

# SageWoman

*Celebrating the Goddess in Every Woman*



## Serenity

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**J**ust past a pink and salmon sunrise I gather the ritual tools: warm water laced with soap and the bitterness of iodine, a washcloth, dry towel, a little steel bucket that sings when struck. It is milking time.

Jewel, my dark Nubian goat doe, waits at the gate. Our breaths are twin steam vents in the chilly air. I follow the rules, set by both of us: plenty of grain is scooped into the dish and sprinkled with mineral-laden salt. I lead her out for our twice-daily ceremony. She hops up on the stand, inserts her head between the vertical bars, and chews her breakfast hungrily. I make fast the stanchion to keep her in position. Next, I wash and dry her bag, enjoying the soothing touch of warm water. I wrap my hands around her teats, feeling the bounce of milk, the rubber texture of her bare skin, the resilient life that dwells therein, the mammalian mysteries unloosed and revered.

The first squirts signal the letting-down of the milk, a prickly sensation that I remember from nursing my own babies. The first milk is released back to Nature, both to clear the teat of bacteria, and as an offering. Next Callie, then Blue get a couple squeezings, aimed into open mouths. That is the Canine Offering. Then milk is pressed into two small dishes for the Feline Offering, and two cats lap in satisfaction. Jewel's spring coat is shiny black, sleek as obsidian.

The steel bucket rings with strong streams of warm milk into the bottom. Steam rises, joins with my breath, as I sing in rhythmic counterpoint. There is music to this job, hands working together to the syllables of my song. I release the milk firm and quick, making foam rise, cresting the milk with lightness. I ponder this job, that of women and children around the world. Women's work. It has been happening for countless millennia, and Jewel and I are part of this ritual that stretches back through all our grandmothers. There is magic in this nourishment of our interconnected species. We are living an ancient and perfect symbiosis, with each other, and with the generations before us. In all of history nothing has altered in this exchange between us. I grant wholesome food, clean water, safety from predators, shelter from the elements to this partner, and she provides us with fresh milk two times a day, every day. There are no days off, no vacations, and so it goes with a milking animal. As long as she milks, I must be there for our twice-daily dances.

In the winter, evening milking happens after daylight leaves the sky. I light a flame lantern and cherish the warmth and gentle hum as it burns. As the lantern glows from the fence near the milking stand, I glimpse a hidden chapter in the life of my farm: the shallow light angle reveals that this ground was once plowed. The gentle rolling remnants of furrows were only obvious in this low-lit darkness. This tender land now hosts a fruit orchard and poultry pens. Among the dormant

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trees, Jewel's winter fur is quite thick, and her essence of goatiness is revealed in her earthy smell.

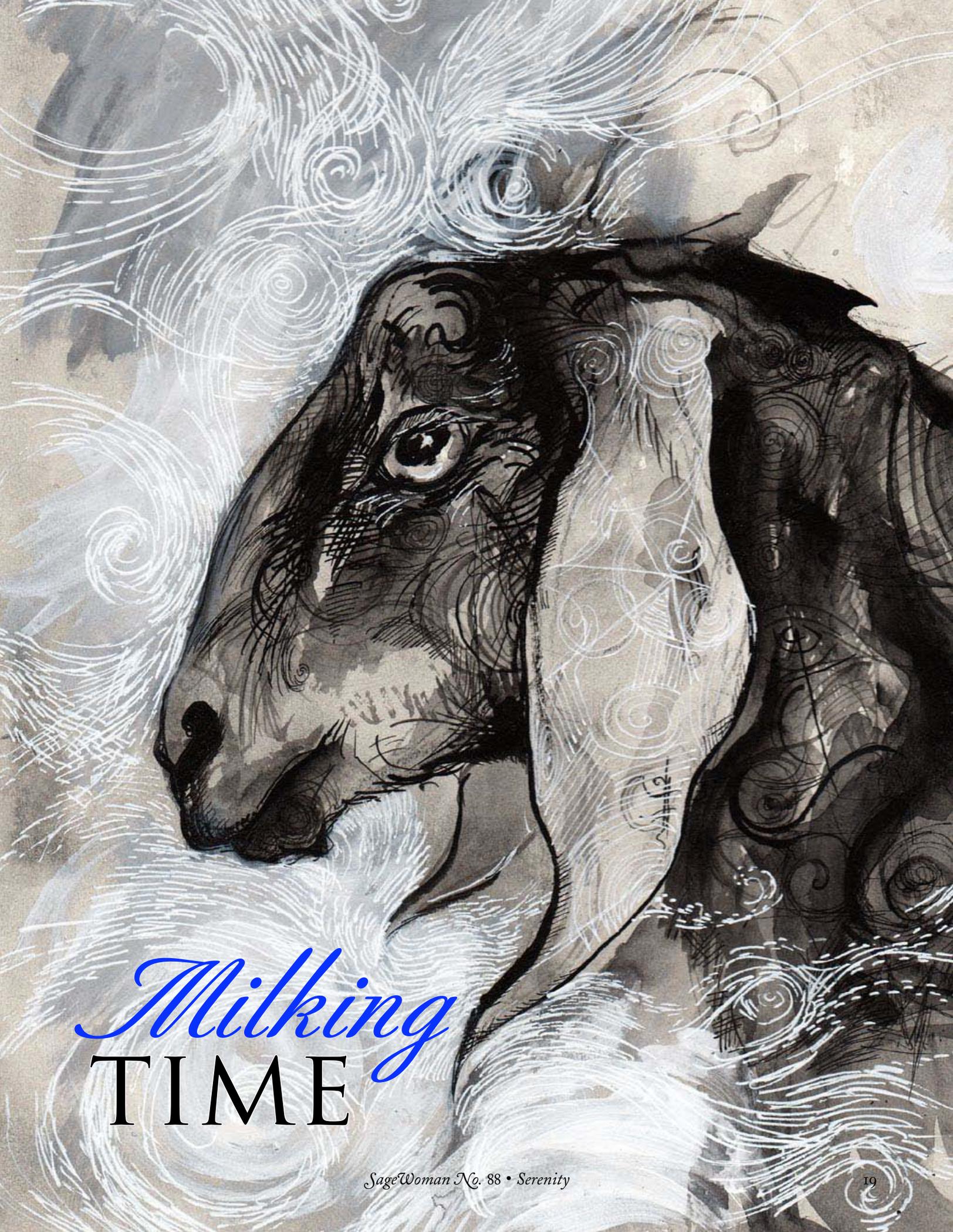
Fresh milk carries the fragrance of nurturing, of unconditional love. The care of milk and its producers has traditionally been based in the realm of women. Can a man fully realize the sacred understanding between my goat and I, the deep and reverent bond of a mother nursing her child? He can grasp her teats, squeeze and breathe and measure, but I and so many mothers before me have fully lived this ritual of connection and sustenance. We are the Life Givers, and we are holy in our work.

The ritual ends with a basket of hay and Jewel in her shed. I toss the wash water, now cool, over the stand as a baptism of both cleaning and thanks. Gathering bucket and washpan, I carry Jewel's gift back to the kitchen. The milk is carefully strained, poured into old fruit jars and placed to cool in the refrigerator.

We are done for another twelve hours, and then we must meet, touch, bless, and part. Jewel begins making tomorrow's milk with the grass she grazed today, with the grain and alfalfa I bestow and with the water I pour into her trough as an offering to the Goddess. ☺



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*Milking*  
TIME