

MAGDALENE CHRISTIANITY



*The
Rhythms
of the
Goddess*

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THE RHYTHMS OF THE GODDESS

Nature's rhythms and sacred number

The Great Goddess is not the physical earth but its ancient spirit and the beingness and primordial ground in which the forms of the earth are fashioned. She is one and is the womb of all goddesses.

The *White Goddess* by Robert Graves is a classic work on mythology and the poetic muse. He described it as 'a historical grammar of the language of poetic myth' that he hoped would restore a magical poetic language once intimately bound up with ritual. His central theory involved the concept of a single goddess who, although known under many names and with different functions, was an expression of a universal religion long predating patriarchal forms. *The White Goddess* is explorative rather than academic, and it sits way outside orthodoxy, yet its powerful ideas set in motion modern studies of the ancient matriarchy.

Graves' exposition involves the rhythms of nature and sacred number and the essential expression of the goddess as rhythmic and cyclical. In the solar calendar her number was thirteen for the number of moon cycles as the sun moved through the zodiac. In this way the goddess ruled the pattern of nature's year and her weather-based seasons, which have been viewed as two, four or the six and seven marked by indigenous Australian peoples.

In the lunar calendar fifteen or 3×5 ruled because the full moon falls on the fifteenth day of lunation. The moon's phases of waxing, full and waning became an image of the threefold goddess related to the emerging, fullness and dying rhythms in the living world and to a woman's menstrual cycle. The phases connected especially with the life cycle of female fertility – virginity, full blooming and fading.

Threefoldness is portrayed in various forms down the ages and the Celtic spiral and the triskele or triskelion remain popular decorative motifs today, from earrings to tattoos.

In the ancient world the symbolism of three was widely represented and highly significant. The picture on the left, below shows a triple spiral petroglyph (carving in stone) from Bronze Age Ireland. As well it could decorate useful objects as in the archaic Greek jug with triskelion motif.



Three-fold Goddess

Three represents the beingness of the awesome triple goddess as guardian of birth, love and preparation for death. She is also commonly described in her roles as maiden, woman-mother and crone or grandmother.

Although not always so obviously related to the moon, the triple goddess was widespread in religions. Irish Brigit is a triune goddess, an example of three in one. Lakshmi, Saraswati and Parvati form a divine Hindu trinity. Hathor, Nephthys and Isis an Egyptian one. The three Matres were worshipped throughout Celtic Gaul. Hebe, Hera and Hecate formed a trinity in Greece while the rites of Kore, Demeter and Hecate were celebrated in the mysteries at Eleusis. The Horae and Graces are threefold. The Greek Fates and the Norns of the Norse myths who ruled the destinies of humans and gods are portrayed as three women weaving the threads of life.



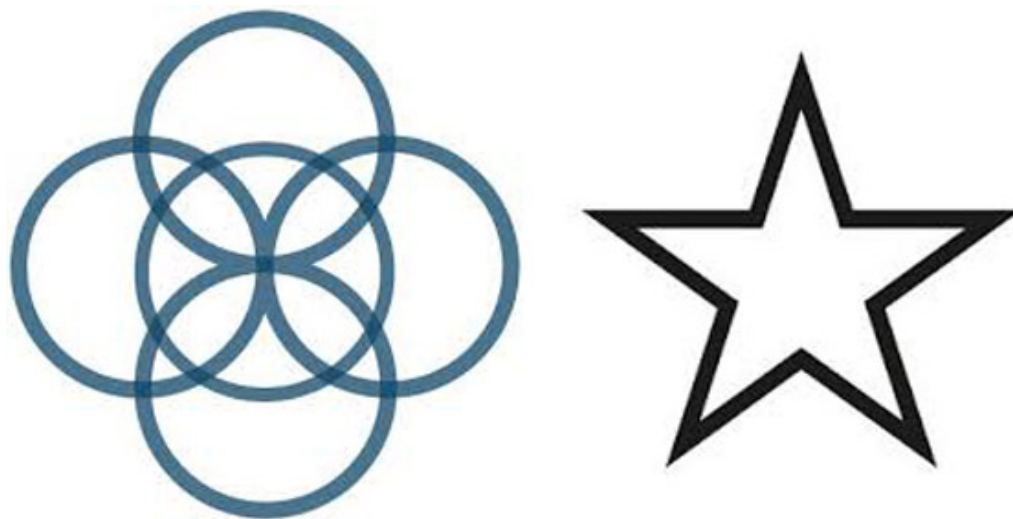
Medieval tapestry of the Fates, also depicting the three stages of the goddess

The threefold goddess archetype is active in the lives of women. Her power is active in many images of Mary Magdalene because we remember her inner authority. Sometimes seated at the feet of Jesus Christ she is open-hearted and eager to learn – the maiden, ready to bloom like the buds of spring. She is portrayed as sacred wife united with her divine lover and revered as the bounteous mother with all nature as her children. And she is revealed in the crone aspect, ancient Wisdom, all knowing, all wise Mary.

