

I LEANED OVER TO PICK UP THE NEWSPAPER

from the driveway and heard cawing overhead. I looked at the sky. *A raven?* Not likely. The common raven lives in the Chiricahua Mountains in southeastern Arizona, not the inner city of Phoenix. It must have been a crow; the sun had blurred the bird's form. But raven or crow, I thought, *more soldiers dead*. A quick thumb of the front section and I found the brief article in small type — two soldiers, one Marine. Sadness mixed with anger tugged at me. Did this relate to the fierce red-haired Goddess that continued to loom in my dreams? I saw blood and devastation, not the peace I sought in ritual work and political activism.

Curious about the bird's appearance, I picked up *The White Goddess*; a search on "raven" led me to the Morrigan.¹ I discovered that in Celtic pantheons, Morrigan, together with Babd and Macha formed the Morrigna (Great Queens), goddesses linked with war and further discovered that Morrigan shape-shifted as a hooded raven.² Immediately I knew that the messenger was a sign for me to pay attention to this Goddess.

One translation of "Morrigan" is "Phantom Queen" — a potent symbol of war itself. A bullet whistles from a shadow; a bomb detonates on a quiet road; a helicopter suddenly explodes during a routine flight. These were disturbing images — ones that I didn't care to think about — yet Morrigan kept nudging me to explore further, to broaden my scope beyond the tangible what of fallen soldiers.



My first realization came as a surprise: *How can a woman be a feminist and not also be a warrior?* By embracing feminism in the late 60s, I unintentionally embraced the warrior's path. Following my decision to become a feminist, I fought salary discrimination, vied for respect from men for my abilities, and dealt with the on-going struggle to be taken seriously. Furthermore, I succeeded in raising my daughter to be a warrior, too she's independent, self-confident, and possesses a healthy self-image.

I have also fought for Pagan rights just as vigorously as for women's equality. Involvement in Pagan Pride Day has become an important

part of my life, and challenging the editorial pages of *The Republic* (Arizona's largest newspaper) to print the truth about Pagan practices has been a genuine battle as well. Defending our faith takes a warrior's spirit and Morrigan's protection.

But although I was starting to see Her influence in my life, Morrigan wasn't finished educating me yet. Outraged at the increasing body counts and the repeated destruction of our beloved earth by the machinery of war, I decided to ask my coven to seek Morrigan and report the findings. My sisters had each protested the Iraq war and the majority honored Celtic goddesses in their personal devotions. What would Morrigan say to us? What would she finally say to me that would expand my understanding and — if not grant me a calmer mind — at least provide me with new perspective.

To begin our visit with the Morrigan, Gretchen³, my sister priestess and a certified hypnotherapist, created a simple visualization to help us focus. (See inset.)

THE MORRIGAN

story
JOAN ROBINSON-BLUMIT

artwork
TANYA STEWART

beyond the warzone



After the visualization, our group shared their experiences. They also spoke about what the myths, stories, and presence of the Morrigan meant to them.

Gretchen identifies with the Morrigan who is theorized to have originated in the megalithic cult of the Mothers, who usually appeared as triple goddesses. Their followers expressed themselves through both battle ecstasy and regenerative ecstasy.⁴ Gretchen told us that she channels her warrior energy most fervently when it relates to her role as a mother.

Exploring beyond Morrigan, she felt kindred spirit with a trio of Celtic goddesses — Eriu, Banba, and

Fotla — deities that used “influence in the sphere of warfare, but by means of magic and incantation rather than through physical strength.”⁵ She explained that often in her life she has used her “warrior” voice rather than physical strength to settle a conflict. Gretchen, who is 5'5" and weighs about 125 pounds, often had to deal with men who used bully tactics when her son was young and playing team sports. On one occasion a dad from another team decided to vent his anger by cursing in her ten-year-old son's face. The man was very surprised to be yanked back and find himself looking at the irate face of a mother. He quickly backed off and apologized to the kids he'd frightened. “How else but magic can explain that I never paid a physical price for taking on enraged men?” Gretchen said. “I've so often drawn on the raven's ferocity for strength of purpose and protection.”

Katie, an initiate and Celtic student, had already met Morrigan. She appreciates that, unlike Brigit and other Celtic goddesses, Morrigan did not succumb or conform to Christianity and become a “saint.” To stand against such an enemy is a warrior trait Katie admires.

But Katie also had issues with her temper. It had turned inward and gnawed at her soul, causing her grief rather than the bursts of creative passion she so cherished. Katie needed to learn how to turn her rage around and to release it with control and confidence. Walking

with Morrigan taught Katie that denying her passion would be denying herself, but that *controlled* vehemence could awaken her to a greater spiritual understanding of her true nature.

Ophelia found meaning in the story of Morrigan's rejection by Cuchulainn. At Cuchulainn's death in battle, Morrigan sat upon his shoulder in her raven guise. Ophelia feels that this represents Morrigan's boundless love and her endurance as a survivor, a lesson from which all women could learn. The message is this: failure doesn't diminish us, “battle scars” heal. Just like a veteran warrior, we can persevere.

