

Spellcraft Issue # 7

Goddess Spirituality 3

### **Elder Wisdom**

By Alicia Sherwood for Goddess Association in Australia.

‘Since life springs from death, death has the potential for renewed life; what are usually considered opposites are recognized as two sides of the same coin’<sup>i</sup>...

In previous articles, we have seen how closely, how beautifully, the aspects of dark and light, life and death weave together in the lore of the Sacred Feminine and the Path of Goddess Spirituality. Here, we come to final aspect of the Holy Trinity, and discover the colours of this principle once again. And, if it seems a difficult task to equate light, beauty and life with age, decay and death, well read on see how pure this truth really is...

It is a very great relief to know, in one’s bones, that as we approach an understanding of and embodiment of the Elder, the Crone, we thus come, one step at a time, closer to the beginning. Indeed, the great wheel has no beginning or end! As one of three (of many, in fact) faces of the Great Goddess, of the Divine Sacred Feminine, the Crone is perhaps the least understood and often vilified aspect. That is Her deep mystery, and perhaps one of the reasons She is feared (at least subconsciously), since the roots of the Crone’s power go deep, the bones of Her wisdom buried in Her core. They are the result of many deaths, losses, joys and wonders, large and small. All the flesh has been composted; naught remains but the stark truth of experience. To say the least this can, at times, be confronting!

Not only this, the Crone, weaver of decay, destruction, death and transformation does not necessarily deliver her teachings, or demand her due, with a Bon Bon to sweeten the deal. She knows what is needed for the cycle to be able to come to wholeness, and often this is a firm hand in the face of us struggling against the inevitable loss of something (a feeling, situation, perception) which has become dear to us.

### **The Wisdom in the Wheel.**

In terms of the Sacred Wheel, whether visioned as the solar, seasonal year, the lunar cycle, a woman's Blood Wheel or the cycle of a person's life, the Crone, that Dark Twin to the Bright Goddess, rules the waning aspect. In the celebration of seasonal moments, this is especially the case during the time of Autumn Equinox through to the Winter Solstice.

This can tend to be a period of introspection and contemplation for our heart and spirit (though in our beautiful climate we might also experience the seeming paradox of this energy combined with an enlivening of our bodies in the cool freshness and vitality of autumn and winter!). It is a time for care and quiet strength. There is an uncertainty during this part of the journey, whether manifested in the season or embodied in one's inner journey, as perceptions warp and the concept of 'reality' is challenged. Here, the Great Goddess is fitfully stirring Her cauldron of transformation, as the decay of self moves to completion and control slips away. Here is an opportunity to discover the truth of yourself away from roles and comfort zones, a paring down to the bone if you will. The essence of the Crone demands that we have trust in the continuing cycle, even while the new is being prepared for in the compost and the ashes of the old.

### **The Deep Dark.**

While silence and stillness are hallmarks of the Crone essence, it also timely action which distinguishes Her. The Crone, whilst She rules the deep dark of Creation and our being, also holds the torch in the darkness, as Hecate does for all who journey the underworld. In this flame, our fears are 'spotlighted' but also the needed action is contrasted quite clearly in this lone light; a decision that seems impossible, or an inevitable turn of events.

There is a ruthless efficiency to the magic of the Elder. She takes Her staff of power to whatever must be ‘cut’ or ‘spoken’; nothing more and nothing less.

In prehistory, this function was represented in art from as far back as Neolithic times (and even earlier), where an example of the essence of the Crone Goddess is identifiable in Her epiphany as bird of prey. Relentless and necessary, She (and the bird of prey) excels at the task of transmuting forms and energy from one thing to another.

Fig. 2, which dates to about 6100 BCE, shows how this epiphany of the Death Goddess embodies life also; the bodies of the birds have what is believed to be eggs inside them, though the birds are surrounded by decapitated bodies.

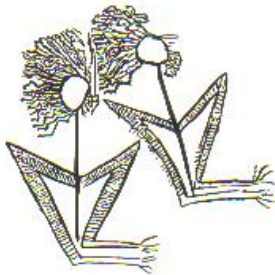


Fig 1.  
Birds of prey on Neolithic dish. A stylistic representation of the Crone.  
(Gimbutas 1999: 41).

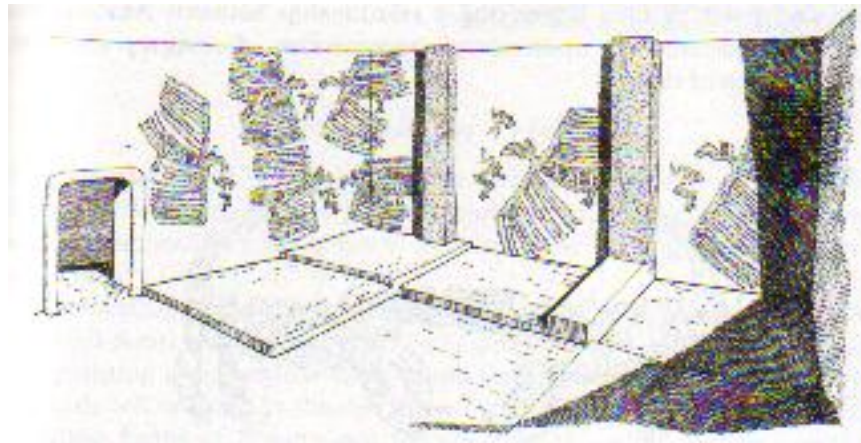


Fig 2. Vultures painted on shrine walls in Catal Hüyük. In many cultures, vultures were also associated with the Mother, particularly in her protective or nurturing aspect (Baring & Cashford 1991: 87).

