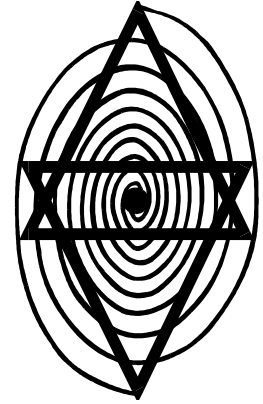


BEYOND WICCA
JOURNEY TO THE ONE
The Dark Goddesses



A favorite subject of this humble author is a study of the Dark Goddesses of which my own personal favorite is Kali. Quite some time ago I turned my life over to Kali and the turmoil that resulted was quite extensive, but she cleans house, she gets rid of what you don't need. Notice, I said *don't need* not *don't want*, big difference. It's kind of like having a stranger come into your house to clean your closet. Your favorite blue sweater may be thrown away, you don't really need those old, comfortable sneakers that smelled to high heaven! You call her in, you take those chances. You will emerge from the experience in a simpler, cleaner way of life, but probably without lots of old comfortable *stuff* you've hung on to for a lifetime. She strips away all that is not Divine. Let's even say that again: **She strips away all that is not Divine!** The results may not be anything like you envisioned when you called upon Her, but they will what She wants them to be and you will be a better person.

This is a tough decision to make, I know, I made it! I've also watched several other people go through the Kali *cleaning* process and it wasn't extremely pleasant for any of them, but they emerged from a tunnel of despair into a fresh, bright light. You don't even think of doing this unless you're ready for change, drastic change!



**Here's what one very understanding lady wrote for her
Dark Goddess web page from the Internet:**

Are you sick of New Age-ers who portray the Goddess as a cosmic Barbie doll, all sweetness and light?

I am.

Okay, sometimes the Goddess does look that way. But She's also embodied in the hurricane, the earthquake, the Ebola virus, and the maggot, just as much as She is in the newborn fawn, the virgin forest, the lover or loving mother.

For male-dominated religions like Christianity, Her dark side is also embodied in women's power to say *No*, a power women need to reclaim.

"The possibility of a future true morality is contained not in the fear of God, but in the still unknown meanings of the old, grim Goddess who represented fear itself. She is the one we most need to understand: not the pretty Virgin; not the fecund Mother; but the wise, willful, wolfish Crone." -- Barbara Walker, *The Crone: Woman of Age, Wisdom and Power*.

More from an introduction to the Dark Goddesses on the Internet

I've always had a bent toward the "dark-hued," though I'm much too old to be considered a goth. I gravitate toward darkness, violence, morbidity, along with hard-edged philosophy.

At times I've been so disgusted with sweetness-and-light Goddess-worshippers that I've considered forming a coven named "the Negative, Unhappy, Man-Hating Castrating Feminist Bitches Coven."

Witchcraft and NeoPaganism, I felt, desperately needed to confront reality and stop being an escape from it.

An aspect of Christianity I have always despised is its false comfort in the promise of an eternal afterlife of joy (or punishment). Its message is that death means nothing and is not to be mourned.

In the wake of the death of a beloved pet, though, it was brought home to me why people want to believe in Heaven. It would have been comforting indeed to believe that I would see her again in the next life. But the bitter fact remains that I have no real way of knowing if that's true. Whatever happens after death, the hard truth is that I will never see her again in this life -- and one day I, too, will die.

If Wicca and Neo-Paganism are to be any more realistic and positive than Christianity, they must face the fact of death, destruction and fear frankly. They must have symbols of the fact that dreadful things do happen, even to good people, and that, though we work to minimize it, we must learn to accept the darkness as part of life, just as we accept joy and life itself.

One way humans have been able to accept the unpleasant things in life is by creating deities that symbolize them, then acknowledging their cruel power by worshipping them.

We are, I hope, too sophisticated to believe these goddesses existed before we did, outside our minds; but by thinking on them, and perhaps paying homage to them through meditation and ritual, we may be able to accept what they represent as a part of the universe.

So let's proceed on this pathway of the Dark Goddesses by an simple, rather passive introduction to Kali from the Internet by Sister Nivedita

The soul that worships becomes always a little child: the soul that becomes a child finds God oftenest as mother. In a meditation before the Blessed Sacrament, some pen has written the exquisite assurance: "My child, you need not know much in order to please Me. Only Love Me dearly. Speak to me, as you would talk to your mother, if she had taken you in her arms."

