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The Great Goddess: Her vestiges uncovered in three patriarchal religions (Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism).

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THE GREAT GODDESS:
HER VESTIGES UNCOVERED
IN THREE PATRIARCHAL RELIGIONS

by

Janette Orr

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through the Department of Religious Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts at the
University of Windsor

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1997
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ABSTRACT

The Great Goddesses held real power in the Ancient World, whether in goddess-dominated religions or god-dominated religions, where the goddesses played subordinate roles. The feminine principle was always present, unlike in the three patriarchal religions under study: Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism.

What happened to the Goddesses in these religions? The gods and male founders of these religions appropriated the Great Goddesses’ powers of creating and sustaining life, and the Great Goddesses’ powers over the process of death and renewal/regeneration/rebirth. They debased or subordinated the Goddesses’ key symbols - the serpent, the tree, the earth, and the moon.

By comparing goddess-dominant myths or religions with Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism it becomes clear that a gender shift occurred in the dominant deity, and that the new male deities or religious founders assumed the Great Goddesses’ powers, while at the same time attempting to exclude the Goddesses and a feminine principle from the new religions. Upon close examination, vestiges of these Great Goddesses can be discovered in Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism.
DEDICATION

For my husband Tom, my mother, father and aunt,

for their inspiration and help.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Story-telling is never an innocent occupation.
- Lucy Hughes-Hallett

I am a journalist and thus interested in what and how people think about current events and why they happen. This interest caused me to wonder what belief system underlies our thinking, as we approach the millennium. Initially, I believed that law provided the underlying basis that shaped our approach to daily events. But our judicial systems do not spring from a vacuum. For the most part, our religious beliefs dictate how they develop. Thus, for example, laws making it difficult for men to gain custody of their children are ultimately based on the religious belief that it is the woman's role, not the man's, to care for children.

Similarly, the current code phrase "traditional family values" urges a return to a time when women did not work outside the home, polite society did not condone pregnancy outside of marriage, and homosexuals had no rights. All are positions rooted in the world's monotheistic patriarchal religions. Our society's religious beliefs form the underlying framework for our thoughts. This holds true even for those who describe themselves as non-religious or atheist, for they have been raised in a culture imbued with religious moral values, whether that culture is Jewish, Christian or Buddhist.

What lies behind these patriarchal religions and their belief systems? As a feminist who would prefer an egalitarian world and thus would like to
alter patriarchal attitudes, I realized I must discover how and why patriarchal 
religions developed their particular belief systems.

As a journalist, I am acutely aware that there is more than one side to 
each story -- and that includes religious stories. In writing Cleopatra, Lucy 
Hughes-Hallett states "story-telling is never an innocent occupation" (3). 
There is always an underlying reason the author adopts a certain slant to the 
story, that certain anecdotes are included and others rejected. For example, 
after a battle the victor usually dictates the story. His scribes set down in 
glowing terms just what the hero has accomplished, and glosses over his 
failures or misdeeds. This version of events is often accepted uncritically, as 
"gospel truth". Yet it may be far from an accurate portrayal of events.

The wary reader can only ask, "Who benefits from this storytelling?" It 
is seldom the conquered, the dispossessed, the minority group with lesser 
social standing. Story-telling has an agenda, that usually serves to bolster or 
entrench the current status quo or what the story-teller would prefer to be the 
status quo.

I pose an example, my personal religious dilemma. Why do patriarchal 
religions assign inequitable roles to women? One key reason given is the 
"Will of God" argument. Women are inferior because it was divinely 
ordained. As Simone de Beauvoir wryly comments in The Second Sex, 

Man enjoys the great advantage of having a god 
endorse the code he writes; and since man 
exercises a sovereign authority over women it is 
especially fortunate that this authority has been 
vested in him by the Supreme Being (621).
But the Supreme Being has not always vested authority exclusively in men. Archaeologists have confirmed 1, there was a time, as Merlin Stone so aptly entitled her book, When God Was A Woman. The goddess held substantial religious power. That power all but disappeared with the rise of the patriarchal religions and the triumph of Yahweh, Jesus and the Buddha. I decided to investigate - to try to uncover just how this happened - and what traces of the old goddesses might remain in these patriarchal religions.

THESIS AND STATEMENT OF METHODOLOGY

My thesis states that vestiges of the goddess survive in the three major patriarchal religions which I have chosen to examine, namely Judaism, Buddhism and Christianity, and that key powers and symbols formerly associated with the goddess have been appropriated by the triumphant male conqueror in each of the religions under study. I will show this through analysis of episodes selected from narrative texts sacred to each of the religions. In addition, I will attempt to discover whether or not a pattern emerges, showing that all three androcentric religions dealt with a rival goddess in a similar or comparable manner.

I have selected these three religions for several reasons. First, because they are patriarchal. Second, because they are not all from the same geographical area. They encompass both eastern and western thought, rather than, for example, all three being from the Abrahamic tradition. Third, because they cover different time spans, from circa 1000 B.C.E. for the key Judaic example; from circa 400 B.C.E. for the Buddhist examples; and circa
100 C.E. for the Christian examples. This selection prevents commonalities based solely on time or place.

I will place each religion in context, searching whether or not rival feminine-based religions coexisted in the early days of the new religions and if contact were possible between the authors of Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism and these rival religions.

I will select key episodes in each patriarchal religion and attempt to deconstruct its imagery. Several criteria were used in selecting the episodes. First, the example had to be a pivotal passage from canonical texts or sacred literature. By pivotal, I mean the episode is generally considered by contemporary scholars to be central in defining the new religion. Second, episodes had to be familiar to the most lax of religious followers, not obscure or arcane. I will attempt to discover whether or not feminine religious symbols and themes are present in my core episodes, and if they are, what happens to them. I will also attempt to discover whether or not the patriarchal religions deal with these symbols and themes in a similar manner. In addition, I will choose minor examples from each religion that appear to support the key example, suggesting a consistency in viewpoint of the early religious authors.

