: ritual bathing and sacrifice and initiated the people of Eleusis so they could live fulfilled lives and enjoy the afterlife when the time came.

However, outside of the village, the crops all over the rest of the country had shriveled up and died, and the seasons had come to a complete halt. The people of Greece begged Zeus for help, and he finally relented. Zeus sent Hermes his messenger to the Underworld to retrieve Persephone. Alas, she had already eaten some pomegranate seeds, which bound her to Hades and the Underworld. However, Hades agreed to let Persephone be reunited with her mother for half of each year.

And Oh! Their reunion was sweet, and Demeter wept with joy, and the people of Eleusis now knew she was their divine Mother Goddess. The earth came alive, the

flowers bloomed, the grain grew, and the bees hummed again with honeyed bliss. The people of the land celebrated with great festivals in Demeter's honor. And though Demeter would mourn each year when Persephone left for the Underworld, and the crops would die with mourning too, all knew Persephone would return soon enough, and Demeter's joy would bring the crops back each year until the end of time.

~ The Myth of Demeter

Goddess Pilgrimage to Sicily, 2018

The Mother Goddess: Myth, Agriculture, and Shifting Perspectives

By the end of the Ice Age and the beginning of the Early Neolithic era, beginning around 10,000 BCE, the Magna Mater, or Great Mother Goddess, flourished as a worshiped, ritualized deity. With the dawning awareness of agriculture, and as humanity shifted from small nomadic hunting and gathering societies to settled planting societies, there was a transformation in social organization and, we can assume, consciousness as well. Though many aspects of human activity such as village life, the cultivation of plants, and managing resources are attributed to the Neolithic era, many of them were already present in Paleolithic times. Nonetheless, as agriculture and a more sedentary life became the norm, a new spiritual awakening was slowly occurring, though it is important to note in this spiral timeline that this does not necessarily denote an “advancement” of humankind.

With the global ice sheets receding and weather warming, humans would have had to adapt to changing flora and fauna. Further, with populations growing and

communities becoming more complex, humans had to find alternative methods for feeding themselves. One prominent theory about the advent of agriculture involves a mutated grain. Wild grain would have been sown with its seeds spread by the wind, and humans could harvest the grain without having to plant it. However, as the land in a part of the Middle East called the Levant¹⁶¹ (Cyprus, Syria, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine) became more arid, a new fat and rich mutated grain appeared whose seeds were welded to the stalk; it required planting by human hands but was easier to harvest, which would have appealed to the people living in the area. Within a generation or so, it took over as the primary grain, soon becoming a cultivated crop. It is believed the Natufian¹⁶² culture that flourished from 12,500 to 9500 BCE near the Dead Sea¹⁶³ was the first to plant and harvest this new grain, and they became some of the world's first farmers. With time, the Natufians and other semi-nomadic communities would grow larger and settle down into farming societies, cities, and civilizations. The Age of Agriculture had begun (Leinhard, 1988, epi. 540).

By 8500 BCE, many permanent villages had been established. Farming soon became as sacred an activity as hunting and gathering had been, a divine act in which humans could participate. Rituals and belief systems around agriculture, its renewal, and abundance grew to support this newfound epiphany. The first growers of food came, we now know, not only from the Fertile Crescent; rather, agriculture was also taking hold in

¹⁶¹ The Levant is an approximate historical geographical term referring to a large area in the Eastern Mediterranean region of Western Asia.

¹⁶² The Natufian culture refers to most hunter-gatherers who lived in modern-day Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria and flourished from 12,500 to 9500 BCE. They were among the first people to build permanent houses and cultivate edible plants. The advancements they achieved are believed to have been crucial to the development of agriculture during the time periods that followed them.

¹⁶³ The Dead Sea is a salt lake bordered by Jordan to the east and Israel and the West Bank to the west.

other parts of the world around the same time. Recently, genetic technology is showing that agricultural awareness arrived in societies simultaneously across the whole globe, such as in Central America and China, rather than from a single small population (Van der Crabben, 2021).

Animals began to be domesticated. Dogs were trained and horses were tamed. Soon, Mesopotamia became a pasture for sheep and goats herded, tamed, and bred. The understanding of animal husbandry, and of the male as playing an essential and necessary role in procreation, began to seed itself.

New Goddess religions emerged to reflect these changing ideologies. The original Primordial Mother began to take on an array of unique personalities and stories, with each culture creating their own mythology and personification of her. In most of the early Neolithic societies, the Goddess remained the creator and overseer of earth's rhythms, fertility, and life-giving qualities. For it was from her, the womb of the earth, that food and life came forth. It is believed that in many places, women maintained a prestigious role in the social organization of their communities and an extensive role in the planting and harvesting, for women performed the same roles as that of the Great Mother: birth and nourishment. Some women became her priestesses, the guardians of the deepest of knowledge, of medicine, of healing, of birth processes and dying processes, keepers of the Great Mother. (Joseph Campbell Foundation, 2013)

Mythologies of the Neolithic period reflected this agricultural revolution, and we find that Goddess, myth and agriculture are intertwined. We have countless tales that have reached us through the ages that demonstrate our ancient ancestors' newfound

awareness of crops and the cycle of the seasons, and with this awareness, a dynamic shift in how people viewed and lived in the world.

On a Pilgrimage to Malta and Gozo in 2013, for example, a shaman and goddess devotee shared a detailed story with me about the islands' early inhabitants who believed in a Giant Mother who gave birth to the people. After eating magic beans to give her strength, she held a baby at her breast and created the magnificent megalithic stone temples we see today. Beans were one of the earliest crops to be planted and are closely associated with the Goddess. Further, in Italian, the word *fava* (or bean) is slang for women's genitalia.

In Anatolia, which is now part of Turkey, we meet the Goddess Kybele¹⁶⁴; She was born as a hermaphrodite but was castrated, and the male part thrown on the ground. From it, an almond tree grew, ripe with fruit; the daughter of the river took the fruit and placed it on her breast. Soon a child grew in her womb, and a boy would be born.

To the Aborigines of Australia, the Sun was thought of as a woman who wakes each day in the east, lights her torch, and carries it across the skies. Before she begins her journey, though, she adorns herself with red ocher which she spills, coloring the clouds. When she reaches the west, she reapplies her paint, and spills reds and yellows. Finally, she begins a journey underground as she makes her way back east again, and her torch warms the underground earth so that plants may grow.

¹⁶⁴ Cybele is an Anatolian (present-day Turkey) mother goddess; she may have had a possible influence in the Neolithic Çatalhöyük civilization, where statues of plump women, sometimes sitting, have been found in excavations. The Kingdom of Phrygia's only known goddess, she was probably its national deity. Greek colonists in Asia Minor adopted and adapted her Phrygian cult and spread it to mainland Greece and to the more distant western Greek colonies around the 6th century BCE. In Greece, Cybele became partially assimilated to aspects of the Earth-goddess Gaia. In Rome, Cybele became known as *Magna Mater* ("Great Mother"). Roman mythographers reinvented her as a Trojan goddess. As Rome eventually established dominance over the Mediterranean world, Romanized forms of Cybele's cults spread throughout Rome's empire.

Egypt, which entered the Neolithic Era around 6,000 BCE, held that the Goddess Neith¹⁶⁵ existed before anything else; it was she who birthed the sun-god Ra, placed him in the sky, then weaved the world together with her loom. Her worshippers built shrines to her along the places where fibrous plants and grain grew wild, or were planted and harvested.

In Mesoamerica, in early Neolithic times, we find similar themes of Goddess as Earth and intimately related to planting, as we do in so many stories across the world throughout the agricultural revolution. On a recent Pilgrimage to Teotihuacan in central Mexico, I first learned of the Great Mother Goddess referred to there as Grandmother Spider.¹⁶⁶ Though her history is still not fully clear, Grandmother Spider was found on a series of murals in the Tepantitla¹⁶⁷ compound in Teotihuacan, and later at other locations nearby such as the Tetitla¹⁶⁸ compound and the Palace of the Jaguars,¹⁶⁹ as well as on

¹⁶⁵ Neith was an ancient Egyptian goddess of weaving and war who was the patroness of the city of Sais in the Nile River delta. Neith was worshiped as early as 3000 BCE, and several queens of the 1st dynasty (2925–2775 BCE) were named after her. Neith was believed to be the creator of the world and the mother of the sun, Ra.

¹⁶⁶ Spider Woman, also known as Grandmother Spider, is a creation goddess in many indigenous cultures. She is thought to be the keeper of wisdom. Throughout the Americas, she is found among the Maya, Pueblo, Hopi, and Navajo mythology, even among the prehistoric “mound builders” in the Mississippian cultures. There is evidence that the earliest Spider Woman was worshiped by the Maya, where she was named the Earth Mother. Traditional stories about Spider Grandmother were passed down by word of mouth through countless generations—in some of these tales she is referred to as Earth Goddess.

¹⁶⁷ Tepantitla is located northeast of Teotihuacán's most famous attraction, the Pirámide del Sol (Pyramid of the Sun). From the outside, the buildings look like other stables in the town of San Juan Teotihuacán, but upon entering the walls reveal traces of elaborate paintings.

¹⁶⁸ Tetitla is a sprawling complex at Teotihuacan. On one wall is a mural believed to be the Great Goddess, Teotihuacan's principal deity. She is shown wearing a feathered bird headdress, which is present in other murals in the complex; snake, owl, and spider symbolism is also depicted in the mural. The Great Goddess mural contains iconography which shows her important role in Teotihuacan culture.

¹⁶⁹ The palace of the Jaguars is located in the Plaza de la Luna at Teotihuacan, one of the most significant temples of the holy city. This building has a large courtyard surrounded by small rooms with magnificent remains of mural paintings which include depictions of the Great Mother.

vessels, an ancient mirror, and more. In one mural, the Grandmother Spider sits in an earthly paradise surrounded by a flowering tree, spiders, butterflies, and birds. Water falls from her hands and drips from the tree above. Below her is a cave filled with seeds and surrounded by maize, fruit trees, water and shellfish. A stone sculpture of a Goddess, which once sat in front of the Pyramid of the Moon¹⁷⁰ at the Teotihuacan complex, shares similar traits and was thought to be a personification of Nature who provides life-giving water and seeds. Though the civilization that settled at Teotihuacan was thought to have arrived well past the Neolithic Era, the rituals and art as expressions of their myths paralleled many of the beliefs and lifestyles of other Neolithic agricultural communities across the world.

In 2016, I led a Goddess Pilgrimage to a little Balinese village just outside of Ubud. The village was called Mas Banjar Kawan, a lush, green and very musical jungle town filled with wood carvers, mossy stones, and a singing river that meandered through its center. Temples abound dedicated to its patron goddess Saraswati.¹⁷¹ Her name, meaning “of many pools,” is said to have sung the cosmos into being, matter born from the dark Void of Brahma’s¹⁷² Nothingness; she is the birther of art, music, dance, poetry and knowledge.

¹⁷⁰ The Pyramid of the Moon began as a modest temple constructed at the very beginning of Teotihuacan’s history, at around 50 to 100 CE. It suggests a powerful religion may have attracted many groups of people from the surrounding areas. Over the centuries, this temple was enlarged and became a massive pyramid, standing over 151 feet tall. Now known as the Moon Pyramid, it is the second-largest monument at Teotihuacan.

¹⁷¹ Saraswati is the Hindu goddess of knowledge, music, art, wisdom, and nature. She represents the free flow of wisdom and consciousness.

¹⁷² Brahma is the Hindu creator god. He is also known as the Grandfather and as a later equivalent of Prajapati, the primeval first god. He is part of the trimurtis, or triple gods: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

Saraswati devotees believe that once upon a time, her river in the sky, the Milky Way, poured itself down onto Earth; it was along the banks of that Saraswati River that agriculture and civilization began. While the river no longer exists, it is now believed it probably did in ancient times, originating in Kashmir and winding its way down to the Arabian Sea, birthing one of our oldest civilizations. Saraswati is seen by all who worship her as the creative power behind life. Her festival, Vesant Panchami, is a harvest celebration in both Bali and India; even today, as the air fills with the fragrance of flowers in full bloom, people dress in yellow, clean their houses, and perform pujas (devotional homages and prayers) for their beloved great Mother Goddess.

As with the Paleolithic era, many of our earliest artifacts from Neolithic times reflect the Great Goddess as life giver, as nourisher, as protector, and even as the One who presides over the cycles of life and death, which parallel the seasonal cycle of crops. The artifacts also reflect the new understandings of an evolving people. For instance, discoveries from Çatalhöyük¹⁷³ in Turkey from six to nine thousand years ago include a stone figurine of a robust female on a throne giving birth and surrounded by leopards, a Mother Goddess intimately connected to life. Another includes a double-female who embraces a male in one body and holds a child in another, a representation of the understanding of how the female takes the male seed and transforms it into new life (The Joseph Campbell Foundation, 2013). We see similar evidence of the Goddess as nourisher in figurines from Egypt, Anatolia and Mesopotamia, such as the Goddess holding her full milky breasts as though nourishing the world.

¹⁷³ Çatalhöyük was a very large Neolithic and Chalcolithic proto-city settlement in southern Anatolia, which existed from approximately 7500 BCE to 6400 BCE, and flourished around 7000 BCE. In July 2012, it was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Along with artifacts, we have been gifted countless stone circles and circular temples from the later Neolithic Era that link the Divine Feminine, nature, and agriculture. In addition to the majestic Mother Goddess temples of Malta and Gozo, we find similar circular megalithic structures all over the world. The Goddess temple at Gobekli Tepe¹⁷⁴ in southeastern Turkey, for example, is the oldest known human-made place of worship, believed to be twelve thousand years old; it consists of seven circles and is filled with pictograms and reliefs of mammals, insects, birds, and sacred symbols. Labyrinths such as on Crete or in Denmark, along with paintings and carvings of labyrinths found all over the world, are reminders of our Paleolithic days of the cave tunnels and of making a sacred journey into the womb of the Great Mother, a mystical return to the primordial Source. Here in New England, our woodlands are covered with stone mounds, turtles and snakes, beehive structures, and round ceremonial structures that are echoes of the magico-mythical realities of our early Neolithic peoples.

The ancient symbols of the Mother Goddess became immortalized in her stories and depictions: serpents, coils, rings, zigzags, labyrinths, triangles, movement, flow, the cosmic egg of existence, the moon, the ocean, the bindu/dot or single drop of pure wisdom, the “ouroboros”¹⁷⁵ or zero, all things contained within a perfect point (Sjoo & Mor, 1987). She became associated with the snake, for it symbolized similar attributes: eternal life through its shedding of the skin and rebirth, and the dark fertile underground out of which life is birthed and to which it returns. Her snake symbols are seen

¹⁷⁴ Göbekli Tepe is a Neolithic archaeological site near the city of Şanlıurfa in Southeastern Anatolia, Turkey. Believed to be 12,000 years old, the site comprises a number of large circular structures supported by massive stone pillars – the world's oldest known megaliths.

¹⁷⁵ The ouroboros or uroboros is an ancient symbol depicting a serpent or dragon eating its own tail. The ouroboros entered Western tradition via ancient Egyptian iconography and the Greek magical tradition. It was adopted as a symbol in Gnosticism and Hermeticism and most notably in alchemy.

prolifically in art from the 6th-5th centuries BCE; she has been portrayed either carrying snakes as in the Minoan snake goddess,¹⁷⁶ becoming a snake, as in the case of the later Greek Goddess Medusa,¹⁷⁷ or had attributes of a snake such as with the Nile Goddess¹⁷⁸ who was portrayed with large spiraling arms. There became a global representation of the Mother Goddess as the serpent, as seen in hieroglyphics and art across the world: In Venezuela, Australia, the Middle East, the South Pacific islands, Celtic and Norse lands, in China, South America, North America, in the Kundalini Shakti¹⁷⁹ of India.

Like other small bands of our earliest people across the world, the hunter-gatherers of the British Isles in the early Neolithic times knew the landscape and the rhythms of the universe intimately: the rise and fall of the tides, the journey of the constellations, the snaking movement of the rivers and streams, the circling of the seasons, the moon, the phases of the triple goddess as maiden, maid and crone. They were keen observers, understanding the interconnectedness of all things, and as the last

¹⁷⁶ The Snake Goddess was one of the Minoan divinities associated closely with the snake cult. She is also called the Household Goddess due to her attribute of the snake, which relates to the welfare of the Minoan household. Since the snake is also a symbol of the underworld deity, the Snake Goddess has some underworld aspects as well.

¹⁷⁷ In Greek mythology, Medusa, also called Gorgo, was one of the three Gorgons, generally described as winged human females with living venomous snakes in place of hair. Those who gazed into her eyes would turn to stone. The most common interpretation of Medusa suggests she is a powerful symbol used to protect from and ward off the negative, much like the modern evil eye. She represents a dangerous threat meant to deter other dangerous threats, an image of evil to repel evil.

¹⁷⁸ This Nile Goddess is from the earliest period in Egyptian History, before the time of the Pharaohs (3500-3400 BCE). This Egyptian fertility goddess raises her arms upward gesturing to the sky as perhaps part of a ritual. She has a bird-like face, narrow waist, small breasts, and elongated snake-like arms with rounded hand ends.

¹⁷⁹ In Hinduism, Kundalini is a form of divine feminine energy believed to be located at the base of the spine, in the muladhara. It is an important concept in Śhaiva Tantra, where it is believed to be a force or power associated with the divine feminine or the formless aspect of the Goddess.

ice age retreated from about 9,000 BCE onwards, maintaining harmony with nature was essential for survival.

Agriculture and knowledge of grain had found its way to the British Isles,¹⁸⁰ which meant that hunter-gatherers could now remain settled and grow grain which could be ground into flour for bread and stored for the winter. The need grew for ritual worship and ceremony of the Great Mother as giver of food and nourishment through the growing seasons. Animals were intimately connected to the people of The British Isles as both sustenance and spirit, and the Mother Goddess was often represented as a woman with characteristics of animals such as birds, snakes, fish, frogs, bear, deer. The lives of humans mimicked the lives of the growing season: Conception and birth aligned with seed planting and was celebrated in springtime; then, pregnant with new life, the next nine months were spent preparing for harvest and motherhood; finally, when winter came, the crops would die and those who passed on would be buried in the dry barren mounds as the Crone of Winter¹⁸¹ reclaimed them.

Over the past decade, I have been drawn more and more to the countless examples of Neolithic and Bronze Era ritual architecture across the British Isles, the land of my ancestors. In Ireland in 2017, a Goddess ritualist and priestess named Regina Ni Dinn¹⁸² led my pilgrimage group in ritual inside a megalithic mound-like tomb similar to

¹⁸⁰ The British Isles are a group of islands in the North Atlantic Ocean off the north-western coast of continental Europe, consisting of the islands of Great Britain, Ireland, the Isle of Man, the Inner and Outer Hebrides, the Northern Isles and over six thousand smaller islands.

¹⁸¹ The Crone is another name for the Cailleach; sometimes called hag, she is associated with the season of winter and is often portrayed as part of the Celtic Triple Goddess.

¹⁸² Regina Ni Dinn (d.o.b. unknown) is a Priestess residing in Dublin, Ireland. She performs rituals and leads groups to sacred sites of the Goddess throughout Ireland.

many found across the British Isles. Called Fourknocks, or Na Fuor Cnoic,¹⁸³ this womb-like cave is carved with traditional Goddess symbols such as labyrinths, spirals, and nature depictions of all kinds, with a ceremonial altar or dolmen across from its entrance. Believed to be many thousands of years old, Fourknocks is not only a tomb, but it is also believed to have been an astrological calendar designed to capture a specific moment in the starry skies.

Many other ritual and astrological features remain across the British Isles, some of which I have visited throughout my Goddess Pilgrimages over the past decade. These include the megalithic stone circles at Avebury,¹⁸⁴ the Callanish stones at the Isle of Lewis, and Stonehenge¹⁸⁵; they linger as testimonial examples of Neolithic life. On a pilgrimage to Cornwall, on a secluded path that wound its way to the sea, I stumbled upon two ancient labyrinths carved into the rock face not far from Tintagel Castle,¹⁸⁶ which is rumored to have housed Queen Guinevere as a child (a much later example of the Mother Goddess). Small stone circles set amongst ancient oak groves, such as the

¹⁸³ Fourknocks is a small Neolithic burial mound in southeastern County Meath.

¹⁸⁴ Avebury is a Neolithic henge monument containing three stone circles, around the village of Avebury in Wiltshire, in southwest England. One of the best-known prehistoric sites in Britain, it contains the largest megalithic stone circle in the world.

¹⁸⁵ Stonehenge is a prehistoric stone circle monument, cemetery, and archaeological site located on Salisbury Plain, about 8 miles (13 km) north of Salisbury, Wiltshire, England. Though there is no definite evidence as to the intended purpose of Stonehenge, it was presumably a religious site and an expression of the power and wealth of the chieftains, aristocrats, and priests who had it built—many of whom were buried in the numerous barrows close by. It was aligned with the Sun and possibly used for observing the Sun and Moon and working out the farming calendar. Or the site was dedicated to the world of the ancestors, separated from the world of the living, or perhaps it was even a healing center.

¹⁸⁶ Tintagel Castle is a medieval fortification located on the peninsula of Tintagel Island adjacent to the village of Tintagel, North Cornwall in the United Kingdom. It is associated with the tales of King Arthur, Queen Guinevere, and Merlin.

druid circle at Leys Castle¹⁸⁷ in Edinburgh, Scotland, and megalithic stones like The Cailleach Bhéara¹⁸⁸ which overlooks Coulagh Bay in southern Ireland, offer a rich narrative to those who are alive today to bear witness to this revolutionary time in history.

The Goddess-worshipping cultures in the British Isles and across the world not only found stability and growth over many thousands of years, but they progressed into very complex Great Mother societies such as those in Mesopotamia, Ancient Egypt, Ancient India, and Ancient China. For quite some time now, with the advent of carbon dating and excavations conducted at places such as the egalitarian community Çatalhöyük, a new picture has emerged of our ancient beginnings, and the agrarian socio-economic civilizations would become the foundation for most of the world civilizations in the thousands of years to come. Almost universally, these ancient founding civilizations shared one feature in common: They worshiped the Great Mother (Eisler, 1988).

These early myths and belief systems most likely gave our ancient ancestors a sense of order, structure, and made sure that *maat*, an Egyptian term meaning “the true order of the state of the universe as it was at its conception,” was maintained (Sinclair, 2010, p. 23). While still trying to avoid sweeping generalizations in terms of the role of women or the matriarchal versus patriarchal status of these cultures, we do know from

¹⁸⁷ Located in the heart of the Scottish Highlands and a short distance from the City of Inverness, Leys Castle estate was recently purchased by the McGilvray Family. The property extends to around 3,200 acres and includes an ancient druid's stone circle, set amongst a quiet oak grove.

¹⁸⁸ The Chailleach Bhéara, also known as The White Nun of Béara or The Old Woman of Dingle, is a mythic Irish Goddess believed to be a divine hag, crone, or creator deity. Her name literally means the "veiled one," and she is associated with the Beara Peninsula in County Cork, Ireland, who was thought to bring winter. She is best known as the narrator of the medieval Irish poem "The Lament of the Hag of Beara," the oldest poem in Ireland, in which she bitterly laments the passing of her youth and her decrepit old age.

recent technological discoveries, and from looking at factors such as diet and burial, that men and women ate the same foods, lived similar lives, shared similar jobs, spent similar time indoors. We are beginning to theorize that many Neolithic communities, such as the one at Çatalhöyük, Turkey, were ones that had no large division of power or status, and no one gender dominated the other (Hodde, 2005).

Eventually, during the Neolithic Era, the female goddesses would greet their male counterparts, and limitless realms of ever-morphing pantheons would co-create, love, fight, marry, beget offspring, betray, feel pain and jealousy, find joy and despair, die and grieve. They would grow to mirror the very people from whose imaginations they were conceived. By the end of the Neolithic Era and the beginning of the Bronze Age around 5,000 BCE, as egalitarian societies gave way to an inequitable elite, male gods would, in many instances, come to own the sky while the Mother Goddess was “diminished” to the lower spheres. Myth, as we are learning, would soon come to reflect a new and shifting consciousness once more.

