

SageWoman

Celebrating the Goddess in Every Woman



Sanctuary

**Finding Isis: Sheltered by Her Wings · A Place for Deer
Durga: Protection of the Fierce Mother · Goddess in the Details
The Rent Tent Revival · Goddess Temple of Ashland**



Living the Dream: Letter from the Editor

by Anne Newkirk Niven

Even if they come to kill me, I will tell them that education is our right.

— Malala Yousafzai

I am my own sanctuary and I can be reborn as many times as I choose throughout my life.

— Lady Gaga, interview in the *Guardian*, May 13, 2011

This issue was originally to have been titled “Protection.” But I soon found myself deluged with submissions about “Defense against the Dark Arts” and realized that a change of title was necessary. You see, I’ve never had time for magickal boogeymen: I was too busy dealing with the real ones.

Raised in a home in which threats of suicide, homicide, and desertion were commonplace and emotional and physical violence were part of daily life, I responded by developing a fierce and protective persona at a young age. The self-appointed champion of my younger siblings, I concentrated on keeping the people I loved alive, safe (often from one another) and hopefully, sane.

My discovery of Wicca as a young adult added a potent weapon to my paladin’s toolkit. Like many young Witches, I took to spellwork with reckless abandon. Calling upon potent magickal allies (at one time I had no less than six “power animals” that I worked with on a regular basis) I wove elaborate magickal barriers to defend against a world full of very real terrors ranging from personal assault to nuclear war.

Back then, I even resorted to using offensive magick when I deemed necessary. I am horrified to admit that on one occasion, I even cast a death spell (using my own blood) in hopes of bringing what I deemed to be a hopeless situation to an end. But I was so wracked by remorse at what I had attempted that I vowed to never play with magickal fire again.

But forswearing offensive magic didn’t mean putting down my warrior’s shield. Instead, I concentrated on wardings and magickal barriers. One of my most successful workings was designed to warn deer away from my car when driving late at night on deserted rural roads. (It worked, too; while many of my friends chalked up multiple deer casualties a year, I only killed one deer in the twenty-odd years I lived in California.) I also got pretty darn good at “invisibility” — the art of not attracting negative attention — and was able to move with relative safety in a variety of dicey environments without incident.

My magickal work seemed quite effective while I was a single maiden, but getting married and having babies almost undid me. Starting with the shocking suicide of my sister-in-law when my eldest son was less than two weeks old, every new crisis hammered away at my suddenly eggshell-thin boundaries. I had built up an image of myself as a powerful, ninja-like magickal woman, but as my hostages to fortune multiplied, my composure evaporated. By the birth of my third son, I was holding on to sanity by my fingernails.

But I stubbornly refused to surrender to my inner demons; one of my primary reasons for reaching out for help was because I could not bear to contemplate what my own suicide would do to my children. Newly-sympathetic to what I recalled of my mother’s torments from depression, anxiety, and agoraphobia, I sought medical and spiritual assistance. Thankfully, I eventually found a regime that has enabled me to live more or less in remission from my panic disorder and concomitant depression for close to a decade.

But it hasn’t been easy, especially as my sons have nudged out from under my wings into their own independent lives. It’s hard to explain — both to them and to their long-suffering father — that my need for schedules, check-ins, and above all, *communication* doesn’t reflect my evaluation of their competence. It’s not that I don’t trust *them* — it’s that I don’t trust the *Universe*.

I still wrestle with these issues almost every day, although my tolerance for independence has gradually expanded in the last few years. What I am slowly coming to realize is that the over-nurturing I exhibit with my sons (and to some extent, my husband, adult siblings, and friends) doesn’t work because it isn’t based on the persons who they actually are, but rather in my projection of my own insecurities upon them. In short, it’s not really my seventeen, twenty-one, and twenty-three year old sons that I’m driven to protect from the big, bad world. It’s me.

