

Who is (the) Goddess?

- The Goddess is Life Itself in all its many permutations.
- The Goddess is incarnate in and as the body of the earth (and of the entire cosmos).
- The Goddess lives in YOU!

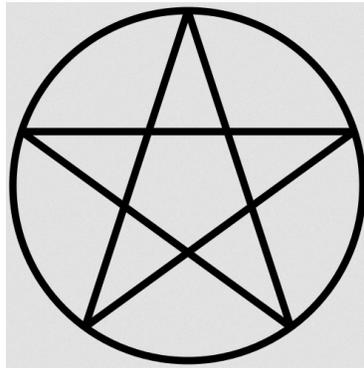
Pause for a moment to reflect on these three statements. The Goddess is not an alien or distant being who rules over humanity from afar. (S)he exists within and as you while also extending so far beyond what your mind could even begin to fathom.

It is extraordinarily challenging to define the Goddess because the contemporary Goddess Spirituality movement encourages individuals to trust their own innate sense of truth and wisdom. As such, the movement resists making dogmatic statements which would define but also constrain its wisdom. Each individual on a Goddess path determines their own unique relationship to the divinity that permeates their entire being without needing to rely on external authorities to dictate how they can relate to them/Her. **In other words, you ARE your own ultimate authority**, spiritually and otherwise... Goddess empowers all of Her human (and non-human) forms to learn to trust their own instinctual wisdom, embodied knowledge, and intuitions about the nature of life and their role in the universe. That said, Goddess also promotes critical thinking and discernment when it comes to determining what is true and what's false. In other words, each person is their own ultimate spiritual authority, but this doesn't mean that anything goes, that facts are not real, or that science is not to be trusted. In keeping with this tradition which celebrates [gnosis](#) (see **point #5**, below), **The Goddess Foundation** exists as a comprehensive resource of information available to anyone interested in exploring the Goddess from within, but it does not promote any rigid dogmatic statements or strict means of engaging with the divine.

Check out **The Goddess Foundation's** [Youtube channel](#) for an introductory video series ([coming soon](#)) featuring interviews with a range of modern Goddess scholars, devotées, and/or practitioners as they define Goddess and their relationship to Her on their own terms.

Below is my own (Courtney Kleftis') personal framework for understanding Goddess and Goddess spirituality. Feel free to take what resonates and leave the rest as you develop your own cosmological vision.

Defining Goddess: The Pentacle Model



[Image Source](#)

The pentacle (pentagram or five-pointed star enclosed in a circle) is a symbol widely used in modern Witchcraft traditions, especially Gardnerian Wicca. I have adopted - and adapted - it for my own purpose of understanding the many different facets of the Goddess (narrowed down to five key tenets):

1. Immanence (The God/dess Self within, the *Daimon*, or the “Divine Double”)

The Goddess exists outside of incarnate/embodied life (is a transcendent force), however, all of life is considered an extension of Her body and as such she is also immanent in manifest creation. Immanence teaches that the divine exists here and now in the material world rather than operating entirely outside of it from a distance.

Every living being carries within them a fragment of the Goddess whose being encompasses the entire universe. There are many spiritual traditions from across the globe that promote profound and intimate relationships between human individuals and their divine counterparts, sometimes known as guardian angels (i.e.: the *HGA* or *Holy Guardian Angel* of the Hermetic Magick tradition developed by magician, Aleister Crowley), *daimons* (not to be confused with “demons”), and even familiars (i.e.: a long-standing concept within European witchcraft traditions). The modern Goddess Spirituality tradition, as I envision it, encourages all of its practitioners to cultivate a deep and life-long relationship with their inner “divine double” - God/dess Self - through a range of diverse spiritual and soulful practices. In alignment with Goddess spirituality’s celebration of the body and sexuality, both often deemed taboo in mainstream society and dominant religious traditions, this relationship with the inner divine can be conceived of in explicitly erotic terms as a sort of sacred marriage, alchemical union, or *hieros gamos*. Click [here](#) for a brief introduction to the concept of the *hieros gamos* as an internal spiritual and sexual process of merging with the inner divine.

2. Animism & Pantheism (The World Is Alive and Ensouled)

3. Sacred Matter and *Mater* (Reclaiming the innate divinity of the body and sexuality)

The second and third points of this Goddess pentacle are inextricably linked. Animism and pantheism both teach that the entire world is alive and ensouled, from microscopic organisms to our entire solar system within the Milky Way galaxy.

The [Oxford English Dictionary](#) defines **animism** and **pantheism** as follows:

- **Animism:** “The attribution of life and personality (and sometimes a soul) to inanimate objects and natural phenomena” ([Source](#)).
- **Pantheism:** “A belief or philosophical theory that God [or Goddess] is immanent in or identical with the universe; the doctrine that God is everything and everything is God. Frequently with implications of nature worship or (in a weakened sense) love of nature” ([Source](#)).