The Bronze Age (5,000 - 200 BCE)



Europa was the epitome of beauty. The daughter of a Phoenician King, the young princess Europa spent her childhood days playing with her girlfriends along the shore, laughing, collecting seashells and flowers, and running gleefully along the water's edge.

One day, the supreme father god Zeus saw Europa playing along the shore and was struck like never before by her dazzling beauty and innocence. Captivated, he knew he had to possess her. He turned himself into a white bull and came to her, pretending to

be gentle and tame. Europa's friends were afraid and wanted to run away, but Europa was taken by the bull's beautiful form, his shining white fur and his strong horns. "Do not worry, he seems so gentle," she told her friends, and sure enough, Zeus disguised as the bull, lay down and let them scratch his back. They gingerly placed flowers upon his body and a garland around his neck, and he walked with the girls to the edge of the sea. Europa climbed on his back, her friends laughing and playing with him in the water. But the bull swam deeper and deeper, and Europa, who did not know how to swim, held onto his horns as tightly as she could.

The girls were afraid and ran to find help from Europa's father, but they were too late, and soon Europa disappeared beyond the horizon. Zeus kept swimming and did not stop until they reached the island of Crete where he retook his human form and mated with her underneath a cypress tree. Later, Europa gave birth to three sons, one of which was Minos who would become King of Crete, build the Palace of Knossos and the infamous labyrinth for his minotaur, and who would give his name to the great Minoan Civilization.

Europa would eventually rule as the first Queen of Crete and would marry the Cretan King Asterion. Before he departed, Zeus left Europa with three gifts: a dog named Laelaps (whom Zeus would eventually turn to stone, along with its prey the Fox; both would hold a prominent place in the sky), a javelin that would always hit its mark, and Talos, a gigantic man who protected Europa and who was made of Bronze, a symbol of the Bronze Age under which the Greeks and Minoans flourished.

~ The Myth of Europa, Goddess Pilgrimage to Crete, 2016

The Goddess Subsumed

While villages across the world remained primarily agriculturally based around a central Great Goddess deity, around the fifth millennium BCE, humanity saw another global transformation. Nomadic bands of warriors arrived from the deserts in the south and the grasslands in the north, sweeping into the Fertile Crescent of what we know today as the Middle Eastern countries of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, Jordan and Northern Egypt. Their cultures were based on war, and on raiding land and herds in order to gain wealth. They brought with them not the nourishing Great Mother but rather their warrior gods of sky, thunder and light such as Zeus,¹⁸⁹ Marduk,¹⁹⁰ Indra¹⁹¹ and Yahweh.¹⁹² Their ideologies soon spread across India, Europe, the Middle East, the Near East, and the Indus Valley,¹⁹³ and by the middle of the Bronze Age (3500-1000 BCE), these male-dominated tribes had fully entered the lands and people of the Goddess. As the Bronze Age progressed, these nomadic warrior tribes would domesticate camels, replace stone tools and weapons with bronze and other metals. They would master the

¹⁸⁹ Zeus is the Olympian god of the sky and the thunder, the king of all other gods and men, and, consequently, the chief figure in Greek mythology.

¹⁹⁰ Marduk, in Mesopotamian religion, the chief god of the city of Babylon and the national god of Babylonia; as such, he was eventually called simply Bel, or Lord. Marduk literally means "bull calf of the sun," although he was also a deity of fertility and storms.

¹⁹¹ Indra is one of the most important deities in ancient Vedic Hinduism and the supreme deva (god) of the Rig Veda scripture. Known as the god of storms and war, he controls the weather, rain, thunder and lightning.

¹⁹² Yahweh is a form of the Hebrew name of God used in the Bible. The name came to be regarded by Jewish people (approx. 4,000 BCE) as too sacred to be spoken, and the vowel sounds are uncertain.

¹⁹³ The Indus Valley Civilization, also known as the Indus or Harappan Civilization, was a Bronze Age civilization in the northwestern regions of South Asia. Lasting from 3300 BCE to 1300 BCE, and flourishing from 2600 BCE to 1900 BCE., it was the earliest known urban culture of the Indian subcontinent.

horse, invent the war chariot, acquire iron, and by the end of the first millennium BCE, were dominating across Europe and western Asia (Campbell, 1988).

People began to build cities, and as city life grew, so did technology, urban building, the arts, medicine, and government. Great civilizations would be born: first, in Mesopotamia and Egypt, and soon in Peru, Crete, China and India. Writing would arrive and change the course of history; myth, thought, and daily life could now be recorded. As humans came to have more control over their environment, so too did they begin to see themselves as distinct from the other forces of nature. Humans became the divine creators, or at least the hands through which they believed the divine worked. Life had radically changed from the earliest days of humanity. Before too long, people would know wars, massacres, revolutions, destruction and the rebuilding again and again of these great cities and civilizations. Where once the Divine could be found in the daily sustenance activities of hunting, gathering and growing, people now found it amongst the holy cities that would rise and fall, and whose cultural expressions were dedicated to, and they believed sourced from, Divinity itself (Armstrong, 2005).

In the earliest centuries of the Bronze Age, we still see the Great Mother as creator, protector, nourisher. She takes on many names, faces, and representations. She is the Holy Mother holding a child in her arms. She is the bare-breasted Goddess holding a snake in each raised hand. She is Danu,¹⁹⁴ the ancient Mother of Celts who symbolized Earth and her fruitfulness. She is the labyrinth etched into stone. She is the sensual fertility goddess of the double-headed long-necked pottery vase. She is the hole in the

¹⁹⁴ Danu, also spelled Anu, or Dana, in Celtic religion, the earth-mother goddess or female principle, who was honored under various names from eastern Europe to Ireland.

circular stone (Men-a-tol) at Land's End, Cornwall, England, as well as in Jefferson, New Hampshire, in the United States.

In the Americas, civilizations and their myths were also being birthed, growing, evolving, dying. For example, on the coast of Peru, Caral is considered one of the oldest civilizations on the continent founded in approximately 2600 BCE. While the settlers had no knowledge of pottery or machinery of which we know, they built an economy based on fish, agriculture, and domesticated plants such as cotton, beans, squash, and guava. They developed trade, managed their ecosystems such as irrigation and invented climactic calendars. Pyramids and circular places of worship were built around the same time as the Egyptian pyramids, with ritual offerings given to the deities. Women played an important role in this civilization, in socio-political, economic and religious spheres, and held high positions such as priestesses or leaders. As such, the Caral practiced gender equality. Their Goddesses, Pachamama¹⁹⁵ the Earth Mother and Cochamama¹⁹⁶ the Sea Mother, played vital roles in the survival of the people and held equal power in the ancient Caral pantheon.

Soon, however, mythologies across these new and ever-morphing civilizations would separate the Great Earth Mother from the Sky Father. The Sumerians,¹⁹⁷ for

¹⁹⁵ Pachamama is a goddess revered by the indigenous peoples of the Andes in South America. In Inca mythology she is an "Earth Mother" goddess, and a fertility goddess who presides over planting and harvesting, embodies the mountains, and causes earthquakes.

¹⁹⁶ Cochamama, or Mama Qucha, is the ancient Incan goddess of sea and fishes, guardian of sailors and fishermen, wife of Viracocha, and mother of Inti and Mama Killa. In some regions, people believed she was the goddess of all bodies of water, including lakes, rivers, and even human-made watercourses.

¹⁹⁷ The ancient Sumerians created one of humanity's first great civilizations. Their homeland in Mesopotamia, called Sumer, emerged roughly 4,000 years ago along the floodplains between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in present-day Iraq and Syria. The Sumerians learned to farm on a grand scale in the so-called Fertile Crescent, a thin, crescent-shaped sliver of Mesopotamia often tied to the dawn of farming, writing, mathematics and astronomy.

example, lived in the area we now call southern Iraq, around 4,000 BCE. The mythologies of the time consisted of over three thousand gods and goddesses! The Sumer creation myth describes the primordial sea goddess Nammu, who birthed EnKi, the god of Heaven and Earth. As a *unified being*, they created the plant world. Their son, the air-god Enlil, tore Heaven and Earth apart and became the breath between the two spheres. Enlil would eventually rule the heavens, and duality, at least in Sumer, was born.

The Sumer cultures would shape and influence the myths, culture and religions of the civilizations to come, many of which included the Semitic-speaking tribes such as the Akkadians,¹⁹⁸ the Babylonians, the Assyrians,¹⁹⁹ the Arabs,²⁰⁰ the Amhara,²⁰¹ the Canaanites,²⁰² and the Hebrews,²⁰³ and the names and stories of their mythological gods and goddesses would merge and morph. While the Mother Goddess was still prominent during the early years of the Bronze age in the Indus Valley (the area of Afghanistan,

¹⁹⁸ The Akkadian Empire was the first ancient empire of Mesopotamia after the long-lived civilization of Sumer. It was centered in the city of Akkad and its surrounding region. The empire united Akkadian and Sumerian speakers under one rule.

¹⁹⁹ Assyria was a major ancient Mesopotamian civilization which existed as a city-state from the 21st century BCE to the 14th century BCE and then as a territorial state and eventually an empire from the 14th century BCE to the 7th century BCE.

²⁰⁰ The first mention of Arabs appeared in the mid-9th century BCE, as a tribal people in Eastern and Southern Syria and the northern Arabian Peninsula.

²⁰¹ Amharas are a Semitic-speaking ethnic group which is indigenous to Ethiopia, traditionally inhabiting parts of the northwest Highlands of Ethiopia, particularly inhabiting the Amhara Region.

²⁰² In the Bronze Age, between 4,000 and 3,000 years ago, a diverse group of people called the Canaanites lived in the Middle East. Despite their culture and influence, they left behind little information about themselves. Other civilizations made records of them, however without Canaanite texts to cite, scholars view the ancient people as a bit of an enigma.

²⁰³ The Hebrews and Hebrew people are mostly considered synonymous with the Semitic-speaking Israelites, especially in the pre-monarchic period when they were still nomadic. However, in some instances it may also be used in a wider sense, referring to the Phoenicians, or to other ancient groups, such as the group known as Shasu of *Yhw* on the eve of the Bronze Age collapse.

Pakistan and Northwest India), she would decline in power and prominence throughout the millennia. As civilizations shifted from goddess worshipping matriarchs to domineering male gods and patriarchal societies, we see evidence through myth of these shifting tides: of the Goddess descending into the Underworld, dismembered, raped, shunned, made into virgin and prostitute, monster and sinner, and eventually, by the turn of the ancient age to the new age, practically silenced.

The oldest known written Goddess Myth, “The Descent of Inanna,”²⁰⁴ was found in cuneiform on clay tablets from Sumer approximately 2112 BCE. It recalls the tale of Inanna, the Queen of Heaven, Goddess of light, life, beauty, wisdom and fertility. Dressed in her finest clothes with the Crown of Heaven upon her head, Inanna descends into the Land of the Dead to pay her respects to her sister, Erishkigal, the Queen of the Dead, whose husband has just died. As she descends into the Underworld, she is ritually stripped of her ring, her scepter, her beads, even her clothing, and when at last she greets her sister, she is turned into a corpse and hung on a hook on the wall as meat.

Inanna is resurrected with the help of her father, the god Enki, but as all who return from the Land of the Dead, she must offer someone in her place. She decides to sacrifice her husband, Dumuzi the shepherd, who appeared to have not mourned her death. He appeals to the Sun god Utu for help, who turns Dumuzi into a snake in order for him to hide; nonetheless, Dumuzi is caught and brought to the Kur, the Land of the Dead. During this time, the crops wither and the land goes arid. Dumuzi’s sister Geshtinanna offers to take his place for half the year, and when that happens, and

²⁰⁴ The Descent of Inanna (known also as “Inanna’s Descent to the Netherworld/Underworld”) is a work from ancient Mesopotamia. This story, which was originally written in cuneiform and inscribed on clay tablets, is in the form of a poem. “The Descent of Inanna” tells of the eponymous heroine’s journey to the Underworld to visit and to challenge the power of her recently widowed sister, Erishkigal. The poem is thought to be imbued with meaning and symbolism, and various interpretations have been attached to it.

Dumuzi returns, the land is fertile and abundant, and the crops grow once more. In “The Descent of Inanna,” the seasonal cycles are explained, and we see the shift from a herding culture to an agricultural one. Inanna would eventually be worshiped by the Semitic Akkadians, Babylonians, and Assyrians, and would be known by many other names: Ishtar, Astarte, Anat, and more.

The myths of ancient Babylonia, which arose after the Sumerian Civilization around 2,000 BCE, demonstrate the initial decline of the Great Mother in the region. Tiamat, the Mother Goddess of the sea, was very powerful, in fact more powerful than all the other gods in the city. Marduk, the patron god of Babylon, was asked by the other gods to destroy Goddess Tiamat. He agreed only if, upon her destruction, he could become the chief God for eternity. After a night of feasting and drinking, the other gods agreed, and thus Marduk set out to destroy the great Mother Goddess. Armed with his bow and arrows, his thunder club, his storm net, and his lightning dagger, Marduk waged a great battle with Tiamat. Many days passed, but eventually Marduk cast his net over Tiamat. She opened her mouth to let out a scream, and at that moment, Marduk sent an arrow down her throat, killing her. Cutting her in half, he placed one half in the heavens, with the moon and stars to guard her. He buried her other half in the deepest abyss of the earth underneath the waters. He assigned the gods to their places then created man to serve the gods so that they would be free to relax and be worshiped (Joseph Campbell Foundation, 2013).

Across the world, the Goddess was usurped by this “cosmic warlord;” sometimes she was assimilated into the existing religion, sometimes she was destroyed. Some of the nomadic warrior tribes would usurp the older gods of their conquered territories;

oftentimes, the new gods would marry the older goddesses, sometimes even assuming the names of the older deities until a new mythology became integrated in these cities and cultures (Joseph Campbell Foundation, 2013).

As patriarchal systems made their way forward, one of the goddess' primary symbols, the serpent, became distorted. This shift in the serpent's representation coincided with the shift from matrilineal societies to patrilineal; where the snake once stood as a proud symbol for the Great Mother's ever-changing phases, it now became equated with women and fear. This new theme would begin to recur time and time again throughout myth, as was the case with the ancient Hebrews who connected the snake to the brother of the first woman, Lilith.²⁰⁵ Many interpret Lilith's brother, whose name was Samael,²⁰⁶ to be the serpent who encouraged Eve²⁰⁷ to bring about the downfall of

²⁰⁵ Lilith is a female figure in Mesopotamian and Judaic mythology, alternatively the first wife of Adam and supposedly the primordial she-demon. Lilith is cited as having been "banished" from the Garden of Eden for not complying and obeying Adam. New goddess scholars and eco-feminists portray Lilith as choosing to walk away from the Garden of Eden rather than be forced to be subservient to a man.

²⁰⁶ Samael appears to play many roles in the ancient mythologies and sacred texts. One of Samael's greatest roles in Jewish lore is that of the main angel of death and the head of *satans*. He appears frequently in the story of Garden of Eden and engineered the fall of Adam and Eve.

²⁰⁷ Eve, whose name means "life" but also is a derivative of "snake" ("hwy" or 'hawwat'), was the Biblical mother of all living things. Created from Adam's rib, she was said to have gone against God's orders and ate fruit from the forbidden tree, causing the first sin and for the couple to be cast out of the Garden forever. The elements of Eden suggest a connection between the figure of Eve and a mother-goddess; but here Eve has been demoted, the "mother" created after all else, as her procreative abilities are usurped by God. As punishment, fertility would be a hardship for women and man would dominate her sexually. The positive association of goddess and women with motherhood is reversed, and the tree of life, woman, and serpent are firmly separated for eternity. The serpent is cursed and demoted to the status of lowest animal. The earth is cursed, its fertility diminished, and the man would now till the soil with difficulty. The future relationship between men and "mother-earth," in all her manifestations, would be a strained one. In its ancient context, Eden was about the fall of the goddess, not the "fall of man."

humankind (Sjoo & Mor, 1987). Many thousands of years later, St. Patrick²⁰⁸ of Ireland drove the ‘snakes’ (pagan earth worshippers) out of the country and brought Christianity to the Isle. In fact, it became customary to destroy serpent idols, which were in fact idols of the Mother Goddess. Woman and the snake, forever linked in Western ideology, became instruments of evil and wickedness.

The Greek myth of Medusa illustrates the patriarchal ideologies of the time taking root, as women slowly lost their political, social, economic, sexual, and marital voice and freedom. Once, in myth, the serpent symbolized the regenerative power of the Divine Feminine; the Goddess was fertile, sexually empowered, the giver and taker of life. In later myths of the Bronze Age, goddess and woman were portrayed as disempowered, they were betrayed (often by another woman), turned into monsters, feared, beheaded, destroyed:

Once upon a time, a beautiful child named Medusa was born to two sea gods. Though her Gorgon sisters were born monsters, Medusa was born a mortal; her face was fair, she always wore a smile, and was so full of kindness and joy. Most of all, her long golden curly locks drew the attention of all who passed her way; indeed, Medusa’s beauty was unparalleled. As she grew, she devoted her days to Goddess Athena,²⁰⁹ serving as her priestess and vowing celibacy, a requirement for the priestesses of the

²⁰⁸ The story of Saint Patrick is one of myths layered on myths. According to the legend, the religious man known as Saint Patrick traveled from Britain to Ireland to do missionary work in the fifth century. The best-known story of Saint Patrick is that he became the patron saint of the Emerald Isle because he “drove all the snakes from Ireland.” However, there never were snakes in Ireland (or at least, there are none in the fossil record). The common belief is that in this story the “snakes” represent pagans or Druids that Patrick banished from the island, given that he is credited as a missionary who brought Christianity to Ireland.

²⁰⁹ Athena is the Olympian goddess of wisdom and war and the adored patroness of the city of Athens. A virgin deity, she was also – somewhat paradoxically – associated with peace and handicrafts, especially spinning and weaving. Majestic and stern, Athena surpassed everybody in both of her main domains.

powerful wife of Zeus. One day, the god of the sea Poseidon²¹⁰ saw Medusa performing her daily austerities for Athena. He was instantly smitten and tried to charm and beguile her. Medusa's heart was given to Athena only, however, and so she rejected Poseidon. Infuriated, he raped her on the stairs of the temple of Athena. Ashamed and broken, Medusa begged her beloved Athena for healing and forgiveness. Alas, Athena's fury was ignited at Medusa's betrayal. She sent Medusa to a faraway island and cursed her, turning her beautiful golden hair into snakes, her legs into the tail of a serpent, and her soul so ugly that anyone who looked her in the eyes would turn to stone. Medusa spent her time in exile hidden in the shadows, turning men into stone, until one day the half-god Perseus²¹¹ managed to hunt her down. While she was sleeping, he used Athena's bronze shield as a guide to see Medusa's reflection, and in this way, avoided turning to stone himself. Then Perseus beheaded Medusa and brought her head back to Athena in a bag, becoming a hero and savior of men.

The Birth of Monotheism

Before Mohammed,²¹² before Jesus, and before Buddha, there was Zoroaster.

Most likely born to a polytheistic tribe around 2,000 BCE in Bronze Age Persia (Iran),

²¹⁰ Poseidon was a brother of Zeus, the sky god and chief deity of ancient Greece, and of Hades, god of the underworld. When the three brothers deposed their father, the kingdom of the sea fell by lot to Poseidon. His weapon and main symbol was the trident.

²¹¹ Perseus, in Greek mythology, the slayer of the Gorgon Medusa and the rescuer of Andromeda from a sea monster. Perseus was the son of Zeus and Danaë, the daughter of Acrisius of Argos. He became one of the Greek's greatest heroes.

²¹² Muhammad ibn Abdullah (570 CE-632 CE) was an Arab religious, social, and political leader and the founder of the world religion of Islam. According to Islamic doctrine, he was a prophet, divinely inspired to preach and confirm the monotheistic teachings of Adam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and other prophets.

the prophet Zoroaster had a vision of the one supreme God called Ahura Mazda.²¹³ He began teaching people to worship this single male deity. A thousand years later, Zoroastrianism,²¹⁴ the world's first great monotheistic religion, became the official faith of the mighty Persian Empire.²¹⁵ Its fire temples were attended by millions of adherents, and its beliefs spread along the trade routes east to China and northwest into Europe, until its eventual collapse a thousand years later.

Shortly thereafter, during the second millennium BCE, an old man named Abraham²¹⁶ was walking up a mountain with his son Isaac, who carried a stack of wood on his back. They were on their way to make an altar and a ritual fire in which they would burn a sacrifice to their God (known sometimes to the Hebrews as "El Elion," "El Olam;" "El Shaddai;" "El Ro'I," a derivative of the Canaanite high god El), whom they worshiped as the Supreme Deity. Abraham planned to sacrifice Isaac, his one beloved and only legitimate son, for the old man had been instructed by his God to do so as evidence of his faith. Luckily for Isaac, God intervened; an angel appeared with a ram who would be sacrificed instead of Abraham's son. Abraham knew then that he was being tested, and that his faith in his one God, to the exclusion of all others, stood firm.

²¹³ Ahura Mazda, also known as Oromasdes, Ohrmazd, Ahuramazda, Hourmazd, Hormazd, and Hurmuz, is the creator deity in Zoroastrianism. He is the first and most frequently invoked spirit in the *Yasna*, the religious texts. The literal meaning of the word *Ahura* is "lord", and that of *Mazda* is "wisdom."

²¹⁴ Zoroastrianism is one of the world's oldest monotheistic religions, having originated in ancient Persia. It contains both monotheistic and dualistic elements, and many scholars believe Zoroastrianism influenced the belief systems of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

²¹⁵ The First Persian Empire, also called The Achaemenid Empire, was an ancient Iranian empire that was based in Western Asia and founded by Cyrus the Great in 550 BCE. It reached its greatest extent under Xerxes I, who conquered most of northern and central ancient Greece.

²¹⁶ Abraham is the common patriarch of the Abrahamic religions, including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In Judaism he is the founding father of the special relationship between the Jews and God; in Christianity, he is the spiritual progenitor of all believers, Jewish or gentile (non-Jewish); and in Islam he is a link in the chain of prophets that begins with Adam and culminates in Muhammad.

Scholars now suspect the Hebrews, the tribe to which Abraham belonged, would have been living amongst a plethora of gods and goddesses, who would have existed at the time; but quite conceivably there might have been one god who held higher power and reverence. This would evolve eventually to the worship of a single God that, seven centuries later, would tell Moses his name was “Yahweh.” Soon, faith in that almighty Heavenly Father would become the backbone of the monotheistic religions, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, for the next two thousand years. (Wells, n.d.)

As a primary male God took root and spread throughout the world, new myths, stories, and religions also emerged. Sometimes the Goddess returned as a primary deity, such as Ma Kali²¹⁷ in India, and Demeter and Persephone²¹⁸ in Greece. Sometimes the Goddess was demonized, such as the case with Lilith, Medusa, and Pandora.²¹⁹ Sirens,²²⁰

²¹⁷ Kali is the form of the Mother Goddess in which she appears angered and aroused to take on the torment of this world. The daughter of Durga, Ma Kali is a Hindu goddess, revered even today, who is considered to be the master of death, time and change.

²¹⁸ Persephone is the daughter of Zeus and Demeter, goddess of the earth. Hades, the brother of Zeus and god of the underworld, abducts the young goddess one day as she is gathering flowers by a stream. Demeter goes in search of her daughter but is unable to find her. Demeter’s grief causes the earth to die—crops fail, and famine comes upon the land. Zeus intervenes and commands Hades to return Persephone. Reluctant to release her, Hades forces Persephone to eat a pomegranate seed, food of the dead. As a result, she can spend only six months out of the year with her mother; the other six months she is destined to spend in the realm of Hades. To the Greeks, the return of Persephone from the underworld symbolized the return of life in the spring. Each spring, as the earth returned to life, some Greeks observed a sacred ritual in which the story of Demeter and Persephone was enacted.

²¹⁹ Pandora was the first mortal woman in Greek mythology. Following the instructions of Zeus – who wanted to punish Prometheus for stealing the fire from the gods and giving it to the humans – she was molded by Hephaestus and endowed with gifts by all the other Olympian gods. One of these gifts was a jar full of all the evils and diseases which exist in the world; once Pandora married Epimetheus, she lifted the lid of this jar and set them all free, thus marking the end of the Golden Age of Humanity.

