

The Global Goddess Oracle

Fall Equinox 2014



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Ask Your Mama by Mama Donna Henes

**Are you cyclically confused? In a ceremonial quandary? Completely clueless?
Wonder no more.**

-
***Ask Your Mama™**
-

The What, When, Where, Why, How, and Who of Ceremony & Spirituality

by

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A Question of What To Do

Dear Mama Donna.

The recent state of the financial, political and environmental realms have pushed me to the point of despondency. I am completely crippled with feelings of helplessness and inadequacy. There is so much that I want to see improve in our country and in the world, but I don't know where or how to begin. What is a girl to do?

Depressed, Frustrated and Disillusioned in Dallas

Dear Depressed, Frustrated and Disillusioned,

First of all, don't be. Depressed, frustrated and disillusioned, that is. Know that you are doing what you can and that it counts. Every single solitary thing that we each do and say and, especially, think really does count. More than we can ever believe.

Some might argue that we don't have any choice in this upside down dangerous world and that we can't effect what will happen. But even if we can't immediately alter the course of human events on the world stage, we can certainly create change in our own lives and in all of the lives that we touch. And our thoughts are the seeds of that change.

Dr. Christiane Northrup writes, "Use your thoughts wisely. Understand

their power. Thoughts have a tendency to become their physical equivalent. This is one of the fundamental laws of the universe. Another one is the law of attraction, which states that 'like attracts like.' Because it is consciousness that creates reality, the kind of consciousness you hold — your vibration — actually creates the kind of life you're living."

So our first order of business must be to stay positive. To entertain only positive possibilities. To imagine only affirmative alternatives. To surround ourselves with wholly uplifting, life-affirming people and influences. To align ourselves solely with the greater good so that our actions will be born of only the finest of our best intentions.

*Far away there in the sunshine are my
highest aspirations. I may not reach
them, but I can look up and see their
beauty, believe in them, and try to follow
where they lead.*

—*Louisa May Alcott*

What we all have to do from now on is to stay alert, stay centered, keep connected and most important of all, keep talking. Talking, writing, protesting keeps the light of truth and tolerance shining upon the hidden agendas of governments, industries, institutions and individuals. Silence, like the dark of night, shelters nefarious deeds. Silence forgives violence.

I have been haunted recently by the words written by a Protestant minister after the downfall of the Nazi regime. "First they came for the gays. I am not gay, so I didn't say anything. Then they came for the Gypsies. I am not a Gypsy, so I didn't say anything. Then they came for the Jews. I am not a Jew, so I didn't say anything. Then they came for the Catholics. I am not a Catholic, so I didn't say anything. When they finally came for me, there was no one left to say anything."

Be bold.

Make a statement.

Make a stand.

Make a difference.

In light of the widespread oppression, manipulation, intimidation that surrounds us today, we most certainly need to say something. We need, in fact, to talk to everyone who we meet, actually engage on a human level with those who we encounter as we make it through our day. Not just our families, friends and colleagues — those of presumed like-minds — but the shoe repair guy, the waitress at the coffee shop, the post office clerk, the bag boy at the super market.

A good example is Dianne, one of the wonderful people who regularly attends my healing circles. She not only prays for the homeless men and women who live on her block, she calls them each by name. I am so impressed and inspired by her personal outreach to the “untouchables.” Everybody is, after all, somebody.

If we ignore, exploit or patronize those people whose lives intersect with ours, how can we expect international relations to be more civilized? We need to walk our talk wherever we go, whatever we do, remembering always, that by doing so we *do* make a difference. Let us each be a sun, sending our caring energy out into the world, shedding light wherever we go. You never know whom you might touch with the radiance of your warmth.

I have an outgoing message on my answering machine that doesn't even say, “Hello.” It just starts right in with, “You know there really *is* still a chance for peace and that chance will definitely increase if we each do our piece. So let's make peace — in our homes, in our own hearts, in our relationships, in our communities, in all of our dealings and in the world. Peace be with us all.”

Much to my surprise, the very people whom I never would have thought would respond favorably, have. The overwhelmingly positive reactions that I have received from workmen, telephone solicitors and service personnel has been an important lesson about the necessity to reach out beyond the boundaries of our biases, assumptions and expectations.

A few weeks ago, I came home to a message from the plumber who was making an appointment to fix my sink. After listening to my taped pep talk, he answered in his gravely Brooklyn brogue, “Yeah, what is this war all about, anyway? Why are we fighting those people? They never hurt us.” This, from someone I would have assumed to be a proponent of the war.

