

Exploring the Four Faces of the Divine Feminine

by Deborah Roth, MA

In women's spirituality, women's life cycles have been approached by looking at the three "blood mysteries" -- menarche, childbirth, and menopause. And, in cultures all over the world, the Divine Feminine has been presented in the form of the Triple Goddess -- Kali in India, Cerridwin in ancient Ireland, Sumerian Astarte and Egyptian Maat. The face of the Maiden approaching menarche is one of sweet innocence; the Mother (obviously associated with the mystery of childbirth) embodies the nurturing aspect; the Crone (whose rite is menopause) represents wisdom.

However, this triple image has become increasingly outdated. Joan Borysenko points out that the maiden years have gotten progressively shorter with the introduction of electric lights and the subsequent elongation of "daylight" hours which stimulates the release of hormones that bring on puberty several years earlier than a century ago. Furthermore, women's life spans have increased from 47 years on 1900 to 75 years in 1990. And, of course, the mothering years of the life cycle have undergone tremendous changes as well, as women have won more freedom in their choices regarding whether they will have children at all and if so, when and how many.

So, what do we do with the gap that has been created, both energetically and chronologically, in the old, three-fold presentation of the feminine life cycle? Overwhelmingly, feminist scholars and theologians are introducing a new phase, in between the mothering years and old age. It is called alternately -- amazon, queen, enchantress, matriarch, priestess, guardian. Borysenko points out that "ballsy behavior is supported by ballsy hormones" at this time -- that a kind of fierce power kicks in which is actually biologically mediated as testosterone levels increase and estrogen levels decrease right before menopause. Mention this phenomena to a room full of amazons and they know exactly what you mean!

Embracing this rich, new archetype, we conjur up the wisdom of the deep Feminine in four ways, drawing on four different energies or archetypes. And while they describe the stages in a women's life span, it is also important to remember that we carry each of them within us at all times. A teenager who is organizing political rallies is calling on her amazon energies. A crone who loves to roller-blade is embracing the maiden's thrill of adventure. There are mothers who never bear children but who create breathtaking works of art and amazons who retreat into silent meditation for months or years at a time. This four-sided construction is not meant to be a box that restricts and confines, but rather a container of possibilities for be-ing and do-ing in the world.

In the act of creation that IS the Divine Feminine, I've named these feminine archetypes "Fem♀Types" and offer keywords** to help in understanding the power and wisdom of each one:

MAIDEN: new beginnings, virgin (meaning "one unto herself"), daughter, menarche, dawn, spring, blossom, waxing moon, dynamic, fresh energy, joy, fun, sociability, sexual awakening,

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innocence, inspiration, potential, possibility, clear thinking, ambitious, enterprising.

MOTHER: fullness, midwife, lover, pregnancy, childbirth, noon, summer, fruit, full moon, ovulation, fertile, nurturing, creative, caring, compassion, receptive, protective, radiating, enveloping, supportive, encouraging, giving, counsel, community.

AMAZON: power, queen, priestess, enchantress, blood sister, peri-menopause, dusk, fall, harvest, waning moon, dramatic, passion, assertive, demanding, erotic, intuitive, restless, penetrating, destruction/creation, magic, intensity, authority, focused.

CRONE: wisdom, sorceress, dark mother, grandmother, menopause, midnight, winter, seed, new moon, menstruation, alchemical, transmutation, inward, endings, silence, death, release, unknown, uncompromising, dissolution, introspective, containing, prophecy.

**These associations were compiled by dipping into the vast cauldron of WomanSpirit literature, including:

Borysenko, Joan, Ph.D., *A Woman's Book of Life: The Biology, Psychology and Spirituality of the Feminine Life Cycle*, Riverhead Books, 1996.

Davis, Elizabeth and Leonard, Carol, *The Women's Wheel of Life*, Penguin/Arkana, 1996.

Gray, Miranda, *Red Moon: Understanding and Using the Gifts of the Menstrual Cycle*, Element Books, 1994.

McCoy, Edain, *Celtic Women's Spirituality: Accessing the Cauldron of Life*, Llewelyn Publications, 1998.

Wilshire, Donna, *Virgin, Mother, Crone: Myths and Mysteries of the Triple Goddess*, Inner Traditions, 1994.

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Chants for the Fem*Types

MAIDEN

Belonging to no one, To no one but to herself.

~~~~~  
I will be gentle with myself, I will love myself  
I am a child of the Universe, being born each moment.

~~~~~  
How could anyone ever tell you
That you're anything less than beautiful.
How could anyone every tell you
That you're less than whole.
How could anyone fail to notice
That your love is like a miracle.
How deeply you're connected to my soul. (Libby Roderick)

MOTHER

Mother I feel you under my feet, Mother I feel your heartbeat
Mother I can see you when the eagle flies, Mother will you take me higher.

~~~~~  
We all come from the Goddess and to her we shall return  
Like a drop of rain, flowing to the Ocean

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## **AMAZON**

We can rise with the fire of freedom  
Truth is the fire that burns our chains  
We can stop the fire of destruction.  
Healing is the fire running through our veins.

~~~~~  
Let it begin with each step we take,
And let it begin with each change we make,
And let it begin with each chain we break,

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And let it begin every time we awake.

CRONE

Ancient Mother, I hear you calling. Ancient Mother, I hear your song.
Ancient Mother, I hear your laughter, Ancient Mother, I taste your tears.

~~~~~

It's the blood of the ancients that flows through our veins.  
And the forms pass, but the circle of life remains

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**MAIDEN/MOTHER/AMAZON/CRONE**

A woman is a mai--den, starting new  
Growing into motherhood, leading to...  
The wisdom of the crone living deep within,  
Sitting in the middle of the web she spins

~~~~~

"Unorthodoxology"
Praise Her from whom all blessings flow.
For waters deep and fire's glow.
For life and breath and earth our home.
Praise Mother, Maid, and ancient Crone.
Blessed be.

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