

Sage Priestess

The Goddess &
Priestessing



The Goddess & Contemporary Women's Spirituality



Venus of Laussel, picture of the original kept in Bordeaux museum, France

Understanding and having a relationship to the Goddess can be difficult and fraught with cultural baggage that tells us that it is wrong or evil.

Cross-culturally Goddesses have been worshipped and honoured for millennia. The first examples date back 20 000 years to the **Palaeolithic**.

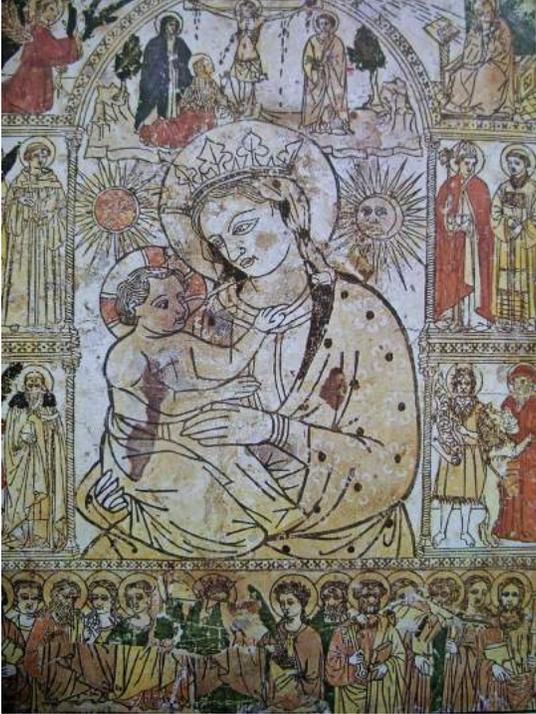
However, it is thought that beginning with the **advent of agriculture**, more complex political systems and war, that the power that the Goddess had gave way to a group of religions based on a male monotheistic God.

This shift can be traced, in part, to 2000 BC and **Babylonian** mythology. Here, the **Goddess** became associated primarily with a "**Chaotic Nature**" that needed to be controlled and the **God** became associated with a **Creative Spirit**.

The separation of "mind from matter, soul for body, thinking from feeling, intellect from intuition and reason from instinct" has had a deep and harmful impact on not only how we negatively view our environment but how women and the female divine is understood (Baring and Cashford).

Let's flash forward a few thousand years! In the 1970s, in North America and Western Europe Christian and Jewish **women started asking questions** about their roles in their faiths and how women were treated & represented. At the same time second wave feminists were asking similar questions about their roles in society and at home.

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1428, Madonna of the Fire (Madonna del Fuoco). An early Italian devotional print

Many women stayed within their faiths and **worked from within** to redefine their roles & develop new relationships with divine women and saints. The best example in Christianity is Mary.

Many other women left organized religion and **created new forms of spiritual expression** primarily influenced by the burgeoning Neopagan movement because of the importance it placed on the Goddess.

These two movements--the reclaiming of the female divine within organized religion, and the creation of new forms of spirituality--were the beginning of Women's Spirituality, and a renewed interest in Goddesses.

This course is part of this larger lineage because it reclaims spiritual sovereignty for women in direct relationship to the Goddess.

The Universal Goddess & the Goddess Within

But who is this Goddess? Women's spirituality sees things a bit differently than we may be used to in organized religion. Women's spirituality (and this program) is **non-hierarchical, non-dogmatic and creative**.

Because of this open approach, the Goddess is understood & experienced in as many ways as there are women and men who find meaning in Her.

We'll look at two ways: **immanent** (within) and **transcendent** (outside).

Immanent

Here, the **Goddess is found within**. You can call on her archetypal qualities at any time in your life because they are accessible within your very being.

Feeling emotionally connected to and inspired by the Goddess in your daily life, and being able to call upon that energy at any given time, is very empowering and healing.

Transcendent

Here, the **Goddess is thought of as a larger force**: a Universal force, Mother Nature, the Earth Mother, the Great Mother & Cosmic Mother.

She is **vast, powerful, timeless and immortal**. And **beyond dualisms!**

You can call on her when you need. There is real comfort in feeling protected by the Universal Mother, or an individual matron Goddess, and feeling part of a greater cycle of being. How you choose to understand the Goddess is your choice!

Priestessing

Aspects of the Goddess as Priestess Archetypes

Throughout this course we'll be working with many different Goddesses. We'll also be exploring Her different guises as priestess archetypes.

The Goddess is sometimes seen as the **one Great Goddess**, sometimes as a **pair** (Mother/ Daughter such as Demeter and Persephone), or as a **triple Goddess** (Maiden, Mother, Crone).

Finally, she has also been conceived of as a **four or five part Goddess** that further reflects the life cycle (e.g. Daughter/Virgin, Lover, Mother, Queen, Crone).



Hecate, British Museum, Public Domain

My approach to Priestessing emphasizes **embodying a felt inner sense of your own divinity**.

So, I have combined traditional Goddess aspects (e.g. Maiden, Mother, Crone) with other Priestess archetypes or paths (e.g. shaman, mystic, seer).

This means that as you discover the wise woman, for example, you understand yourself as a wise woman and are able to Priestess from that embodied place.

These aspects are just some of the different paths you can take as a Priestess!

What's a Priestess?



Priestess of Delphi, John Collier, 1891

The word priestess comes from the Greek word, **presbyter**, which means **elder**.

Traditionally, priests and priestesses are defined as **roles of spiritual authority** and **mediators of spirit**. However, this is only one way to define a priestess.

Cross-culturally, women have held **powerful and healing roles** in their communities that do not necessarily fit with the traditional Western definitions.

Also, ideas of what power is and how to be a leader are also up for interpretation!