Based on these interrelated concepts, Goddess-based spiritualities honor the innate divinity of the earth Herself, conceptualizing Her as the cosmic “Mother” (or *Mater* in Latin). In alignment with these values, Goddess traditions celebrate the innate divinity of the human body and sexuality (women’s bodies in particular). While the Goddess is celebrated in her form as primordial Mother of the entire cosmos, she is neither confined by nor reduced to this role as many critics of the Goddess movement mistakenly believe. Contrary to popular belief, Goddess Spirituality doesn’t promote an essentialist view of gender in which the assumed binary (male/female) reigns supreme and both women and men - neglecting those who do not identify with either gender - are assigned to carefully circumscribed roles based on their biological sex. Instead, Goddess Spirituality celebrates the many different - sometimes contradictory - facets of an all-encompassing deity of whom we (LIFE in the broadest sense) are all a part. In SUM, motherhood and maternal, nurturing qualities are just a tiny fraction of all that Goddess represents/embodyes and to claim otherwise does Her a massive disservice. These life-affirming beliefs and practices provide a much-needed antidote to millennia of both demonizing and dominating women, sexuality, and the body at the behest of the monotheistic sky god of the Abrahamic religions (i.e.: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam).*** In sum, the Goddess encourages all of Her many human followers to develop healthy relationships with both their physicality and sexuality through whatever means speak to them.

*** Please note that the Goddess can be found hidden in plain sight within the Abrahamic religions and neither She nor I (though I cannot speak for all Goddess followers) demonize these traditions. While it is true that the mainstream expressions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam promote dangerously patriarchal ideologies, this does not describe folk currents, lived experiences, or mystical veins of these traditions. Outside of church/synagogue and/or imam doctrines, many Abrahamic religious traditions celebrate the feminine or female face of god (i.e.: as the Shekinah in Judaism or Sophia/Hochmah - divine wisdom - in mystical and gnostic Christianities).

4. **“The Spiral Dance” (adopted from modern witch, [Starhawk](#)’s, vision of the eternally cyclical and spiralic nature of the evolution of the universe)**

All of life exists in an eternal state of becoming. In other words, there is no end goal and life doesn't evolve in a linear fashion from point A to point B. Life exists in the eternal NOW and the focus is neither on the future or the past, but rather on the present moment.

Goddess scholars such as the renowned Carol Christ (1945 - 2021) often identify Goddess as "She who changes." This is in alignment with [Process Theology](#), a religious theory discussed at length by mathematician-philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1861 -1947) which posits the notion that life (divinity incarnate) is eternal yet always changing. Unlike the omnipotent and omniscient sky god of the Abrahamic tradition(s), Goddess is neither a static nor an immutable entity. Since Goddess exists in and as all of life, She is constantly evolving via the inter-relationships between different faces, forms, and/or expressions of Herself.

From my perspective, process theology and Goddess Spirituality both illustrate the concept (as well as the [Reclaiming Witchcraft](#) ritual) of the "spiral dance" in which life exists in a constant state of flux, moving through a never-ending series of cycles in and out of existence (i.e.: from birth to death to rebirth, etc.). Unlike the Eastern traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism, albeit discussed here in extremely general and overly-simplistic terms, Goddess spirituality *celebrates* the cyclical nature of the universe rather than striving for "Enlightenment" and/or release from the cycle of (re)incarnation. While the many iterations of both Hinduism and Buddhism are extremely rich and call for a much deeper exploration than I can provide here, to my mind this general principle does exist as a means of distinguishing them from the extremely life-affirming modern Goddess Spirituality movement.

5. Gnosis and Experiential Knowledge (Trusting yourself as your own ultimate authority)

The final point of this Goddess Spirituality pentacle brings us full circle to the concept of immanence (see **point #1**, above). The Goddess often comes to Her human devotees through dreams and altered states of consciousness (i.e.: trance or meditation), in which they do not need to rely on external authorities to connect with the divine that resides within all of us. Unlike most organized religions which require interpretation or guidance from a religious intermediary such as a rabbi, priest, or pastor, the Goddess speaks directly to and through Her followers. Learning to communicate with the divine in both yourself and in the world around you is a highly individualized practice of gnosis or knowledge acquired through direct (embodied) experience.

Gnosis is compatible with intellectual/rational study (another means of achieving knowledge and/or wisdom); as such, Goddess encourages all of Her devotees to explore many different strands of earthly wisdom teachings. In other words, She promotes interfaith explorations and is not restricted to any one religious path or teaching. (For more about the contemporary interfaith movement, see the Harvard-based [Pluralism Project](#) and my own, Courtney Kleftis', working [research project](#) on this ongoing initiative). Goddess teaches that truth often lies in paradox and/or apparent contradictions, which suggests that the true meaning of life and of Goddess Herself can be reached from many different strands of Her complex web of existence. Bearing

© Courtney Kleftis
July 2021

this in mind, Goddess (and **The Goddess Foundation** by extension) welcomes individuals of all faiths without discrimination or judgment. All She asks for is a critical mind and an open heart.