²²⁰ In Greek mythology, the sirens were dangerous creatures who lured nearby sailors with their enchanting music and singing voices to shipwreck on the rocky coast of their island. It is also said that they can even charm the winds.

harpies,²²¹ hags and witches emerged, demonized versions of the Great Mother. In the Old Testament, the Canaanite goddess was referred to as “the Abomination” (Campbell, 1988, p. 216). The Virgin was birthed as an archetype, as in Mother Mary²²² and Guan Yin,²²³ in order to ensure male ownership of the feminine, and as a means of overthrowing the matrilineal system (Leeming & Page, 1994). Additionally, powerful female figures became prostitutes in myth. The new religions began to see the Masculine and Feminine as diametrically opposed, two contrasting energies that vie for power. In some cultures where the Mother Goddess became the partner of a male deity, as was the case with Shiva/Parvati²²⁴ and Zeus/Athena, she often had a lesser role than her masculine counterpart.

In *Ancient Mystery Cults* (1987), author Walter Burkert²²⁵ remarked extensively on the idea of the “Mysteries,” presumably the ancient wisdom of the Mother Goddess, the rites associated with this knowledge, and the priestesses and priests as the safe-keepers of that knowledge. Throughout the last of the Bronze Age, as the matriarch was

²²¹ The Harpies were mythical monsters in Greek mythology that had the form of a bird with a human female face; often agents of punishment they abducted people and tortured them on their way to Hades' domain, employed by the God as instruments for the punishment of the guilty.

²²² According to the gospels of Matthew and Luke in the New Testament, Mary was a first-century Jewish woman of Nazareth, the wife of Joseph, and the mother of Jesus. Both the New Testament and the Quran describe Mary as a virgin. In Western Christianity, Mother Mary is a popular focus of personal devotion. Often depicted with her infant child, she has come to represent a holy divine figure and a mediator between humanity and the divine.

²²³ Guan Yin is the Chinese Goddess of mercy, the bodhisattva of compassion. Bodhisattvas are enlightened beings who choose to stay on Earth to help the human race. Similar to the Virgin Mary, Guan Yin is a popular intercessor to help others understand divine salvation.

²²⁴ Shiva (Siva), the God of destruction, death and regeneration, is one of the most important gods in the Hindu pantheon and is considered a member of the holy trinity (trimurti) of Hinduism. Parvati is the wife of the Hindu god Shiva. She is the reincarnation of Sati, the first wife of Shiva who immolated herself during a yajna (fire-sacrifice). Together, the two symbolize the Sacred Marriage.

²²⁵ Walter Burkert (1931-2015) was a German scholar of Greek mythology and cult. A professor of classics at the University of Zurich, Switzerland, he taught in the UK and the US.

being oppressed and an attempt at eradication was happening, these Mystery Cults²²⁶ were significant in keeping the Mother Goddess energies alive. Mystery Schools such as those for Demeter and Persephone in Greece, and Isis and Osiris²²⁷ in Egypt, were birthed during these times of matriarchal oppression; and it was during these rites and rituals that a transformation of consciousness occurred within its participants. With their limited number of initiates, The Mystery Schools were not churches, and their goal was not to spread faith, but rather to keep and preserve the rituals and transformative ways of connecting with the divine. (Burkert, 1987)

In the 6th century BCE, in northeast India, a non-theistic ideology was born: Buddhism. As much a moral philosophy as a religion, Siddhārtha Guatama (the Buddha), taught that through inner awareness and by cultivating such practices as kindness, compassion, wisdom, patience, and generosity, one could achieve enlightenment. His best-known teachings of the Four Noble Truths²²⁸ and the Eightfold Path²²⁹ teach about human suffering and the liberation of that suffering into Nirvana.²³⁰ With its emphasis on reincarnation, non-duality, and non-conceptual thinking, we hear echoes of the

²²⁶ Mystery religions, mystery cults, sacred mysteries or simply mysteries, were religious schools of the Greco-Roman world for which participation was reserved for initiates.

²²⁷ Osiris, the brother/husband of Isis, was the Egyptian god of fertility, agriculture, the afterlife, the dead, resurrection, life, and vegetation.

²²⁸ In Buddhism, the Four Noble Truths are "the truths of the Noble Ones," the truths or realities for the "spiritually worthy ones." They are traditionally identified as the first teaching given by the Buddha, and considered one of the most important teachings in Buddhism.

²²⁹ The Noble Eightfold Path is an early summary of the path of Buddhist practices leading to liberation from samsara, the painful cycle of rebirth, in the form of nirvana.

²³⁰ Nirvana, the state to which all Buddhists aspire, is the cessation of desire and hence the end of suffering. Nirvana in Sanskrit means "the blowing out." It is understood as the extinguishment of the flame of personal desire, the quenching of the fire of life.

mythologies of ancient Neolithic times. These teachings would spread throughout India and Asia, and eventually the world over, with different schools of beliefs and practices.

As wealth grew and inequality was perpetuated in various places across the world, the mythologies grew to reflect these hierarchical societal structures. Goddess was once an inclusive, circular, equal deity, not separate from anything else, and thus the everyday and the sacred were intertwined. Then male gods, and in many cultures a single male sky God, became authoritarian entities in a separate sphere; they rose above into Heaven, and goddesses were demoted to the realms below, sometimes to an even lower underground world of the dead. Once upon a time, the Goddess *was* the Universe, alive and infinite, and a living organism who manifested an aspect of herself as Earth; her people were one with the Earth and celebrated her cycles and seasons, death and regeneration. Now the universe was confined to a linear one; gods were not the vibrant life energies within us but separate entities who demanded worship, and the role of humans was to devote themselves to Him (Joseph Campbell Foundation, 2013).

The Common Era (1 CE - Present)



Once upon a time, God of the Hebrews planted a garden. It was bright and beautiful. The plants were abundant, the cows and goats grazed peacefully; it needed no rain nor were there storms. The air was filled with the scent of flower blossoms, the birds sang, and magnificent fruit trees filled the garden including the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Yahweh, the God who had planted it all, looked around with satisfaction, but thought one thing was missing: someone to enjoy this earthly

paradise. And so, Yahweh created a man in His image, and called him Adam, and placed him in this garden called Eden, and instructed him: "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil you shall not eat, nor the Tree of Life, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die." Then, from Adam's rib, he created a companion for Adam, who would be the First Woman.

Adam and the Woman lived happily in the Garden of Eden. They ate fruit and nuts from the permitted trees; they woke and slept with the rising and setting sun. The birds sang, the bees buzzed, and Adam and the Woman lived without care or thought. They were naked and unafraid. And God instructed the First Couple, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

However, one day a serpent, who was Satan in disguise, spoke to the Woman and asked why it was that she was unable to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. She explained that God had commanded that they neither eat the fruit nor touch the forbidden tree. The serpent convincingly explained that they would not die if they ate the fruit from the forbidden tree, for then they would know good and evil and their eyes would be open to the wisdom of God. The Woman was persuaded, and she took a bite of the fruit and gave some to her husband, and he ate it.

God appeared in the Garden and called Adam and the Woman to Him, demanding to know why they had disobeyed Him. Adam pointed the finger at the Woman, who blamed the serpent. God cursed the serpent: "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life." God cursed the Woman that she and her daughters

would know pain in childbirth, and that she, whom Adam now called Eve, the “Mother of all things,” would be ruled over by Adam. Finally, God cursed Adam that he should eat from the ground. He cursed them both by giving them mortality. Then God clothed them and sent them out of the Garden of Eden forever.

~ Adapted from the New International Holy Bible, 1973, Genesis, 2-3

At the turn of the first new millennium CE, as the polytheistic Egyptian and subsequently the Greek civilizations declined and Rome flourished, a Jewish king named Jesus of Nazareth lived in Roman-occupied Palestine. The Romans had demanded the Jewish people worship the Roman Emperor as a god. However, it was forbidden for those in the Jewish faith to worship any god besides their One God Yahweh, and thus Jesus rejected their demands. He believed that the kingdom of Yahweh could not be found on Earth but rather in an everlasting afterlife which promised the forgiveness of people's sins. Starting in Galilee²³¹ in Northern Israel, Jesus traveled throughout the region preaching his beliefs, along with other traditional Jewish tenets such as love and peace. While most Jews would not align fully with Jesus' ideas, a small group of disciples believed he was the Messiah²³² that would lead them out of Roman rule.

Sometime between CE 30 and 33, Jesus traveled to Jerusalem to continue to spread his beliefs; while there, he was arrested and crucified by the Roman governor

²³¹ The Galilee is a fertile, mountainous region in northern Israel. It's known for the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus is said to have walked on water.

²³² In Abrahamic religions, a messiah is a savior or liberator of a group of people.

Pontius Pilate²³³ for what was considered rebellious conduct. Three days after his death, Jesus' tomb was found empty, and many claimed to have seen him rise from the dead. After Jesus' death, the apostle Paul of Tarsus²³⁴ began to spread the idea of Jesus as Messiah, with Jesus' promises of the afterlife. The idea of a loving god who would forgive their sins after death was appealing to many poor and destitute people. The Romans persecuted these believers, but more and more believers began to convert. By CE 395, Christianity²³⁵ became the primary religion of the Roman Empire.

By 200 CE, the western world would continue to experience radical mythological, social, political, and economic shifts, and a continued severing of the human/physical from the spiritual plane. Populations would grow, great cities would rise and fall, and the Roman Empire²³⁶ collapsed. Hinduism, although patriarchal, would remain at home in the world of myth and archetype, continuing to celebrate gods, goddesses, and the merging of their mythic and living realities. Buddhism would stay rooted in its psychological realms. Several centuries later, conquered lands such as the British Isles, the Nordic people, the Slavic and German countries would be forced into Christianity, but many would retain their ancient pagan customs and rituals, even some of the myths and characteristics of ancient deities, although under new Christian names. Indigenous

²³³ Pontius Pilate was the fifth governor of the Roman province of Judaea, serving under Emperor Tiberius from the year 26/27 to 36/37 CE. He is best known for being the official who presided over the trial of Jesus and later, he ordered his crucifixion.

²³⁴ Paul (born Saul of Tarsus) (5- 64/65 CE), commonly known as Paul the Apostle and Saint Paul, was a Christian apostle (although not one of the original Twelve Apostles) who spread the teachings of Jesus in the first-century world. Generally regarded as one of the most important figures of the Apostolic Age, he founded several Christian communities in Asia Minor and Europe from the mid-40s to the mid-50s CE.

²³⁵ Christianity is an Abrahamic monotheistic religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. It is the world's largest religion, with about 2.5 billion followers.

²³⁶ The Roman Empire centered on the city of Rome; it was established in 27 BCE following the demise of the Roman Republic and continuing to the final eclipse of the empire of the West in the 5th century CE.

peoples of the Americas, Australia, the Northern Peoples, the Pacific Islands and countless other cultures of the world would continue to live out traditional lives and myths as in days of old until the time of colonization in the last half of the second millennium; for them, the mythological-spiritual realms and the physical world would continue to support and inform each other in the early centuries of the Common Era (Armstrong, 2005).

However, the mythological and metaphoric belief systems of the primary monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and eventually Islam, were perceived as historic fact, in part supported by the introduction of Aristotle's²³⁷ and Plato's rational thought, as discussed later in this paper. In other words, their God could be experienced in actual events that occurred in the world rather than the realms of timeless imagination, and belief systems of the era would be forced into a framework that needed to be "proven." The devotees of monotheistic cultures often turned an event from history into myth but then reclaimed it as historical fact, such as Jesus rising from the dead (Armstrong, 2005).

In the fourth century CE, Emperor Constantine²³⁸ closed the shrines and temples of the remaining Goddess cults such as Demeter, Cybele and Isis. Over time, as the Christian and Islamic God rose, Goddess worship was eventually forbidden. There was a

²³⁷ Aristotle (384-322 BCE) was a Greek philosopher and polymath during the Classical period in Ancient Greece. Taught by Plato, he was the founder of the Lyceum, the Peripatetic school of philosophy, and the Aristotelian tradition.

²³⁸ Flavius Valerius Constantinus, or Constantine I (272-337 CE), also known as Constantine the Great or just Constantine, was a Roman emperor reigning from 306 to 337. Constantine was the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity. The age of Constantine, which included Constantine I and his successors, marked a distinct epoch in the history of the Roman Empire and a pivotal moment in the transition from classical antiquity to the Middle Ages.

concerted effort to obliterate the Goddess: Sacred texts and prayers were changed to a male pronoun, a male god fully replaced the Goddess, priests replaced priestesses, female positions of power were outlawed, and the Patriarch²³⁹ was fully born (Tate, 1996). When the polytheistic Roman Empire fell in CE 476, a sect of Christianity called the Catholic Church²⁴⁰ quickly moved into Rome and soon became the dominant form of Christianity. Catholicism would spread throughout Europe and the British Isles.

In CE 595, Pope Gregory²⁴¹ sent forty monks from Rome to England in order to convert the pagan people to Christianity. A Benedictine monk by the name of Augustine²⁴² led the charge; he was under instructions to allow the pagan festivals and beliefs to continue, but to superimpose Christian rituals and philosophy whenever possible. Though it took many years to see the plan to fruition, the conversion of the pagan, nature-worshiping people to Christianity came to pass. Pope Gregory's plan of allowing the local people to continue their rituals, while slowly changing the names and

²³⁹ Originally, a *patriarch*, meaning "chief" or "to rule," was a man who exercised autocratic authority as a senior head father over an extended family. The term developed an ecclesiastical meaning within the Christian Church. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are referred to as the three patriarchs of the people of Israel, and the period during which they lived is termed the Patriarchal Age. In its common form, it refers to the male head of a family or tribal line, or a person regarded as the father or founder of an order, class, etc.

²⁴⁰ Roman Catholicism has been the decisive spiritual force in the history of Western civilization. Along with Eastern Orthodoxy and Protestantism, it is one of the three major branches of Christianity. The Roman Catholic Church traces its history to Jesus Christ and the Apostles. Over the course of centuries, it developed a highly sophisticated theology and an elaborate organizational structure headed by the papacy, the oldest continuing absolute monarchy in the world. Today, the Catholic Church is the largest Christian church, with 1.3 billion baptized Catholics worldwide as of 2019. As the world's oldest and largest continuously functioning international institution, it has played a prominent role in the history and development of the West.

²⁴¹ Pope Gregory I, commonly known as Saint Gregory the Great, was Bishop of Rome from 590 CE to his death in 604. He is known for instigating the first recorded large-scale mission from Rome, the Gregorian Mission, to convert the then largely pagan Anglo-Saxons to Christianity.

²⁴² Augustine of Hippo (354-430), also known as Saint Augustine, was a theologian and philosopher of Berber origin and the bishop of Hippo Regius in Numidia, Roman North Africa.

philosophy, was successful; feast days of local deities became the feast days and festivals of Christian saints, and within a few generations, many had forgotten the old names of their beloved gods and goddesses.

In CE 610, a nobleman named Muhammad was told he was God's prophet by the angel Gabriel²⁴³ while on retreat near Mecca (in what is now Saudi Arabia), and he was given the teachings of the Islamic Qu'rān. Muhammad began to actively promote these teachings of God and monotheism. Though he was persecuted, he eventually made a stronghold first at Medina,²⁴⁴ then at Mecca.²⁴⁵ Sharing the laws and codes of the Qur'an, and the revelations revealed to him, Muhammad and his followers began to spread this new Islamic ideology. After his death in CE 633, his father-in-law succeeded him and, with three other "righteous caliphs" or spiritual leaders, they spread the Islam religion far and wide: to "Sham" (Syria, Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq), then to Egypt and North Africa, Spain and India. Arabic would become the shared language, and a common currency would unify worshippers throughout the region. Through centuries of conquests, the seat of power would shift from city to city, country to country, from Jerusalem to Constantinople. Architecture, science, math, education, literacy, astronomy and the arts

²⁴³In the Abrahamic religions, Gabriel is an archangel who appears in the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Quran. In the Hebrew Bible, Gabriel appears to the prophet Daniel to explain his visions. The archangel also appears in the Book of Enoch and other ancient Jewish writings.

²⁴⁴ Medina is a city in western Saudi Arabia.

²⁴⁵ Mecca, in a desert valley in western Saudi Arabia, is Islam's holiest city, as it's the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad and the faith itself. Only Muslims are allowed in the city, with millions arriving for the annual Hajj pilgrimage.

would flourish. Empires such as the Ottoman²⁴⁶ would rise and fall. Islam would continue to spread across the world, and it continues to grow today, at one and a half billion believers strong. (PBS, 2014)

Throughout the Middle Ages, from about CE 500 until CE 1500, God became the excuse to repress, if not forcibly forbid, female sexuality. In many parts of the world the female genitalia were both physically and metaphorically mutilated, women were denied their sexual or sensual energy, an act that was “sanctioned by God.” In Europe, Christian crusaders²⁴⁷ during the Middle Ages²⁴⁸ locked women up in chastity belts and took the key while they went off to fight for “God,” often for years at a time. Exploitation, repression and control became a major tool of patriarchal dominance not just of women, but of non-Christian peoples, animals, and the earth itself. The Divine Feminine took on the role of mothers, wives, daughters, and nuns forcibly having to bow to the patriarchal cosmological order (Sjoo and Mor, 1987). Nature, Earth, and Spirit were no longer connected, and man was instructed through sacred texts to have dominance over Nature rather than be interconnected with it, a philosophy and way of living that would perpetuate even today.

²⁴⁶ The Ottoman Empire was an empire that controlled much of Southeastern Europe, Western Asia, and Northern Africa between the 14th and early 20th centuries. It was founded at the end of the 13th century in northwestern Anatolia in the town of Söğüt by the Turkoman tribal leader Osman I.

²⁴⁷ The Crusaders were warriors for a series of religious wars called The Crusades, initiated, supported, and sometimes directed by the Latin Church in the medieval period. The best known of these Crusades are those to the Holy Land in the period between 1095 and 1291 that were intended to recover Jerusalem and its surrounding area from Islamic rule.

²⁴⁸ In the history of Europe, the Middle Ages or medieval period lasted approximately from the 5th to the late 15th centuries, similar to the post-classical period of global history. It began with the fall of the Western Roman Empire and transitioned into the Renaissance and the Age of Discovery.

By the beginning of the second millennium, some sects of the three prevailing religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, would slowly return to ritual, prayer and thus myth, finding the chasm between mythological thought and a proven, rationalized religion too difficult to navigate. The Greek Orthodox Christians,²⁴⁹ the Jews, and Muslim sects such as the Sufis²⁵⁰ began to turn towards a mystical God in which one could search the interior, invisible realms to find Him, which they found in the rich world of myth.

However, as the Dark Ages lifted, Christianity in Western Europe revived its enthusiasm for Plato's and Aristotle's rational thought (as further explained in the next section), and mythology became overshadowed by ideologies which many believed were factually-based. With the expansion of Christianity and the slavery and genocide that often accompanied it, the mythologies of Indigenous Peoples in the Americas, in Africa, across Europe, in Norse countries and in Australia were usurped by this new religion. While some cultures continued their former rituals and customs under new Christian names, others were forced to assimilate the new belief system or be killed for heresy.

The writings of Apostle Paul at the turn of the first century CE emphasized men's authority over women. Accordingly, women throughout the Middle Ages until well into the 19th century, and in many places even today, were forbidden education, married off as property, confined to their homes, not allowed a political voice, beaten as daughters of Eve and burned alive as witches. Though farming and agriculture continued to be the

²⁴⁹ The Eastern Orthodox Church, also called the Orthodox Church, is the second-largest Christian church, with approximately 220 million baptized members.

²⁵⁰ Sufism is a mystical form of Islam, a school of practice that emphasizes the inward search for God and shuns materialism. It has produced some of the world's most beloved literature, like the love poems of the 13th century Iranian Rumi. Its modern-day adherents cherish tolerance and pluralism, qualities that in many regions unsettle extremists.

primary means of sustenance, Nature, like women, was exploited and dominated under the patriarchal Christian rule.

As the world's cultures became labor-based and eventually in more recent times with the Industrial Revolution and mass production, any residual or ancient role women once played in the fabric of society had now vanished, a complete disconnect with Mother Earth Goddess and Nature itself. Goddess became assimilated with the attributes of the Patriarch.

The original Cosmic Mother, who was an independent, sexually free, fertile creator, a wisdom keeper, a warrior, a lover, a nourisher, was now altered, forbidden, obscured, and practically silenced. However, as myth, folk and fairy tales began to be recorded, her voice could still be heard, the lingering shadows of the ancient animistic Mother language. Magic, mysticism, and sacred imagery were still woven into these old stories, and though male scribes were primarily the ones responsible for transcribing them, underneath the surface we see the timeless tale of the Great Mother.

Today we are left with archetypes that are undeniably universal, shadowy impressions that Joseph Campbell says represent a past reality; their power is so profound as an internal image because they were once experienced as a mythological reality. The remnants of the ancient myths also "line the walls of our interior system of belief, like shards of broken pottery in an archaeological site... we cannot hear the exact tune but we are still hearing its refrains" (Campbell, 1988, p. 5).

CHAPTER III

Myth and Science

as Divergent and Convergent Systems

“I believe in everything until it is disproved. So, I believe in fairies, the myths, dragons. It all exists, even if it's in your mind. Who's to say that dreams and nightmares aren't as real as the here and now?”

~ John Lennon



Grandmother Spider was hunched over, her long silky hair soft against her frail spindly body, watching, watching, so very patient. All around her, the sky was inky-dark, an inconceivable blackness. There she sat, for an unknown eternity in the endless darkness, watching and waiting for the Universal Mind to awaken.

One day, the Universal Mind stirred, and began to awaken from its Dream. From its center, a radiant light emanated and birthed seven beings who became bright twinkling stars and took their places in Sky World. Then she took her spinning wheel, and softly humming her spinning song, she spun a thread and connected the stars together. Then she spun a Spirit doorway through which all of Life would enter.

The seven stars contained the seven colors, and light and shadow and darkness, and the Universal Mind brought forth more beings through the Doorway of the Stars and they became the suns and moons and planets and took their place in Sky World. As each one came into Being, Grandmother Spider sung her song and wrapped her Web around each one, connecting them all together, the light from the Universal Mind and the suns and moon and stars reflecting off her shimmering thread.

Soon the Beings created children who would arrive on the Earthwalk: birds and animals, rocks and trees, plants and oceans, mountains and streams, humans and insects, rain and fire. Grandmother Spider spun her thread longer and longer and wrapped every Being within their own personal energy Web, each with their own unique purpose and energy, but leaving a trail of thread that she would use to weave and wrap the next Being. Each Being of the Universal Mind would come to the Earthwalk with its own

dream, its own gifts, its own challenges, its own lessons, its own awareness; but each one shared the energy of all else, and was connected to all Beings past, present and future.

At the end of each life, the Being would return through the Doorway of the Stars and the web would unravel, until the Universal Mind beckoned them forth once more. In this way life continues in an endless cycle of coming and going, and Grandmother Spider never runs out of her magical thread that connects us all.

~ Taino Creation Myth (Spider, 2005)

Myth and Science

Since ancient times, humanity has attempted to inquire and explain, to reflect and account for the inner and external workings of the cosmos; as we have just seen, they have always done so through myth. However, as ancient civilizations cast a heavenly omniscient Father into the realm of Spirit above, thinkers began to increasingly concern themselves with the world of matter in the physical plane.

The Oxford Dictionary (2022) defines “Science” as “the intellectual and practical activity encompassing the systematic study of the structure and behavior of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment;” it gives us a systematic approach to acquiring knowledge. For the definition of myth, I return to my original definition as seen in Chapter I, which differentiates itself from science:

Mythology can be defined as a body or collection of stories, revered as sacred or embraced as truth, told by a specific culture that seeks to explain existence. Myth offers us answers to the origins of the world and its people, and to what happens when life ends. It defines how people relate to each other and the world around them. It provides a society’s beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and rules, and expresses a culture’s relationship to their deities, to good and evil, to suffering and joy. Myth defines and separates the sacred from the profane. It tells the stories of our ancestors, explains events in nature, the cycles of the seasons, the reason for the

stars, sun and moon in the sky. *Myth is willing to acknowledge and embrace the unknowable, unproven and unexplainable as a dynamic force in the manifest and unmanifest universe, such as the supernatural powers of a great creator, goddesses, gods and heroes.* Ultimately, myth provides a container for connection and cohesion, and gives purpose to individuals and a like-minded society as a whole. (Sundeen, 2022)

Myth and science are synonymous in so many ways, as they both answer the questions: Where did we come from? Who are we? Where are we going?