If the feminine were not problematic, I would expect to uncover few attempts to hide, debase, subordinate or overcome the feminine in these new religions. I would expect to find an expansion of religious knowledge in the new patriarchal religions, knowledge that does not involve the appropriation of feminine symbols or themes.
My method will be comparative; my approach will be multi-disciplinary; and my perspective will be a feminist critique.

I will begin by examining the Great Goddess under her various names, as deity of fertility and regeneration, along with her various symbols. My approach will be interdisciplinary, as I rely upon art and archaeology; canonical and non-sacred texts, mythology and literature; sociology and anthropology; and of course the history of these three religions, to support my thesis. As James Bailey writes of his approach in *The God-Kings and Titans*,

Each [expert], necessarily working in a confined field, has missed the picture that is given by placing his [or her] work into the context of the work of others. At almost every point, the basic research for this essay had already been excellently done. At almost every point, either the research worker has drawn back from the natural conclusion to his own discoveries or he [or she] has been frozen by the criticism of his [or her] colleagues (17).

Thus, I believe that much of the evidence to support my thesis exists in other disciplines, but has not been applied to the field of Religious Studies.

I have mentioned that I will bring a feminist perspective to this paper. Most religious interpretations have come from male scholars, who may have had little or no interest in women's roles. For many, the idea that women as a group might have held substantial religious power is an alien concept. Despite feminist inroads, the foundation of today's scholarship still tends to be based on the work of earlier male scholars, who were, generally, imbued with strong patriarchal values. As feminist scholar Rita Gross points out in *Buddhism After Patriarchy*,

5
In most accounts of religion, males are presented as religious subjects, as namers of reality, while females are presented only in relation to the males being studied, only as objects being named by the males being studied, only as they appear to males being studied (296).

I believe feminist scholarship is also flawed, insofar as most feminist scholars have missed the broader picture. To paraphrase James Bailey, quoted earlier, "They have missed the picture that is given by placing their work into the context of the work of others". Traditionally, feminist scholars have examined the role of the goddess from within the confines of their own religions. They have not stepped back and looked at where their goddess originated, or looked at what powers she held in the past. That point of view is almost entirely missing from Religious Studies scholarship. I am proposing to adopt a more comprehensive point of view. As a result, I must rely on primary religious texts, with little back-up from feminist scholarship, as I attempt to make my case.

I will re-examine key religious episodes from another point of view: What if women once held substantial religious power? If they did, what happened to that power as the new monotheistic patriarchal religions were born? I plan to re-examine early religious writings and re-interpret these writings, where warranted, along feminist lines. In doing so, I hope to shed some light on what happened to the goddess when she encountered Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism.
CHAPTER TWO: THE GREAT GODDESS

ISIS: I am all that ever was, is or shall be.
- inscribed at Thebes

I intend to set out my fundamental premise in this chapter. That is, that goddess-based religions were widespread throughout the ancient world, ranging around the Mediterranean basin and across to India, and that these goddesses held real power.

A milieu existed with a broad theme apparent: that of strong goddesses, who went by various names, but who shared strikingly similar powers and symbols. Those powers were basic to human existence and survival: the powers over life and death. The goddesses held the key to fertility, both creating and sustaining human, plant and animal life. The goddesses also held power over death, through understanding the cyclical existence of nature. Death may bring renewal, rebirth, or resurrection that enables existence to continue.

In earliest times, these goddesses appeared to be chthonic, embodying the principles of both life and death, yin and yang, harmony and chaos, before their powers were split. Dualism emerged, whereby one deity solely represented fertility while a second enjoyed powers over death and renewal. These goddesses embodied the truism that states "Without death, there can be no life". Our lives remain dependent upon the death of others, for we feed
upon plants and animals, fruits and fishes. Without their deaths, we could not sustain our existence.

In addition to these shared powers over life and death, the goddesses shared key symbols: the serpent, the tree, the earth, and the moon.

However, the growing strength of the gods disrupted the halcyon days of the goddesses' reign. Religious rivalries and power struggles ensued. I will show that the goddesses lost most of these battles. The new gods assumed their powers and appropriated or debased their symbols. This process culminated in the triumph of patriarchal religions such as Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism.

HISTORY

A commonly held western belief is that religions have evolved, reaching their peak in monotheism, or belief in one deity. Pantheism (the worship of many deities), or henotheism (the worship of one deity at a time, selected from a pantheon of deities) are viewed as steps along the way. Pantheism and henotheism venerated both female and male deities. Present-day monotheism reveres only a male deity or founder. The feminine aspect is absent from the godhead.

This belief, equating religious monotheism with betterment and perfection to the exclusion of other types of religion, tends to blind scholars to older religious traditions. Their truths may emerge from written records, and from art work that may have depicted oral traditions.
Some of our oldest written records reveal that goddesses and gods shared the limelight\(^4\). A god might dominate a particular pantheon, but the goddess was ever-present, either as the god's consort or major rival. For example, Zeus lived atop Mount Olympus, ruling the lesser Greek gods and goddesses with his wife, Hera, at his side. The Sumerian goddess who breathed life into the first humans, Ninhursag, co-existed somewhat fitfully with Enlil, a new male hero. In Hinduism even the god known for his asceticism, Shiva, is not fully functional without his consort, Parvati. Other religions in the geographical area stretching from the Mediterranean basin across to India reflect similar situations: a dominant god accompanied by a consort goddess, who is most often depicted in her role as mother, responsible for giving birth.

Other religions in this geographical area reveal the reverse: a dominant goddess with a male consort or son\(^4\). In Asia Minor, the Phrygian goddess Cybele ruled with her godlet Attis, who died each fall and was re-born each spring. Across the Mediterranean Sea in Egypt, Isis dominated, with Osiris as the dying god and his son Horus as the resurrected god. In India, the fierce goddess Kali must dance on Shiva's corpse and infuse him with her energy before he can revive. In the first two examples, the goddess is not only mother, the creator and sustainer of life, but also the renewer: the deity who offers re-birth or resurrection after death -- some form of immortality. Her consort remains a lesser deity, who is the recipient of her gifts of life and death/resurrection. She is active; he is passive.