It is in India that this thought of the mother has been realized in its completeness. In that country where the image of Kali is one of the most popular symbols of deity, it is quite customary to speak of God, as "She," and the direct address then offered is simply "Mother."

But under what strange guise! In the West, art and poetry have been exhausted to associate all that is tender and precious with this thought of worship of a female deity. The mother plays with the little One, or caresses or nurses Him. Sometimes she even makes her arm a throne, whereon He sits to bless the world.

In the East the accepted symbol for Kali is of a woman nude, with flowing hair, so dark a blue that She appears in color to be black, four-handed, two hands in the act of blessing and two holding a sword and a bleeding head, garlanded with skulls, and dancing, with protruding tongue, on the prostrate figure of a man all white with ashes.

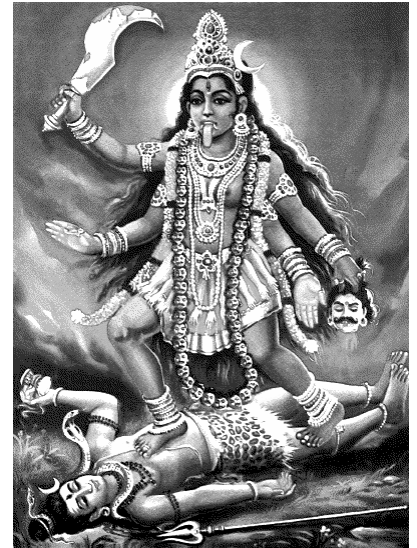
A terrible, an extraordinary figure! Those who call it horrible may well be forgiven. They pass only through the outer court of the temple. They are not arrived where the Mother's voice can reach them. This, in its own way, is well.

Yet, this image, so fearful to the western mind, is perhaps dearer than any other to the heart of India. It is not, indeed, the only form in which the Divine Energy presents Herself to Her worshippers. To the Sikh, She is absorbed, embodied in his sword; all women, especially as children, are Her incarnations; glorious Sita carries the great reality to many.

But Kali comes closer to us than these. Others we admire; others we love; to Her we belong. Whether we know it or not, we are Her children, playing round Her knees. Life is but a game of hide-and-seek with Her, and if, in its course, we chance to touch Her feet, who can measure the shock of the divine energy that enters into us? Who can utter the rapture of our cry of "Mother?"

Now, let's get a bit deeper into the aspects we're really here to talk about. Here's a writing that's harsh, REALLY HARSH, but it does give you a hint of what the destructive power of Kali is really all about.

- I am going to burn down the world
- I am going to tear down everything that cannot stand alone
- I am going to turn ideals to shit
- I am going to shove hope up your ass
- I am going to reduce everything that stands to rubble
- And then I am going to burn the rubble
- And then I am going to scatter the ashes
- And then maybe SOMEONE will be able to see SOMETHING as it really is
- WATCH OUT -- Mel Lyman



Some may find this extremely disrespectful to the primary Mother Goddess to millions of Hindus, but it conveys the message of what facing Kali's destructive power can really feel like!

Kali is the most fully realized of all the Dark Goddesses. Her name is derived from the Hindu word for Time, yet also means "black." She is also called Durga, although that is usually in a more passive, motherly phase than we're going into right now.

Her very appearance is meant to terrify. She is very dark blue or black, sometimes with fangs and claws. She wears a girdle of severed arms, a necklace of skulls or severed heads, earrings of children's corpses, cobras as bracelets or garlands. Her mouth is blood-smeared. She is often shown standing or dancing on Her husband, the god Shiva.

Our favorite vision of Kali is that of slaying the demons, such as represented by the picture above. The legend goes that, a long, long time ago, the demons, led by their terrifying king, were going to take over from the Gods and Goddesses. The strongest of the gods conjured up Kali by projecting beams of light from their foreheads. She began her dance of death, slaying demons right and left with her fearful weapons. The king of the demons presented a particularly difficult problem though. Anytime his blood dripped on the ground, another demon was born out of each drop. Kali finally held him up over her head, severed his head and drank all the blood that flowed from the body without spilling a drop on the ground. That's why Her mouth is often shown with dripping blood.

