

WHY WE NEED TO CLAIM THE QUEEN

BY BARBARA ARDINGER
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Eight years into a new century, it's time to do some new thinking about the Goddess. For as long as any of us can remember thinking about her at all, we've seen her in a familiar form. This is the Triple Goddess — Maiden, Mother, and Crone. We've been taught that this feminine trinity is older than the male trinity (Father, Son, Holy Ghost) of the standard-brand religions and that it echoes the three phases of the moon and that the phases of a woman's life mirror it. Goddess — moon — woman. Three triplicities. How handy. How symmetrical. That's the way it's truly always been and the way it should always be. Right?

Wrong. Our beloved Triple Goddess is one of our foundational myths. It's nice and it's perhaps inspiring, but it's only a myth. Anyone who looks at a calendar or almanac — or up into the sky every night for a month — can easily see that the moon *doesn't* have three phases; oh, and yes, we live longer than the ancients did. It's time to set aside the old paradigm and adopt a new one. I propose a four-fold goddess for the modern woman.

It's easy to find multiple goddesses. As Vicki Noble shows us in *The Double Goddess*, cultures around the world have given us innumerable twin goddesses. Some are sisters, some are lovers, some are mothers and daughters. Many triple goddesses are three sisters: the Matronae, the Norns, the Erinyes, the Greco-Roman Graces, Gorgons, and Graeae. There are also triple goddesses whose representations are actually three heads or faces of one goddess, like Brigit and Hecate, and even a triple-headed dog, Cerberus, guardian of the underworld. When I put the question of triple goddesses to a Goddess Scholars list to which I belong, I learned that there are a pre-Roman Etruscan trinity of two goddesses and a god as well as other, later, mixed trios. There are larger groups of sisters, too. Nine Muses. As many as twenty-seven Valkyries.

But, wait, I hear you say — what about Persephone, Demeter, and Hecate? It's true that Demeter and her daughter are a double goddess. In Sicily, they were called *Damatres* (“mothers”). But though we sift through Greek myth trying to find a crone to go with this mother and daughter, there is no evidence to make Hecate the crone aspect of the mother and daughter. Hecate has only a bit part in that story of the kidnapping of the Persephone.

The maiden-mother-crone is not ancient. She was invented by Robert Graves in *The White Goddess*. Published in 1948, *The White Goddess* is neither history nor herstory, neither theology nor thealogy. It is a close reading of Celtic poetry and myth by an eccentric 20th-century poet-scholar. He first mentions “the capricious and all-powerful Threefold Goddess” as the “mother, bride and layer-out” of the God of the Waning Year (p. 24). Later Graves assigns the familiar

trinity of colors to this goddess. White is “the color of the first member of her moon-trinity.” (Aha! a lunar connection, too.)

THE FOUR PHASES OF THE MOON

We like to think that the moon has three phases: New Moon, Full Moon, Dark Moon. These are said to correspond to the maiden, mother, and crone. Nearly every coven, circle, or other ritual group I know of regularly celebrates the Full Moon, and many also hold rituals on the New Moon ... or at least on the Saturday closest to the Full or New Moon. Most of the witches I know say that the three days before or after “count” as full or new. They scrutinize their calendars to find out exactly what time the moon moves into Full or New.

But the moon clearly has *four* phases: Waxing, Full, Waning, and Dark. The New Moon is actually the very beginning of the Waxing phase. Keeping our thinking symmetrical, if we see only three lunar phases, we also like to allot only three phases to a woman's life. But these days life is a lot more complicated than that. The

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maiden, or virgin, is the prepubescent girl. Or maybe she's the teenager before she gets married, though today she may or may not be a physical virgin. Or maybe she's the grown woman who, devoted to her career, remains unmarried. And let's remember that the crone recycles as the virgin, so maybe this phase also represents the older woman who is cycling into a new phase without the bother of boyfriend, husband, or family. In 1933, the Jungian analyst M. Esther Harding discussed moon goddesses and the Greek word *parthenos*, which means "no more than unmarried woman." (Thus the Parthenon was dedicated to the never-married Athena.) Harding goes on to say that being a virgin "involves the right to refuse intimacies as well as to accept them. A girl belongs to *herself* [Harding's emphasis] ... she is 'one-in-herself'" (pp. 101-03).

The mother is the grown woman who has given birth to at least one child. Or maybe it's the woman who is a "mother of invention" or of her career or who mentors younger women. But what about the teenage mother — where does she fit? What about surrogate mothers? If a woman gives her baby away, is she still a mother? What about movie stars and other women who use surrogate mothers to have children for them after they've passed menopause?

The crone is said to be the "woman of the fourteenth month," that is, the post-menopausal woman who has not menstruated for a lunar year plus one month. Some people say that the crone also has to have passed her second Saturn return (approximately age fifty-six). But some women say that "cronehood is a state of mind" and accept crones in their twenties and thirties because they "feel like crones." What about young women who have had hysterectomies? Are they crones because they no longer menstruate? What about women who don't feel old at sixty? After all, *AARP Magazine* recently proclaimed that "sixty is the new thirty." Some people say that if you've been croned then you're a crone and seem to believe that croning is an ancient ritual. The earliest croning rituals I know of were performed in the 1980s by Prof. Carolyn Harrison of the Claremont Colleges in southern California.