The electrician, another guy who really shocked me, loves the message and calls in daily just to hear it! Once I was here when he called and when I picked up, he complained. "Let me call back again," he implored. "I want to hear the message. It makes me feel good." The reason, he explained, is that it is not political. It is personal. And it touches his heart.

But why was I surprised? People are just people, after all. When you think about it, all people are of a like-mind when it comes to living a life unthreatened by hatred and violence. The urgency for war only seems enticing when it is waged elsewhere. Ask anyone. "Do you want bombs and missiles to blow up your house?"

Every parent has the right to put her/his child to sleep each night without any risk of that child being shot, trapped in the midst of some hostile crossfire — be it in Iraq, Afghanistan, Ireland, Angola or the South Bronx. No one wants to live and work in a war zone — in Palestine, Bosnia, Zimbabwe, the World Trade Center or East L.A.

So, buck up and say what is on your mind. The more you do so, the more empowered you will feel.

*We become just by performing just actions,
temperate by performing temperate actions,
brave by performing brave actions.
—Aristotle*

xxMama Donna

*Are you cyclically confused? In a ceremonial quandary? Completely clueless? Wonder no more. Send your questions about seasons, cycles, and celebrations to CityShaman@aol.com.



Book Review by Dawn “Belladonna” Thomas: Dark Moon by Leisl Leighton

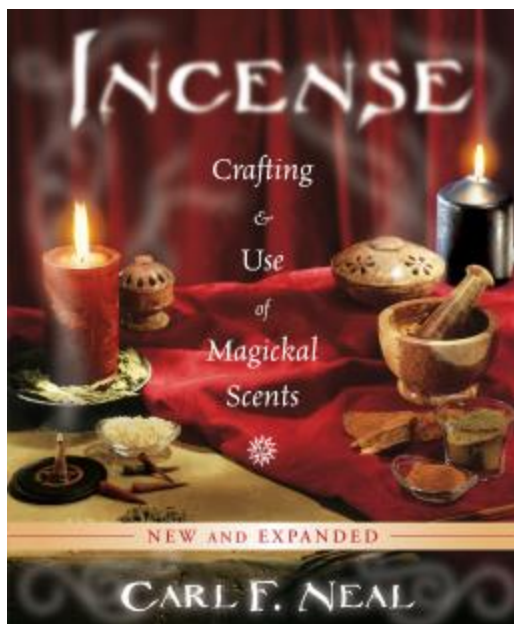
Penguin Books Australia | Destiny Romance
Destiny Romance
Romance, Women's Fiction

The book begins with us being introduced to Skye. She is a witch that has had her powers bound by her grandfather because she is uncontrollable. Her power has been leaking out which attracts all kinds of people to her. She and her two Wiccan friends went on a skiing trip and there Skye meets Jason. Their passion is instantaneous. Skye is afraid to get close to anyone and doesn't want to see him again. Fate

has other plans and the two are thrown together again when Jason takes his nephew to a new daycare, owned and operated by Skye. Jason woos her until she agrees to go out on a date with him. They must work together to save both of their families from dark magic. Skye is reluctant at first but listens to him and her friends. She must accept who she is before she can do anything and that may be the hardest thing she has ever done.

This was an interesting book of good versus evil. The author does a good job building the characters so they felt real instead of being forced. Although this book is listed as a romance, I thought there was more passion than romance. I must admit Jason did a magnificent job courting Skye.

Dawn “Belladonna” Thomas is a High Priestess and Elder of The Apple Branch, a Dianic Tradition. She is the editor and book reviewer for the Oracle and was the Treasurer for The Global Goddess, a non-profit organization. She recently graduated from the University of Florida fulfilling a lifelong goal of completing her college education. She has been published in several magazines for her paper crafting designs. She is the owner of Belladonna’s Garden and makes homemade soaps. She is an avid gardener and lives in Florida with husband.



Book Review by Dawn “Belladonna” Thomas: Incense Crafting & Use of Magickal Scents by Carl F. Neal

Llewellyn Worldwide, Ltd.

ISBN: 9780738741550

Health, mind & body, non-fiction (adult)

This is the second edition and has been expanded and updated. I had not read the original edition and was very interested in this book. I had not made incense before but it has been on my “wishlist.” The directions and recommendations

the author gives are very easy to understand and follow.