Gruesome yes, but, really, what mother won't go through something like this for her children? Be honest about this. Is Kali really that bad after all?

The demons has been slain, but She kept up her dance even continuing to slash at the already dead demons, all resemblance of control seeming to be lost. Shiva, known in the legend as Her loving husband, smeared His body with white ash to resemble the dead and went into the field and laid down with them. Kali came upon Him, placed her foot on Him, ready to slash again, then recognized Him. Her mouth was open, tongue sticking out, a typical reaction to surprise by Hindu women, She stopped Her dance, stopped by the love for Her husband, Shiva. Destruction, love, are they related? Love can conquer all!

Yet Kali is not always dark. She also is a loving mother, and especially in that aspect is worshipped by millions of Hindus.

Used to a God that is all *good*, Westerners have found it difficult to understand why Hindus would worship such a deity, or why their art emphasizes Her most hideous forms. But:

"Tantric worshippers of Kali thought it essential to face her Curse, the terror of death, as willingly as they accepted Blessings from her beautiful, nurturing, maternal aspect. For them, wisdom meant learning that no coin has only one side: as death can't exist without life, so also life can't exist without death. Kali's sages communed with her in the grisly atmosphere of the cremation ground, to become familiar with images of death. They said, 'His Goddess, his loving Mother in time, who gives him birth and loves him in the flesh, also destroys him in the flesh. His image of Her is incomplete if he does not know Her as his tearer and devourer.'" Barbara Walker, *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*.

As we said earlier, She will change things, She will take away all that is not Divine. Are you ready for such a change?

Let's take a look at a few other Dark Goddesses, not quite so gruesome as Kali, but still dark in many aspects. We can learn from all the legends so let's take a look at Artemis.

As Wiccans, we know that *No* means No and not Maybe. Well, Artemis really takes this seriously!



Artemis was adamant that She could never be seen by a man, even by male worshippers. The penalty for glimpsing Her was death.

The hunter Actaeon discovered the Goddess bathing naked in a stream. Accounts differ as to whether he meant to ogle Her or simply came upon Her by accident. With a single word and gesture, the enraged Goddess turned him into a stag. His own hounds tore him to pieces while She watched.

Artemis did often kill the forest animals. She also protected, like many another Goddess, but She not only protected life, She also took it away. With Her nymphs and hounds She would often hunt in the deepest wilderness, slaughtering stags and lions.

"The summits of the high mountains tremble, and the shady forest holds the frightened cries of the beasts of the woods; the earth trembles, as well as the seas, filled with fish. The goddess of the valiant heart springs forth on all sides, and sows death among the race of wild animals." -- "To Artemis (II)," *The Homeric Hymns*, translation by Apostolos N. Athanassakis

Artemis was even associated with human sacrifice in some legends. Euripides wrote two versions of the sacrifice of the maiden Iphigenia, placing it in comfortably distant times. In one version, Iphigenia went gladly to her death; in the other, she did not. As the sacrificial knife plunged toward her, she vanished, and a mountain deer appeared on the altar and was stabbed in her place. Then she was transported by Artemis to a mystic island of women, who sacrificed all men who came upon its shores, and lived out her life there.

Women in labor might pray to Her for death, and She often answered such prayers. The deaths of adolescent girls in childbirth were attributed to Her.

Pleasant reading for men, probably not, but we've got to understand the Dark Goddesses in all their many different concepts. Look at the myth of Demeter and Persephone, not too dark a tale, but connected with the underworld and its associated dark powers.

"Go and see -- that transcendent beauty frozen in the breath of the other world; those lips that have answered the embrace of the King of the Dead; and feel the glance of the eyes which have taken in what no one living sees."

Three Essays on Religion and Thought in Magna Graecia, Gunther Zuntz

Persephone, also known as Kore to the Greeks or still known as Proserpina to the Strega, is known alternately as the goddess of new, growing things, or as a terrible goddess of the dead. The daughter of Demeter (Earth) and Zeus (Sky), she has over time developed many aspects.