Sondra, a priestess, coordinated our Morrigan moon ritual; the music we used inspires her to invoke the goddess and the warrior in herself.⁶ Cyndy, who suffers from bipolar disorder, had recently spun into depression at the time of our ritual. Tapping Morrigan's energy helped her win the battle over the inertia she seemed previously unable to escape. In her vision, she walked along a bleak, narrow path. The only stars were not bright sparkly ones, but icy pinpoints of light scattered amid a faraway spray of clouds. The moon was dark: Morrigan's time of month. Very high, black shiny cliffs were on her right, impossible to scale, and on her left, the sea crashed, cold and fierce. Even the sand was black under her bare feet. Then she heard wings, and a large dark shape landed beside her. A musty odor pervaded the air as another shape emerged from the first one. Morrigan now walked with her. Although shadowy and mute, Cyndy could clearly see the goddess's boots, heavy leather and

laced, scuffed toes and iron studs. But she kept trudging, her eyes on the sand, until Morrigan waved an ax around and it whistled ominously over her head. Suddenly her despair turned to anger and she yelled, “A warrior walks with me! I'm a strong woman — a warrior is part of who I am!” And, in that moment, she knew she could fight her way back.

Morrigan's spirit remained within her the next day when she agreed to join her son at a local shooting range. Firing off round after round, a sense of power

MORRIGAN VISUALIZATION

(Follow your customary relaxation techniques for light mediation.)

Just before dusk, vermilion splashes across the sky. A shadow appears and it's you — a sleek, soaring raven. Senses sharp, strong and powerful, you wing through the air. With earth and water below, you are mistress of all that you see.

A brilliant moon rises. Drawn by its energy, you fly towards it. You, who move easily between the worlds, acknowledge your interest and ability as a messenger. Channeling more and more of the moon's energy, legs grow beneath you, growing and growing until you connect with the earth. Your body is human now, and you stretch taller and taller until you touch the moon ... your reflection in the moon's radiance is Morrigan. Vibrant and spirited, filled with the fiery, warrior presence that is Morrigan, she speaks, and your vision is clear.

filled her and her healing began. She made an appointment with her doctor and reached out to friends. She thanked Morrigan for the strength to help herself.

A recent graduate of naturopathic school, Wendy is calling upon Morrigan for strength to pass her professional exams. She said with a smile — referring to her “battle” — “hopefully I will not be one of the chosen slain.” Wendy, who has been with the coven since its start, when she was a first year medical student, graduated with honors. She acknowledges Morrigan’s spirit as a sustaining element in her success.

A graduate student in the Creative Writing program at Arizona State University, Charlene said, “I’ve discovered that the Morrigan calls me to be a spiritual warrior. This is a state of mind, one which calls me to act on behalf of and to protect those who cannot protect themselves: children, animals, the oppressed, and our planet. But it also calls me to new ways of being in the world around me: to listen carefully, to breathe deeply, to pay attention to the smallest details, and to be *present*, whatever the circumstances. These ideas help me to be in my body, alive, aware, and ready to act, if needed. As a teacher and a writer, I live in the body of the Morrigan.”

Studying Morrigan has awakened a many-faceted warrior in my coven sisters. It was a joy for me to share in the experience as each sister gained new wisdom. As for me, I read “the Morrigan Prophecy,” a poem I discovered online while researching Morrigan’s herstory, a poem which I printed and framed to keep on my altar. If a goddess who glories in battle ultimately seeks peace, then I, too, may have hope. My dreams, so often nightmares, have now quieted. ©

REFERENCES

¹Robert Graves, *The White Goddess*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1948, p. 143.

²Shrine of the Forgotten Goddesses, <http://inanna.virtualave.net/morrigan.html>.

³All names of coven members have been changed for confidentiality.

⁴Encyclopedia Mythica™, <http://www.pantheon.org/articles/m/morrigan.html>

⁵Mythical Ireland, <http://www.mythicalireland.com/mythology/tuathade/morrigan.html>, referencing Anne Ross, *Pagan Celtic Britain*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1967 (reprinted 1994).

⁶She recommends “Morrighan’s Quest” on *Legends of the Goddess* by Laura Powers, Punch Records, Nashville, TN, 1997, “Hymn to the Morrigan” on *Be Pagan Once Again* by Isaac Bonewits, Nyack, NY, 2004; “A Raven in the Snow” on *A Celtic Christmas, Vol. 3* by Brian Dunning & Jeff Johnson, Windham Hill Records, Beverly Hills, CA, 1997; and “Warrior Goddess” on *Journey to the Goddess*, by Lisa Thiel, Sacred Dream Productions, Monrovia, CA, 1997.

⁷Shrine of the Forgotten Goddesses, <http://inanna.virtualave.net/morrigan.html>

THE MORRÍGAN’S PROPHECY

*Peace to (as high as) the sky
sky to the earth
earth beneath sky
strength in everyone
a cup very full
a fullness of honey
honor enough
summer in winter
spear supported by shield
shields supported by forts
forts fierce eager for battle
“sod” (fleece) from sheep
woods grown with antler tips (full of stags)
forever destructions have departed
mast (nuts) on trees
a branch drooping down
drooping from growth
wealth for a son
a son very learned
neck of bull (in yoke)
a bull from a song
knots in woods (i.e. scrap wood)
wood for a fire
fire as wanted
palisades new and bright
salmon their victory
the Boyne (i.e. Newgrange) their hostel
hostel with an excellence of length (size)
blue (new) growth after spring
(in) autumn horses increase
the land held secure
land recounted with excellence of word
Be might to the eternal much excellent woods
peace to (as high as the) sky
be (this) nine times eternal.⁷*

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