The author goes into detail on the different types of incense. I was familiar with cone incense since we use them in smokers (wooden figurines with open mouths that blow smoke rings). I have some stick incense and always wondered how it was made. I remembered I had a small incense kit. The kit has small joss sticks and a ceramic stone with a hole in the middle. These small sticks, about two inches long, burn for about 30 minutes. I like the versatility and flexibility from the different types of incense. After reading this book I can tell the difference between the three kinds and don't feel intimidated by it.

I had to giggle at the author's telling of an experience with a smoke detector going off in his store. His experience was candid and I could imagine his embarrassment. This is an excellent book for anyone thinking about making incense. The recipes the author provides are can be used for all types described in the book. I look forward to making my first batch of incense as soon as the humidity drops.

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Harvest Seed - Manifestation by Sondra Slade

Harvest Seed
humming ancient tunes
tracing ancient runes
in the Ley Lines
of morphogenic coding
etched across it's skin

Nurtured at the Source
suckled by Magna Mater
flushed with fertility
enfolding, replicating, ripening,
Now released into the light
as Intention matured into Manifestation
opening
into ecstatic union
with Water, Sky,
Earth and Fire.

The Monad
Carried
by the Four Winds of Power
Carrier
of the First Spark
Blueprint of divine design
the Singularity
that mysteriously grows
into multiplicity
birthing the diversity
of untold Bounty

We too are the Coded Seed
bursting forth from the branches
of the World Tree
at the center of Cosmic Creation
filling the vastness of space
with our full-blown
desire
intention and
creativity

We were Star Borne
but Earth Nursed
 planting our dreams deep
 into Gaia's fertile soil
 and tending them
 until they sprouted, then emerged
 full grown and self-aware
honing the quality of Attention
to transform what we observe
and manifest what we imagine
learning to breathe
procreative Prana
and exhale it
as embodied Light

Hear Me Roar by Katy Ravensong

I am pagan. Hear me roar. But my roar is only a whispered shout, a gentle breeze that goes unheard, drowned by the typhoon winds of organized religion.

I will not push my religion on you nor will I try to save your soul. I will not knock on your door being a constant nuisance to get you to become part of my "elite" group.

I do not seek "converts". Those destined for the pagan way will find it in their own heart. Mine is a peaceful way. In quietness and solitude, I find my strength.

I will not preach hell and damnation, nor will I tell you that my way is the only way you can reach the Divine. All Gods are one God. All Goddesses are one Goddess. The God and Goddess are one.

I will not corral your children and try to indoctrinate them to my way of thinking. I will not tell them that the devil will get them if they do this or don't do that.

Instead, I will quietly Honor God, Goddess, and the Great Spirit in my own way. I will follow what my heart tells me is right FOR ME.

I will honor the earth and its inhabitants and do my level best to improve rather than destroy the legacy that has been handed down to me.

I will never knowingly harm anyone or myself. What I send out comes back to ME. I will accept responsibility for my own actions and not blame the Christian's devil or my brother or my neighbor for what I have done.

Yes! I am pagan! Hear me roar!

Katy Ravensong/2002

Hestia: A Goddess for the Equinox By Dawn "Belladonna" Thomas

I chose to honor Hestia for the second harvest. Because of her antiquity, she was thought to be one of the first Olympian goddesses. Her antiquity is noted in the Greek proverb "Start with Hestia," meaning "Begin things at the beginning."

Hestia was seen only in the fire of the hearth, living in the center of every home, an honored guest and helpful to her hosts. As the hearth goddess, Hestia symbolized family unity. In the early days of her worship, succession was through the matrilineal line and seems traces of it survived. There was a custom that a new home was not considered established until a woman brought fire from her mother's hearth to light her own.

This is a good time to begin turning inward and also finding creativity in the fires.

Preparation: Open Fire (fire pit or cauldron), brown or orange altar cloth. Symbols of the harvest (corn, wheat, oats). This ritual will take place at noon.

Prayer: Hestia, I ask you to join me tonight. I honor you tonight as the Goddess of the second harvest. I am preparing for the dark part of the year in order to begin again. I ask for your guidance as I begin my introspection. I need inspiration to complete my projects that I started earlier in the year. May I get inspired as I gaze into your creative fire. Blessed Be.