There is evidence of priestesses in: Neolithic Catal Huyuk (Turkey) Malta, Crete, ancient Mesopotamia, Classical Greece, Egypt, Syria, Canaan, Israel and in the Roman Empire.

Women have also held important roles in Hinduism, Judaism, and in the Hawaiian Huna religions, just to name a few.

Priestessing can involve holding the space for ritual and ceremony as well as holding the space for others to heal and connect to their divine nature.

Priestessing

Holding Space

Holding space for others begins with learning to hold space for yourself.

When you can **sit with your shadow places and find love and compassion** for yourself waiting there you are healing and connecting to your divine nature.

When you **let your light shine in the world** and give yourself permission be who you are without apology you are connecting to your divine nature.

Priestesses are also:

- Connected with **natural rhythms** of the earth
- In touch with their own **energy** & the energies around them
- **Generous** with their gifts and act from a place of service
- **Intuitive and wise** & willing to share that wisdom with others



Relief of a high priestess, ca. 700 B.C.E.

- **Empowered & Empowering**
- Witness to **rites of passages**
- **Lineage holders** of an ancient way of being
- Open to letting the **divine speak through them**
- In touch with their inner wisdom and **willing to listen**

Ultimately, you will discover your own sense of what a priestess is to you as you go through this course!

Questions to Consider

Have you ever felt the presence of a Goddess in your life? How did it feel?

What does the Goddess mean to you?

Do you think the Goddess is immanent, transcendent, both or neither?



Questions to Consider

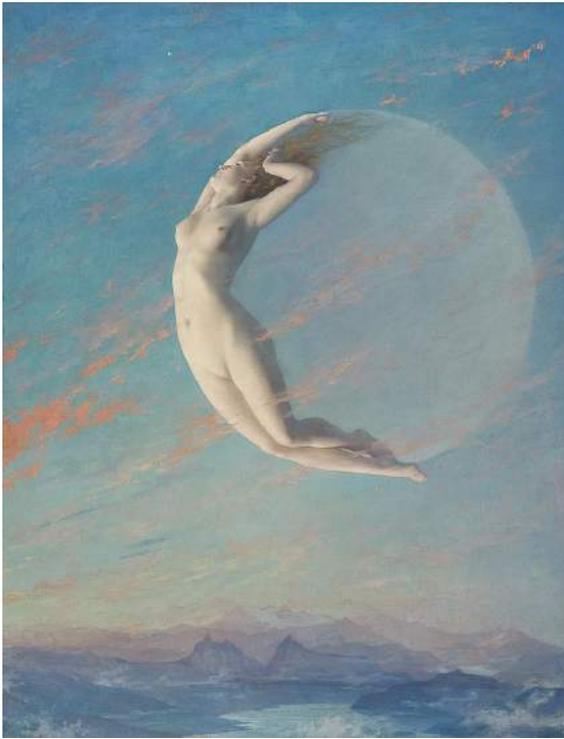
What aspects of being a Priestess appeals to you?

What are you not so sure about or is a growth edge for you as a Priestess?

After reading this booklet, what do you think about power and leadership from a Priestess perspective?



Suggestions for Working with the Goddess



Selene, 1880 by Albert Aublet

1. **Find images** of the Goddess you want to work with and sit with how they make you feel.

Tip: I love Pinterest for this!

2. **Read** about your Goddess. Learn the stories and myths associated with her. What do they say about your own story?

3. **Create a sacred space** for your Goddess. Include her symbols and offer her things she would love!

4. **Meditate on your Goddess.** Imagine she is sitting with you. Feel her presence within and beside you.

5. **Draw or paint** your Goddess. Or **write or dance** for Her.

6. When you have gotten to know your Goddess, **pray to her.**

Note: If you view the Goddess as immanent (from within) pray to that part of yourself that can help guide you.

7. **Create a ritual** inspired by your Goddess.

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Photo Sources, in order of appearance

Venus of Laussel by photo 120, œuvre dont l'auteur est mort depuis environ 25 000 ans (Own work) [CC BY 3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>)], via Wikimedia Commons

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Relief of a high priestess, ca. 700 B.C.E. By Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund (Brooklyn Museum) [see page for license], via Wikimedia Commons

Selene, 1880 by Albert Aublet [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

Highly Recommended

If you have an hour to spare, I highly recommend watching **Goddess Remembered** by Donna Read (1989, NFB).

It fills in so many gaps about the history of the Goddess and how women's spirituality developed!

Here's the link:

https://www.nfb.ca/film/goddess_remembered/

About Vanessa Sage, PhD

**My work focuses on self-compassion, inner-bravery,
and discovering the mystery in our everyday lives.**

Hi, I'm Vanessa Sage, Ph.D., and I've been immersed in spirituality and tarot for over 25 years! I'm a Priestess, a spiritual and business mentor, and a poet. I've led six cycles of women in Priestess Training, have written a book of poetry, and run a tarot school.



**I love finding wonder
in my everyday life, and comfort
in a good book and a cup of tea.**

I Care Deeply About Mindful Compassionate Leadership. I am committed to building enriching, conscious and thriving community based on the principles of love, compassion, kindness and respect.

I have a Ph.D. in cultural anthropology from McMaster University. Over the course of my 10-year academic career, I studied: Buddhism, goddess spirituality, pilgrimage, contemporary paganism, and how hope for a city was embodied in an arts scene.

**I walk this path with you. I'm inspired by many spiritual
traditions, I do my own personal spiritual growth work, and
am a highly sensitive introverted empath.**

You'll notice that I talk about the Goddess, drum, invite you to be seen and heard, and have a very intuitive participatory teaching style. All the feelings are welcome and there's a lot of laughter when we meet.

**I believe we're all leaders and have valuable things to
learn from each other.**