Knowledge of how religions operated before the first written records were available, around 3200 B.C.E., remains problematic. For noted
archaeologist Marija Gimbutas, a goddess was the only deity worshipped 10,000 years ago. In *The Civilization of the Goddess: The World of Old Europe*, Gimbutas described graves that contained feminine figurines or statuettes -- no specifically male artefacts have emerged.

The primordial deity for our Paleolithic and Neolithic ancestors was female, reflecting the sovereignty of motherhood. In fact, there are no images that have been found of a Father God throughout the prehistoric record. (The) ... images cluster around a self-regenerating Goddess and her basic functions as Giver-of-Life, Wielder-of-Death, and as Regeneratrix (x).

In reviewing her work, religious scholar Leonard Swidler concluded, "There appeared to be no male God [his emphasis] at this early period" (Biblical 22).

Some three thousand years later in Asia Minor, grave sites at Catal Huyuk still contained mainly female artefacts. According to James Mellaart in *Catal Huyuk*, this culture had a goddess-dominant religion.

Its rites connected with life and death, birth and resurrection, were evidently part of her sphere rather than that of man. It seems extremely likely that the cult of the goddess was administered mainly by women (202).

Mellaart added,

The divine family then was patterned on that of man; and the four aspects are in order of
importance: mother, daughter, son and father (201).

The geographical range of a goddess or goddess-dominant religion appears to have been broad. In Shiva and Dionysus, his comparative study of an Indian and Greek god, French anthropologist Alain Danielou writes that a feminine presence was pervasive.

[There was] a single great cultural movement extending from India to Portugal, dating from the 6th millennium B.C., and documented, not in scripture (since there was no writing at that time), but in the grace and clarity of its visual arts. For the ambience is strongly female (32).

Without written records, the interpretation of these finds remains problematic. Whether truly monotheistic goddess religions ever existed can remain a moot point. For the purpose of this thesis, acknowledgement of the existence of goddesses and goddess-dominant religions is sufficient.

Thus before the rise of monotheistic patriarchies, the evidence points to religions where goddesses dominate and religions where gods dominate. In both cases, the more powerful deity is paired with a consort or companion of the opposite sex. In no case is the goddess missing, as happens with Yahweh, the Christian God and the Buddha. These three are sole deities or rulers of their particular religion, without recourse to a feminine companion.

So the question must be asked: "What happened to the goddesses in these three religions?" To answer that, I will delve into the world of religious rivalries, examining what powers and symbols the goddesses held in common. Then, I will simplify, using the term "Goddess" or "Great Goddess"
as a generic code word indicating a deity holding those powers and symbols. The use of the term "Goddess" or "Great Goddess" will not refer to a specific goddess unless so stated.

**THEME: FERTILITY**

I take the position that one over-arching theme existed in the Ancient World: the necessity of fertility. All else follows from this. The Great Goddess's powers and symbols are inter-connected, reflecting this basic need for survival. Her powers involve creating and sustaining life, and include the power over death and renewal, or rebirth. Her symbols all share an aspect of fertility: the earth, the moon, the serpent, and the tree. The Great Goddess's knowledge includes both how to enhance fertility and how to control or prevent fertility, that is, contraception. The Goddess's powers and symbols cannot be distanced or separated from this concept of fertility. Together they form a unified whole, a world ethos reflected in goddess-dominant religions and still visible in goddess-subordinate religions. This ethos describes how the world is, and how the Great Goddess causes it to function.

**KEY POWERS**

I take the position that the ultimate power attributed to any deity is the power to create and sustain life, while all other powers are of lesser, secondary importance to the deity's worshippers.
This creation of life can be broken down into two areas: first, actual creation of the universe, which was a one-time affair; and second, the day-to-day maintenance of life on this planet through the on-going procreation of human and animal life and fertilizing of vegetation.

This second process is fuelled by death, for without death there can be no life. Humans cannot survive without killing animals or harvesting crops for food. In death our bodies become fodder or fertilizer for other animals and crops. Twentieth century humans tend to lose sight of this process. We do not enjoy thinking of ourselves as an integral part of the food chain. In this cyclical existence, the corollary of life is death.

Thus a key function, if not the key function, of a ruling god or goddess is control over our continued existence on this planet, that is, over the process of life, death, and whatever may follow death: renewal, re-birth, resurrection, regeneration.

Feminists such as Riane Eisler point out that life itself was more precarious in the Ancient World, and the creation of life, especially human life, remained more of an awesome mystery than it does today.

There is overwhelming evidence that while both feminine and masculine deities were worshipped... the highest power in the universe was seen as the feminine power to give and sustain life, the power incarnated in the body of a woman ("Goddess" 4).

Despite male contributions to conception, the stark fact remains: human life only emerges from a woman's body and that same body produces milk to sustain that life (Spretnak 18).
But this is not merely a feminist argument. Mythologist Joseph Campbell insists,

There can be no doubt that in the very earliest ages of human history, the magical force and wonder of the female was no less a marvel than the universe itself; and this gave to woman a prodigious power, which it has been one of the chief concerns of the masculine part of the population to break, control and employ to its own ends (Masks: Primitive 315)

Every woman embodies or incarnates the Goddess, with the potential to create life from within herself. She is a manifestation of the Goddess, ensuring the survival not just of women, but of men as well. Men, on the other hand, cannot bring forth life from their own bodies, despite what their gods may be able to do. Men do not share this specific relationship with their gods.