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Just Be by Heather Geileis Kohser

In Good Company

As the wheel turns toward the darker times, we naturally turn inward. Even as a sun worshipper, soaking up the last rays, as the nights lengthen, I secretly crave the coziness of my home, in the solitude of winter. My grandmother told my mother, as her grandmother told her, "When you are alone, be sure you are in good company." Inspired still by these words, I wonder and ask- who are we when we are alone? What does our true nature look like? How does our essence feel? How does the element of spirit manifest in us as women? I invite you all to write a poem – a spirit poem, an essence celebration poem, a power of connection poem.

The key to writing this, is to let all facades fall away, allow the protection of your ego to step aside, if only for a few moments. Breathe in deeply, filling every bit of your lungs, deep belly breaths. Feel the energy of the Mother beneath your feet, and draw Her up into your body, with each breath. Drawing life energy up through your feet, and

up into your core, feel the nourishment. Don't worry if you experience some excitement in your body. Your spirit can be very sexy, if you let it! Now, sink down into yourself, with tools to write, still feeling the connection, and let your words flow. Write them, anything, with no thoughts or worries of how your poem sounds, or looks on the paper now. Be present to yourself, and write! If the words are not coming, try switching your pen, or type with your non-dominant hand, with no worry of your penmanship, or typos. You can also write the alphabet backwards over and over, or write I wonder statements, such as: I wonder why the sky is blue, or I wonder why dogs smile. The idea is to exhaust your ego, turn off your brain, and let your spirit sing! The poem may be a secret one, for your eyes only, to read aloud again, in times when you have trouble remembering who YOU really are. You may also wish to share with other spirit seekers.

Perhaps in the months to come, we could share our works of spirit within the Global Goddess Facebook Page or Yahoo Group -a virtual poetry slam, celebrating our essence. I invite you to seek to remember your true nature, bring your inner child out to play, and dance with your very essence. In doing so, you may come to know that you are never really alone, and you are in magnificent company!

Just Be!

My spirit rushes like the many songs of wind
through this body -
mingling with breath
fleeting yet constant -
if I let it.

My spirit moves like hot sex magma rising
up through this vulva
throbbing, pulsing, drumbeat from the core
surging from Source to set my heart
on fire!

My spirit sings, shouts, cries out with the sound of
Maaaaaaaaa!

Primal, guttural, buzzing with intention -
beyond time, a melody of the void-
Goddess whispers.

My ancestresses knew this song.

My spirit is unbridled cosmic dancing, ecstatic longing

to shake me out of my tree.
My ego lies broken, wounded, bound by burdens,
torn apart to be made whole -
so I can remember-
my essence.
With whimsy and wonder I search inside
seeking spirit
and I see -
All there ever was, and all there ever will be,
Infinite joy, and a fierce love so pure it hurts.
Abundant feelings tingling each cell, woven in a web of light and dark
connecting to the All -
star-stuff, earth-stuff, all the in between stuff.
Life energy, endless nourishment -
Desire
to just be.

By~ Heather Geileis Kohser

Mama Donna's Spirit Shop



Moon Schedule Fall Equinox to Samhain

By Dawn "Belladonna" Thomas
(Times are Eastern Time)

New Moon – September 24th: 2:14 a.m.

2nd Quarter – October 1st: 3:33 p.m.

Full "Blood" Moon – October 8th: 6:51 a.m.

4th Quarter – October 15th: 3:12 p.m.

New Moon – October 23rd: 5:57 p.m.

2nd Quarter – September 2nd: 7:11 a.m.

Full "Harvest" Moon – September 8th: 9:38 p.m.

4th Quarter – September 15th: 10:05 p.m.

Moon Void of Course Schedule

Date	Starts	Ends
September 23 rd	8:15 a.m.	11:59 p.m.
September 26 th	8:39 a.m.	10:29 a.m.
September 28 th	4:31 p.m.	6:50 p.m.
September 29 th	11:29 p.m.	October 1 st 12:41 a.m.
October 2 nd	12:18 p.m.	October 3 rd 4:00 a.m.
October 4 th	2:32 p.m.	October 5 th 5:24 a.m.
October 6 th	3:38 p.m.	October 7 th 6:07 a.m.
October 8 th	10:20 a.m.	October 9 th 7:44 a.m.
October 10 th	8:49 p.m.	October 11 th 11:51 a.m.
October 13 th	1:58 p.m.	7:30 p.m.
October 15 th	7:27 p.m.	October 16 th 6:29 a.m.
October 18 th	9:10 a.m.	7:08 p.m.
October 20 th	11:30 p.m.	October 21 st 7:12 a.m.
October 23 rd	1:22 p.m.	5:10 p.m.
October 25 th	12:11 p.m.	October 26 th 12:40 a.m.
October 27 th	12:18 p.m.	October 28 th 6:03 a.m.
October 29 th	11:01 p.m.	October 30 th 9:52 a.m.