However, as we shall soon see, at a certain point in our history, science diverged from myth, declaring itself as *truth* and myth as *untruth*. It became reductionist as it observed, explained, proved, categorized, systematized, manipulated and controlled smaller and distinct or individual parts of the workings of the universe instead of an integrated whole that could be taken on faith, the Sacred becoming, to some, a lofty ideal that had no place in the world of science. Science would refuse to claim what myth could from the above definition: that it “is willing to acknowledge and embrace the unknowable, unproven and unexplainable as a dynamic force in the manifest and unmanifest universe, such as the supernatural powers of a great creator, goddesses, gods and heroes.” It is this very divergence that has partially led, along with a breakdown of so many of our mythological systems as we shall see in the following chapters, to a planet in crisis.

Below is a sampling of some of the world’s prominent cosmological philosophies about the inner workings of the universe. I examine several indigenous polytheistic/goddess-god/animist cosmologies and compare them to scientific philosophies and theories that have been born from or under patriarchal/monotheistic traditions. I further explore how these perspectives have shaped society and our relationship with our planet and each other.

A Brief Look at Some of the Early Sciences



Once upon a time, at the beginning of all time, there existed an island which floated in the Sky. Below the island, birds flew; below this, endless ocean in which the sea animals swam. Sky Man and Sky Woman lived together happily on the island; there was not yet death or birth, and sadness did not exist. In the middle of the island, there was a great Tree whose roots extended downward into the unknown, and whose branches reached even higher into the heavens, and whose light shone across the whole island.

One day, Sky Woman grew heavy with child, and she often went to the Tree of Life to pick its fruit and to nourish her growing child. Her husband, digging up roots for Sky Woman, accidentally dug a hole which opened to the wide air below. Curious, Sky Woman leaned over the hole to see, and fell through! Frantically, she tried to grasp the edges of the island, but alas only bits of root and dirt and seeds from the tree of life were all she could hold. And so, she fell downward, toward the great vast ocean below.

The great Winged Ones gathered together, and in an attempt to save her, they interconnected their feathery wings and made a soft raft onto which Sky Woman landed. But they knew their wings would not hold for long, and so they called upon the Sea Beings to help. Big Turtle offered to take her on his back, and all of the other birds and sea creatures asked how they might help. She asked them to bring mud from the depth of the ocean floor, and one after the other, each tried but failed. Finally, Little Toad gave it his best, and when he reappeared from the ocean's floor, his mouth was full of mud! Sky Woman and the Animals spread the mud across Big Turtle's back, and it grew and grew

until it became the size of North America. Sky Woman planted the roots and seeds from the Island in the Sky, and soon forests and meadows came to be. Then she scattered dust into the air and created the stars, and the moon, and the sun.

Sky Woman soon gave birth to a daughter, and together they circled the earth so that the earth and plants continued to grow. One day, the First Daughter came upon a man. In awe of such a sight, she fainted. He placed two arrows on her chest, and when she awakened, she knew she was with twin children.

Eventually the First Daughter gave birth to twin boys, the Left-Handed and the Right-Handed. Some people called them Sapling and Flint. They created animals and humans out of clay and breathed life into them. They made berries, fruit, and medicine, and the new world was harmonious. Alas, while Sapling supported all they had made, Flint tried to destroy it. A great battle took place, and Sapling triumphed; taking his rightful place in the Sky, he was content with watching over the world they created. Flint, however, stayed below the Earth and was content to dwell in the affairs of Humankind, in warfare and pain. Even today, as they reign from their separate spheres in the Sky and below the Earth, the two maintain the balance when both are honored through the rites and offerings.

~ A Haudenosaunee Creation Myth (Lawler, n.d.)

For tens of thousands of years, indigenous or traditional philosophies and medicines have been used to heal and create balance and wellbeing for the millions of people who once inhabited this planet. Rituals, ceremonies, and celebrations that were in synchronicity with the seasons, native foods, and the use of plants, prayer, drumming, chanting, singing, and dance are some of the ways in which our early and indigenous

people lived in harmony with the earth. Our first people knew that nature contained within her powerful medicine, both throughout earth and within our own bodies, and some of the best medicines were those that empowered the body to take care of itself (Shimer, 2004). For many, this healing aspect to life was considered a gift entrusted to them by the Great Mystery, and thus was respected and honored. The individual's place as a part of a greater whole became the foundation of our early cosmologies and, in many parts of the world, continues to form the basis of the mythical-scientific belief systems across the world even today.

The Hindu Cosmology

On Friday afternoons, the Sri Lakshmi Temple in Ashland, Massachusetts opens its doors to the public for ritual and prayer. I have spent many afternoons in meditation here in front of the Mother Goddess Durga in her courageous form, riding her tiger, or in contemplation in front of Shiva and Parvati the Divine Couple; some days I chant with my mala beads in hand in front of the giant Goddess Lakshmi²⁵¹ herself. In the Temple, there is no differentiation between the actual stone statues and the energetic vibrations they each emanate; further, these energies are found by practitioners to be both outside the body and within us.

At times, I am immersed in my own deep inner cosmological world, but sometimes I simply sit and observe. At 4:00 p.m., all is usually quiet in the Temple, but within the hour, the temple fills with grandparents, parents, and children of all ages, dressed in their finest silks. The ritual fire is lit, the air fills with the perfumed smoke of

²⁵¹ Famous for her beauty, grace and wealth, Lakshmi is one of the most significant goddesses in the Hindu pantheon. She is part of the Hindu Goddess trimurtis, along with Kali/Durga and Saraswati.

incense. Flower petals and fruits are strewn throughout, and powdery spices mix with droplets of holy water, sprinkled on the foreheads of deities and people alike.

Businesspeople come in suits and circumambulate the deities, sometimes even while holding business meetings on their cell phones; for in this tradition, there is no separation between the world of myth, faith, and their living reality. Children play and mothers talk. Some come for blessings from the priest for unborn children, some to find out which day, or whom, they should marry, some to be healed from disease. Some drive their new cars to the Temple entrance to be blessed in ritual for safety; some look to the deities for life's bigger questions. In many cases, their questions are answered.

Hinduism, with its vast pantheon of gods and goddesses which exists to this day, is a prime example of how their cosmological²⁵² “science” and their mythological origins are not fundamentally opposed. Together, rather, the two create the structural framework that sustains society, and which is shared through song, prayer, ritual, story and ceremony. The Hindu quest for balance and harmony between humans and nature is rooted in their cosmological explanations. Thus, the ancient Hindu philosophers, the Rishis,²⁵³ Seers²⁵⁴ and priests saw the phenomenal world through the lens of wholeness and through coherence, with Divinity the essential ingredient of it all.

It is said that once upon a time, Brahma the Lord Creator sat in the absolute darkness in deep meditation, surrounded by the Nothing, before thought, before time, before anything at all existed. Everything just *was*, and an unknown eternity passed.

²⁵² Cosmological: relating to the origin and development of the universe.

²⁵³ Rishis are accomplished and enlightened people. They find mentions in various Hindu Vedic texts. Rishis are believed to have composed hymns of the Vedas.

²⁵⁴ Oracles and prophets

Finally, one day, Desire showed itself for the first time, appearing deep within the heart of Brahma: “Everything is so serene, so perfect, it is a shame you have no one with which to share this blissful eternity.” At that precise moment, born out of that first Desire, a bright light, *shakti*, was born from Brahma’s forehead. She appeared first as a faraway star, and then grew and grew, until she took the form of the luminous Goddess Saraswati. She danced in radiant bliss towards Brahma, whose eyes grew wide, beholden to her exquisite beauty. She came upon Brahma and delicately touched her finger to his third eye.

At the moment of their union, the first original sound rose and erupted from the very depths of the Goddess in union with God, born from love itself. As she sang this sound out into the universe, the vibration of its echo created stars, planets, galaxies, supernovas, earth, the trees, the sky, the wind and moon, sun and rain, the soil and fruit, all creatures and the human race. This sound that brought existence into being was the sacred syllable of OM, that which contains everything.

Hindu creation and reincarnation myths put forth the explanations and laws about the origins of the universe, including the five basic elements that make up the cosmos, matter, earth, and humankind. One’s understanding of reality, a merging of science and myth, is based upon four things: one’s ongoing relationship with the Divine, one’s quest for enlightenment, conflicts from previous incarnations (karma), and one’s life purpose (dharma). From a physics standpoint, the universe is seen as eternally cyclical, birthed by the god/goddess consorts Brahma/Saraswati; it is sustained by Vishnu/Lakshmi; and it is dissolved by Shiva/Kali. This cycle is reflected in the all-encompassing universe down to the microscopic atom.

The sacred ancient Hindu texts lay out the mythological and scientific cosmology of the origin and nature of things. For example, the Rig Veda, one of the oldest sacred texts ever written of which we are aware, and dating from about 1500-2000 BCE, demonstrates the merging of science and myth with its emphasis on cosmic light, harmony and law. It attempts to give order and a realistic understanding of the manifest world from the chaos of which it was born: All matter and its qualities are made up of five Elements, imbued with *Prana* or life force and powered by the feminine principle *shakti*, and work independently or in conjunction with each other in infinite and intricate ways. These include earth (pruthvi), water (apas), fire (tejas), air (vayu) and aether or spirit (akasa) which interact in various proportions to each other. Each of the Elements has associations including the senses and states of being, such as subtle or concrete; these are further categorized into various qualities (doshas) and layers, seasons, directions, and tendencies, and their infinite ways of manifesting are what comprise the seen and unseen universe.

The 6th century physicist Prāshastapāda²⁵⁵ described concepts such as the law of motion, the qualities inherent in substances, the dissolution of matter, and the Divine Being who created it all:

After a cycle of universal dissolution, the Supreme Being decides to recreate the cosmos so that we souls can experience worlds of shape and solidity. Very subtle atoms begin to combine, eventually generating a cosmic wind that blows heavier and heavier atoms together. Souls depending on their karma earned in previous world systems, spontaneously draw to themselves atoms that coalesce into an appropriate body.

~ Prāshastapāda (Goodwin, 2011, pp. 81-82)

²⁵⁵ Prāshastapāda was an ancient Indian philosopher. He wrote the *Padārtha-dharma-saṅgraha* (Collection of Properties of Matter) and a commentary, titled *Prāśastapāda Bhāṣya*, on the Vaisheshika Sutras of Kanada (circa 6th century BCE); both texts are comprehensive books in physics. In these texts Prashastapada discusses the properties of motion. Ganganath Jha translated *Prāśastapāda Bhāṣya* which was published in 1916.

Thus, Hindu cosmology encompasses and maintains a focus on both the material and the subtle worlds, the spiritual not separate and in fact an integral part of the fabric of the cosmos. The origins and explanations for all things in existence are shared through myth and song, prayer and ritual, sacred text and dance, all of which still are still the foundation of scientific thought even today, so many thousands of years later.

The Chinese Theory of Five Elements

Around 500 BCE, about the time that Greek philosophy was emerging, Chinese cosmology flourished in a period known as “The Contention of a Hundred Schools of Thought,”²⁵⁶ out of which basic philosophical schools were formed including Taoism²⁵⁷ and Confucianism.²⁵⁸ Within their cosmology, we see philosophical evidence of universal states and natural laws that underlie all things in our world, which can be influenced by individuals and their relationship with nature, their rulers, and Divine forces. This ancient belief system defines the intricate ways with which Nature acts and affects the body, and how the different dimensions of all things affect each other. All things are connected internally, with nature, and with the universe. Worship was given to gods, goddesses and immortal beings which could rule over places, nature, family lineages, and even human behavior.

²⁵⁶ “The Contention of the Hundred schools of Thought” was the phenomenon of the momentary emergence of many schools of thought and philosophies at about the same time and the contention and debate among them, creating a great deal of “noise”—the phenomenon often referred to in Chinese history and culture as *Baijia zhengming* (The Contention of a Hundred Schools of Thought).

²⁵⁷ Taoism or Daoism refers to either a school of philosophical thought or to a religion; both share ideas and concepts of Chinese origin and emphasize living in harmony with the Tao or The Way as set forth by Lao Tzu in the *Tao te Ching*.

²⁵⁸ Confucianism is an ancient Chinese belief system, which focuses on the importance of personal ethics and morality. Whether it is only a philosophy or also a religion is debated.

In Chinese theory, the essence of all things is called *qi*. Everything that has ever been or will be, including matter and non-matter, plants and humans, water, ideas, feelings, demons and ghosts, contain *qi* or a subtle universal life-force or vital energy.

Like the Hindu cosmology, the Chinese believed in a universe in which the material forces that comprise it are simultaneously Divine, are influenced by the physical and subtle planes, and are ever-changing. Called “The Five Element Theory,”²⁵⁹ they include wood (*mu*) fire (*huo*), earth (*tu*), metal (*jin*), and water (*shui*) and are aspects of the universe’s ongoing dynamic existence. These forces interact with each other in infinite ways, and make up all natural phenomena; further, each element contains the masculine and feminine principles or yin/yang, as well as a vast list of natural phenomena: the seasons, the climate, stages of growth, internal organs, the senses, colors, sounds, aspects of the soul, body tissues, emotions. By the first millennium CE, this philosophy would grow to include not just *qi* as the essential building block, but also *li*, the underlying principle or reason for a thing being what it is. (Smith, 1994).

The Native American Medicine Wheel

According to the story of the Native American Medicine Wheel, all things come from No-thing, and it is to No-thing that all things will return. This No-thing is called the Great Spirit, who has infinite names in countless languages, including the Mohawk’s “Shonkwaia’tison,” the Lokata’s “Wakan tanka,” and the Algonquin’s “Manito.” It is from the Great Spirit that all things become manifest, return to the No-thing/Great Spirit, and return again in a different form in a never-ending Circle of Change. This, then,

²⁵⁹ The basic substances of the material world according to the 'Theory of the Five Elements' are Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal and Water. All material things are made of a single or a combination of the Five Elements, since these are the fundamental components.

becomes the universal law: Nothing ever ends but instead all things are cyclical. It is a merging of myth and science in which all things are created and find form from thought. Its ideology concerns itself not solely with the material but also with the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual realms as well, a dynamic ever-circling cosmos in which balance and harmony sit at its core.

The Medicine Wheel becomes a symbol for understanding the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects of our lives as they relate to the natural world and the cosmos. It is a symbol of existence in harmony with itself. A microcosmic reflection of the Universe as well as the universal mind, it contains a circle which reflects nature's cycles: the earth, sun and moon, the seasons, birds in their circular nests, the rising and setting sun, death and regeneration. The circle of the Medicine Wheel contains a cross, representing the four directions: East, South, West and North. The four spokes of the cross make a path to the center, at which sits the Great Spirit (or Self). It is a tool used to harmonize a person with their inner, outer, natural and universal worlds (Montour, 2000).

According to Native American wisdom and physics, the Great Spirit created four primary sources or powers, intelligences that vitalized the manifest world: Vibratory Force, which is an oscillating, elliptical movement such as the way a planet moves; a Binding force, which is a centripetal movement such as gravity; a Light force, which is wave movement; and Life Force, in which we only experience it but cannot see or measure it. This Life Force is the power behind that which creates and sustains all things in existence, including our own consciousness (Montour, 2000).

Together, these four intelligences are, in a sense, the caretakers of the Universe. They are shown on the Medicine Wheel as the four cardinal directions: The Spirit of the

East is the power of insight, of discernment, the spiritual eye that has the potential to open and see anew; its color is yellow, and it is associated with new beginnings, new life, the rising sun, illumination, and the season of Spring. The Spirit of the South, the color of red, is the power of growth, experience, exploration and investigation, of trust in our innate intuition; it is associated with the season of Summer. The Spirit of the West, whose color is black, is the power of strength, introspection, wisdom, maturity, self-reflection; it is associated with the season of Autumn. The Spirit of the North is the power of renewal, of the quiet gathering of energies, of concentration and clarity; its color is white, the sum of all colors, and is associated with Winter.

The Native American Medicine Wheel represents who we are as individuals, the earth, and the universe and works in a synchronistic manner for the whole. At its most basic, we are born as perfect beings, whole and complete. Imbalances, whether individual or the greater imbalances of humanity or the world, can also be witnessed within the Medicine Wheel; it can be used to help us restore harmony and balance once more.

Louis Montour²⁶⁰ is a Mohawk physician from Kahnawake, Quebec, Canada and member of the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy. He writes that the term “medicine” refers to a vital energy force or power that is contained within all things in nature, much like *prana* of Hindu cosmology or *qi* of Chinese philosophy. It can be thought of as a vortex of spinning energy used to attune a person with the natural forces that can be found cosmically and within: “[The Medicine Wheel] is a physical, mental, and spiritual device that can enable its users to come into attunement with the cosmic and natural

²⁶⁰ Louis T. Montour, MD., (d.o.b. unknown) is a Mohawk physician from Kahnawake, Quebec, and currently resides in Canada. He uses and teaches about the Medicine Wheel in its relationship to healing.

forces in which they are immersed and have their being, and find harmony with their environment and within themselves” (Montour, 2000).

In 2020, I traveled to central Mexico to participate in a traditional indigenous Toltec²⁶¹ healing and dance ceremony: La Danza de la Luna. Joining a group of Toltec women, men, and shamans, we gathered in ritual and spent four nights and five days fasting, sitting in the sweat lodge or temazcal to purify our bodies, minds and spirits, and dancing in the Medicine Wheel from sundown to sunrise. Our intention: to help heal the imbalance of Mother Earth.

It is believed by the Toltec people of Mexico that when the Conquistadors²⁶² arrived in 1521, the balance and harmony of the people, the earth and the heavens was thrown off as the Masculine usurped the role of the Feminine. As the Conquistadors invaded, and some apprentices misused their power, the teachers (*naguals*) hid the ancestral wisdom, allowing only the most trusted with the ancient mysteries. However, prophecies foretold that someday it would be necessary to return that knowledge to the people. Spiritualist Don Miguel Ruiz,²⁶³ the author of *The Four Agreements*, was one

²⁶¹ The Toltec were a Mesoamerican civilization that was located in central Mexico from about 900 to 1168. They are an important civilization in the history of Mesoamerican culture because many different later societies in the same area considered the Toltec to be an example of the height of craftsmanship and civilization. The Toltec language was Nahuatl, which was the same as the Aztecs. As well, the Nahuatl word for Toltec, in the Aztec society, came to mean ‘artisan’ in reference to their view that the Toltec were the height of culture, art and design in Mesoamerica.

²⁶² Conquistadors were the explorer-soldiers of the Spanish and Portuguese Empires of the 15th and 16th Centuries. During the Age of Discovery, conquistadors sailed beyond Europe to the Americas, Oceania, Africa, and Asia, subjugating, colonizing and opening trade routes. The word *conquistador* comes from Spanish and means "he who conquers."

²⁶³ Miguel Ángel Ruiz Macías (1952-), better known as Don Miguel Ruiz, is a Mexican author of Toltec spiritualist and neo shamanistic texts. Author of *The Four Agreements*, his work has been well received among members of the New Thought movement that focuses on ancient teachings as a means to achieve spiritual enlightenment.

such holder of this wisdom, and the people I met at La Danza de la Luna are of that lineage as well.

According to local medicine man don Álvaro,²⁶⁴ the following wisdom was foretold in the ancient prophecy on a mural in the temple of Atetelco²⁶⁵ in Teotihuacan: When the four races join in this sixth sun in a dance of love and harmony, vibrating at the same frequency as the moon, stars and Mother Earth, a new cosmic race will be born, and the Earth will be healed. The dance we performed was interpreted from a pictographic description in one of the ancient codices, currently being held in Mexico City.

Every night at sundown, after a fire ceremony and time at the sweat lodge or temazcal, we entered the Medicine Wheel. The “doors” to the circle, placed at each of the four directions, were sealed by four dancers who would stand as guardians all night and hold the energy of our circle. Then we danced and danced and did not rest until morning. Led by Four Winds,²⁶⁶ a medicine man of the Dakota Nation,²⁶⁷ we sent prayers to Mother Earth through our feet with each mindful dance-step we placed on the ground. Then we reached our hands skyward and sent our prayers to the Moon, becoming the axis mundi as we danced, moving energy up and down, connecting with the Feminine to heal the Earth Mother, and sending gratitude and thanks back to the Moon Goddess. We called

²⁶⁴ Don Abuelo Álvaro Diaz (d.o.b. unknown), Toltec shaman from Teotihuacan, Mexico.

²⁶⁵ Near the pyramids of Teotihuacán, lost between cornfields and houses, is the archaeological zone of Palace Atetelco. During the heyday of the ancient city, this area was an apartment complex of sorts for the pre-Hispanic city of Teotihuacán. It's believed that it operated between the years 450 and 650 CE.

²⁶⁶ Four Winds (d.o.b. unknown) is a Dakota Medicine Man and leader of La Danza de la Luna which he shares across the world. Four Winds resides part of the time in Mexico City.

²⁶⁷ The Dakota are a Native American tribe in North America. They compose two of the three main subcultures of the Sioux people, and are typically divided into the Eastern Dakota and the Western Dakota. They have federally recognized Tribes and reside primarily in North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, the upper Missouri River, Montana and Canada.

upon the blessings of the Great Creator, of the four directions, the five elements, the ancestors and all our relations including the spirits of Nature. We made spirals and circles, together creating the shapes of butterflies, hummingbirds, snakes, the stars, the sun and moon through our dancing bodies, forming and dissolving in a dizzying turn of movement to the beat of drums. As individuals, we began to restore harmony within ourselves, and as we did so, it was believed that Mother Earth began her journey towards balance as well.

The Cosmology of Indigenous Australia

No records exist for us to be truly sure of what the Aboriginal²⁶⁸ peoples of Australia and the Torres Strait Islands²⁶⁹ thought about the origins of the universe. With more than seven hundred separate languages, lifestyles, religious and cultural traditions, it is difficult to provide a single summation of their ideologies. However, through songs, dances and tales that have come to us through the ages, we have been given insight into much of the complex ideologies of one of the world's oldest and long-lived cultures, many of which reflect their intimate relationship with the land and the cosmos.

Based on the concept of The Dreaming, the Aborigines and Torres Strait peoples believe that Ancestral Spirits rose from the oceans and traversed the barren world in human form, creating the animals, plants, people, oceans, rivers, trees, rocks and other important geographical formations and beings. At certain special places, the Ancestral

²⁶⁸ Aboriginal Australians are the various Indigenous peoples of the Australian mainland and many of its islands, such as Tasmania, Fraser Island, Hinchinbrook Island, the Tiwi Islands, and Groote Eylandt, but excluding the Torres Strait Islands.

²⁶⁹ The Torres Strait Islands are a group of at least 274 small islands in the Torres Strait, a waterway separating far northern continental Australia's Cape York Peninsula and the island of New Guinea.

Spirits transformed themselves into trees, rocks, rivers, wells, and other non-human-beings which remain today as sacred ritual and ceremonial sites, providing a living mythical and mystical reality for these indigenous people.

It is believed a new life begins when a spirit falls from the Skyworld and is born as a baby. Throughout that individual's life, much wisdom is gleaned from symbolic visits to Skyworld through Dreaming, and various creator spirits can travel between both worlds. Knowledge, customs, rituals, traditional values and laws are learned through Dreamtime and passed through story, song, dance, music and art.

“Tjukurrpa” is the word for Dreaming in the Arrernte²⁷⁰ language; it means seeing and understanding the law (Artlandish, 2021). In Dreamtime, there is no distinction between past, present and future. Celestial bodies are held to the same laws as people, and animals on earth and often take on human attributes and behaviors, such as the Pleiades²⁷¹ who are thought of, according to one Aboriginee nation, as young girls who gather roots and vegetables in the sky; Orion²⁷² is believed to be young men who are hunting emu, kangaroos and other animals.