Generally, the goddesses monopolize the ability to give birth or create new life in both goddess-dominated and god-dominated religions. In the Mesopotamian region, the Mother Goddess was known by many names: Inanna, Ishtar, Astarte, Ashtoreth. Sometimes the Goddess rules alone, without a partner, such as Inanna. More often she rules with a lesser male deity at her side, such as Cybele and Attis, Artemis and Adonis. Other goddesses are married to a dominant husband, but retain the power of fertility: for example, Hera and Zeus. Among the Aryans of ancient India, the gods dominant while wives such as Parvati are still responsible for reproduction ⁶.
In addition to this ability to create and sustain life, the other great power held by many goddesses is the power over death and renewal. In broad terms, the Goddess's son or consort dies and the Goddess resurrects him. The godling is re-born, often each spring, symbolizing the re-awakening of nature after a period of dormancy or "death" in the preceding months. He is the eternal dying-and-rising god, marking the cyclical existence of all life. The Sumerian Mother Goddess, Inanna, is associated with Dumuzi; the Semitic Mother Goddess Ishtar is connected with Tammuz; the Canaanite Anat resurrects Baal; Phrygian Cybele has Attis; Aphrodite has Adonis (Gray 22).

In these myths and legends, the goddesses exercise the key powers of life, death and renewal, while their husbands, sons or consorts play a lesser role in the eternal drama of human existence. Gods such as the Babylonian sun-god Marduk or the Egyptian Osiris may have ruled the world, ordering lesser deities and humans to do their bidding. But for the most part, they did not bring these lesser creatures into existence, nor did they re-create life or renew life. That remained women's work.

SYMBOLS

In addition to sharing the key powers of creating and sustaining life, and of death-renewal, the goddesses also shared symbols. Among them were the serpent, the tree, the earth or fertile ground, and the moon.

Anne Bancroft, in Origins of the Sacred, writes,

Accompanying the Great Goddess...came many of the symbols we know - ...the serpent...the ox-
horns of the fertile moon-earth-Mother. Sacred pillars and trees also came with her (46).

These symbols represent various aspects of a deity, which help remind worshippers of the deity's strengths and key powers. Just as the symbol of the cross reminds Christians of Jesus' power over death, so these symbols remind worshippers of the goddesses' powers.

THE SERPENT

Above all, the serpent symbolized the goddesses' key powers. The serpent was involved in two key areas: creating and sustaining life, and death/renewal. In addition, the serpent possessed one outstanding characteristic: wisdom.

Both Mircea Eliade's *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (1987) and John M'Clintock's *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature* (1880) exhaustively document mythologies of the serpent. Despite these encyclopedias being published more than one hundred years apart, the authors attribute virtually identical powers to the serpent, mentioning that the serpent is the most-worshipped or adored creature in myths around the world. The serpent plays a fundamental role in the creation of the universe: it lays the cosmic or universal egg. The serpent embraced the entire universe within its body when it swallowed its own tail, thus forming the ouroborous. Besides this creative ability, the serpent represents the death/renewal cycle and immortality, because of its seemingly magical ability to shed and renew its skin.
Mary Condren writes in *The Serpent and the Goddess*:

In ancient philosophy or mythological systems, creation and wisdom were closely bound together, and the Serpent was a potent symbol of both (10).

In conjunction with this, the serpent linked the human with the divine. Acting as an intermediary, the serpent conveyed the goddesses' wisdom and prophecies to her priestesses. The serpent had access to knowledge not readily available to humans, for serpents exist in two worlds: both above and beneath the surface of the earth. They are creatures dwelling in or having access to the mysterious underground world and the secrets of the oceans. Yet they can also exist on land, on the earth's surface. So they bring information about the underground world and oceans to the earth's surface for their priestesses to decode.

Because snakes...live underground, embodying...the souls of the dead, they know all secrets, are the source of all wisdom, and can foresee the future (Eliade, *Patterns* 168).

In early history, humans were restricted beings, living solely on the earth's surface and unable to plummet the earth's depths or soar in the skies - a drawback in understanding how the world operated.

In *The Goddess Obscured*, Pamela Berger writes that snakes were often seen

...as guardians of the inner sanctuaries and were generally viewed in the ancient world as being privy to the mysteries of the underground (17).
Perhaps the best-known inner sanctuary and site of serpent wisdom was Delphi, dubbed by contemporaries as "the navel (or womb) of the world" (Fellows 43). In the cave at Delphi, female oracles called Pythonesses or Pythia surrounded themselves with snakes (pythons), then predicted future events. Possibly these serpents were more than just symbols of prophecy, for their venom may have induced hallucinogenic trances (Eisler, "Goddess" 12)  

The Goddess and her serpents abounded in the Ancient World. Archaeological evidence is overwhelming in linking the serpent and goddess. In Egypt a fundamental linguistic link existed between goddesses and serpents. The glyph for the word "serpent" forms part of the hieroglyph for the general word "goddess". In addition, most Pharaonic goddesses have the serpent glyph encoded as part of their names: Isis, Nephthys, Nut, Tefnut. This does not hold true for the Egyptian gods, as the glyph for "serpent" does not appear in any of their names, regardless of the high ranking of the god (See Wallis Budge's The Egyptian Book of the Dead 144-5).

From Minoan Crete comes one of the most famous depictions of the goddess and serpents. Ivory statues date back to 2000 B.C.E. These so-called "Little Goddesses of the Serpents", or priestesses, stand upright, holding a golden serpent outstretched in either hand (Stone plates 5,6a,6b). These serpents were housed in cistae, which are found widely scattered throughout the Mediterranean basin, including in 13th century B.C.E. Canaan (Stone plate 14). Ancient coins also suggest the importance of serpents. Snakes emerging from their cistae were stamped on coins from Ephesus in Asia Minor (LaBarre 70).
Other remnants of this Goddess-serpent image are still visible. Perhaps the most well-known is Athena, the Greek Goddess of Wisdom, often depicted with a serpent coiled at her feet or emblazoned on her cloak or shield (Stone plates 18,19). At the height of her power, a special building called the Erechtheum stood on the Acropolis, alongside her temple, the Parthenon. This was considered to be the home of Athena's snake (Stone 202).