Planting Days

September: 26th, 27th, 28th
 October: 5th, 6th, 9th, 10th, 14th, 15th, 24th, 25th

Harvesting Days

September: None
 October: 11th, 12th, 13th, 16th, 17th, 18th

Pagan Every Day Miss Piggy by Barbara Ardinger, PhD

Miss Piggy by Barbara Ardinger, PhD
September 27th

The Goddess of Everything hurled herself into the world in the first episode of *The Muppet Show*, September 27, 1976. She had a supporting role at first, as an astronaut (porkonaut) in “Pigs in Space,” but then... well... she and Kermit the Frog fell in love. She demanded more lines and the guest stars. Soon we witnessed a satined, sequined theophany. Excuse me. *Theaphany*. Starring in five seasons of *The Muppet Show* and five Muppet movies, she ascended in purple-gloved glory to the heavens of the Muppet pantheon. Who can forget the Busby Berkeleyesque underwater ballet sequence in *The Great Muppet Caper* where The Pig rises in perfect balance atop the fountain of life? It’s a porcine apotheosis.

Then she ventured into the epigraphy: she wrote a book. Like the oracles and sibyls of old, the pig pronounces words of wisdom. Her *Guide to Life* tells us everything we will ever need to know about beauty, fashion, finance, manners, romance, success, and other vital topics. Do we think we’re ugly? “Not everyone can be a superstar,” Miss Piggy says, “but anyone can be a semistar, a starette, or a teensyweensystar.

Our goddesses attend to our emotional needs. Henson knows, life in the twenty-first century is not easy. “Misery love timpani,” The Pig writes. “If your depression is particularly acute, you may be able to deglumify things a bit with some upbeat music. But if you like classical music—as moi does—do be careful: even the most sprightly, toe-tapping symphonies have at least one grouchy movement filled with oboes, doldrums, and bassinets.”²¹

There’s no one like The Pig. Aggressive and winsome at the same time, she loves her Kermie. Maybe she’s the reason it’s not easy being green...

Every Day: Finding the Extraordinary in Our Ordinary Lives (RedWheel/Weiser, 2006), a unique daybook of daily meditations, stories, and activities. Her new book, **Secret Lives** is a novel of magical realism about elderly women, younger women, good men, and mythological characters including the Green Man and the Norns gone mad in a modern world. Her earlier books are *Finding New Goddesses*, *Quicksilver Moon*, *Goddess Meditations*, and *Practicing the Presence of the Goddess*. Her day job is freelance editing for people who don't want to embarrass themselves in print. Barbara lives in southern

California. To purchase a signed copy of *Finding New Goddesses*, just send Barbara an email at bawriting@earthlink.net

Pagan Every Day Tara by Barbara Ardinger, PhD

Tara by Barbara Ardinger, PhD

October 4th

The great mother goddess does not belong only to the people of Tibet. She is beloved throughout the world, and there are many stories about her. In one, she presented at the creation of the universe and declares that she will remain a female body until all sentient being are enlightened. In another, she is born male, as Avalokitsvara, then reborn female. Historical tradition tells us that her first image (a sandalwood statue) arrived in Tibet when the Nepalese princess Tr'itsun came to marry King Songtsen Gampo in the seventh century C.E. Her name can mean "lady Star" or "Lady who Accepts the Ceremonial Scarf." It is said that her name can be discerned in the names of goddess in cultures all around the world. Some believe that the Tibetan Tara is connected with the Hill of Tara in Ireland.

Prema Dasara and Anahata Iradah travel the world teaching the Tara Dance. As soon as I found out they were coming to Goddess Temple of Orange County, I sent an e-mail: could I bring some of my Tara figures to set on the altar? Prema said yes. It's a small world. It turns out that Dagmola Jamyang Sakya, who gave me the Green Tara initiations, is a friend of theirs. Traditionally, Tibetan woman have stayed at home, and the nuns keep house for the more famous monks. Prema and Anahata have broken through the chauvinism and taught the woman to dance in praise of Tara.