Tribes live according to cycles, which determine where they hunt and gather and what they eat. Seasons, of which there are often more than four and sometimes as many as thirteen, are determined by the plants in season, the turning of the constellations, and

²⁷⁰ The Eastern and Central Arrernte people live in Central Australia. In Arrernte culture every single person is held in the web of kinship in a warm and consoling embrace.

²⁷¹ The Pleiades star cluster, also known as the Seven Sisters and Messier 45, is a conspicuous object in the night sky with a prominent place in ancient mythology. The cluster contains hundreds of stars, of which only a handful are commonly visible to the unaided eye. The stars in the Pleiades are thought to have formed together around 100 million years ago, making them 1/50th the age of our sun.

²⁷² Orion is a prominent constellation located on the celestial equator and visible throughout the world. It is one of the most conspicuous and recognizable constellations in the night sky. It is named after Orion, a hunter in Greek mythology.

the particular constellation that rises with the sun. They use the stars to navigate and have a complex astronomical system that continually teaches and informs them. Thus, earth and sky are interconnected landscapes with which humans can visit and find intimacy (Clarke, 1997).

Much like the Native American view of the Four Directions, the Aboriginal peoples of Australia and the Torres Strait Islanders use four directions to inform the workings of individuals and society. North corresponds to “law;” south to “ceremony;” west to “language;” and east to “skin.” The intersection of these points, at the center, corresponds to “country” or “here.” In the indigenous language of The Guugu Yimithirr people of Far North Queensland, Australia, for example, all of existence is described in relation to these four directions; this offers a kind of cardinal awareness that provides a way of seeing that is altogether different from Western consciousness.

For dozens of millennia at least, the Aboriginal Peoples learned and developed medicine from the plants around them and from the Ancestors of Dreamtime, passed down through countless generations through song, dance and story. Known today as “Bush Medicine,” local native plants serve as the primary source of healing. Illness and health are based on a variety of relationships, factors and causes including the natural world, the human one, and supernatural realms; and protecting one’s spirit is fundamental to staying healthy. For example, the health of an individual or even perhaps a whole family or community might take a turn for the worse if a sacred site were to be disrupted in any way. Doctors or medicine people, sorcerers, rain-makers, and other healers are provided special powers from the Ancestors, which is received in Dreamtime, to help heal and restore the sick.

Though colonization by the British in 1788 would drastically change the lives of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples, and western technology has radically modified their traditional healing methods, the cosmology and knowledge of bush medicine has and hopefully will stand the test of time (Clarke, 2008).

Revolutions in Science that have Impacted Humanity's Relationship with Earth



At the beginning of time, three entities emerged from the cosmic egg: Eros (love), Gaia (earth), and Chaos. Gaia, whose name means “Earth” or “land,” is the most ancient of the deities. Gaia the Mother Goddess gave birth to Ouranos, the Sky, whom she took as a consort; then She gave birth to all things including the mountains and the sea, and gave form to the shapeless earth, to the celestial bodies, plants, animals and humans. Gaia nourished everything on earth, provided affection and comfort; upon death, all returned back to her.

With Ouranos, she birthed the twelve Titans, and three giants. However, Ouranos was cruel, and as soon as they were born, he imprisoned them in Tartarus, the deepest abyss within Gaia's bowels. Gaia grew angry and tried to convince her children to punish their father. However, only her son Cronus agreed to help her, and as she lay with Ouranos, Cronus castrated his father. From Ouranos' blood Gaia birthed the Erinyes, the Giants and the Nymphs.

Cronus eventually married his sister Rhea and became ruler of the Titans.

Reacting to a prophecy of Gaia's that he too would be overthrown by a son, he swallowed his children before they were born. Like her mother before her, Rhea could no longer tolerate her husband's cruel behavior, and when Cronus' youngest son Zeus was born, Rhea pleaded to Gaia for help.

Gaia and Rhea kept Zeus hidden in the cave where he was born and tricked Cronus by giving him a stone, swaddled in clothes, to swallow. Eventually, Zeus overthrew his father Cronus, then went on to rule the Titans, and defeated the old gods... Gaia's own children.

Gaia grew unhappy and tried unsuccessfully to overthrow Zeus. Though she was still worshiped with reverence as the earliest deity, Zeus eventually commanded the pantheon of deities and the workings of the world and heavens.

~ Goddess Pilgrimage to Crete 2016

The Early Greeks: Logos and Language

It is believed that the language of the modern Indo-European cultures (Europe and much of Asia) evolved from the people who lived in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages. In *The White Goddess* (2013), Robert Graves describes the poetic myth of ancient times as a magical language infused with spirit. Some of the world's fairy tales are at least six thousand years old and come from this sacred time of interconnectedness (Shultz, 2016). However, the quality of language shifted during later years as patriarchal systems began to be put into place; philosophy, logic, and rationalization took precedence over mythology, magic and poetry.

Around 800 BCE, the Greeks adopted the Phoenician alphabet²⁷³; they added vowels and created a new, accessible and precise writing system. As the author Colin Wells²⁷⁴ reminds us, “writing and thinking go together,” and soon the ancient Greek Age of Reason arrived (Wells, n.d.). Several hundred years later, a Greek philosopher, mathematician and astronomer named Thales of Miletus²⁷⁵ would write and publish his thoughts on cosmology and the essence of matter as being derived from a single unitary force (water), and Science as we know it would be born.

Rational thought became a movement, passed on through literary writing in which ideas could be built upon, debated or changed in future generations. Aristotle expounded upon Thales’ ideas, and soon, “logos,” or “reasoned discourse” through logic and a systematic building of argument became the primary means of persuasion, as put forth in his work *Rhetoric* in 350 BCE. Thales, Aristotle, Plato, and many scholars who would follow, perpetuated the monist lens not altogether different from the emerging monotheistic religion. Greek reasoning would be assimilated by the Jews, who already had begun the worship of a single male God above all other gods. The “single unifying force,” about which the Greek philosophers theorized, would become for many, finally, the Heavenly Father of the new religions (Wells. n.d.).

During this time, writing itself changed and reflected this new system where the practical and the sacred were now split by logic, the soul now separated from the Great

²⁷³ The Phoenician alphabet is an alphabet from the Canaanite and Aramaic inscriptions found across the Mediterranean region. The name comes from the Phoenician civilization.

²⁷⁴ Colin Wells (d.o.b. unknown) double majored in history and English. He is an author of several books, many articles, a contributor to the *Arion Journal of Humanities and Classics* from Boston University; his overarching theme is the “clash of faith and reason” and how it has played out throughout history.

²⁷⁵ Thales of Miletus (624-547 BCE) was a Greek mathematician, astronomer and pre-Socratic philosopher from Miletus in Ionia, Asia Minor. He was one of the Seven Sages of Greece.

Mother, connection and oneness severed to a new rational Sky, Spirit male, mentality. Myth and science would eventually appear on the scene as opposing forces (Wells, n.d.). Myths could not be “proven” and must therefore be false; the word “myth” would change to denote a false story, fantasy or superstition of anything other than the monotheistic religions. This separation of myth versus science would prevail until recent centuries, and the word “myth” continues to be perceived in the same way even to this day.

Plato, who lived from 427 - 347 BCE in Athens and founded his school of philosophy, the “Academy,” from which our modern higher institutions derive their name, perhaps best illustrated the crumbling of myth and the elevation of a logical, proven and distinct science. In his condemnation of poets in *The Republic* (375 BCE), in books II and X, Plato argues that poets (mythmakers) are imitators of the world and thus are far from the truth. He further argues that poets are deceptive and harmful, corrupting youth and inciting passions instead of rational thinking and civic virtue. Plato believed poetry appeals to people’s emotions, and due to its unruly and unpredictable consequences upon human behavior, should be discarded from the ideal society. Finally, Plato insisted poets should go into exile and do their work outside the city gates (Plato, 375 BCE; Sanchez, et. al., 2018).

The Greek Theory of the Four Elements

By the middle of the first millennium, philosophies about the earth and the cosmos had been sufficiently absorbed in the Greek mind to become a structure that could be formulated. The Greek philosophers tended to narrow their focus of inquiry, viewing the various living and non-living forms according to their individual elements,

rather than a larger view of how an individual relates to and is affected by the whole. Formulated by the Sicilian philosopher Empedokles²⁷⁶ in the 5th century BCE and pursued and supported by Plato and Aristotle amongst others, a philosophy of the structure of the earth and its inhabitants was born. In short, four elements: Earth, Water, Fire and Air comprised all things, and existed both in isolation as well as in infinite combinations, along with their opposing qualities (heat, cold, moist and dryness among them). Additionally, these elements with their qualities exhibited either affinity or opposition, and thus the powers of attraction or repulsion. Out of this came a “hierarchy” of order: mineral, plant, animal and man, with mineral containing only one element and humans containing all four.

Each of the elements was believed to have specific qualities, such as substance versus process, temperatures, temperaments, and more. Further, they had the potential to influence and be influenced by each other in an incessant and infinite interaction. This intermixing formed the basis of all physical and organic reality. A century later, Plato would go on to add a fifth element, aether, which would include the celestial bodies as well (Benson, 2000).

With the Greeks, we see the beginnings of Spirit/Divinity relegated to a separate plane, one “above” the earth. The fifth element, aether, was believed to contain Spirit; it became the invisible element above and beyond the material lower world of earth, water, fire and air. Though originating from earlier times, we see evidence of a hierarchy of matter already present in the cosmology of the region: The Warka Vase, a ritual vase

²⁷⁶ Empedocles (494-422) was a Greek pre-Socratic philosopher and a native citizen of Akragas, a Greek city in Sicily. Empedocles' philosophy is best known for originating the cosmogonic theory of the four classical elements. He also proposed forces he called Love and Strife which would mix and separate the elements, respectively.

found in the Sumerian Goddess Temple of Inanna, illustrates a vertical representation of matter, depicted with earth (mineral) at the supporting base of the vase; above it, water; then plants; then warm-blooded animals; then man; then the goddess from which all life flows. Though the Divine continued to oversee life and its processes for centuries to come, this fifth element would eventually find itself becoming downgraded or ignored in terms of practical earthly considerations.

Yet despite its hierarchical systematic classification, a Greek philosophy of planetary interconnectedness lingered. In *Timaeus*,²⁷⁷ for example, Plato described Earth as an organic world-soul with a physical body; the human soul, according to Plato, was a microcosm of the world soul (Benson, 2000). However, with logos, the written language, and a hierarchical and systematic cosmology, the focus of the early Greeks became one based on the physicality of the earth and its inhabitants and less about Spirit. While gods and goddesses still informed day-to-day life, the Greek philosophers, with their “scientific” inquiry, began to tease out myth from the inner workings of the cosmos. Further, with Thales’ single unitary force of matter and neighboring monotheistic practices influencing philosophical perspectives, this systematic view of human reality would remain until the twentieth century when quantum physics opened a new cosmological possibility.

²⁷⁷ *Timaeus* is one of Plato's dialogues, mostly in the form of a long monologue given by the title character Timaeus of Locri, written c. 360 BCE. The work puts forward speculation on the nature of the physical world and human beings.

The Age of Enlightenment

After almost two thousand years of monotheistic fanaticism and superstition, the “Age of Reason” took hold in the eighteenth century across Europe and America. This movement, along with a subset of French scholars who dubbed the movement as the “Age of Enlightenment,” was again a radical shift in the way one thought and was allowed to think about the inner workings of the universe. At long last, people (and educated white “men of letters” in particular) could live, learn and view the world from one’s own perspective without fear of being persecuted, jailed, or even murdered. Both an intellectual and social movement, these thinkers reasoned that an emphasis on intellectual pursuits, be it in the natural or social sciences, could vastly improve human life. Immanuel Kant, in his essay “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” (1784) would describe this period of Enlightenment as “humankind’s release from its self-incurred immaturity” (Bristow, 2017).

It was seen for many as a time of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. New ideas and possibilities began to arise, along with unrest which culminated in the French Revolution²⁷⁸ of 1789, which shifted power away from the Church, nobility and the monarchy and to the people. During this time, “man” (it should be noted this was not the case for most women of the time) was allowed to explore and pursue individual thought, and they did so freely. “Truth” swung from its Biblical foundations and fear of persecution to that of reason, rationality, and the belief in the potential of man’s

²⁷⁸ The French Revolution began in 1789 and ended in the late 1790s with the ascent of Napoleon Bonaparte. During this period, French citizens razed and redesigned their country’s political landscape, uprooting centuries-old institutions such as absolute monarchy and the feudal system. The upheaval was caused by widespread discontent with the French monarchy and the poor economic policies of King Louis XVI, who met his death by guillotine, as did his wife Marie Antoinette. Although it failed to achieve all of its goals and at times degenerated into extreme violence, the French Revolution played a critical role in shaping modern nations by showing the world the power inherent in the will of the people.

perfection. Basic religious beliefs were often rejected, including a belief in God and miracles. Like their ancient Greek philosophers after which they modeled themselves, these scholars attempted to distance reason and intellect from Spirit even further. God, since He was unknowable, was not a worthy venture to try to understand; instead, Nature could provide revelation enough.

Darwinism

In the 19th century, Charles Darwin offered the world a new theory of evolution: a novel explanation for the history and diversity of life on earth. He was raised by a prominent grandfather who had leanings towards the Enlightenment movement, who advocated freethought about God and religion, and who promoted ideas about evolution and progressive cultures, and by a well-respected physician for a father in Great Britain, both of whom greatly influenced a young Charles. Further influenced by his education and mentors in both Edinburgh and Cambridge, Darwin set out on a trans-continental ecological survey, and for five years, he committed himself to field observation, collection and experimentation. From his experiences, he became convinced that our current world could only have come from a gradual evolution of one species into another, a scientific explanation for the great “mystery of mysteries” and the origin of all life.

Through his meticulous fieldwork, he became convinced that the variation of species was due to a slow transformation, and he set out to find the cause of it. To answer his question, Darwin found these tenets to be true in the natural world: That individuals within a species differ ever so slightly; that species tend to reproduce over generations at a geometric rate, but that is kept in check by limited resources, disease, and other factors

which create a struggle for survival amongst that species; that some members will have variations which give them an advantage in this struggle to survive, which means they will survive better and have more offspring; that offspring tend to inherit their parents' variations; and that the more advantageous traits will tend to be passed on more frequently and thus preserved. This tendency Darwin called "Natural Selection." He believed that over time, this process would result in gradual changes of the species, and eventually, over a great deal of time, its descendants would radically differ from its ancestors enough to be considered a different species (Lennox, 2019).

In his *Origin of the Species* published in 1859, Darwin's findings were met with upheaval, backlash, dissension and non-believers, not only from the religious conservatives, but even from his scholarly peers and mentors and are still rejected by some to this very day. His revolutionary contributions to biology and to the field of science would include the idea that Nature was a system of matter in continual motion, governed by natural laws rather than the result of a single Divine Creator. For Darwin, the process of creation was ever evolving but not *conscious*.

With Darwin, science became firmly rooted in explanation. Now humankind was suddenly not the epicenter of all of life, much like Copernicus²⁷⁹ before him in 1543, who ushered forth his "heliocentric theory" with the sun (versus the earth) at the center around which the planets and other celestial bodies evolved. Under Darwin's explanations, Nature was an ever-evolving system of creation, and one which could be explained, proven, systemized and categorized (Ayala, 2007). Science and myth had seemingly been severed completely.

²⁷⁹ Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543), born in Poland, was a Renaissance polymath, active as a mathematician, astronomer, and Catholic canon, who formulated a model of the universe that placed the Sun rather than Earth at its center.

The Age of Industry

As Science eroded the last vestiges of a magico-religious intimacy with the planet in the Western culture, it expressed this newfound perspective with the Industrial Revolution. A technological phenomenon that embraced new manufacturing processes, it began in Great Britain in the mid seventeenth century and continued for well over a century and a half. This life-changing social and economic turning point in history would replace agriculture with mechanized production of such necessary items as textiles and food. Changes would also occur in mining, transportation, communication and technology. Inventions would lead to a better quality of life for many but also to urbanization, a population explosion, and ultimately social, economic and environmental impacts that are with us even a century and a half later.

Millions would flock to cities in hopes of more opportunity, wealth, and a better quality of life. The Industrial Revolution would spread outward, making its way across the globe, with machines, water-powered mills, steam engines, coal-fired factories, a greater need for labor, slaves, and land. Better roads, railways, and navigable canals brought goods across cities, states, countries and the world. Overpopulation resulted in water pollution followed by disease. Pollution from factories, primarily from the use of coal, ensued. Harsh working conditions became the norm, including extremely low wages, exceptionally long working hours, and even children forced into labor. As consumer goods became the mainstay of these flourishing “first world” countries, subsistence and cottage farming declined, resulting in not just greater but unequal wealth and distinct economic and social classes.

University of Colorado Associate Professor Thomas Andrews²⁸⁰ reminds us of living conditions in America just before the Industrial Revolution took hold:

Well into the 1800s, the American economy was almost exclusively an organic economy, one in which people met their needs by harvesting energy and materials from the earth's surface ecosystems. Food, fuel, shelter, motive power, clothing, and virtually every other necessity of life - Americans obtained all of these from plants, animals, falling rivers, and blowing winds. (Andrews, 2018)

By the nineteenth century, however, America's labor force was powered by coal, petroleum and natural gas extracted from deep within the earth. It had become the most productive in the world, but the health and welfare of its workers would suffer greatly. Earth was something to be plundered and used for personal gain. Social status became, for many, the new mythology, and money, the new God.

The Quantum Realm

It took a long time to realize that the earth was round, that continents drift, that living things evolve, and that the speed of light is not only finite but is also the greatest velocity we know of in existence. Eventually, in 1896, the electron was discovered, evidence that all matter exists in the form of particles. Max Planck²⁸¹ came along at the turn of the twentieth century, showing us that energy comes in well defined "quanta" - the smallest scale on which anything in the universe can move. Soon, this idea would be

²⁸⁰ Thomas G. Andrews (d.o.b unknown) is an associate professor of history at the University of Colorado Boulder. He specializes in the social and environmental history of the American West. His first book, *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War* (2008), won six awards, including the Bancroft Prize.

²⁸¹ Max Karl Ernst Ludwig Planck (1858-1947) was a German theoretical physicist whose discovery of energy quanta won him the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1918.

expounded upon, and the term “quantum mechanics” was born by a group of physicists in the 1920s including Max Born,²⁸² Werner Heisenberg,²⁸³ and Wolfgang Pauli.²⁸⁴

Essentially, quantum mechanics is the branch of physics concerned with minute particles, such as atoms, protons and electrons. Suddenly many of the old formulas of how things worked in relation to each other could no longer be explained. Waves, such as light, were originally thought to be just that: waves; particles, it was thought up to that time, were simply particles. However, about the time that Einstein²⁸⁵ was publishing his theory of relativity²⁸⁶ at the turn of the twentieth century, scientists such as Werner Heisenberd, Max Born, Niels Bohr,²⁸⁷ Louis de Broglie,²⁸⁸ Planck, and many others proved that was not the case.

²⁸² Max Born (1882-1970) was a German physicist and mathematician who was instrumental in the development of quantum mechanics. He also made contributions to solid-state physics and optics and supervised the work of a number of notable physicists in the 1920s and 1930s.

²⁸³ Werner Karl Heisenberg (1901-1976) was a German theoretical physicist and one of the key pioneers of quantum mechanics. He published his work in 1925 in a breakthrough paper.

²⁸⁴ Wolfgang Ernst Pauli (1900-1958) was an Austrian-born scientist who made numerous important contributions to twentieth-century theoretical physics. Paul was one of the pioneers of quantum physics.

²⁸⁵ Albert Einstein (1879-1955) was a German-born theoretical physicist, widely acknowledged to be one of the greatest physicists of all time. Einstein is best known for developing the theory of relativity, but he also made important contributions to the development of the theory of quantum mechanics.

²⁸⁶ The theory of relativity usually encompasses two interrelated theories by Albert Einstein: special relativity and general relativity, proposed and published in 1905 and 1915, respectively. Einstein's theory of special relativity is one of the most important papers ever published in the field of physics; it is an explanation of how speed affects mass, time and space. Einstein's 1915 general theory of relativity holds that what we perceive as the force of gravity arises from the curvature of space and time. Einstein proposed that objects such as the sun and the Earth change this geometry.

²⁸⁷ Niels Henrik David Bohr (1885-1962) was a Danish physicist who made foundational contributions to understanding atomic structure and quantum theory, for which he received the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1922. Bohr was also a philosopher and a promoter of scientific research.

²⁸⁸ Louis Victor Pierre Raymond (1892-1987) was a French physicist and aristocrat who made groundbreaking contributions to quantum theory. In his 1924 PhD thesis, he postulated the wave nature of electrons and suggested that all matter has wave properties.

Wave-particle duality is the fundamental idea behind matter: At one moment, it appears like a wave, and the next, like a particle. Particles are pretty obvious; they are single concrete bits of matter which carry energy with them if they are moved or disturbed. Waves such as sound and light, on the other hand, begin localized and then spread out, like ripples across a pond; they carry energy as they spread out in motion. Colliding particles bounce off each other; waves move through each other and emerge unchanged.

Yet long before we knew anything about the subatomic world, at the turn of the nineteenth century, a British physician and physicist named Thomas Young²⁸⁹ experimented with what we call the “Double Slit Experiment”: Light, as he found in his experiment, was not composed of particles as was previously theorized, but rather it was a wave and subject to diffraction. By the 20th century, scientists believed light could *behave* like particles, called photons (discrete particles of light). And if so, particles such as electrons (negatively charged subatomic particles) must behave like waves. Although the electron did behave like a wave, that wave was deposited at a single point, a particle. It propagated like a wave but interacted at a point like a particle. Thus, energy and matter, they proved, can exhibit characteristics of both a particle and a wave, known as the particle-wave duality of matter.

The experiments on quantum theory also included two particles linked together as a single wave, and scientists found that manipulations of a single particle affected the physical properties of the other particle, regardless of distance between the two. This is

²⁸⁹ Thomas Young (1773-1829) was a British polymath who made notable contributions to the fields of vision, light, solid mechanics, energy, physiology, language, musical harmony, and Egyptology. He was instrumental in the decipherment of Egyptian hieroglyphs, specifically the Rosetta Stone, and is noted for his “Double Slit Experiment.”

called “quantum entanglement,” an important term for our purpose. When a pair or group of particles interacts or shares attributes in such a manner that the individual cannot be described as separate from the state of the others in the group, then when one is “disturbed,” (i.e., its physical property such as position, spin, etc. is changed), the others show the same changes, regardless of their proximity in space to the original particle. *The whole system is affected*. Einstein referred to this phenomenon as the “spooky action at a distance.” Further, they found that the simple act of *observation* could turn waves into particles, suggesting that Reality is made up of waves of potentiality rather than actual physical matter (Davis, 2012).

So where exactly is this taking us in relation to mythology? As we find that Reality is actually waves of potentiality, we can begin to see the ancient mythological cosmologies and modern science begin to converge. We can look back to our indigenous peoples across the globe and throughout time who believed, as seen in the examples in the previous pages, that Matter came from the No-thing (as demonstrated in Native American and ancient African mythology), from the Void (Hindu mythology) from Dreamtime (Australian Aboriginee), or from the morphogenetic field; and it was expressed through Consciousness (or through Desire or Thought, through The Great Creator, or even the Primordial Mother herself, depending on the myth). If Earth is acting as a single organism, as we shall soon see, and if everything on the planet shares similar particles behaving as an entangled group, then all our actions, everything we do, all the changes we make, all the manipulation and destruction of our environment, and the healing and hope for Mother Earth, is happening to everything on a quantum *and* macrocosmic scale!

The Gaia Theory

Throughout the first half of the 20th century of quantum theory, science splintered into primarily independent areas of study and professions, each with their single area of focus and with little interdisciplinary overlap or larger perspective. This reductionist perspective was to shift with a human feat like none other before: On July 20, 1969, humankind landed on the moon. The image of looking back at our phenomenal, miraculous blue and white earth perhaps reminded us again of our wholeness, of a planet in which all things functioned together as One, and a reminder of how far from that vision “modern scientists” had strayed.