A woman's life in the 21st century is too complex to fit into simple formulas. Life is too long for a mere three stages. We cannot look to the "ancient wisdom" for solutions to modern issues.

In their book, *The Women's Wheel of Life*, Elizabeth Davis and Carol Leonard, suggest not just four phases but thirteen. Between mother and crone, come *amazon*, *matriarch*, and *priestess*. The *amazon*, Davis and Leonard write, is "the pathfinder and trailblazer" (page 85).

The matriarch has reached a state of equilibrium and harmony, "a fine combination of physical vitality and worldliness, the harvest of all she has worked for and experienced" (p. 87). The priestess "discovers the power of circling as a means to realize personal growth" (p. 113) "There are a bunch of women out there," Davis and Leonard write, "who support one another fully in being their most magnificent, radiant selves, and aren't freaked out by one another's beauty or whatever gifts each one may have" (p. 126). I propose queen as the sum of all these qualities and further propose that women "of a certain age" shine forth in their juice and power.

Until the late 20th century, most women did not live past menopause. Historically, how many old women can we name? Hildegard of Bingen, Abbess; Eleanor of Aquitaine, Queen of England and France; Catherine de Medici, Queen of France; Elizabeth I, Queen of England; Mbande Nzinga, Queen of Angola; Victoria, Empress of the British Empire; Tz'u Hsi, Empress of China. Rulers come to mind because we have almost no information about ordinary women. Throughout history women worked hard and bore many children. They were still the primary care-givers in the home, and they often just wore out or died in childbirth. Until the Industrial Revolution, women worked beside their husbands; after the Revolution, they went to the factories along with their husbands. As the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes said, the life of man was "solitary, nasty, brutish, and short." Except for the "solitary" part, that description probably went double for the life of woman.

Today, at least in the developed countries, women commonly live twenty or thirty years past natural menopause. What this means is that we need to acknowledge and name the fourth phase of life — the phase between motherhood and cronehood. I propose that before getting to crone, women spend a couple of decades as *queens*. When we finally get the kids out of the house, we find ourselves at the top of our game. Thanks to the wonders of modern medicine, both allopathic and holistic, we're healthier. If we're working in the corporate world, we reach upper management; many women leap off the corporate ladder, however, and successfully open their own businesses. Because we've already lived fifty years, we have experience, knowledge, and wisdom. As the saying goes, we're "been there, done that, and bought the T-shirt." We're not still making the old mistakes (though we may be inventing new ones), we no longer hesitate to be as smart as we are, or to speak our minds. Whether our realm is a well-organized and smoothly run home or a corporation we're at the top of our form. We're queens, and we deserve to be proud of it.

I have discussed this issue with friends and with the Goddess Scholars. Many of them — we're mostly of queen age ourselves — agree with me. One scholar said she still feels "juicy." Another reports that she is retired but "in my prime," though because of physical problems she now calls on younger women to help her. Other women I know in their fifties and sixties are writing their first books or taking classes or moving into new fields they never before had time to explore.

As my friend Margaret remarked, queens are in the giving-back stage of life. They sit on boards and committees involved in charitable giving. They're grandmothers who start study groups and after-school programs. Because they have more free time than mothers and more energy than crones, they do a lot of volunteering. The way the world is today, we need these queens to straighten it out and make it fly right.

Do we want to hang on to the idea that woman, moon, and goddess cycle together? If so, then let us claim the four-fold goddess. Numerologically, 4 is the number of work and discipline. In the Tarot, it's Card IV, the Emperor, whose quality is intellect, and the fours in the Minor Arcana represent the foundation and structure needed for things to manifest. It's being "four-square" and perhaps "forthright." Four is the number of the earth, says J.E. Cirlot in *A Dictionary of Symbols*; it is symbolic of "the human situation, of the external, natural limits of the 'minimum' awareness of totality, and ... of rational organization" (p. 222). There are four seasons, cardinal directions, elements, Guardians of the Watchtowers, solar festivals in the wheel of the year, and groups of four animals or divine creatures in many mythologies. Four is a solid number. It's got corners in which we can stack our books and our tools, and there's room to spread our work out and get something done.

Who would the Queens be among our familiar goddesses? For a start, let's consider Hera, Isis, Inanna, Frigg, and Changing Woman. They're more than wives, more than mothers, but not aged enough to be crones. These goddesses are active and creative.

Dear reader, what I have written here is only an outline. What do you think? If you have reservations or objections, share them with me. If you like my proposal, it's your turn now. Amplify it. Add details. Create new rituals to honor the fourfold goddess. Take another look at women in their fifties and sixties and see what they're doing that inspires you. Create magical work for the waxing and waning moons. Write and tell me what you're doing to celebrate the four-fold goddess. ☺

RESOURCES

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M. Esther Harding, *Woman's Mysteries: Ancient and Modern*, Harper Colophon Books, 1971.

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Vicki Noble, *The Double Goddess: Women Sharing Power*, Bear & Co., 2003.

Thanks to Margaret Harwood for reading and commenting and to the women of the Goddess Scholars list. They know ten times more than I do and freely share their wisdom.

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