On Tara's birthday, October 4, I went to the temple with fifty other women. As Anahata played a twelve-string guitar, Prema told us stories of Tara and taught us the dance. Raise your eyes to the heavens, she said. See the luminous and beautiful goddess above us. Raise your arms to her and twirls. *Om Tare Tutare Ture Soba!*

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Persephone: The Mysteries of the Deep Earth by Shauna Aura Knight

The story of Persephone's descent is popular in the Pagan community. Some tell it as the rape of Persephone. Others have rewritten it as a story of Persephone's individuation and empowerment. At Diana's Grove and in the Reclaiming tradition I've heard the story told as Persephone falling in love with Hades but her mother—the goddess Demeter—tries to maintain control over her child.

The stories we tell say a lot about us...and the way we tell a story says a lot too. It speaks to our culture, to our individual wounding, and to our assumptions. Here are several different ways you can work with the story of Persephone.

Original Version

Persephone is in her mother's garden but wanders beyond the walls. Hades sees her, desires her, and drags her down to the Underworld, tricking her into staying by getting her to eat six seeds of pomegranate. He forces her to wed him and her rape is implied. Meanwhile, Demeter cannot find her daughter, and the earth falls into a terrible winter. People cry out to the fertility goddess to help them but she ignores them, hunting for her daughter. She seeks out Zeus and Apollo for help, and is aided by Hecate. Demeter discovers Hades has Persephone and demands he release her. They bargain, but because Persephone has eaten the six seeds, Hades lays claim to her for six months out of the year. Persephone reluctantly agrees to be his bride for this time, eagerly awaiting her return to the sunlight and warmth above.

This story becomes an explanation for the seasons—winter is when Demeter grieves her lost daughter during Persephone's miserable months in the Underworld. Persephone's descent was central to the Eleusinian Mystery cult and was woven together with the idea of the turn of the seasons, the powers of life force, the fertility of the land, the soil and the growth in the spring. The ground was connected to the powers of the Underworld and the dead, with the growing plants being connected to rising life force.

A Retelling

Persephone is in her mother's garden. She's always done as she's told and stayed within the garden walls, but one day she wanders beyond them. Hades sees her and falls in love with her; Persephone falls for him. Without telling her mother, she follows Hades down to the Underworld and marries him.

Meanwhile, Demeter is frantic and the earth falls into a desperate winter. Demeter goes to Zeus, Persephone's father, and then to Apollo, who saw that Zeus may have offered Persephone's hand in marriage to Hades without Demeter's permission. Ultimately Hecate helps Demeter down to the Underworld to find her daughter. Furious, she demands Hades release her daughter.

Hades tells Persephone she can stay with him if she eats the fruits of the Underworld. She eats six seeds, but no more, out of pity for her mother. She agrees to split her time between the two people who love her the most.

Whenever Persephone returns to Hades, Demeter is inconsolable and thus we endure the winter months.

Power, Control, and Perception

Now—even in that retelling, there are retellings. The second version is still very disempowering to Persephone; everyone gets to choose what Persephone does except Persephone herself. Her controlling mother, her controlling husband, and her absent father, Zeus.

Instead, you can tell the story where Persephone separates herself from her controlling mother by choosing to be with Hades, whom her mother disapproves of. Persephone steps into the role of queen, steps into her power as an adult instead of remaining a child under her mother's control.

However, all of these versions explore control and power. In each of them, someone is trying to control Persephone—including herself. In one it's Hades, in another it's Demeter; some versions imply Zeus. How we tell stories shapes our thoughts and ideas. Stories help us to reclaim our power, and I believe there is a specific magic to shifting an old myth into a new one.

Descent and Death

There is a magic that comes through all the versions in the story of the descent and the return. It's the story of the season—of fertility but also of death. You can't grow plants without soil, and soil is made from the dead.

Death is an uncomfortable mystery, so I find it somewhat appropriate that there are other uncomfortable aspects—namely, Persephone's kidnap and rape. Most of us don't go willingly to our death. We avoid it, delay it, bargain with it, plead with it. Maybe there was a crucial reason in the original story Persephone is taken to the Underworld against her will.

Either way, the story of Persephone's descent and return—the mystery of going to the Underworld and land of the dead—was central to the Eleusinian mystery rites. Participants in those rites likely ingested entheogens, which can have unpleasant physical effects including nausea. They're toxins, and some can cause physical sensations that I imagine make someone feel like they are dying.