Then, in 1972, James Lovelock²⁹⁰ revolutionized Science once more when he proposed the “Gaia Theory” of Earth as a living organism (Lovelock, 1972). Named “Gaia” after the Greek Earth Mother Goddess, his theory was far from novel; Lovelock himself presumed this idea was as old as humankind. In fact, scientists have historically accepted the notion of a living earth. For example, James Hutton,²⁹¹ the “father of geology,” told the Royal Society of Edinburgh in the 1790’s that he thought of Earth as a superorganism, and that by studying the functions of the body we could simultaneously learn about the inner workings of the Earth (Lovelock, 1988).

²⁹⁰ James Ephraim Lovelock (1919-) is a British independent scientist, environmentalist and futurist. He is best known for proposing the Gaia hypothesis, which postulates that the Earth functions as a self-regulating system.

²⁹¹ James Hutton (1726-1797) was a Scottish geologist, agriculturalist, chemical manufacturer, naturalist and physician. Often referred to as the father of modern geology, he played a key role in establishing geology as a modern science.

Thus in 1972, Lovelock, along with collaborators Lynn Margulis²⁹² and Lars Sillén,²⁹³ built upon Hutton's nineteenth century suppositions; by looking at the composition of the biosphere, Lovelock, who had spent the prior decade examining life detection by atmospheric analysis, proposed that the Earth's biosphere and the Earth itself both evolve, adapt and change *in order to support each other*. Previously it was thought that Earth's atmosphere remained relatively constant, and biology borrowed and returned gasses without changing the abundance of them in the atmosphere, a rather passive equilibrium (Lovelock, 1975).

Lovelock and his colleagues went further and hypothesized that Earth was in fact a whole living, interdependent, interconnected "superorganism," and both the chemicals of the planet and the atmosphere were active participants in creating and maintaining harmony and equilibrium. He proposed that all of Earth's organisms and systems develop and evolve to sustain life; the evolution of earth is a single process, with living organisms, rocks, the air and oceans functioning as a tightly bound single entity (Charlson, et al., 1987; Lovelock, 1975).

His hypothesis was initially met with much dismissal and skepticism by the scientific community. However, as climate change became observable and finally an indisputable "fact" over the last few decades, we can now fully appreciate Lovelock's Gaia Theory: *Each part of the Earth exists to keep the entirety in balance. Further, the action of an individual organism is the starting point of all geo-physiological systems,*

²⁹² Lynn Margulis (1938-2011) was an American evolutionary theorist, biologist, science author, educator, and science popularizer, and was the primary modern proponent for the significance of symbiosis in evolution.

²⁹³ Lars Sillén, (1916-1970) was a Swedish chemist who collaborated with James Lovelock on the Gaia Hypothesis. He had the rare distinction of having a mineral, Sillenite, named after him.

and if one organism is beneficial to the environment, it can help the totality, what Lovelock calls “global altruism.” Conversely, if a species affects the environment in unfavorable ways, imbalance will result and potentially even the eradication of that species, or perhaps greater consequences. Eventually the planet would readjust and would continue to evolve, but perhaps without humans upon it (Lovelock, 1988).

Lovelock explains: How humans have behaved and exploited the earth in the past century is like perceiving the brain as supreme power and dismissing the idea that the rest of the cells in the organs of the body are separate. It would be foolish! In the same way, we must view Earth and everything within, upon and around it as one glorious living organism whose “altruistic” purpose is to support and sustain all life upon it.

The Age of Information

By the mid-1900's, a global industry characterized by mechanized production would again make a radical shift to one based on information and communication via computer technology. Though many claim the first computer was designed by Charles Babbage²⁹⁴ in 1822, called The Babbage Difference Engine, it was Konrad Zuse²⁹⁵ who created the first electro mechanical binary programmable computer between 1936 and 1938.

²⁹⁴Charles Babbage (1791-1871) was an English mathematician, philosopher, inventor and mechanical engineer, Babbage originated the concept of a digital programmable computer. Babbage is considered by some to be "father of the computer."

²⁹⁵ Konrad Ernst Otto Zuse (1910-1995) was a German civil engineer, pioneering computer scientist, inventor and businessman. His greatest achievement was the world's first programmable computer, which became operational in May 1941.

In the mid-20th century, the world would be introduced to the first digital computer, the first stored program computer, and the first commercial computer. By the second half of the century, humans would see minicomputers, desktops, workstations, personal computers, laptops. Soon the world would be witness to unstoppable discoveries of ways in which information was gleaned, processed and shared, transferred and stored. Like the Industrial Revolution before it, the Age of Information would shift the work sector from a “blue collar” mechanized world to a knowledge-based global economy built on information technology.

With these new information technologies, decisions about labor, products and consumers could now be made with more efficiency. Building upon the ecological divides from the Industrial Revolution, and with an advancing chasm in wealth and class across the world, the unprecedented development within the Age of Information continued to sever people from their natural environment. Work and education began to take place inside, behind a computer screen. The physical world of matter began to disappear behind a world of information.

By 1980, humans could store information on computers but there were many different “languages” and ways to do so. On January 1, 1983, a new communication protocol was established: called the Transfer Control Protocol/Internet Protocol²⁹⁶ (TCP/IP), it gave the world a universal computer language through which all could communicate. The Internet was born.

²⁹⁶ TCP stands for Transmission Control Protocol, a communications standard that enables application programs and computing devices to exchange messages over a network. It is designed to send packets across the internet and ensure the successful delivery of data and messages over networks.

Then, in 1989, a British computer scientist would change the world forever. Sir Tim Berners-Lee²⁹⁷ was working at a large particle physics lab in Switzerland. As a software engineer, Berners-Lee noticed that computers each held specific pieces of information, and too often a person would have to go to many different computers, often with their own unique programs, just to acquire the information one needed. He devised a solution to this problem: In a proposal titled “Information Management: A Proposal,” Berners-Lee put forth, then wrote and implemented, a new technology, one that he made sure would be free and available to all users. By the early 1990’s, this technology would connect humanity in ways the world had not seen or known, and “it sparked a global wave of creativity, collaboration, and innovation never seen before.” Our world became, for the first time in its history, a global society. Tim Berners-Lee gave his new technology a name: The World Wide Web. (World Wide Web Foundation, n.d.)

Thus, with new discoveries and inventions such as the personal computer, the World Wide Web, and Apple Computer’s revolutionary products pioneered by Steve Jobs,²⁹⁸ more and more human activities, social, political, educational, economic, are being driven by information technology. As technology in the Age of Information continues to develop, we are seeing a degradation of the natural world (Kahn, et al., 2009).

²⁹⁷ Sir Timothy John Berners-Lee (1955) is an English computer scientist best known as the inventor of the World Wide Web. He is a Professorial Fellow of Computer Science at the University of Oxford and a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

²⁹⁸ Steven Paul Jobs (1955-2011) was an American inventor, designer and entrepreneur who was the co-founder, chief executive and chairman of Apple Computer.

CHAPTER IV

Climate Change: Our Earth in Crisis

“I believe in mythology. I guess I share Joseph Campbell’s notion that a culture or society without mythology would die, and we’re close to that.”

– Robert Redford



Skoll and Hati, the wolves of Aesir, have been chasing the sun and the moon since the dawn of time. It is predicted that one day, they will accomplish their goal. When that time comes, and the sun and moon are swallowed by the wolves, the stars will disappear, and the trees and mountains will fall into the earth as Yggdrasil, the Sacred Tree of the World, crumbles. Fenrir, the giant wolf, will break free from the chains which bind him, and he will wreak havoc on the earth. Jormungandr, the sea serpent, will rise from the depths of the ocean, and water will rise and spill onto the land as he comes ashore. Upon this flood, the ship of nails known as "Naglfar," made from the fingernails of dead men and women, will arrive carrying Chaos which is fated to destroy the world. The ship will be captained by Loki himself, the trickster and traitor now freed from the chains placed upon him by the gods, and the ship will be manned by giants and beasts of all terrible kinds.

Then Muspelheim, the Land of Fire, will crack open and the fire giants will come forth, led by their King Surt and his flaming sword. The armies of Chaos will march across the Rainbow Bridge on their way to the Kingdom of the Gods, Asgard; as they march, the Rainbow Bridge will crumble behind them.

Odin, the All-father, will know that Ragnorak, the End of Days, has come as foretold in the ancient prophecies. He will seek the wisdom of Mimir, the wisest of them all. With no other choice left to them, the gods will wage a great battle. The All-father Odin and many other gods will be killed, swallowed whole by the Giant Wolf Fenrir. Odin's son, Vidar, will then kill the wolf Fenrir, driving a sword through his throat. Almost all of the gods and goddesses, the monsters, the giants, and the wolves will inflict

mortal wounds upon each other. In a final showdown, Thor, the god of Thunder, will kill the sea serpent Jormungandr with his hammer, but paralyzed by poison, he too will meet his end. The human race will die with them.

Some believe the earth itself will be swallowed by the Primordial Sea and lost forever. Others believe that when the dust clears, several gods and goddesses will remain and usher in a new time of peace and prosperity. The world will turn green once more and flourish. Two last two humans, Lif and Lifthrasir, who have hidden from the battle, will come out from hiding and repopulate the world. A new sun, the Daughter of the old Sun, will rise and will shine her light on the dawn of a new era.

~ Goddess Pilgrimage to Norway, 2015 (Skjalden, 2011)

This paper takes the stance that Climate Change undeniably exists. Studies too numerous to list over the past two decades show clear evidence of a shifting and warming climate whose effects are increasingly devastating to our planet, socially, economically, politically, and environmentally. Our atmosphere is thought to be warmer than it has been in millions of years as a result of human activity. Atmospheric carbon dioxide has increased by forty eight percent since 1850, before the onset of the Industrial Revolution. This is more than what has happened naturally over the last 20,000 years. (NASA, n.d.)

In 2001, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change²⁹⁹ released a Special Report on the Regional Impact of Climate Change. The results: life as we know it on earth may not survive. In what is being called the “sixth mass extinction,” countless plant and animal species have disappeared as a result of the destruction and degradation of

²⁹⁹ The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is an intergovernmental body of the United Nations responsible for advancing knowledge on human-induced climate change.

ecosystems across our planet. Thirty years ago, Philosopher David Loy³⁰⁰ wrote what many now believe to be true: “In this century it has become clear that the fundamental social problem is now the relationship between humankind as a whole and our global environment” (Loy, 1988, p. 302).

Three decades later, we are indeed witnessing our Earth in crisis. Studies of peer-reviewed scientific journals show that ninety seven percent of published climate scientists agree that climate warming trends are the result of human activity. Further, most of the leading scientific organizations in the U.S. and across the world support this stance; close to two hundred of them have given their names to the California Governor’s Office of Planning and Research as concurring that climate change exists as a result of human activity, including the U.S. Global Change Research Group,³⁰¹ the World Health Organization,³⁰² the World Meteorological Organization,³⁰³ the U.S. National Academy of Sciences,³⁰⁴ and the American Medical Association³⁰⁵ (Office of Planning and Research, n.d).

³⁰⁰ David Robert Loy (1947) is an American scholar, author and authorized teacher in the Sanbo Zen lineage of Japanese Zen Buddhism.

³⁰¹ The United States Global Change Research Program (USGCRP) coordinates and integrates federal research on changes in the global environment and their implications for society.

³⁰² The World Health Organization is a specialized agency of the United Nations responsible for international public health.

³⁰³ The World Meteorological Organization is a specialized agency of the United Nations responsible for promoting international cooperation on atmospheric science, climatology, hydrology and geophysics.

³⁰⁴ The National Academy of Sciences is a United States nonprofit, non-governmental organization. NAS is part of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, along with the National Academy of Engineering and the National Academy of Medicine.

³⁰⁵ The American Medical Association is a professional association and lobbying group of physicians and medical students.

NASA³⁰⁶ is one of these organizations and concurs with the Climate Change report referenced above: There is a 95% probability that our current warming trend is a result of human activity since the mid twentieth century, and it is marching forward at an unprecedented rate. In the middle of the eighteenth century, scientists discovered that carbon and other gasses have a warming nature to them; the increased levels of these gasses in recent years have caused our Earth to heat in response. Further, carbon dioxide is being released two hundred and fifty times greater than it had been in the last ice age when it occurred from natural sources. (NASA, n.d.)

NASA describes the numerous effects from our current carbon output. First, we are witnessing a global temperature rise of 2.12 degrees Fahrenheit, with most of the warming occurring in the last forty years. Second, our oceans are warming, having absorbed most of the carbon-induced heat. Third, we are experiencing a shrinking of the ice sheets in Greenland and Antarctica. Fourth, glaciers are retreating across the world, including in the Himalayas, the Alps, in Alaska, the Andes, the Rockies, and Africa. There has been decreased snow in the northern hemisphere over the last five decades, with spring snows melting earlier than ever before. Sea levels across the world have risen eight inches in the last century; the rise during the last two decades is double that of the last century and is still accelerating. The arctic sea ice is declining in size and depth over the last two decades. There is an increase in climate events including rainfall, drought and severe storms with record highs and decreasing lows. Finally, the past century has seen a thirty percent increase of ocean acidity, a result of our increased carbon emissions. (NASA, n.d.).

³⁰⁶ The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) is an independent agency of the U.S. federal government responsible for the civilian space program, as well as aeronautics and space research. NASA was established in 1958, succeeding the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics.

Thirteen years after their initial 2001 report which gave conclusive evidence that climate change is real and a result of human action, the International Panel on Climate Change released their fifth summary for policymakers in the hopes of ultimately achieving stabilization of atmospheric greenhouse gasses in order to prevent climate change:

Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, and since the 1950s, many of the observed changes are unprecedented over decades to millennia. The atmosphere and ocean have warmed, the amounts of snow and ice have diminished, and sea level has risen...Human influence on the climate system is clear, and recent anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gasses are the highest in history. Recent climate changes have had widespread impacts on human and natural systems. (IPCC, 2014).

Not all people across the world concur. In 2019, the PEW Research Center³⁰⁷ found that while the majority of countries surveyed believed in climate change as a major threat, not all believed it was a priority, and in fact nine percent did not believe it existed at all. For example, when surveyed, ninety percent of the people in Greece expressed high levels of concern, and people from countries the world over, such as those from Korea, Mexico, France and Spain, considered it a major threat. Yet only fifty nine percent of Americans saw climate change as a major threat, and half or more of the people surveyed from Russia and Israel see it as only a minor threat. (Fagan & Huang, 2019)

In November 2021, I happened to be in Scotland on a Goddess Pilgrimage at the same time the Glasgow Climate Change Conference (COP26) was being held. That year had joined the ranks as one of the 7th hottest years on record, *with all seven happening*

³⁰⁷ The Pew Research Center is a nonpartisan American think tank based in Washington, D.C. It provides information on social issues, public opinion, and demographic trends shaping the United States and the world.

since 2015. Over two hundred countries came to discuss and negotiate plans for a global effort to reduce carbon dioxide and protect the environment.

Leaders looked at science, solutions, the political will to act, and clear indications of action, and came away with some good building blocks. Amongst them: steps toward continuing to lower global greenhouse gas emissions, accelerating action in this “critical decade,” continuing to keep Paris Agreement³⁰⁸ goals towards lowering the global temperature, of moving away from fossil fuels, to help financially challenged countries to adapt to the climate change crisis. Further, one hundred and thirty-seven countries pledged to halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation, many agreed to help countries transition away from coal, to make the push toward zero-emission cars, to limit methane emissions, and the promise by private institutions and banks towards helping to finance the global goal of zero-net emissions. Yet according to UN Secretary-General António Guterres,³⁰⁹ even with these promises, “Unfortunately the collective political will was not enough to overcome some deep contradictions” (United Nations, n.d.).

With human’s over-growing reliance on technology and information disengaging us from our physical planet, and with global economic, social, political, gender and race disparities, the severing of humanity from our environment is having detrimental effects.

³⁰⁸ The Paris Agreement, often referred to as the Paris Accords or the Paris Climate Accords, is an international treaty on climate change, adopted in 2015. It covers climate change mitigation, adaptation, and finance.

³⁰⁹ António Manuel de Oliveira Guterres (1949) is a Portuguese politician and diplomat. Since 2017, he has served as secretary-general of the United Nations, the ninth person to hold this title. A member of the Portuguese Socialist Party, Guterres served as prime minister of Portugal from 1995 to 2002.

In their article “The Human Relation with Nature and Technological Nature,” Kahn,³¹⁰ Severson³¹¹ and Ruckert³¹² (2009) discuss human relations with regard to technology and nature. The authors are concerned that we run the risk of “environmental generational amnesia.” We are adapting to the loss of our physical world and learning to embrace a technological nature, which is presented by simulation and artificial means such as robotic toys and virtual worlds (Kahn, et al., 2009).

To demonstrate their point, Kahn, Severson and Ruckert drew upon cross-cultural and evolutionary developmental accounts of humans and their relationships with the natural world. They examined hundreds of experiments and studies. One such study included the effect of looking at Nature through an open window and observing the frequency of sickness in prisons, of healing of hospital patients, and of health and well-being in the workplace. They contrasted that with artificial Nature interactions. The researchers became convinced that while simulated Nature provides some enjoyment, there is no comparison to the benefits of direct human interaction with Nature. Further, there are and will be psychological and physical consequences of our reliance on information technology, and future generations will not obtain the “full measure of human experience and of human flourishing” (Kahn, et al., 2009).

³¹⁰ Peter H. Kahn, Jr., (d.o.b. unknown) is a Professor in the Department of Psychology and School of Environmental and Forest Sciences at the University of Washington. He is the author of *Technological Nature* (MIT Press), and Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal Ecopsychology*.

³¹¹ Rachel L. Severson (d.o.b. unknown) is an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Montana. She is Director of the Minds Lab, where she and her research team investigate how children attribute minds and internal states to human and non-human others.

³¹² Jolina Ruckert (d.o.b. unknown) received a PhD in Developmental Psychology from the University of Washington in 2014. She currently teaches at Lewis and Clark College.

CHAPTER V

A Global Society without a Universal Mythology

*“When we lose our myths we lose our place in the universe.”
~ Madeleine L'Engle*



Whilst in his small dusty cell on the island of Patmos, John had a Revelation: A vision of Jesus Christ, surrounded by bright light and flames. John was afraid, but Christ calmed his fears and told him to write down what he was hearing and seeing, which were to be given to seven particular churches; for they were messages that were coming directly from God which foretold all that would occur before Christ returned to establish the Kingdom of God on Earth. Christ warned John that the faithful would be imprisoned, assaulted, and challenged by Roman authorities but that they must cling to their faith. If they did so, they would know God's love and inherit the world; if they were not faithful, their souls would be eternally damned.

Then Jesus led John away to Heaven. Whilst there, John saw the throne of Heaven, the angels, and even God Himself. Then John saw, in God's right hand, a written book with seven seals. And an angel proclaimed in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?" Jesus, the "slain lamb," was the only one worthy. Thus, as each seal was unbroken, John had visions of catastrophic events occurring for the earth's people, for God was judging everyone and had filled a book with the names of the faithful who would be saved. John then saw seven angels appear with seven trumpets, and each time a trumpet was blown, devastation rained down on earth.

Next, John heard a voice telling seven angels to pour seven bowls of God's wrath upon the earth: festering sores, a sea of blood destroying everything in it, rivers turning to blood, people scorched by fire, "the kingdom of the beast" being plunged into darkness, the drying up of the River Euphrates. Jesus revealed to John that the angels

would mark the faithful followers of Him, and when the plagues ended, the people of faith would know bounty and live in eternal paradise. Those who were not faithful, who worshiped beasts thinking they would be victorious, would die in increasingly terrible ways. Village by village, communities would fall into chaos.

Then, before the seventh bowl was poured, John's vision showed a great and mighty storm full of thunder, earthquakes, and hail. The Whore of Babylon (a symbol of the seduction and beauty of Rome) appeared as a great serpent, and thus the people must turn away from that seductive snake and keep the faith. Jesus gathered the people of faith, and a great battle of Good and Evil took place. Jesus led the faithful to victory in a war against God's enemies, and Satan fell into a lake of fire.

Then, in John's vision, a New Heaven and a New Earth would come to pass, with no tears or pain, no mourning or death. Only the people whose names were written in the Lambs Book of Life would be allowed to enter and live with Jesus Christ for all eternity. However, Christ did not want anyone hurt unnecessarily and encouraged John to send his message out as quickly as possible. Then all should praise Jesus' name and wait for His Second Coming, for He will come again.

~ Adapted from the King James Bible (1987), Book of Revelation, 1-22

Here we are, then, two million and five hundred thousand years after the birth of humanity: a global society on the brink of ecological disaster. The reason seems clear: We no longer have a pertinent and unified story to tie the cosmos and each other together, one that helps us to see our connection to, and place in, the great circle of things. With the advent of information technology and the world-wide web, we have become a global

society; cultures the world over are sharing beliefs, stories, rituals, and traditions, economies and ideologies. However, we do not have an adequate *universal* mythology to teach or inform us, to help us make sense of our lives and our world, and to connect to the Sacred that manifests itself as all things human and non-human on earth and in the cosmos. The result is that the earth, as we know it to be, may be dying.

In 1988, journalist Bill Moyers and mythological scholar Joseph Campbell discussed the need for a global mythology in depth; despite their conversation happening almost 35 years ago, their messages are more pertinent than ever. “The only mythology that is valid today is the mythology of the planet, and we do not have such a mythology... What we have today is a demythologized world” (Campbell, 1988, p. 10, 28). Moyers observed that without myth, indigenous societies are likely to disintegrate; Campbell concurred and said he believed it was happening to us as well, as our myths begin to disappear. “When the world changes, then the religion has to be transformed” (Campbell, 1988, p. 26).

Our myths and models have to be appropriate for the time in which we are living, and the ones available to us are losing their relevance. According to Campbell, the Abrahamic religions (mythologies) belong to another set of human values, and no longer have relevance; they are a Biblical view of the universe and humankind, from a time many thousands of years ago and, for many of us, in a place far, far away. Many of these old stories no longer relate to how we currently live or behave in society, or how we see the Divine, the planet, other beings and each other. They just do not work anymore (Campbell, 1988). Karen Armstrong (2005) ascertains that each time humans have taken a step in their evolution, we have changed our stories to reflect our changing conditions,

continuing to tell the stories of our “timeless truth.” However, we, as a global society, have yet to do so.

According to Leeming³¹³ and Page³¹⁴ (1994), the patriarchal usurping of the Goddess has left a gap in our collective experience and in our world culture. We have lost our “connection,” which is the true sickness of our modern world. There was once a time where ego (the personal self) existed on the same plane as earth (“I am That”), submerged in the unconscious. Now, because our ego is so separate from its oceanic Mother origins, and because the divine feminine and masculine archetypes are in conflict with each other internally, we have outwardly moved to a war-like world, one of hierarchy, conflict, and destruction of the earth (Sjoo & Mor, 1987).

Today we see acid thrown in the faces of those who speak out against the patriarch, infanticide in India and China, daughters sold as brides. The physical and spiritual worlds that were once intertwined in Mother Goddess societies are now lived as alien parts; we no longer have the same rich inner and informative life that once was experienced by our ancient ancestors. Campbell believes the destructive and violent acts we see today are because we no longer have a myth: “I think that what we are seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive...” (Campbell, 1988, p. 5).

³¹³ David Adams Leeming (1937-) is an American philologist who is Professor Emeritus of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Connecticut, and a specialist in comparative literature of mythology.

³¹⁴ Jake Page (1936-) was the founding editor of Doubleday's Natural History Press, as well as editorial director of Natural History magazine and science editor of Smithsonian magazine. He has written more than forty books on the natural sciences, zoological topics, and Native American affairs, as well as mystery fiction.