In India, the serpent has played a major role from ancient times to the present. In Indian Serpent Lore J. Vogel exhaustively explores the role of serpents in Indian religions. In outlying pre-Vedic areas the snake is sometimes still worshipped as a village deity. In mainstream Hinduism, serpents often surround Kali, the fierce black goddess of destruction, responsible for death and renewal. On the esoteric side of Indian religions the serpent represents hidden feminine power or energy waiting to be released from the human body. This hidden power, called shakti or kundalini is represented as a dormant serpent, coiled at the base of the human spine. Wisdom or enlightenment cannot be obtained without releasing this serpent power (Klostermaier, Survey 256).

In these examples, the serpents have been allied with goddesses and their powers. Literature and art rarely depict western gods with serpents serving as allies\(^9\). Eastern gods may be depicted with serpents, but the gods tend to rule over or dominate them\(^10\). Contrary to some popular beliefs, the serpent was not viewed as a phallic symbol for the goddesses during the time periods under discussion (Stone 199).
Thus the serpent remained allied with feminine, rather than masculine, deities. The serpent reminded worshippers of the two key powers of the Goddess: of creating and sustaining life, and death/renewal -- the endless cycle of all existence -- while also existing as a symbol of the Goddess's wisdom.

THE TREE

While the serpent remains the goddesses' basic ally, the tree is perhaps the most recognized symbol of the goddesses, representing life and "the sacred continuity of the spiritual, cosmic, and physical worlds", for as Pamela Frese and S. Gray explain in The Encyclopedia of Religion,

A tree is often used to symbolize a deity or other sacred being ... Trees are not only sacred in the major religions of the East and West, but also ... in the creation of life in birth, about death and the afterworld, and about health and illness. Trees ... serve as mediators or links to the religious realm (15:26).

In many religions, the universe is divided into three sections: the heavens, the earth and the underworld. They are linked by the cosmic tree which is at the middle of the universe, upholding the world. The tree is the sole entity capable of spanning these three dimensions, with its roots in the underworld, its trunk emerging from the earth, and its leaves sweeping the skies. The tree accesses the secrets of each domain it touches, while forming the "axis mundi" of the world (Eliade, Patterns 299).
The tree represents "an inexhaustible source of cosmic fertility" (Eliade, Patterns 280).

Th(is) central notion of inexhaustible creation (is) symbolized by the cosmic tree which is identified with the Great Goddess (Eliade, Patterns 281).

This celestial tree is central to many cosmogonies. In Scandinavian myths, the sacred ash, Yggdrasill, reaches into the underground with its roots. Its trunk, entwined by a snake, is in Miogardor, the realm of humans, while its branches reach to Asgaror, the home of the gods. The Babylonians believed that their cosmic tree, Kiskanu, was home to the goddess of plenty and a god of fertility (Eliade, Encyclopedia 15:27). In Hinduism, the cosmic tree emerged from the navel of Vishnu, as he reclined on the body of the world serpent, responsible for keeping him afloat on the waters of the universe (Vogel plate XIX).

Thus trees are clearly linked with deities in many religions, and archaeological evidence specifically connects goddesses to trees.

The Minoan ...religion was dominated by a goddess, one of whose manifestations was linked to a sacred tree...she is represented with animals, birds, snakes and pillars, as well as with sacred branches and sacred trees (Berger 15).

Often, the imagery links the serpent with trees:

... the snake resides at the foot of the tree of life or the cosmic tree (Eliade, Encyclopedia 14:433).

According to Eliade,
... guard every symbol embodying the sacred, or (anything) able to bestow power, life, or omniscience (Patterns 291).

In Eve: The History of an Idea, John Phillips extends the imagery further, including goddesses, serpents and trees.

Snakes were thought to control "wisdom" (magic), immortality and fertility. As such they were special companions of women, and often guarded earthly or celestial gardens of delight (41).

Greek mythology also incorporated the motif of the goddess, the serpent, and the tree, along with sacred fruit. In the Isles of the Hesperides, Zeus's wife Hera tends her tree, ripe with golden apples. Coiled around the tree's base is the serpent Ladon, guarding the magical fruit. The up-and-coming Greek hero Hercules successfully steals the apples as one of his twelve labours, but Zeus returns the apples, explaining their power must remain with Hera (Grant 224-25). The power residing in Hera's apples is not revealed.

Another key fruit connected with several goddesses is the pomegranate, a symbol embodying the concepts of both fertility and sterility. Cut open, the pomegranate reveals an interior full of seeds, with little room for pulp or fruit flesh: a fertile womb. However, the pomegranate also contains contraceptive properties. This hidden knowledge is revealed in the Greek myth of Persephone. Persephone is kidnapped, the unwilling bride of Hades, lord of the underworld. Her mother, the earth goddess Demeter or Circe, demands her daughter's return. Hades, also known as the god of
sterility, hands Persephone a pomegranate. For every seed Persephone eats before reaching the earth's surface, the world will experience one month of winter. Persephone consumes six seeds, and as a result, the Greek world endures six months of winter (Riddle 26).

The pomegranate's sterility powers have been verified, according to medical historian John M. Riddle. In *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance*, he writes,

... five plants that have female steroids (i.e., those that are either estrogenic or prostogenic): date palm seeds and pollen...pomegranate seeds, willow flowers, apple seeds...and scotch pine (51).

These five have true oral contraceptive properties (Riddle 52). In laboratory experiments, female guinea pigs fed pomegranates did not become pregnant. Echoing the biblical use of the number forty \(^{11}\), forty days after drug withdrawal the fertility of the guinea pigs was restored to normal (Riddle 26).

The power of the goddesses and their priestesses apparently extended beyond the knowledge of fertility, that is, how to ensure reproduction. Their knowledge also encompassed how to prevent conception - the other side of the issue. Thus the goddesses' symbol held specific knowledge: how to enhance and prevent fertility.