Five-fold Goddess

Five is the number of the human being, the ‘handy’ five-fingered being, maker and creator throughout life on earth.

The earthy symbol of five appears in many guises. Below are two. The Celtic symbol of five depicts nature’s fourfold elements, earth, air, fire and water, interlocking with the fifth (the etheric). The pentagon, a five-pointed star today signifies fame or celebrity, with its origin in the archetypal and stylized form of the standing human being, legs apart, arms extended and the head above, making five points. Its relevance goes way back. In ancient Egypt it marked the guidance on earth by Sirius the brightest and most important star. And it has been taken up today as the pentagram (with intersecting lines showing) a sign connected with Wicca and the restoration of lost female rites.



Five relates to the five stations of the goddess directly linked to human life – birth, initiation (entry into woman- or manhood), consummation (sex, marriage, bonds of love), repose (the time of wisdom, knowledge, reflection and vision) and death, which leads to the return and rebirth. Each station had its sacred places and ritual significance. Each also involved responsibilities and privileges. Knowing the purpose of these enabled a person to connect fruitfully to the world around, to the community and to life beyond the physical. That is why they remain relevant.

Hebe, Maia, Persephone, Aphrodite, Inanna, Ishtar, Parvati, Hathor, Bastet, Isis, Hekhmah, Athena, Tara, Ceridwen, the Morrigan, Erishkigal and Nephthys. These and countless other goddesses world-wide guarded the five stations, with many having more than one sacred role.

In ancient times wise women acted as guides and mentors in the keeping of the rites and the sacred places. Only the initiation of young males into adulthood was in the hands of men.

Losing the rites of the goddess and her power

Mary Magdalene lived in the first century when patriarchal cultures and religions dominated. Women remained in charge of some events – birth remained a female domain, as did some rites around death. In ‘repose’, the age of wisdom, women had a place including in the Temple. Men, including the elderly, however, had all the worldly power. Sex and marriage was controlled by men. And on her entry into womanhood, every month a woman became ‘unclean’ and was isolated from society.

Today we are bereft of life mysteries and women and men have suffered because of this. We mark the stations of life that were once profound mysteries through the prism of dis-ease and discomfort. Birth is increasingly placed in the hands of medical clinicians. Forgotten is the spirit-earth connection telling us that human procreation is a microcosm of divine Creation. Death is quickly shunted off to professionals in funeral parlours.

For young males without the formal initiatory rites of passage, entrance into adulthood is often associated with pumped up but directionless aggression. As for females, too long has menstruation begun ‘the curse’ that only ends with menopause, and that relegates women to the burden of useless old age, respected only if someone has achieved worldly status – but this status mostly pertains to men. ‘Crone’ has become a term of derision; ‘hag’ derived from *hagia*, ‘holy’ is even more insulting.

For many women sex, love and marriage do fulfil dreams. More often the whole process is fraught through unrealistic fantasy expectations of ‘happy ever after’ or a redundant concept of male ownership that results in daily media reports of domestic abuse.

The Songs of the Goddess - an imaginative reconstruction

In my novel *Marriages of the Magdalene*, I took up the theme of the rhythm of the goddess, amalgamating her three and five stations. Mary Magdalene’s female mentors take her on a journey to the five ancient sanctuaries of female mysteries, memories of which were held in women’s secret lore.

Tree lore was the key to Graves’ work, and he called on trees of the Celtic lands to explore their language and symbolic meaning. Trees in different lands will

have their own significance. I focused on Palestine's indigenous trees, the trees of the Bible. Through these I could investigate and imagine the matriarchal undercurrent hidden behind the patriarchal stories of biblical sites.

These are the five trees of Canaan related to five ancient mystery sites:

- The Palm and the birth mysteries of Jericho
- The Tamarisk and the Wisdom mysteries of life by the deep wells of Beersheba
- The Olive and the mysteries of sex, love and marriage celebrated at Jerusalem
- The Tabor Oak and the prophetic mysteries of far-seeing at ancient Shechem
- The Acacia and the death mysteries of Hebron

I drew my versions of ancient forgotten rites from imagination – or perhaps memory. I was conscious too that in the light of the Christ event, the goddess must emerge again, and is emerging, yet we need to renew the mysteries in a form that reflects the soul's striving towards spiritual individuality that lives beyond the limits of gender.

We acknowledge our humanity when we return to the goddess through our newly won individual consciousness, because we are both male and female and will experience both over the course of our incarnations.

When we reclaim the three and five stages of the goddess for Mary, we do this for all women and all men. It will be wonderful when we mark the important milestones of life again with an acknowledgement of their spiritual purpose – our birth into this world, which is indeed a school of life and learning; our first steps into adulthood that bring hope of loving fruitful partnerships as echoes of divine love; the quest in maturity for inner wisdom and true vision; and the great transition marked by our death, thus to journey again through the spiritual realms.