Persephone and Kore were originally separate, distinct figures in the Greek pantheon. Kore, *girl* or *maiden* is described as a young, beautiful girl, and Persephone, meaning *she who destroys the light*, as a dark, brooding woman of terrifying aspect, almost akin to Kali. Late in the evolution of the Greek pantheon the two aspects were combined into the fair, sad figure of a woman so well known in romantic poetry and art.

As the classical story goes, Persephone was out gathering flowers in a meadow when she is seen by Hades, god of the underworld. Smitten by her beauty, he seizes her just as she is plucking a narcissus, and carries her off into the earth.

The Guardian of the Gate challenged Her, and She stripped Herself of all the clothing and jewels She wore, for nothing may be brought into that land. For love, She was bound as all who enter there must be and brought before Death Himself.

Her mother, Demeter, stricken by her loss, abandons her divine duties in the search for her missing daughter, and the earth falls barren. Fruit withers on the trees, green leaves turn and fall, and the animals either die or fall into hibernation. This continues until Demeter pleads to Zeus, he intervenes, and demands the return of Persephone to her mother unless she had, by some word or deed, consented to her abduction.

During her brief stay in the underworld Persephone eats of a pomegranate and, wittingly or not, commits herself. For as many seeds as she has eaten, she is compelled to spend an equal number of months each year with her new mate in his dark realm. The months of her absence from the earth mark the winter season as her mother falls into a deep, seasonal grief.

...when the earth falls into darkness and cold, it is said that the Goddess spends this time in the Kingdom of Death. For in love She ever seeks Her other Self, and walks a part of Her cycle in the shadows.



Hades loved Her, as He forever would, and knelt at Her feet. He lay His sword and crown there, stood, and kissed Her, saying:

"Do not return to the living world, but stay here with Me, and have peace and rest and comfort. It is the fate of all that lives to die. Everything passes, everything fades into the darkness. I bring comfort and consolation to all who pass the gates. But You are my heart's desire...return not, but stay here with Me."

She smiled Her dark, lovely smile, took up His crown and placed it upon Her own head, saying:

"Here is the circle of rebirth. Through You all passes out of life, and through Myself all may be born again. Even death is not eternal...Mine is the mystery of the dark womb, that is the cauldron of rebirth. Enter into Me and know Me, and You will be free of all fear. For as life is but a journey into death, so death is but a passage back to life, and in Me the circle is ever turning."

In love, He entered into Her, and so was reborn into life. As He is known as Lord of Shadows, the comforter, consoler, the opener of gates, the eternal King....so She is the Rose in the Darkness, the deep abiding mother; from Her all things proceed, and to Her they return again. In Her are the mysteries of death, of birth, and the fulfillment of all love.

Persephone as the maiden is symbolic of youth, beauty, fertility and desire. The story of her seduction is also the story of transition from "girlhood" into "womanhood."

The union of Persephone and Hades is a wedding of life/death, consummated (interestingly enough) by the eating of seeds grown in darkness.

Hecate is often associated with the Persephone myth, so here's a little bit on Her



Once a fairly benign goddess in early Greek times, Hecate became the dread Greek-Roman Goddess of ghosts, a close confidante of Persephone and a patron of witches, often portrayed as a triple-faced Goddess, representing the maiden, mother and crone and the three phases of the moon. She is a one of the mightiest witches ever. She is often described as inhabiting the heavens, earth and the Underworld, thus having complete access to our collective unconscious.

Hecate was worshipped at three-way crossroads at night even by ordinary Greek families and could ward off ghosts if properly propitiated. But Romans also believed She had more sinister worshippers -- the witches and sorceresses who could coerce even the gods to do their will.

When Persephone was kidnapped by Hades in the later Greek myth, far-seeing Hecate was the only one who witnessed it. Some myths also say she was there by Demeter's side to congratulate her when Persephone returned from the underworld.

Before we wind up this fascinating stop along the way in the Journey to the One, we need to take a look at what, supposedly, would be the earliest of the Dark Goddesses to exist, Lilith.