In India, as well, the goddesses' links with trees abounded. Tree goddesses and sacred groves dedicated to the goddesses flourished. The pipal and sal trees were among those considered sacred, and tree goddesses were often depicted with their limbs entwined around tree trunks (Campbell, *Mythic* plates 236-238).
Thus the goddesses were often depicted with trees, and the imagery often included a serpent coiled at the base of the tree or around its trunk, and the tree bearing sacred fruit.

THE EARTH

Of all the symbols reflecting the divine, perhaps the earth remains the only symbol still connected exclusively with the Goddess.

Without the earth, we cannot exist, for the earth provides the sustenance that makes life possible. As outlined by Mircea Eliade and Lawrence Sullivan in The Encyclopedia of Religion,

From the earliest records we possess of religious history, the earth ... supports and contains all the life forms that reveal themselves to human beings ... The earth is the foundation, the generative source, of every expression of existence (4:534).

This generative source is apparently feminine. I have uncovered no sources that speak of the earth in masculine terms. Many people use simple phrases to express her powers: "Mother Nature" and "Mother Earth" or "Earth Mother", and the New-Age term, "Gaia", referring to the earth goddess (and original Delphic oracle) in Greek mythology (Eisler, "Goddess" 18)

Mother Earth does not just bring forth life. She includes the "reality of death", and through death, the re-emergence of new life. This cyclical existence is played out in the myths of the dying and rising god. Each fall the
vegetative god dies and is re-born or resurrected each spring, thanks to the fertility powers of the Goddess.

The death of the god gives rise to life in new forms, especially that of plants. Life and death are simply two phases in the career of Mother Earth (Eliade, Encyclopedia 4:540).

Mother Earth remains the universal womb. Often her sacred marriage to a sky god or other male deity has reduced her importance in the creative process, but as Eliade sums up,

Nevertheless, the earth, especially in the image of the great mother, has never forfeited her role as the locus of life, the source of all forms, ...and the womb where the dead await their rebirth (Encyclopedia 4:541).

The earth is also linked to other goddess symbols, for the serpent acts as intermediary, revealing the mysteries hidden beneath the surface of Mother Earth. Another symbol, the tree, is firmly rooted in the earth, dependent upon the earth for survival.

The earth as feminine manifests two great powers: the power of creating and sustaining life, as well as the power of death and regeneration/resurrection. These, of course, are the same two key powers associated with the Great Goddess.
THE MOON

Just as we experience a cyclical existence through the eternal process of life-death-and-renewal, so too the moon experiences a parallel cyclical existence in the heavens, with its continuous process of waxing and waning every twenty-eight or twenty-nine days.

This monthly cycle appears to correspond to women's menstrual cycles. In Women's Mysteries: Ancient and Modern, M. Esther Harding concludes:

To primitive man, (a woman's) monthly rhythm, corresponding as it does with the moon's cycle, must have seemed the obvious result of some mysterious bond between them (55).

In turn, the menstrual cycles are tied to pregnancy and birth. In addition to these ties with women's fertility, the moon is also connected with the goddesses' powers of death and renewal. The waxing and waning of the moon led to the idea that it dies and is reborn each month. Because of this belief, another comparison has been made: the dying and rising god, or consort of the goddesses, is often compared to the moon (Eliade, Patterns 171). The cyclical pattern is similar, occurring annually rather than monthly, as the god lives, dies and is resurrected each spring.

This waxing and waning means the moon is ever-changing, but paradoxically this monthly cycle is eternal.

Another goddess symbol is also connected with the moon - the serpent. For as Mircea Eliade explains in Patterns in Comparative Religion,
Above all...the serpent has a lunar significance...Like the moon that is gradually diminished and then gradually renews itself, so the serpent sheds and renews its skin and becomes a symbol of death and resurrection (165).

Theodor Reik, in *Pagan Rites in Judaism*, writes of another association. Among many people, "menstruation is ascribed to the bite of a snake" (84).

Thus several strands can be woven together. If women incarnate the potential for creating life within their own bodies, and their bodies appear to follow the rhythms of the moon, then a connection exists among women, birth, death/renewal and the moon. Thus the moon symbolizes the Goddess's power of death and renewal, and to a lesser extent, fertility.

**RIVALRIES**

Religions attempt to answer a fundamental question: "Where do we come from and what happens after death?" (Streng 175). The Great Goddess cults provided coherent answers. The Goddess creates and sustains life, and controls death and its aftermath: renewal/rebirth/resurrection. Through her symbols, the Goddess offers a way of accessing knowledge about this process and how her adherents may be affected. These symbols explain the Goddess cults' world view, which is rendered more explicit through the use of myth.

For as Alain Danielou points out:

All mythology is founded on the personification of certain cosmological principles...What counts
in mythology are the inherent principles and not the legends with which they are surrounded in order to make them more readily understood (29).

Thus if the Goddess were to disappear from a religion, then a masculine god must offer his answers to religion's fundamental question. This probably involves a two-pronged approach: the male god assumes the Goddess's powers, while at the same time debasing, conquering, submerging or subverting the Goddess's key symbols.

Could such a scenario ever take place? The answer must be an emphatic yes. The shifting fortunes of the old goddesses and gods reveal power struggles, both on the political and social levels.

For example, one of the most blatant religious revisions occurred around 1750 B.C.E. When Hammurabi conquered Sumeria, he brought his new sun-god Marduk with him. He ordered his priests to re-write Sumerian religious history, inserting Marduk back into the texts, to emerge triumphant over his rival, Enlil. Marduk became the dominant god, complete with historical pedigree. However the original texts still exist without reference to Marduk, providing a clear example of the overthrow of an old god, with the victorious god assuming his powers (McCurley 13-16).