The Goddess Foundation (TGF) functions first and foremost as a library and archive which means it promotes traditional modes of attaining knowledge (i.e.: through literature and the rigorous study of the rational mind). However, in order to balance this approach with a more holistic and embodied perspective on the ways in which people perceive and relate to the world around them, **TGF** also provides a platform for people to explore their own unique experiences of the divine (i.e.: gnosis) in a safe and supportive community of like minded individuals. In alignment with the non-dual qualities of Goddess Spirituality which transcends binary thinking and blurs the boundaries between supposed opposites (i.e.: male/female, masculine/feminine, yang/yin, light/dark, etc.), **TGF** strives to strike a balanced middle path between the seeming polar opposites of reason and gnosis. Like the Goddess Herself who embodies paradox - the simultaneous truth/co-existence of seemingly contradictory realities - **TGF** honors the complex intersections of mind and body/spirit, reason and gnosis, in the lived experiences of the communities it serves.

Why do we need the Goddess?

The Goddess is an enormous cosmic force that cannot be fully grasped by the human mind. She is ineffable. That said, She exists within all of life on earth and, likely beyond, in distant galaxies. While the Goddess is not a gendered or anthropomorphic (in other words, human) entity, viewing Her in these terms serves as a much-needed antidote to the deeply wounding patriarchal society which has defined and dominated life for the past five millennia. Why do women need the Goddess, asks renowned scholar-practitioner of feminist spirituality, the late [Carol Christ](#) (1945 - 2021), in her iconic [1978 article](#). Ultimately, Christ argues that women need a divine symbol which reflects and honors their human bodies and experiences of life rather than deeming them second-class citizens, or worse, the source of all evil like the Hellenic Pandora and/or the later Hebrew Eve. In the words of Christ herself,

“A woman who echoes [Ntosake Shange](#)’s dramatic statement, ‘I found God in myself and I loved her fiercely,’ is saying, ‘Female power is strong and creative.’ She is saying that the divine principle, the saving and sustaining power, is in herself, that she will no longer look to men or male figures as saviors.”

Evidently, while the Goddess only exists as feminine or female in the human imagination, Her gendered guise is vitally important as a source of twenty-first-century women’s empowerment and self-valorization.

What about queer and/or non-binary individuals?

How can they too benefit from the eternal wisdom of the Goddess? As a queer, albeit cisgendered, woman myself, I have grappled with this question for years. Tentatively, I propose the following:

© Courtney Kleftis
July 2021

Goddess is the all-encompassing, wholly inclusive (proto)conscious source of the entirety of life within the cosmos. While claiming the gendered title, Goddess, in honor of the generative principles of the feminine (i.e.: the capacity to gestate and nurture life from within), these qualities are evenly distributed across the universe regardless of biological sex or chosen gender identity. In other words, Goddess, or perhaps God/dess celebrates all expressions of life and encourages us to express ourselves in any way we see fit as (S)he continues to engender life in a way that displays an infinite and ever-expanding range of diversity. While adopting the name Goddess as a feminist political statement, the divinity (S)he represents cannot be contained by any human constructs, including but not limited to gender.

Additionally, within the realm of [archaeomythology](#), it has been convincingly argued that God/dess is inherently androgynous; carrying within Her cosmic body both male and female sexual organs. Based on this observation, God/dess appears to transcend the constraints of the gender binary as we know it. Going way back into the Neolithic era (ca. 10,000-4,500 B.C.E.), the renowned but controversial late Goddess scholar (and foremother of the Goddess spirituality movement), Marija Gimbutas (1921-1994) sheds light on the symbolic portrayal of divinity in unmistakably androgynous terms. According to Gimbutas, the primordial bird-snake goddess figurines which proliferated across the European continent tens of thousands of years ago contained both phallic and vulvic symbols. To Gimbutas, this androgynous symbolism indicates that the divinity represented by these avian and serpentine sculptures displayed the capacity to self-reproduce via parthenogenesis (symbolized by the copresence of male and female sex organs). Finally, it's worth noting that this androgynous imagery appears not to have been a bizarre anomaly of the distant evolutionary past. Instead, this simultaneously phallic and vulvic symbolism continues well into the early Egyptian era, captured by the iconography of the forgotten proto-Isis creation god/dess, [Neith](#), who closely resembles the earlier Neolithic bird-snake goddesses unearthed by Gimbutas. In sum, unlike the traditional transcendent male god of Judeo-Christianity, God/dess is a force that exists beyond gender whose iconography demonstrates that (S)he honors *all* human (and otherwise) expressions of gender and sexuality. God/dess IS life itself and while (S)he can be represented in many forms, (S)he transcends all forms. This suggests that regardless of our human (and gendered) form - regardless of where we identify on the spectrum - we too ultimately transcend these transient categories/distinctions.