Dreaming the Darkness

Let's explore Persephone's descent into the seasons, the cycles of life and death. Imagine being Persephone experiencing the mysteries of fertility, of the plants that rise and die and rise again. Imagine the power of passing through that experience.
Journeying across the veils...and returning.

Imagine being Persephone in her mother's garden...warm and sunny like it has been every day she's ever been alive. She tends the flowers, the fruits. The sweat trickles down her neck. She wanders to the edge of the garden, further than she has gone before. Every day she wanders just a little further. "Stay away from the forest," her says. "Stay away from the caves."

One day she crosses beneath the boughs. Further she goes, entranced by the scent, the shade. Further she goes until she feels herself being watched. She shivers and turns... she sees him, standing there in the shadows. He reaches for her and she takes his hand. She is standing in sunlight and he in shadow but she steps toward him.

She falls in love with him. He meets here there in the shade of the forest every day. "If you come below we can be together," he whispers. For weeks, she has not dared. For

weeks she has kept this secret. Then there is the day when she cannot resist him any longer, when she goes beneath the ground.

Time shifts and slows as she descends. Hours later in his bed, he feeds her the seeds of the pomegranate.

She feels the cold, the dark...she smells the earth, the decay in the soil...the sweat on her own skin...the sunlight in her hair...she feels her body slowing down. She feels her heart palpitating, the nausea. She cannot stand. The world is slowing...slowing....she reaches out her hand but cannot move. She cannot speak.

She feels the whole cycle of the world...the plants that die, that return to the soil. The animals eat the plants and their own bodies become that earth. Every person, everything that has ever lived descends into that soil...and she herself begins to become the soil as her body slows. She sleeps, the world passing through her dream like an ocean that is the eternity of the earth.

Later, she begins to rise, to awaken. Her lover awaits her. She sees the eternity of the sky, craves the sunlight, but she knows that to see them means she must leave her lover's side. Yet, she needs the warmth.

She tells Hades that she cannot eat all the seeds. She cannot remain beneath the ground, she must return to the sun and the sky. But because of the seeds she has eaten, she understands the mysteries of death, of the land beneath the ground. She can dwell there and return, she can die and rise.

Persephone's power is to know the mystery of the whole cycle, life to death to life.

Frozen Grief: A Ritual of the Descent

Another powerful facet to this story is from Demeter's perspective. I once attended a Diana's Grove ritual where we began with Persephone joining Hades through the crack between the worlds. Then we witnessed Demeter, inconsolable, searching for her lost daughter.

One ritualist spoke as Demeter. She spoke of her daughter, born in springtime, growing ripe in summer, changing...and then gone. Gone, and the winter of Demeter's own grief descended. Gone, as grief froze the world over.

The elements were invoked as the seasons. I recall that invoking winter struck me to my core...all the water of all the world freezing. "When has your grief frozen over your ability to take action?" I thought about when I'm consumed by the enormity of my grief, where all the waters within me have frozen.

We shifted into a trance journey about our own grief. Earlier in the day, we'd discussed the things that had been done to us, the things in this world that we couldn't change, the things that overwhelmed us. The ritual space was lit with candles that were progressively snuffed. Once we stood in the darkness, all I could hear was the sounds of grieving. I have a hard time crying, but without anyone to see me in that dark I wept. Together we grieved for all the hurts in our lives, in the world.

I was consumed by my fears. My fear of failure, of apathy, of depression...fear of being cold forever...fear of being alone forever...fear of rejection.

Demeter's voice returned. "Have you seen my daughter? I cannot find her. I cannot find her *anywhere*." And then, "I was alone when I was grieving. But you are not alone. Reach out into the darkness to the hand that is next to you."

I was not alone. It didn't heal my grief...it didn't fix it. But grasping the hands of the sobbing women next to me helped somehow. I wondered what they grieved for, even as I knew that their hands lent me strength. Particularly potent for me was that one of the women holding my hands was someone that I'd thought hated me at one time, so it was strength from the unlikeliest of places.

Demeter told us of her wanderings, how she asked Hecate for help. "My daughter has been taken, stolen."

Hecate said, "Question reality. Question your assumptions. Was Persephone was stolen, or, could she have left on her own?"

Hecate guided Demeter to Persephone and Hades, and Demeter acknowledged that Persephone chose this. They negotiate, and Persephone chooses to return to the sunlight for half the year.