If the wisdom of the Elder is the wisdom that accompanies death, it may also be considered Blood Wisdom. For the Crone is represented as a post-menopausal woman, who has experienced the deaths of Maiden to Virgin (Menarche), Virgin to Mother/Sovereign (Birth and mature motherhood) and finally Mother/Sovereign to Crone (Menopause) where the Blood Wisdom is now embodied, literally. The representations of the Dark Goddess lie at the very heart of our various strands of history and myth; from Kali the Destroyer in the East, to Keridwen the death-dealing sow and keeper of the Cauldron of Wisdom in the West. To love the Goddess, and to know Her and the wholeness of woman, is to love Her fearsome character as well.

### **The Relentless Joy.**

It's a fact. The Crone laughs a great deal more than is considered proper; and often at the most inopportune times (such as when our egos take a tumble!). It is the laugh born from having seen everything before and knowing when it's time to 'lighten up', reset our priorities and get some perspective.

In many of Her stories from long ago, it is only the Crone who knows how to stir the younger Goddess from her despair. In Greece, the grieving Mother Goddess Demeter, wretched at the loss of her daughter Kore/ Persephone to the underworld, has withdrawn her abundance and plunged the land into the scarcity of winter. Baubo, however, comes along and, dancing her jig with lifted skirts, brings a smile to Demeter and thus breaks the spell of winter.<sup>ii</sup> In the *Homeric Hymn*, it is a figure known as Iambe who takes the role of the Crone essence, telling bawdy jokes; 'in later times also it was Iambe who pleased the moods of the Goddess'.<sup>iii</sup> Such is the medicine of the Elder. It is She who can help lift the weight of your emotional burdens, by reminding you of your Truth and the perspective it always offers.

**Ritual suggestion:**

Aim to conduct this ritual during the waning moon, from last quarter to the dark moon would be best. Adorn your altar with those things which best represent an honouring of the Crone Goddess, the Elder and Wise Woman for you. Understand that you are also acknowledging Her essence *within* you....

You may wish to use a black or silver candle, anointed with oils such as Juniper, Cedar or Aniseed. Allow your wanderings in nature to reveal treasures that speak of healing of Elder Wisdom; a crow feather or old bone, a special stone or rotting leaf. A sacred walk such as this is indeed part of the ritual, and is an important connection to Her nature.

In your sacred space, having honoured the circle, elements and ancestors in whichever way is right for you, ask for the blessing of the Crone Goddess, that she might share her wisdom with you at this time and guard your journey. Sit very quietly with your breath, noticing how it fills the void of your being, beginning at a death, rising to life and ending with death...Sit for a time with your feelings about the dark, about age and death also. Are you fearful? Ambivalent? Disdainful? Admiring? Such musings will in fact tell you about your attitude, not only to those outside of yourself, but more importantly to that aspect within yourself; a vital part of your essence and power as a person.

Using charcoal (or something else if you prefer) draw your unique vision of the Crone and Her essence. Look at how the dark and light of the charcoal and paper lie together. What does this reveal to you? What are the gifts? What are the teachings or the wounds that need healing with regard to this essence of the Sacred Feminine?

As the next part of your ritual, you will make use of the transformative power of the Elder Goddess. Sit for a time and think of one thing in particular which you sorely need to 'let die' in your Self/ Life. It could be a situation in your life, a destructive behavioural pattern or old perception of self. Write the thing which is due for transmutation clearly and concisely on a piece of paper.

Holding it next to your heart, allow yourself to feel love and compassion for that which has served you, but can do so no longer. Be ready to bid it goodbye and a good death. Ask the Crone to take up whatever it is...see Her aged hands take it from you and know that it is truly being given over to Her and Her healing ways. Put the piece of paper to the candle flame and watch as it turns to ashes in a (safe) 'cauldron', knowing as you do so that the energy is being transformed. Feel it begin to release and let go from your being, and the light and purity of a new truth find its space to grow. Give heart felt thanks to Goddess, the ancestors and spirit guides, and close your ceremony in your usual way. Be sure to bury the ashes in the ground afterwards. You may find that a period of 'mourning' is appropriate. Feel free to visit the 'graveside' and place flowers and other offerings as you process the letting go and transformation deep within you.

Blessings of the Elder One light your days and nights...

The Goddess Association in Australia (G.A.I.A.) is a not for profit, member- driven organization which is committed to bringing women together, united in the timeless wisdom and lore of Goddess. For more information go to [www.goddessassociation.com.au](http://www.goddessassociation.com.au)

Alicia Sherwood M.A. (Ancient History) facilitates programs and workshops for women. For more information, go to [www.moontree.net](http://www.moontree.net)

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<sup>i</sup> Buffie Johnson *Lady of the Beast: The Goddess and Her Sacred Animals* (1994: 97).

<sup>ii</sup> Hornblower & Spawforth *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (2003: 236).

<sup>iii</sup> *Hymn to Demeter* 205.