This deliberateness was not restricted to Hammurabi. The Greeks also employed this method to explain changing religious and social status. In the play The Eumenides, the citizens of Athens were asked to vote: should their city be named after Athena, the goddess who brought them their lucrative olive tree, or Poseidon, the god who offered fruits of the sea? The vote came down to gender: one more woman than man voted. Athena won, but
Poseidon demanded retribution for his loss. A triple sanction ensued: women lost the right to vote; their children could no longer be called by their mother's name; and the women themselves could no longer call themselves Athenians after their goddess (Spretnak 29). The old social and religious order had been overturned.

Early written epics share one common feature: the new male hero, the sky-god, succeeds only after battling and defeating a serpent or reptile. Marduk slays Tiamat, the leviathan of the sea; Perseus slays the serpent-haired Medusa; Hercules kills the many-headed Hydra, after strangling the snakes which encircled his crib. Centuries later, St. George makes a name for himself slaying the dragon, while fellow saint, Patrick, wins kudos for forcing all snakes out of Ireland. As the unnamed author writing in *Cyclopaedia* (1880) states:

In the tradition of most pagan nations...the serpent appears as an enemy of man, and a triumph over this enemy is usually described as THE GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT (my emphasis) of a popular deity (9:582)

Eliade concurs.

The "Tree of Life", the tree with the golden apples or the golden fleece...are protected by a dragon [serpent]. Anyone who wants to attain one of these symbols...must first give proof of his "heroism" or his "wisdom" by braving all dangers and finally killing the reptilian monster (*Patterns* 442).
What these authors have not pointed out or explored is that these
snakes or reptiles represent a feminine principle or protagonist. Yet these
new masculine deities have just defeated THE principal goddess symbol of
the Ancient World, the serpent.

Recognition of this pattern pre-dates formal feminist scholarship by
nearly a century. At the same time, in response to anticipated criticism, I
have been unable to discover ANY popular goddess deity defeating a reptile
or serpent. The conquering remains exclusively masculine, and with few
exceptions, the serpent remains feminine.

In broad terms, then, fierce religious rivalries existed. Old deities made
way for the upstarts. Powers and symbols shifted, new ideologies solidified
into orthodoxy, and sometimes it proves difficult to see the wars behind the
new religions as they struggled to succeed.

I will show that, as monotheistic patriarchies, Judaism, Christianity and
Buddhism took a step beyond the then-familiar god-dominated religions.
Their scriptural writers attempted to excise the feminine completely. No
consorts, no goddesses for their gods. They ruled alone. However, I will
show that their sacred literature reveals less-than-smooth sailing as they
attempted to rid themselves of the feminine. If the texts are read carefully,
the old goddesses hint at their presence and we can catch a glimpse of the
power struggles as the goddesses succumbed and the gods triumphed.

For as Alain Danielou has stated,

We should not lose sight of the fact that such myths
or legends are only there to make abstract ideas
and universal realities more comprehensible (29).
CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have laid the groundwork for my thesis. Religions where goddesses were invested with real power did exist. Those powers included creating and sustaining life, along with power over the process of death and renewal. Symbols surrounding the goddesses include the serpent, the tree, the earth and the moon. Rival religions featured a triumphant male god or hero who invariably defeated one of the goddesses' key symbols, the serpent. This is the background or filter through which I will examine Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism for traces of the goddesses, their powers and symbols.
CHAPTER THREE: JUDAISM AND THE GODDESS

You shall not permit a female sorcerer to live.
- Exodus 22:18

In the preceding chapter, I established that many ancient societies revered a Great Goddess, with powers of creating and sustaining life, and power over the process of death and renewal, and her key symbols, the serpent, tree, earth and moon. Her cults stretched from Portugal to India, and around the Mediterranean basin, dating back to at least the sixth millennium B.C.E.

In this chapter I will show that a Great Goddess appears in Judaism, and that Yahweh strips her of some powers and debases her key symbols. To do this, I will examine the core woman's myth of Judaism (as well as Christianity), the story of Adam and Eve as recounted in Genesis 2-3. Stripped to its bare essentials, the plot involves the principal elements of the goddess cults: a woman and a man, along with a serpent, a fruit, and a tree. By removing the religious interpretation traditionally imposed upon this story, I will show that Eve fits the Goddess pattern.

I will outline the penalties that Yahweh imposes upon Eve and Adam for their transgressions and the practical results of these penalties. Then I will look at Yahweh's new powers and the debasement of goddess symbols as a result of the traditional religious interpretation of this myth.
I will provide context: the milieu enveloping the author(s) of Genesis 2-3 provided ample goddess traditions to draw upon, ranging from the historical background of Yahwism to goddess cults in neighbouring areas.

BACKGROUND

I do not propose the story of Adam and Eve was adapted from a single religious source, but that the story is more accurately described as an amalgam, a synthesis of ideas adopted from several religions.

Dating the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2-3 remains problematic. Most scholars believe the story is the oldest creation narrative in the Hebrew Scriptures, but they disagree as to when it was written down: either around 950 B.C.E. if ascribed to J or Yahwist sources, or sometime after 586 B.C.E. if written down following the exile in Babylon (Speiser xxix). This written narrative likely reflects an oral tradition, or oral version of the Adam and Eve story, that pre-dates the written narrative by several centuries.

No matter which dating system is adopted, however, the author(s) could have been influenced from several directions. I will examine three of the many possible influences, pointing out commonalities and trends shared by each goddess tradition and the Adam and Eve myth.

INFLUENCE ONE: SUMERIAN MYTHS

I posit a possible Sumerian influence in the myth of Adam and Eve because, as I will show, a Sumerian goddess and Eve shared similar symbols. As for the goddess's powers, Sumerian myths reflect power struggles between
a goddess and god, with the god appropriating some of her powers of creation. In addition, scholars have previously documented a Sumerian influence on Genesis creation stories (Kramer, History 143-49). The elements are present: the goddess's symbols and powers; and a trend is apparent, as the goddess loses some of her powers to a god.