Lilith is most well-known as the demoness/goddess who was the first woman, created by god at the same time as Adam, unlike Eve who was created from Adam's rib. Lilith, like Adam, had been created from the dust (Adamah) of the earth. But as soon as she had joined Adam they began to quarrel, each refusing to be subservient and submissive to the other. "I am your lord and master," spoke Adam, "and it is your duty to obey me." But Lilith replied: "We are both equal, for we are both

issued from dust (Adamah), and I will not be submissive to you." And thus they quarreled and none would give in. And when Lilith saw this she spoke the Ineffable Name of the Creator and soared up into the air. Since Lilith refused to submit to Adam's will and left the garden of Eden and was subsequently cursed by God, according to popular opinion, this tale is "evidence" that she was originally a goddess or at the very least an aspect of the great goddess and was demonized for being an independent female.



I think you're getting a bit more of an idea now about the Dark Goddesses. Here's a look at a modern definition we can learn from that could apply to the Dark Goddesses of old.

Bitchy adj : having the threatening characteristics of a female canine (a wolf, dingo, coyote, wild dog, fox) applied esp. to a woman who is active, direct, blunt, obnoxious, competent, loud-mouthed, independent, stubborn, demanding, achieving, overwhelming, Lusty, strong-minded, scary, ambitious, tough, brassy, boisterous, turbulent, sprawling, strident, striding, and large (physically and/or psychically). *Websters' First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language*

Bitches are good examples of how women can be strong enough to survive even the rigid, punitive socialization of our society. As young girls it never quite penetrated their consciousness that women were supposed to be inferior to men in any but the mother/helpmate role. They asserted themselves as children and never really internalized the slave style of wheedling and cajolery which is called feminine....All Bitches refused, in mind and spirit, to conform to the idea that there were limits on what they could be and do. -- Joreen, *The Bitch Manifesto*

Isn't it odd how men think they're insulting a woman by calling her a "bitch"? But why men fear *bitches* may have more to do with a dim memory of the association of many death-dealing goddesses with hounds, such as Artemis, Hecate and Hel. To this day, much folklore associates dogs with death.

"According to the Vedic tradition, the Bitch-goddess Sarama was the mistress of the death dogs, and a divine huntress like Artemis, Diana, Anath and other western versions of the lunar maiden." -- Barbara Walker, *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Legends*.

So our modern term *Bitch* really isn't so bad after all. This completely, wholeheartedly happily male Editor loves every one of them. All the Bitches he's known and loved have actually brought tremendous understanding and happiness into his life.

Before we leave this often misunderstood of Dark Goddesses (and Bitches) let's take one last look at the subject - - - - -

I'm the bitch from hell.
I think you know me well.
I am the dark goddess
Kali, Hecate, Medusa, Lilith, Ereshkigal.



These faces of the feminine are much less easily acceptable than those of Aphrodite the Goddess of Love or Demeter the Great Mother. But it is in the energy of the dark goddesses that a vast store of feminine power lies.

The dark goddess lives in us all. Often suppressed and denied she will eventually leak out in hostility and sarcasm, with sly cutting digs, nagging, gossip and put downs. She reveals herself at her most ugly in our closest relationships. Liz Taylor in "Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolfe" plays her out admirably. Jung calls her the 'animus suppressed'. She is everything that nice girls are not. Suppressed too far she turns her destructive energy inwards and creates depression and disease.

The energy of the dark goddess brews and bubbles in the belly. Suppressing her simply adds bite to her words when they do manage to escape. If the energy of fermentation in a bottle of rich wine starts to become more than the cork can contain the wine will ooze out. If we ignore this and shove the cork back down harder the build up will become greater and next time the leaks will become spurts. Finally the pressure will shoot the cork off completely and the precious liquid will be lost. This is the path of denial, of refusing to acknowledge the truth that needs to be spoken. The alternative is to appreciate that bottle, to nurture the rich gift that is brewing, turn it and tend to it and to choose when the cork should be removed and the sweet dark flavor be offered to the world.

Accepted and celebrated the dark goddesses give us the strength to overcome the fear of rejection and to dare to stand in our truth and tell it how we see it. This is an enormously empowering experience.

"As women it is our task to preserve the balance. Sometimes we can't, but we have to try. The earth, our mother, is sick and may die because we haven't tried hard enough. Men rule us because they are willing to be violent. They are too stupid to realize that our capacity to be violent exceeds theirs. Women have to stop being afraid of that potential, and learn instead to exercise it with wisdom and justice.

"Pat Califia, Doc and Fluff