The seasons turned to autumn and Persephone spoke to us. "It is time for me to return to him again. I must go," she said. I felt that ripe, heavy longing to return to the depths. Persephone held out a rough clay bowl. "As I pass into the Underworld, I can take with me one seed from each of you. One vision, one wish, one dream. What do you hold that needs to be cleansed and healed, what needs to ripen underground? What needs the magic of time and silence and winter and the deep dark ground?"

We each placed into the bowl a symbol of our hopes and sang Starhawk's chant "Hold On" while Persephone took our seeds below.

Mysteries of the Dark Earth

There are many different ways to look at any myth. What does this story tell you? What versions speak to you? Does one version resonate in the center of your chest...does another version disturb you? And what mysteries does that reveal for you? Question your reality. Question your stories. Question your perceptions.

Shauna Aura Knight:

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Solitary Autumn Equinox Ritual By Dawn “Belladonna” Thomas

For the altar:

1 yellow candle

1 orange candle

An apple

A cup of wine or juice

A small cluster of grapes

Some vine (real or artificial - to honor the Muin Moon cycle)

Fall flowers or fall leaves

Set up your ritual area. Light the candles and arrange the grapes, the vine and flowers or leaves on the altar.

Casting the Circle

Take the apple and hold it in both hands. Feel the wisdom and love of the goddess. She is generous.

“The apple is an ancient symbol of the Goddess with her great knowledge and power of healing. It holds her wisdom and provides a gateway into other realms. Sacred is this space filled with the riches of the Great Mother.”

Call the Quarters

“Hail to the Spirits of the East, Element of Air, knowledge, and wisdom. Bless me with your gifts during the season of fall. Please join me tonight.”

“Hail to the Spirits of the South, Element of Fire, brighten my days. Bring illumination and passion in many ways. Please join me tonight.”

“Hail to the Spirits of the West, Element of Water, come to this circle of mine. Add love, peace, and intuition in this place and time. Please join me tonight.”

“Hail to the Spirits of the North, Element of Earth, bestow strength and success. Please join me tonight.”

“The circle is cast as above and so below.”

Call the Goddess

"The Autumn Equinox is the harvest of fruits and late grains. I ask the goddess of grain, Demeter, the Lady of the Harvest and bountiful earth. Bless me during this autumn season. I also ask Pomona, the goddess of Apples to join me. Please share your sacred orchard with me.

At the autumn equinox a time of equal light and dark hours occurs. Help me to find balance and harmony within. Guide me with your wisdom and remind me to be thankful for all of the blessings that I have in my life.

It is now time to pass from summer into the dark of the year. On this day of the equinox, this day of balance, it is the threshold where light begins to fade. As the nights grow longer, it is a time to cultivate inner wisdom."

Meditation and Giving Thanks

"I raise my chalice in thanksgiving for what the Mother Earth has given me this year." *Think of these questions and answer honestly. What is my personal harvest? What have I brought into manifestation this year? What can I do to honor the generosity of the Earth that sustains me? How might I thank my loved ones and acquaintances who have supported my creativity this year? How can I best acknowledge and celebrate myself for hard work completed this year?*

Releasing the Elements

"Spirit of the North, Element of the Earth, thank you for lending your strength and stability this night. Hail and Farewell. Blessed Be."

"Spirit of the West, Element of Water, thank you for blessings me with loving emotions so right. Hail and Farewell. Blessed Be."

"Spirit of the South, Element of Fire, thank you for your passion and illuminating light. Hail and Farewell. Blessed Be."

"Spirit of the East, Element of Air, thank you for the winds of change that swirl within my life. Hail and Farewell. Blessed Be."

Releasing the Goddess

"I thank you Demeter and Pomona for joining me this night. Hail and Farewell. Blessed Be."

Open the Circle

"The circle is open but remains unbroken.

Blessed be!

Merry meet, merry part, and merry meet again."

Dawn "Belladonna" Thomas is a High Priestess and Elder of The Apple Branch, a Dianic Tradition. She is the editor and book reviewer for the Oracle and was the Treasurer for The Global Goddess, a non-profit organization. She recently graduated from the University of Florida fulfilling a lifelong goal of completing her college education. She has been published in several magazines for her paper crafting designs. She is the owner of Belladonna's Garden and makes homemade soaps. She is an avid gardener and lives in Florida with husband.