But protection isn't really what I need, either. I mantled up with sword, spear, shield, buckler, and vambrace back to defend myself against the world long ago. I've gotten tons of practice since then, too: just ask anyone who has seen me do battle in defense of my family. Properly prepared, I have the rock-solid conviction that I can stand up to any opponent, mundane or magickal. But what I lack is a place where I can lay down my weapons, strip off my armor, and rest, peaceful and naked as an infant, in the bosom of the Mother. I need *sanctuary*.

I don't think I'm alone in my urgent need for safe haven. The world today bristles with warriors, both female and male. Even the best and most compassionate of us face life today as combatants, striving against overpowering odds and mammoth forces that threaten our very survival. Armored with nothing more than our intelligence, strength of will, and a dash of sheer bravado, we battle heroically for our causes, our jobs, our loved ones, our freedoms, and our very souls. Like Malala Yousafzai, a 14-year old Pakistani schoolgirl who recently survived a Taliban-ordered assassination for having the temerity to voice the concerns and aspirations of young girls in the Swat Valley, we dare to face the world unbowed: defiant and empowered.

But being constantly-alert, hyper-vigilant and over-stimulated takes its toll on our bodies as well as on our spirits. Scientists are increasingly pointing to elevated stress-activated hormones such as cortisol as causative of a variety of diseases, ranging from impaired glucose tolerance to high blood pressure and decreased bone mass. The psychological and spiritual impact of being constantly on alert also reduces our ability to experience empathy, resulting in compassion-fatigue, irritability, and even despair.

So, what in the name of Goddess can we do? How can we create the peaceful, safe places that we all long for?

We may want to look to the younger members of the Goddess community for direction in this particular endeavor. Though I didn't plan it this way, most of the articles in this issue are written by women younger than I. (I just turned fifty-three.) These are no willowy, helpless waifs in need of motherly advice: they have a courage, determination, and self-respect that brings renewed hope for the future to my soon-to-be menopausal soul. All of them know, with a wisdom rooted in an understanding of their own stories, *who they are*.

It takes great optimism and courage to truly be present in today's world. But by allowing ourselves to be open to the voice of the Goddess within, the Goddess in the hearts of our sisters (and brothers), and the Goddess in the non-human world, we can reconnect to our Source through the simplest of moments.

When we open ourselves to trust the world, even for a moment — in spite of our wounds, our history, and even our exhaustion — we can find refuge in the most unlikely of places. The Goddess is present, we find, in a drop of rain falling on a steaming hotel roof; in the limpid eyes of a deer standing immobile on the edge of a muddy country road; on a warm breeze drifting from the banks of the Nile; and radiating from the face of an inner-city girl planting a garden in a tiny oasis in New York City.

Take heart, dear ones: She truly *is* with us, if only we have the eyes to see. Namaste.



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Editorial Notes

We encourage all Goddess-loving women to write for *SageWoman*. Most of our articles come from our readers! *SageWoman* accepts non-fiction submissions from women only, while *Witches&Pagans* accepts both fiction and non-fiction from all genders. *Crone: Women Coming of Age* accepts material from women 49 years of age and older. *SageWoman* publishes primarily first-person spiritual narratives.

For our current editorial email address (we change them often to deal with spam) please use our contact form online at www.bbcontact.com, call 888-724-3966, or mail your submission to SageWoman, P. O. Box 687, Forest Grove, OR 97116.

Next issue #84 "Women & Men" Deadline is past.

#85 "Herbal Magick" Deadline March 1, 2013

Green witchery — the magick of the natural world, especially plants — is one of the most popular topics among *SageWoman* readers, so this is your chance to tell us about how you use plants (especially herbs) in both your magickal/spiritual practice and for healing and well-being. We are especially interested in your experience of green/wildcrafting; growing your own plants and connecting with devas/spiritual plant beings.

#86 "Renewal & Rebirth" Deadline July 1, 2013

Sometimes in life, we find that we need — or desire — to go back to the beginning and start over. When it's time to start afresh, or to rediscover what has been lost, how do you find the energy, courage, and hope to begin again? What goddess do you call upon when its time to be reborn?

Coming Soon:
#87: Serenity



Magazines that feed your soul and liven your spirits.



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