Today, across the world, many of our societies are large and multicultural, a merging of old traditions and new ideas, many of whom say they have no religion at all. There is a growing idea that religion has no future, at least not in the way we have known it for the past few thousand years. According to a Gallup³¹⁵ survey, there has been a steady decline of followers of religion since the turn of the twenty-first century. For example, in 2020, forty seven percent of adults in the United States belonged to a church, a synagogue or a mosque, dropping down from fifty percent in 2018 who belonged to a religious institution, and an enormous drop from seventy percent who belonged to one in 1999, a number that remained virtually constant since it was first measured in 1937 (Jones, 2021). According to the 2018 General Social Survey³¹⁶ of US attitudes, “no religion” became the single largest group, edging out evangelical Christians (Hout & Smith, 2015). In a 2008 European survey, twenty three percent of those surveyed said they did not belong to a religious affiliation; in France, twenty nine percent of the population declared themselves as atheists (Zwilling, 2018).

A glimpse at the news and events happening around the world is testimony to our broken mythological state. As Bill Moyers said, a quick read of *The New York Times* tells us so (Campbell, 1988)! We are no longer in harmony with our inner and outer worlds. The pervasive anxiety and depression in the United States and across the globe is testimony to this disconnection. Addiction, for example, is a way to fill this gap and to attempt to achieve through artificial means a mystical experience not readily available to

³¹⁵ Gallup, Inc. is an American analytics and advisory company based in Washington, D.C. Founded by George Gallup in 1935, the company became known for its public opinion polls conducted worldwide.

³¹⁶ The General Social Survey (GSS) is a sociological survey created and regularly collected since 1972 by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. It is funded by the National Science Foundation. The GSS collects information and keeps a historical record of the concerns, experiences, attitudes, and practices of residents of the United States.

us. Jonah Sachs³¹⁷ shares that with the erosion of myths/religions, we are in what he calls a “myth gap” full of people seeking meaning or purpose; consumerism is currently filling that gap for many (Williams, 2014). Campbell believes our modern lives have given us a stagnant and inauthentic way of living that no longer invokes spirituality, connection to a larger energy, and an interconnection to all things (Campbell, 1988).

Endings themselves are embedded in mythologies across time and space. Often seen as the end of humanity in some form or another, these endings were either tied to a circular rebirth, as in many of the agrarian or animist myths; or in the linear apocalyptic tales of an end of humanity with no return. Sometimes we see themes that cross into both ideologies, such as the Great Flood which can be found in a great many myths throughout ancient Mesopotamia, Mesoamerica, ancient Greece and Aboriginal Australia. In some myths, a few people are saved and will repopulate the world, as in the Biblical tale of Noah and the Great Flood. Others, such as the Mayan end of this world cycle (which was supposed to happen in 2012), do not necessarily show but allude to how humanity ends. In many cases, a downfall of humanity is the impetus for the end of the world.

Although there was not a definitive time of its ending, the Egyptians believed the Primordial Waters (known as the god Nun) would reclaim the Earth, for the balance of the world, *maat*, was disrupted when the god Seth killed his brother Osiris. The Pharaohs, who were in direct communication with the gods, had to make a daily sacrifice to the sun god Ra or *maat* would be gone forever and would bring about the end of the world.

The Norse people believed that the end of the world, called Ragnarok, would be initiated by a period of chaos, followed by a Great Winter and moral depravity, at which

³¹⁷ Jonah Sachs (1975-) is an American storyteller, author, designer and entrepreneur. He is the author of *Winning the Story Wars: Why Those Who Tell—and Live—the Best Stories Will Rule the Future* and *Unsafe Thinking: How to Be Nimble and Bold When You Need It Most*.

point, after the greatest battle to ever take place, the sun and moon would be consumed and the earth would descend into the primordial sea only to eventually be reborn again as paradise. Two human people, Lif and Lifthrasir, would hide; they, along with the remaining gods, would go on to populate this new paradise.

The Hindus believe in world cycles, and that we are in the fourth age of the world, or *yuga*, which lasts four million three hundred and twenty thousand years; each of these *yugas* have subsets of shorter cycles which last twelve thousand years. In the first cycle, all beings were happy and lived equally; in the next cycle, morality declined and humans turned to the gods for wisdom; in the third, humans became greedy and envious. According to their mythology, we are currently residing in the fourth age of what is called the *kaliyuga*, and is believed to have started on February 18, 3102 BCE; it marks a time where there is dishonesty, death, corruption, an imbalance of power, and money reigns supreme. Then, it has been foretold, a drought will burn the world for a hundred days, and rains will flood the world for a hundred days, the god Vishnu³¹⁸ will come on a white horse and save the good people, and the world will begin again.

Although there is controversy about what the Christian end of the world looks like, many believe all of the faithful Christians will be saved for all eternity by the second coming of Christ. An Antichrist will also appear and will be responsible for much suffering on Earth for a period of seven years. Then a battle will take place between Jesus and the Antichrist, called Armageddon. In the end, Christ will prevail and will end all suffering, pain and death.

³¹⁸ Vishnu is one of the most important gods in the Hindu pantheon and considered a member of the holy trinity (trimurti) of Hinduism. His avatars include Krishna and Rama.

The Hopi believe that the world has cyclical endings and beginnings. Our current Fourth World was populated after the last world had become unlivable and corrupt due to its own humanity's evils. So, the people climbed out of the earth and into the one in which we live today, with the possibility of a perfect world. In the Hopi tale, however, the chief keeps the hole to the Third World open, as his lifeless child was left there, which meant evil was allowed to flow from the old world into the new one. Although again there is no definitive end of the Fourth World, it is believed it will be due to a lack of respect for the planet (Moniz, 2014).

Ram Dass³¹⁹ spoke of the old myths of ours beginning to crumble. He believed that when myths stop serving society, there is a contraction and a desperate clinging to the old story just before it disintegrates and a new one is born, a pattern we see across the whole world right now. This contraction or grasping onto the old belief systems often results in blame, prejudices, bigotry, and eventually violence (Ram Dass LSR Foundation, 2022). Bill Moyers summarizes writer Thomas Berry's³²⁰ perspective: That we are in trouble because the story, our assumptions and fundamental beliefs, has shifted, and we are currently between stories. Our myths used to energize us, give us purpose; they guided us, and eased our pain. We had self-identity. Now the old stories are no longer working. They are not filling us up in any way, but we have not learned a new one yet (Campbell, 1988). Karen Armstrong said it well: to dismiss myth as a society is to leave ourselves in peril (Armstrong, 2006).

³¹⁹ Ram Dass (1931-2019), also known as Baba Ram Dass, was an American spiritual teacher, guru of modern yoga, psychologist, and author. His best-selling 1971 book *Be Here Now*, which has been described by multiple reviewers as "seminal," helped popularize Eastern spirituality and yoga in the West.

³²⁰ Thomas Berry (1914-2009) was a cultural historian and scholar of the world's religions, especially Asian traditions. Later as he studied Earth history and evolution, he called himself a "geologist."

Humanity is witnessing a crisis like never before. With our seemingly endless march towards “progress,” with the disintegration of our spiritual relationships and intimacy with the eco-field, with fractured belief systems across the world, with the rising seas, global droughts and raging fires of Climate Change, with moral degradation and chaos, are we experiencing a Ragnarok or Armageddon as predicted in the stories of old?

One thing seems clear: Humanity’s relationship with Earth must shift if we are to potentially survive on this planet. If our actions, relationships, beliefs, and societal structures are dictated by our mythologies as illustrated throughout this paper, and if we are indeed a global society as indicated above, we *must* birth a global mythology which connects us to our planet. We need a new story, one which allows us to see and experience our interconnectedness, which encourages us to act with reverence to all myriad beings, which helps us to understand that our actions affect all things in existence, as illustrated by the Gaia theory, quantum physics and our ancient indigenous and early myths.

I believe we must rebirth a new myth in which our planet is perceived as the Divine Feminine; her long-suppressed archetype is intertwined with Earth itself and is found within all of us, female and male. For it is through the resurrection of the *Divine Feminine as Earth* that humans have the potential to recognize our Oneness with all things. This new human story, informed by the memories and myths that span humanity, along with newer scientific insights and perhaps even the consciousness of the planet itself, might not only be the answer to our global plight but it is already being birthed: *Earth as our Mother, a myth for our planet in crisis.*

CHAPTER VI

Mother Earth: A Global Myth for a Planet in Crisis

*“Tell them as I dying live, so they dying will live again.”
~ The Moon through a tortoise to the African Bushmen*



Early one morning, two young Lakota men were out hunting with their bows and arrows. As they were standing on a hill looking for game, they saw in the distance something coming towards them. Soon they realized that it was a very beautiful woman, dressed in white buckskin and bearing a bundle on her back.

This woman was so striking that one of the Lakota had bad intentions. He told his friend of his desire, but his friend said that he must not have such thoughts because surely this is a holy woman. The mysterious woman was now very close to the men; and, putting down her bundle, she asked the one with bad intentions to come over to her. As the young man approached, they were both covered by a great cloud. When the cloud lifted, only the sacred woman was standing there. At her feet was the man with the bad thoughts who was now nothing but bones, and snakes were eating him.

“Behold what you see!” the strange woman said to the good man. “I am coming to your people and wish to talk with your chief Hehlokecha Najin (Standing Hollow Horn). Return to him, and tell him to prepare a large tipi in which he should gather all of his people and make ready for my coming. I wish to tell you something of great importance!”

The young man returned to his chief and told him all that had happened -- that this holy wakan woman was coming to visit them and that they must all prepare. Chief Hehlokecha Najin then had a great lodge made from several tipis as the sacred woman had instructed. He sent out a crier to tell the people to put on their best buckskin clothes and to gather immediately in the lodge. There was a buzz from the excitement of the

people for the coming of the holy woman, and everybody was wondering where this mysterious woman came from and what it was that she wished to say.

Soon the young men who were watching for the coming of the wakan person announced that they saw something in the distance approaching them in a beautiful manner. Suddenly, she entered the lodge, walked around sunwise, and stood in front of Chief Hehlokecha Najin. She took the bundle from her back and holding it with both hands in front of the chief, said, "Behold this holy bundle, lela wakan, and always love it! No impure man should ever be allowed to see it, for within this bundle there is a sacred pipe. With this, you will, during the winters to come, send your voices to Wakan-Tanka, the Great Creator"

After the mysterious woman said this, she took a pipe from the bundle and also a small round stone which she placed upon the ground. Holding the pipe up with its stem to the heavens, she said: "With this sacred pipe, you will walk upon the Earth, for the Earth is your Grandmother and Mother, and She is sacred. Every step that is taken upon her should be as a prayer. The bowl of this pipe is of red stone; it is the Earth. Carved in the stone and facing the center is this buffalo calf who represents all the four-leggeds who live upon your Mother. The stem of the pipe is of wood, and this represents all that grows upon the Earth. And these twelve feathers which hang here, where the stem fits into the bowl, are from Wanbli Galeska, the Spotted Eagle, and they represent the eagle and all the wingeds of the air. All these peoples, and all the things of the universe, are joined to you who smoke the pipe—all send their voices to Wakan-Tanka, the Great Spirit. When you pray with this pipe, you pray for and with everything."

The wakan woman then touched the foot of the pipe to the round stone which lay upon the ground, and said: "With this pipe, you will be bound to all your relatives; your Grandfather and Father, your Grandmother and Mother. This round rock, which is made of the same red stone as the bowl of the pipe, the Creator has also given to you. It is the Earth, your Grandmother and Mother, and it is where you will live and increase. This Earth which has been given to you is red, and the two-leggeds who live upon the Earth are red; and the Great Spirit has also given to you a red day, and a red road. All of this is sacred, and so do not forget! Every dawn, as it comes, is a holy event; and every day is holy, for the light comes from the Creator; and also, you must always remember that the two-leggeds and all the other peoples who stand upon this earth are sacred and should be treated as such.

~The Legend of White Buffalo Calf Woman

Told by Black Elk, Oglala Sioux to Joseph Epes Brown

(adapted from Brown, 1989)

A wise woman once told me the Goddess needs us as much as we need her. Without the rituals, the offerings, and the remembering, She, with her infinite faces, energies, personalities, and manifestations, might be forgotten and ultimately fade from human existence. Likewise, the colorful, rich and joyous magic of living, which comes from recognizing the Divine Feminine within us, will die if we do not remember and celebrate Her. I believe the devastation we are witnessing on our planet is testimony to the severing of the mythological Great Mother archetype in our lives. The remembering and rebirthing of Her is both urgent and necessary if we are to heal and become whole both as a people and as a planet.

Myth is about the mystery of creation, and since it is women who hold and birth life, we must look to the Feminine for clues to that Mystery once again. Inviting the Divine Feminine to rise again in human consciousness is the only way we can return to health, wellness, wholeness, and peace. As Joseph Campbell said, “The world is the body of the goddess which is divinity itself” (Campbell, 1988, p.121). With our ancestors alongside us who know the road, who once walked the path of the Goddess, who honored the Great Mother and the Sacred Mystery within all of existence, we must find our way back to a mythology that reminds us of our connection to the earth, the water, the elements, the planets, the universe, to each other. We have to learn how to find harmony and kinship with all things. Like the serpent who sheds her skin and resurrects herself, we need a new philosophy for the planet, for all people, for these difficult modern times, and I believe *the embracing of Earth as our Mother* ~ our new mythology whose roots began in the antiquity of humanity ~ is the answer to this call.

Perhaps it is precisely because the Divine Feminine is needed again, as our planet and humanity struggle to survive, that *she is already beginning to rise once more*, a new moon slowly reflecting light again for the first time in many millennia. Crisis has the tendency to drop duality and to put us back into awareness of our Oneness. Indeed, as people across the world gather with concern for the planet, as “science” becomes ever-more complex and begins to embrace ecology and interconnectedness, and as it merges with our ancient mythologies, we are beginning to see the re-emergence of the Divine Feminine in the modern world. I can feel the slow swell of a united Divine Feminine movement reclaiming her place as a dynamic and prominent force in the human psyche, the emergence of a new myth with Mother Earth at its core.

Many thousands of years ago, as Riane Eisler reminds us in her interview with Scott London,³²¹ Feminine principles prevailed of which inclusion, partnership, and harmony between the sexes were the norm in human affairs. Our modern structures in politics, economics, education, and personal relationships are no longer working, nor do they address our mounting planetary problems. Thus we, as a global human society, are beginning to turn back and rediscover the need and value in the Feminine principle (London, 1996). Campbell reminds us that in India and Greece, the Goddess eventually returned following the devastating ravages of the mid-second millennium BCE Indo-European invasions (The Joseph Campbell Foundation, 2013). Are we in the midst of another “devastating ravage”? Rather than marauding invaders who brought a thunder-hurling god, have we brought upon ourselves hurling thunder in the form of climate change? Could the Goddess be resurrecting once again for her people?

The emerging consciousness of Mother Earth as a living and feminine deity is being demonstrated in countless ways across the world; my own Earth Ministry ordination and doctoral program is just one small example. For instance, in 2009, Bolivia created a law which formally acknowledged the basic rights of Mother Earth: the right to life, diversity of life, water, clean air, equilibrium, restoration and pollution-free living. Then in 2010, leaders of the country promised to uphold and respect these rights with its “Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth.” The guiding principles include harmony, collective good, guarantee of the regeneration of Mother Earth, no commercialism, holistic management and development, along with the adoption of indigenous world

³²¹ Scott London (d.o.b. unknown) was born in Washington, DC, raised in Sweden, and now lives in Santa Barbara, California with his wife and their two daughters. He is a journalist and photographer, and he hosted the public-radio show *Insight and Outlook* from 1995 to 2000. He has also done interviews for CBS Radio, CBC’s *Radio One*, and *Weekend America*.

views (Earth Law Center, 2016).

As humans recognize the plight of the planet, people are calling upon themselves, and the goddesses and gods of old, as spirit protectors and healers. Nature-based pagan, Wiccan and animist identification is one of the fastest growing spiritual movements, especially in the West, with old beliefs taking new forms and perspectives that include interconnectedness, and earthly elements taking on divine feminine qualities. For the first time in a thousand years, Iceland has its first Viking church which opened in 2018. The spread of yoga, meditation, new-age spirituality, indigenous rituals, shamanism, and the healing arts are ushering forth consciousness and awakening the Divine Feminine at incredible speed. The #MeToo Feminist Movement³²² is helping to further awaken our much-needed Feminine energy. It feels as though an ancient intelligence is rebirthing and recreating herself to shape and mold a new way of being. Our ability to view the Earth from space, the image of One Planet without divisions or states or nations or hierarchies, is perhaps one of the symbols of this new mythology.

This emergent universal mythology that embraces Earth as the Divine Feminine is a true merging of the old and the new. Her nickname alone, “Mother Earth,” speaks to this, as does the slogan on Earth Day: “Love your Mother.” Recent trends of renewing ancient earth-based traditions demonstrate this shifting consciousness, especially in the last few decades. For example, we are again witnessing celebrations of seasonal holy-days, such as the Winter Solstice, across America and Europe; the President of Ireland lit

³²² #MeToo is a social movement against sexual abuse and sexual harassment where people publicize allegations of sex crimes. The phrase “Me Too” was initially used in this context on social media in 2006, on Myspace, by sexual assault survivor and activist Tarana Burke. The purpose of #MeToo, as initially voiced by Burke as well as those who later adopted the tactic, is to empower sexually assaulted people through empathy and solidarity through strength in numbers, especially young and vulnerable women, by visibly demonstrating how many have experienced sexual assault and harassment, especially in the workplace.

the sacred fire on Beltane³²³ (May 1st) in 2018; and the Goddess Brigid's³²⁴ holy day of Imbolc³²⁵ will become a National Holiday in Ireland in 2023. Trends in sustainability, backyard gardens, farmer's markets, solar energy, water protection demonstrations, and healing, drumming, and prayer circles for worldwide peace continue to connect us to the earth and each other. When I am outdoors hiking, I continually see offerings on rocks, flowers left in rivers, streams and oceans. The vegan movement is gaining momentum like never before as we recognize our meat-based diet is one of the leading causes of greenhouse gas emissions. Newly made stone cairns dot the landscape as markers and tributes like the days of old. In 2021, America's President Joe Biden³²⁶ formally changed Columbus Day to Indigenous People's Day in recognition of the first people who inhabited America. We collectively plant trees on Arbor Day. Humanitarian movements are also sweeping the world, such as #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, and Immigrant Rights.

³²³ Beltane is the Gaelic May Day festival. It represents the peak of Spring and the beginning of Summer. Earth energies are at their strongest and most active. Most commonly it is held on 1 May, or about halfway between the spring equinox and summer solstice. Historically, it was widely observed throughout Ireland, Scotland, and the Isle of Man.

³²⁴ Brigit, also called Brigantia or High One, is an ancient Celtic goddess of the poetic arts, crafts, prophecy, and divination; she was the equivalent of the Roman goddess Minerva (Greek Athena). In Ireland, Brigit was one of three goddesses of the same name, daughters of the Dagda, the great god. Her two sisters were connected with healing and with the craft of the smith. Brigit was taken over by Christianity as St. Brigit, but she retained her strong pastoral associations. St. Brigit had a great establishment at Kildare in Ireland that was probably founded on a pagan sanctuary. Her sacred fire there burned continually; it was tended by a series of 19 nuns and by the saint herself every 20th day. Brigit still plays an important role in modern Ireland, as well as in Scottish folk tradition where she figures as the midwife of the Virgin Mary. Numerous holy wells are dedicated to her.

³²⁵ The Goddess/Saint Brigid's feast day is February 1, traditionally known as Imbolc. The half-way point between the Winter Solstice and the Vernal Equinox, it is a pagan festival day which celebrates the season when the ewes came into milk.

³²⁶ Joseph Robinette Biden Jr. (1942-) is an American politician who is the 46th and current president of the United States.

One of the ways we can continue to invite the Feminine back into our consciousness is by once again recognizing our intimate relationship with Earth, the two inextricably linked. Through his in-depth studies of the role of fungi in animate and inanimate life, biologist and author Merlin Sheldrake³²⁷ reveals how the earth is both entangled and cooperative; it is an intimate world built upon relationships between organisms that are interdependent and interconnected (Sheldrake, 2020). I am reminded again of the Gaia Theory, of the earth as a living organism. The new global myth that is being called forth is one that helps us to identify with the planet as a connected, living being, one that puts us back into reverence with Mother Earth.

The emergence of a new Animism is further testimony to the rebirth of our ancient ideologies, supported by new understandings, which link the Great Mother archetype and Earth. “New Animism” is a term for the recent global movement of seeing and celebrating The Great Mystery within all things, a deeply rooted value-system based on respect for the land, reverence for all life, and the idea that the more-than-human-world is imbued with sentience (Pearce, n.d.). Naturalist Kyle Pearce³²⁸ writes,

Animism is not an abstract concept but a direct way of feeling and experiencing life. The revival of the living, breathing language of Animism is vital for reversing climate change and building a regenerative culture where young people believe in the future again (Pearce, n.d.).

³²⁷ Merlin Sheldrake (1987-) is a biologist and a writer. He received a Ph. D. in tropical ecology from the University of Cambridge for his work on underground fungal networks in tropical forests in Panama, where he was a predoctoral research fellow of the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute.

³²⁸ Kyle Pearce (d.o.b. unknown) is a teacher of history, forest ecology and eco-mindfulness through Animist Ecology who helps people harness the power of their creative gifts using the psychology of flow. He started in Animist Ecology in 2016 to teach outside in the forest on group ecology adventures where people can learn eco-mindfulness practices, share their love of nature and explore their interconnection with their local ecology.

The fact that twenty countries and counting in the United Nations support the debate that Mother Earth needs human rights protection is an example of the active principle of the new Animism in our world.

To reiterate, the old view of Animism, as presented in the first chapter, was based on Sir Edward Burnett Tylor's nineteenth century work *Primitive Culture* (1871) which essentially held Animists, or as he called them "primitive people," at the bottom of a human and cultural hierarchy, "delusional people" who "thought like a child" and could not distinguish between animate and inanimate objects. From there, human society for Tylor ascended with religion becoming the indicator of a culture's more advanced sociological and moral ideals. Finally, scientific reasoning would become the indicator of high modern culture.

Further, as we saw earlier, this perception began to change in the mid-twentieth century with the work of anthropologist Irving Hallowell. He published his observations about the Ojibwe Nation's relationship with other "people" beings such as rocks and bears, and how humans learned about their environment, each other and themselves from their intimate relationships with *all* earth beings. In doing so, Hallowell challenged prior outdated and offensive views such as Tylor's and encouraged people to step outside of their Euro-American-human centric view and to see things from a larger world-wide lens (Crow, 2020).

Of course, most of us today see the world far differently than Tylor and are offended by his definitions and theories. In our modern world, the principles of Animism, that all forms of life possess a spiritual essence, are beginning to resonate more and more for many, and the plight of our planet demands a different story for how to live on the

earth. It is estimated that forty percent of the world believes in Animism, and it is one of four world views (Lawless, 2017). Deities and the worship of gods and goddesses are born from Animism; the Lakota term “mitakuye oyasin,” meaning “all my relations, embraces this concept.

Many others of late are ushering this new Animism into our world belief systems, helping us to “remember” our intimacy, which we once had with the earth; Graham Harvey is such a person. In his book, *Animism: Respecting the Living World* (2005), Harvey writes:

Animists are people who recognize that the world is full of persons, only some of whom are human, and that life is always lived in relationship with others. Animism is lived out in various ways that are all about learning to act respectfully (carefully and constructively) toward and among other persons. (Harvey, 2005)

Harvey explains that Animism is about relationships. This includes how we relate to other humans, the Other-than-Humans, and our Elders who also include Stone Elders and Tree Elders. Our modern societies have taught many of us how to appropriately and respectfully relate to each other, but we no longer know how to relate to our Other-than-Human family. Animism is about seeing them all as equals, as our ancient ancestors once did and many indigenous people still do. Though mainstream populations may have forgotten the tools and structures needed to do so, many people are finding both old and novel ways of “remembering,” whether that be learning from our indigenous brothers and sisters, or by creating new ways of relating to all beings upon Mother Earth. (Harvey, 2005).