The Songs of the Goddess came to me as a kind of poetic summation of Mary Magdalene's experiences. Songs like these may have once been sung in women's secret mysteries. They also attune us to the living world around us – the kind of empathy desperately needed today when we are abandoning Mother Nature, or at best barely hear as she calls us, surrounded as we are by noise and concrete and metal.

Truly, the rhythms of goddess belong to us all. And above all we need to recognise that the three and the five are one. The goddesses are like the petals of a flower, part of a beautiful unity. There is always unity in spirit.

Let us sing again the Songs of the Five Trees.

Five Songs of the Trees



The Date Palms at Jericho



Jericho perfumed by jasmine and balm,
Is older than mankind can know.
Here sat the Bee Queen looking over her hive
In this sanctuary named for the Moon.

Here sat the Bee Queen, known as Deborah
Beneath Tamar, the birth tree, the palm,
With sun-like fronds arched above honey-sweet dates
In Jericho, named for the Moon.

She taught the deep mystery of souls coming in:
The descent from their bright spirit home
To the body in which they will dwell on this earth –
In our sacred place named for the Moon.

Men conquered the city and turned it to greed.
Yet with wonder we speak of this still –
Of the new life in us. May we never forget
Our sweet Jericho named for the Moon.

The Tamarisk at the Wells of Beer-Sheba



Wisdom commissioned the wells,
The seven ancient wells of Beer-Sheba,
To be dug in the desert's wide grandeur
As entry to her Books of Nature.

To Solomon she whispered her secrets,
And by Wisdom, he heard all she told
When she opened her waters of blessing.
Then come now, consider the wells.

The Queen of the South tends her tamarisk;
In its flowers yellow butterflies linger.
They are souls, and she hears their heart yearning;
She knows them and loves what is true.

She calls you to ponder the wells,
The seven ancient wells of Beer-Sheba;

Their cool waters hidden from seeing
Like the seven wells deep in your being –

They swirl with a chaos of currents
That by Wisdom are calmed and aligned.
In stillness, souls find understanding.
So come now, consider the wells.

The Blessing of the Olive Tree in the City of Peace



On Jerusalem's hills with a valley between
See there the sanctuaries of wonder and peace.
Long before blood was shed, and lives sacrificed,
On a plateau below, only Nature's fine fruits
Were set down as a sacred love offering.

On one hill, midst olive groves bathed in soft moonlight
The Priestess-Queen waited in her gown pale as snow.
On the other hill, rocky and brightened by sunlight
Priest-King, in robes of the warmest blood hue,
Walked resplendent there, even in shadow.

In the valley, the threshing floor rang loud with singing
Of people bringing in all the harvested grain
For threshing and grinding, to prepare with hearts longing
For the bread-baking day, and the glorious rite –
Look now, for no creature was slain.

The shining Queen descended to the plateau below her,
Bearing oil pressed from olives plucked ripe from her tree.
And the King made the journey down dry stony pathways,
Bringing good wine fermented from grapes of the vine,
Transformed to full sweet potency.

The King and Queen met, and the people sang louder,
For all had come gladly to celebrate love;
Through the royal sacred marriage, and a mystery unfolding,
You would see sun and moon join as one in a dance –
A vision in the heavens above.

As priestess, the Queen then anointed her Priest-King;
She blessed him with oil from her holiest tree.

Many lovers' hearts opened in the peace of that evening,
And souls wracked by conflict, as they shared bread wine,
Found quiet and inward unity –

O, that Jerusalem's hills with a valley between
Would again become sanctuaries of wonder and peace.
When no more blood is shed, no lives sacrificed,
Then the whole land will sing, and Nature's fine fruits
We shall know as love's sacred peace offering.

The Oaks of Shechem



Tree lore gives expression to the spirit of Wisdom
Weaving into creation,
As it was from the beginning of the world.

I will sing to you now of the tall oaks of Shechem,
Where the Queen once walked lightly
Through her sacred oak grove.

In the place of far-seeing
Her eyes opened to vision
And she spoke out of what was to come.
Be patient Beloved and feel her sad longing.
Even now hear her speaking
In her sacred oak grove:

‘When the Sun Being shines brightly
It will wake the old goddess
To be known in a glorious new form.

‘In the age of renewal when the lost is restored,
The torn apart mended,
The divided re-joined,
We shall know her within us
As a pure light emerging
In our soul – neither female nor male.’

For the day is now near; let us sing with the cosmos
Weaving into creation
As it was in the beginning of the world.

The Acacia of Hebron



Whose tree is acacia
With its red wood for coffins?
It's the Crone Queen at Hebron,
Waiting in her night cave.

She sings out a Mystery
At the time of your dying.
When you stand at the threshold,
She will call you within.

Bravely enter the darkness.
She will wrap her arms around you
And mother-like, whisper,
Death is never an end –

Does not the caterpillar enter the darkness to emerge a
gloriously robed butterfly?
Do not the bare winter branches bring forth leaves, buds,
and flowers each in their time?

Your death is but transition,
Perhaps revelation.
Fear not, and go, then
When the dark Crone Queen calls.