Further, we are constantly engaged in Animist behavior, whether consciously or unconsciously such as when we treat our pets like children or talk to our plants, but as a result of cultural conditioning, we have stopped viewing it as such. “We have never been

separate, unique or alone and it is time to stop deluding ourselves. Human cultures are not surrounded by ‘nature’ or ‘resources,’ but by ‘a world full of cacophonous agencies’”

(Harvey, 2005. p. 12). Poet Aubrey Marcus³²⁹ reminds us:

You are comprised of 84 minerals, 23 Elements, and 8 gallons of water, spread across 38 trillion cells. You have been built up from nothing by the spare parts of the Earth you have consumed, according to a set of Instructions hidden in a double helix and small enough to be carried by a sperm. You are recycled butterflies, plants, rocks, streams, firewood, wolf fur, and shark teeth, broken down to their smallest parts and rebuilt into our planet's most complex living thing. You are not living on Earth. You are Earth. (Marcus, 2018)

With an ever-growing body of awareness, we are beginning to see how a singular thought or action affects the whole, how individual planetary beings adjust and morph not simply to survive, but to maintain a greater harmony. We are recognizing how *individual* consciousness has the potential to affect and create *all* consciousness and thus reality, such as Robert Lanza’s theory of Biocentrism: All living organisms are worthy of moral and ethical consideration, and consciousness is what creates the manifest universe (Lanza et al., 2009). We have new scientific studies of ecosystems such as the quaking aspen forests, one of the largest living organisms on the planet, who share nutrients, information, electrical impulses, healing, friendships; and we are learning about the imperative role mycelia plays in earth’s cycles. We are recognizing our interconnection with the effects of prayer circles and entanglement within quantum physics, all of which have import on the collective rebirth of the Divine Feminine, of our relationship with Mother Earth, and of our survival as a species.

³²⁹ Aubrey Marcus (d.o.b. unknown) is a poet, an experimentalist, an unconventional fitness lover, and the CEO of Onnit, an optimal human performance company that he has built into one of the fastest growing companies in America. He is passionate about raising awareness for psychedelic medicine and is a 20-year native of Austin, Texas where he currently resides.

Because we are interconnected, when we connect with Mother Earth, we awaken the Divine Feminine within us; and when we awaken the Divine Feminine within us, we awaken her for the world. Let us take another quick look at quantum physics here in terms of the morphogenetic field: All of the cells of all things in existence are made up of chemical, physical and electrical cues full of patterning information that communicate, shape and form what is birthed in the eco-field. The morphogenetic field and its informational codes are responsible for the structure of the body, its organs, its processes, even its place in and how it interacts with the environment. It is, in essence, the “wisdom body” which includes an inherent memory derived from previous but similar systems. Everything that exists in both the manifest and unmanifest world is able to draw upon its collective memory and simultaneously contribute to it.

In 2014, British biologist and author Rupert Sheldrake was interviewed for the journal *Scientific American*; here, Sheldrake encourages the world to push beyond our limited theories about consciousness and cosmology in order to open up to new possibilities. He describes what he terms “morphic resonance” here:

Morphic resonance is the influence of previous structures of activity on subsequent similar structures of activity organized by morphic fields. It enables memories to pass across both space and time from the past. The greater the similarity, the greater the influence of morphic resonance. What this means is that all self-organizing systems, such as molecules, crystals, cells, plants, animals and animal societies, have a collective memory on which each individual draws and to which it contributes” (Sheldrake, 2014).

Similarly, Joseph Campbell reminds us that our nerves carry the memories the body once tapped into in order to harmonize the mind and body. Echoes of the ancient stories, the myths and rituals we once birthed to achieve that harmony, live within us (Campbell, 1988, p. 87).

Thus, the Divine Feminine, who across the ages has represented the very earth beneath our feet, is in our collective memories, in our consciousness; our neurons remember her! We remember her as “Gaia” from ancient Greece, the primordial Mother born from chaos at the dawn of creation from which all things came. We hear her faintly singing as Terra Mater from Rome who birthed and nourished humankind. Our bones recall Bhudevi, the Hindu Earth Goddess who, with her consort, created all things, sustained and nourished life through agriculture, and received them back into her body at the end of their lives. There are countless stories such as these that mirror those of Earth as our Mother, tales as old as time and across the planet, in almost all cultures. Even with the few exceptions in which Earth is presented as male, such as the Egyptian story of Geb,³³⁰ we see the aspects of nature appear as goddesses: Qetesh, for instance, as the Egyptian goddess of nature and beauty; Tefnut as the goddess of water and fertility; Anuket as the goddess of the Nile; and Isis as the goddess of healing. Earth as our Mother is woven into the very fabric of our universal memories.

³³⁰Geb was believed to be the deity of earth, and was central to the ancient Egyptian creation myth.

CHAPTER VII

Conclusion: My Personal Myth

NEW RELIGION

*This morning no sound but the loud
breathing of the sea. Suppose that under
all that salt water lived the god(dess)
that humans have spent ten thousand years
trawling the heavens for.*

*We caught the wrong metaphor.
Real space is wet and underneath,
the church of shark and whale and cod.*

*The noise of those vast lungs
exhaling: the plain chanting of monkfish choirs.
Heaven's not up but down, and hell
is to evaporate in air. Salvation,
to drown and breathe
forever with the sea.*

~ Bill Holm



Once upon a time, a long time ago, a buffalo demon named Mahishasur was born. He grew to be very cruel and took great pride in harming others. Wanting power and invincibility, he prayed to Lord Brahma and performed severe penances and great fire pujas. Eventually, Lord Brahma heard Mahishasur's devotions, and though he could not grant immortality (for all things must die), Brahma gave him this special boon: that no man could kill him, and if he had to die, it would only be at the hands of a woman.

Mahishasur was sure that this was impossible, and his power and invincibility soon overtook him. He raped, pillaged and murdered, destroyed temples and whole cities, then went on to fight the gods in the heavens. He ran to and fro, bloodthirsty, kicking up dust in his wake. Soon, the dust obscured the sun, the land grew parched, and darkness reigned.

The people of the earth called upon the god Shiva the Destroyer for help. Shiva gathered with all the other gods and tried to devise a way to destroy Mahishasur, who embodied ego, greed, power, and darkness. Out of their love for the earth and all things upon it, a divine energy was born. She was Durga, the Great Mother, a luminous light bedecked with ornaments shining like new moons, adorned in pomegranate red with a thousand arms that waved in all directions, ready ~ almost ~ for battle. She knew she needed weapons and tools for defeating the Darkness, so she asked the gods and goddesses to place each of their weapons in her hands. They did as she commanded: a conch shell, a bow and arrow, a thunder bolt, a lotus, a chakra, a sword, a water pot, Shiva's trident. Though now fully armed, Durga knew it was not quite enough to defeat Mahishasur, so she commanded that all the gods and goddesses in existence merge

themselves with her. And so, as One, Ma Durga mounted a great fiery lion, let out a roar that shook the very earth itself, and set out to destroy the Demon of Darkness.

When Mahishasur first heard the roar, he was afraid, but when he saw it was a woman, his ego and vanity got the better of him. A great battle took place, and both fought fiercely for many days and many nights. Eventually, Mahishasur grew tired, and Durga was able to trap the Buffalo Demon beneath her feet. Drawing her sword, Ma Durga beheaded Mahishasur. At long last, the dust cleared, the lands were fruitful, the rivers flowed, the animals and people thrived, and light, peace and harmony reigned forevermore.

~ Adapted from *The Devi Gita*, 15th century (Brown, 2002)

It was her waters that beckoned, of that I am certain - the ancient waters of the Goddess Well,³³¹ hidden deep in the heart of hill country, Texas. It was her waters that called me, the arteries and veins of the Great Mother that meandered through the little town of Wimberley on their winding path towards the sea. Carved forever like scrimshaw into my bones will be the memory of walking the riverbeds, the forgotten carcasses of uprooted trees scattered along the banks, and seeing the salty tear-waters that still run from the townspeople's eyes as they recall the devastation from a recent flood. In an instant, my cells can recall the dance I discovered in this sacred place between pain and healing, parched and flowing, emptiness and fullness. Here, I not only discovered my doctoral path of Earth Ministry, but I was also welcomed into a Tribe of beautiful souls, all of whom shared a profound reverence for our beloved Mother Earth.

³³¹ Jacob's Well is a perennial spring in the Texas Hill Country flowing from the bed of Cypress Creek, located northwest of Wimberley, Texas.



As testimony to what is being birthed in the eco-field, I offer my own personal story or, as Joseph Campbell might say, my “private myth.” In the following pages of this chapter, I share some of my own life’s experiences, culminating in my Earth Ministry ordination, as evidence of our collective and ancient memory being birthed from the eco-field and taking shape and form once more. Again, I highlight the use of the Organic Inquiry dissertation writing and research method which “embraces the individual’s intuitive and interactive experiences, including a blend of research and spiritual inquiry” (see page 13); in other words, my life experiences contribute as testimony to the changes currently taking place on our planet.

The relatively newer science of quantum physics again comes to mind, which recognizes our interconnectedness, the connection of our minds with a cosmic mind, and how the changes in a single particle have the potential to affect or even change other like particles. Could my individual thoughts and actions have an effect on the world, stir the memories of others, awaken ancient codes and patterns as a way to shape the future? Because it is coming through *me* from the morphogenetic field, is it taking form for all of us?



Finding the path to The Wisdom School and my journey of becoming an Earth Minister can be attributed to a seed which was first planted, then lovingly watered in my formative years at a private school called Sudbury Valley School in Massachusetts. In the early 1970’s, as the second wave of feminism was rising in the fight for gender equality,

and as the stacks of *Ms. Magazine* grew in the corner of our small apartment, my own recently-divorced mother made the drive for many years to and from the small campus with me and my younger brother in tow. Based on an earlier educational model called Summerhill School³³² located in Suffolk, England, ours was a ‘free’ school, with few boundaries or parameters but one essential tenet: that all beings ~ whether woman or man, adult or child, two legged or four, tree or plant ~ are Sacred beings and thus deserve to be treated with equality, reverence and respect. There at Sudbury Valley, the great outdoors was our classroom, and our natural curiosity was fed and supported by a staff who satisfied our inherent thirst for learning.

Our school was on a nineteenth century estate that included the Underground Railroad,³³³ an old mill, a swimming pond, a great barn, and small wooden sheds with writings carved into the clapboards from slaves on the run. I still can recall, clear as day, walking up the old dirt carriage road to the red barn and inhaling the sweet smell of concord grapes, stopping to press Touch-Me-Nots and shouting out my delight when they jumped back at me. I spent countless years sitting, like a bird in a nest, in the nook of a giant Beech Tree; one of my greatest teachers, it was Beech who taught me about Nature’s cycles, the seasons, and interconnectedness. Dotting the property and in the nearby woods that surrounded the school were ancient stone burial cairns and

³³² Summerhill School is an independent boarding school in Leiston, Suffolk, England. Founded in 1921 by Alexander Sutherland Neil, Summerhill is a “radical” educational experiment based on children’s natural curiosity that allows students to learn what, when and how they want.

³³³ The Underground Railroad was a network of secret routes and safe houses established in the United States during the early- to mid-19th century. It was used by enslaved African Americans primarily to escape into free states and Canada.

observatories to watch the movement of the stars, sun and moon, built once upon a time by our first Native People. Most of those sacred stones still stand today.

In *The Wind is My Mother*, Bear Heart³³⁴ writes:

I had a sense of belonging as I grew up because of my people's relationship with these elements, and I imagine that's why most of our people related to the environment. We recognized a long time ago that there was life all around us - in the water, in the ground, in the vegetation. Children were introduced to the elements so that as we grew up, we were not looking down upon nature or looking up to nature. We felt a part of nature, on the same level. We respected each blade of grass, one leaf on a tree among many other leaves, everything. (Bear Heart, 1996, p. 4)

With Nature as my teacher, I too grew up with a deep reverence for Earth, the Mother of us all, and felt an integral part of this great wide wondrous world.

Years later, I would begin to build communities that celebrated Mother Earth and the Divine Feminine. One in particular ~ my town's Farmer's Market community ~ drew hundreds each Saturday. It was a true community affair, filled not just with people but dogs, goats, chickens, llamas, and even a parrot who never missed a Saturday morning; all of us gathering, connecting with each other, dancing in the street, and of course, eating! We brought boxes of fresh produce to the elderly, the food pantry, and the local soup kitchen. My goal was to help others connect with Earth's bounty, to meet and learn from the farmers who labored to grow food, to understand that our nourishment is filled with a myriad of energies and experiences that occur during Nature's cycles and seasons, and most of all to celebrate the gifts that Mother Earth shares with us. I would foster the Harvard Farmers' Market community for over twelve years.

³³⁴ Bear Heart Marcellus Williams (1918-2008) was born of the Muskogee Creek tribe in Okemah, Oklahoma. He became steeped in the medicine ways of his people, and later in life, in the ways of many other traditions. Over the course of his life, he was adopted by several tribes and freely shared his healing gifts and wisdom with people of all cultures and backgrounds.

My most beloved community ~ and the tributary that ultimately found itself flowing all the way to the Goddess Well in Wimberley, Texas ~ goes by the name of The Durga Studio, named in honor of the Hindu mother goddess Durga. Founded decades ago, her headwaters are located in a picturesque and historically spiritual town called Harvard, Massachusetts. Nature and Divine-Feminine based, with yoga as a means of embodiment, our “Durga Tribe” has enjoyed philosophy, mythology, yoga, earth celebrations, Solstice and Equinox gatherings, Goddess Pilgrimages, sacred poetry, drum circles, belly dancing, Red Tents, Be-Ins, kirtans, and so much more.

In 2017, I joined the Wisdom School of Ubiquity University to pursue my Doctor of Ministry degree. Not only was I intrigued by the idea of becoming a minister, but I felt an even greater pull: *The Divine Feminine, embodied as Mother Earth*, was beckoning. I knew in my bones that the Divine is not only “above” us but also beneath our very feet, and Mother Earth needs us to recognize this once more. With the war against Nature, the toxic Patriarch prevailing, and the exploding human population happening in the twenty first century, it felt imperative that we remember and rebirth the Divine Feminine archetype: She who brings forth life, who nourishes, protects and unconditionally loves her children, who acts in roundness, circles, cycles connection, inclusiveness, softness, allowing. For it is through her, I believed, that Earth could return to wholeness, could heal, could find harmony, equality, and peace.

In September of that year, during a week-long Wisdom School immersion called “Co-Creating a New Civilization,” I gathered around the sacred waters of Jacob’s Well in Wimberley, Texas with a group of fifty educators, scholars, artists, scientists, activists, and concerned citizens. We all shared one thing in common: A mutual love of Mother

Earth. Whilst there, I met a remarkable community of people who call themselves The Earthtribe.

The Earthtribe community was founded more than thirty-five years ago, birthed from a shared vision of Dr. Will Star Heart Taegel and an indigenous medicine man named Bear Heart, along with Will's lifelong partner Judith Yost and a special oak tree in Houston. It now includes many thousands of members across the world. At its heart is the belief that it is through Nature that we can find beauty, balance, compassion, healing, harmony, and joy. Will Star Heart wears many hats including being a pastoral minister, a psychotherapist, a scholar, an eco-physicist, a writer, a community leader. Bear Heart, who passed into the Ancestral realm with his death in 2008, was a beloved and revered Muskogee Creek medicine man. Judith Yost was a therapist, shaman, singer, and a beloved leader. Out of their mutual yearning for a world that is once again connected to Nature, to each other, and to the greater rhythms of the universe, the Earthtribe community was born.

Almost six months later, In March of 2018, I traveled back to Texas hoping to find an official direction and intention for my ministry studies at The Wisdom School. With the support of two exceptional Earthtribe facilitators, Shiila Safer³³⁵ and Dan Gauthier,³³⁶ I participated in a special kind of vision quest ~ what would eventually be

³³⁵ Shiila Safer (1951-) is an artist, poet, Earthtribe facilitator, bestselling author, co-owner of 2nd Tier Publishing, and nature-based coach and mentor. She assists people in returning to their deep connection with trees and the Earth, and opening to the abundant resources that are readily available through our Earth connection.

³³⁶ Dan Gauthier (1953-) is an Earthtribe facilitator and co-founder and owner of 2nd Tier Publishing in Wimberley, Texas.

called Mother Earth's Wild Heart Quest ~ at a sacred and magical site called Enchanted Rock³³⁷ in Fredericksburg, Texas.

We arrived just past dawn, before the crowds of tourists came to hike and picnic. Shiila and Dan led me through a ritual and brought me to the special spot at the top of Enchanted Rock where I would sit for several hours. As I climbed the hill for the formal sitting of my Wild Heart Quest, puddles from the previous night's rain gazed skyward, and the sun sparkled off of the pink granite rock. Then, as I sat in acute awareness, time and space dissipated. Wind and Hawk seemed to speak with me, conversing in a language beyond words. Here I had a dream-like vision:

I was seated around a campfire on a small tree stump, one of many which encircled the fire. The smoke billowing from the crackling logs obscured most of the circle, but here and there through the flames, I could see small groups of people huddling together, talking quietly amongst themselves. I felt the presence of two men, almost larger than life, on either side of me; though I was not looking at them directly, I knew who they were: Bear Heart, to my left; and Will Star Heart to my right. The gift of their presence was profound: comforting, grounding, like gentle grandfathers; they were both, it felt, the Divine Masculine arriving to guide me on my journey. In my vision, Bear Heart handed me a drum and in a strong voice, told me to play and offer a song to the community. I tried to shy away, not at all confident yet. Smiling encouragingly, Bear Heart told me it was time to step forward, with my own voice, and sing for Mother Earth, and to help the world hear her heartbeat once more.

³³⁷ Enchanted Rock is a pink granite mountain located in the Llano Uplift about 17 miles north of Fredericksburg, Texas. This 425-foot pink granite batholith has given rise to myths and legends over the years.

When at last I opened my eyes, I knew the precise path I would take for my Ministry journey, with the Earthtribe and The Wisdom School supporting me along the way: *I hoped to become an Earth Minister and, under the guidance of Will Star Heart Taegel and the Spirit of Bear Heart, co-create an Earth Ministry Ordination Program.* I wanted to help people see all of Nature as containing Spirit. I hoped to bring the Divine Feminine archetype as our life-giving Mother Earth to the forefront of our consciousness, and to help others see that all things on the planet and in the cosmos are interconnected and interdependent. I wanted to create an earth ministry program not just for myself, but also for others called to this path. Nature would be our Temple.

Earth Ministry Ordination Program

With today's changing tides, there is a global urgency to drastically shift how we are living on our planet. Amidst climate change, global warming, deforestation, pollution, warfare, and dominion over nature in the name of "progress," *Mother Earth and her co-habitants need to be both spoken for and heard.* This I believe to be true: All things are connected; all things contain the One spirit; and every action affects and is supported by all others.

I have thus spent the last five years simultaneously co-creating, developing and completing an Earth Ministry Ordination Program under the wisdom and guidance of Will Star Heart Taegel (and Bear Heart's spirit!). Through intensives, hands-on learning experiences, pilgrimages to sacred sites throughout the world, the tutelage of many amazing mentors and teachers, as well as supportive readings, I have immersed myself fully and whole-heartedly with themes and topics that relate to protecting, connecting

with, and giving voice to the Sacred Spirit of Mother Earth. These themes and intensives include: Animism and Shamanism; The Divine Feminine; Sacred Medicine; the Teachings of the Medicine Wheel and the Journey into Self; Earth-based Community Immersion; Ritual, Ceremony and the Sacred Altar within Earth-Based Community; A Pilgrimage to Earth's Power Points; Co-Creating a New Civilization; The Mother Tongue; Earth Art/Eco Art; Co-Creating an Earth-Based Community; and an Independent Study translating the ancient mystic grandmother Lalla³³⁸.

Testimony to the learning style of my early days at the Sudbury Valley School, I felt strongly that The Earth Ministry Program should be an experienced, *embodied learning of the eco-field*: Not solely book knowledge, but rather the awakening, through our intimacy with Nature, of our feeling bodies and intuitive wisdom; a sensory journey of awareness, of noticing, while being supported energetically, physically, emotionally and spiritually by the Earthtribe and the facilitators of The Wisdom School. The Earth Ministry Program embraces the Sacred within all of existence, but with an understanding that this can only happen if we first and foremost connect to the Sacred within ourselves.

Bear Heart writes,

We are here to reflect the beauty of all of life - the beauty of the trees, the grass, the animals, the birds, the rivers as they flow by. All these may be lost in time. While we are still here, can we not appreciate and love the land, the environment, so that when we pass on, we will have left something solid and beautiful for those who are going to follow after us? (Bear Heart, 1996, p. 253)

He insists we must teach by being a living example.

Thus, the Earth Ministry Ordination Program we developed allows for the participant to become a "living example" of intimacy with Mother Earth. It is meant to be

³³⁸ Lalla, or Lalleshwari (1320-1392), also known locally as Lal Ded, was a Kashmiri mystic of the Kashmir Shaivism school of Hindu philosophy. She was the creator of the style of mystic poetry called vatsun or Vakhs, literally "speech."

a comprehensive, self-guided, in-depth study of Mother Earth energies and of the Sacred Spirit that pulsates through all things both animate and inanimate. Embracing myth, history, science, culture, ritual, ceremony, and place, this program intends to give the Earth Minister a voice through which Mother Earth's Spirit can speak. Its aim is to support the participant's natural curiosity and individual interest by allowing for a wide range of possibilities of study, assimilation, and expression.



Having completed my program at last, I traveled back to Texas once again for my Ordination with Will Star Heart on Beltane, May First of 2021. It was a moment I shall cherish forever, underneath the piñon pine trees with my wise and wonderful Elder welcoming me through ceremony into a new lineage: that of Earth Ministry, the first of its kind. Today, as I finish this dissertation and my Doctor of Ministry, I feel truly ready ~ I feel Mother Earth is truly ready ~ for me to begin my real work: that of helping others see and recognize her, our Mother, whose form is an expression of the Divine Feminine archetype and whose sacredness we all hold within us. May we all Love our Mother, and may this truly be our new story in all the years to come.

“Aho Blanco River! What message do you have for me?” I asked, sitting on the riverbank the morning of my departure. Snowy Egret, Blue Heron, Caracara and Mourning Dove came to listen to the answer. Crow family was there, laughing all the while. Gone were the old Grandmother Trees who had sacrificed themselves in the flood, having thrown themselves across the rising waters to save their children and grandchildren along the banks. Sitting there on that misty Sunday morning, I could feel these younger trees were healing us even as they healed themselves...through their soil,

their branches, through their bark, through their slow heartbeat and vibration, through their spirits which are bigger than life.

River answered my question, “It is through the Feminine that we can carve a new channel, a way of being and living in reverence to the Great Mystery. Although sometimes, Jen, your passionate waters rise quickly and can be overpowering. Drink instead from the quiet teachings of the Sacred Well, for she draws worshipers by the thousands with her gentle giving. Be this.

“You must practice and show others what deep embodied awareness is; how to listen with your soul. Continue to develop your ritual practice, mentor others in the eco-field. Continue to build your community of co-creators that revere the Mother. Remember the gift of spaciousness, and the importance not just of connection but of the richness of connecting one-on-one. Keep sending ripples of love outward. Water is life. And the Divine Mother is the primordial ocean which will carry us all to a new and harmonious way of living on this beautiful planet.”



*The soul is new, the moon is new,
The mother waters are eternally renewing.
Since I rinsed my mind and body in the rain of I Am That
I, Lalla, am eternally new.
~ Lalla (14th century; 2020)*

Just as the moon completes one phase and begins another in an eternal cycle of renewal, so too this chapter of my life comes to a close; but I begin anew, with fresh insights, wisdom, clarity and purpose about what I must do to help our planet, however

small a part, as a recently ordained Earth Minister. Humanity is preparing itself for its next revolution as well, with the potential of embracing the best of our mystical past and the sciences of today, and with the knowledge of what might be possible if we allow the Great Mother to take our hands. Even as one tale ends, so too a new story begins, another circle around the spiral, the old Grandmother spinning her yarns of the Great Mystery to the children who create and recreate her, shapeshifting in whatever form is needed to keep the balance of the cosmos. Here in New England, Winter is turning to Spring, as it always does; the ice is melting, and the rivers are beginning to sing their sweet song again. Long dormant, they now reach out across the ages, carving new channels with a serpentine dance of remembering, of healing, of interconnection, of reverence, of aliveness. The Mother Waters carry us on her currents; we surrender, making our way to the infinite sea of awakening at long last.

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