Sumer consisted of the lower half of Mesopotamia, roughly identical with modern day Iraq from about Baghdad to the Persian Gulf. In classical times, it was known as Babylonia. The Sumerians were a non-Semitic people, whose religion was later adopted or taken over by Semitic people (Kramer, Sumerians 3-32).

Sumerian written records date back to around 3200 B.C.E., while cultural artefacts may be older. As mentioned earlier, Hammurabi of Babylon revised Sumerian religious history around 1750 B.C.E., marking the end of the Sumerians as a political, ethnic and linguistic entity (Kramer, Sumerians 32). The Babylonians of 500 B.C.E. were the inheritors of this religious tradition. The author(s) of the Adam and Eve myth could have been exposed to Sumerian religious influences at any point during this period.

Cultural artefacts reveal the Goddess, the sacred tree, serpents, and sometimes fruit. Fred Gladstone Bratton, in his Myths and Legends of the Ancient Near East, explains this motif as it appears on Sumerian bowls:

One typical rendering...shows a snake guarding the tree of life. On another the serpent stands behind a woman. A third shows a man and a woman seated; between them stands the tree of life and behind the woman is a serpent (43).
He concludes that this points to the existence of a Sumerian legend that ultimately influenced the story of Adam and Eve.

The Sumerian myths, however, do not necessarily incorporate these symbols. Instead, as Ward Fellows writes, "The(ir) key idea is power" (28). One trend which became very clear was the ongoing eclipse and the marginalization of the goddesses.

The eclipse of the goddesses can be seen dramatically by the fortunes of mother-figures. The primordial first mothers disappear early. In the marshy south, the mother of all and the creator of humanity was Nammu, who was then eclipsed by Enki (Frymer-Kensky 71).

According to a reform document ascribed to King Urukagina around 2350 B.C.E., not only goddesses held greater power in the past:

The women of former days used to take two husbands, but the women of today (when they attempted to do this) were stoned with stones inscribed with their evil intent (Schmanot-Besserat 12).

The way in which power was manipulated was via the overthrow of the goddess's procreative powers by male deities who assumed these duties. In one myth, the goddess Ninmah and the god Enki battle over creating humans. She is the mother-goddess who oversees the shaping of the embryo in the womb. Enki boasts he can create life through his semen. He admits he needs a woman's womb to complete the job, so must entrust his semen to a second woman's womb. However, without Ninmah's help, the woman aborts and Umul is born, a weakly creature. Enki admits the uselessness of his creature
and the indispensability of Ninmah in making a fully formed human being. This is viewed as a stand-off between Enki and Ninmah (Frymer-Kensky 17).

However, this is more than just a stand-off: the goddess had enjoyed exclusive control over human procreation. A major shift has occurred in acknowledging the male role in reproduction. Enki has proven that semen creates life, while the goddess Ninmah merely controls how the foetus develops in the womb. The semen is the life-giving element; the womb is the incubator. Therefore as all men have sperm, all men can create human life. If pregnancy does not ensue, that is the fault of the incubator. Now the male, with his life-creating sperm, may challenge the belief that a woman incarnates the goddess's procreative abilities within her own body. Male sperm has become the sole agent in engendering a child (Frymer-Kensky 49).

While this myth has not directly influenced the author(s) of Genesis 2-3, an indirect link may exist, for the Genesis author(s) incorporated the idea of a god appropriating a goddess's powers. Parallels do exist between another Sumerian creation myth and the creation of Adam in Genesis 2:7 and Eve in Genesis 2:22. In both Sumerian and Genesis myths, the creator deities breathe spirit into their male creations.

However Eve's creation out of Adam's rib is a play on words, or pun. In a Sumerian poem, the god Enki's rib is bothering him.

The Sumerian world for "rib" is "ti"...The goddess created for the healing of Enki's rib is called Nin-ti, "the lady of the rib". But the Sumerian word "ti" also means "to make live". The name Nin-ti may therefore mean "the lady who makes live", as well as "the lady of the rib" (Kramer, History 146).
However, the pun loses its validity in Hebrew, for the Hebrew word for "rib" and that for "who makes live" have nothing in common.

In the Sumerian myth, the creator deity is female; in Genesis the creator deity is male. The author(s) of Genesis has turned the Sumerian creation myth upside down, as Yahweh appropriates the old goddess's power of creation.

Thus Sumerian myths may have influenced the writing of the Adam and Eve myth.

**INFLUENCE TWO: CANAANITE MYTHS**

In addition to a possible Sumerian influence, I posit a possible Canaanite influence, mainly because the Canaanites were next-door neighbours to the Israelites, and worshipped a goddess whose powers included creation and possibly death and renewal, and whose symbols are found in the Adam and Eve myth.

The Canaanite mother-goddess is Asherah, consort to El, the paramount god in the Ras Shamra texts. Asherah is involved in fertility rites (Gray 72), represented

... in the position of the tree of life between the animals, which depend on her for sustenance. Hence derives the name of the sacred emblem, the stylisation of the tree of life, which is called the "asherah" in the Old Testament (Gray 74).
Her name means *grove* and her cult object was a sacred pole or image carved out of wood, representing the cosmic tree of life. Asherah is probably related to the Babylonian goddess Ashratum, who had a temple dedicated to her, and who, at various times, was the consort of Ramaanum or Amurru (*Interpreter's 250*). *Ramaanum means pomegranate* in Akkadian (*Interpreter's 840*), a fruit closely connected with the Goddess.

No wooden representations of Asherah have survived. However in *Priestesses*, Norma Lorre Goodrich writes of a cult statue of Artemis at her temple in Ephesus, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Witnesses described the statue as "not an ancient but an archaic work" (70). They reported the statue had not been carved in stone nor made of ivory inlaid with gold, as was the custom. Instead,

Vitruvius and Pliny, who as Roman tourists were independent viewers, agreed that the venerated statue had been carved from cedar wood (Goodrich 71).

The cult statues of Asherah were probably held in similar reverence.

In addition, Asherah is often depicted holding serpents in her hands, in a pose similar to the famous Minoan "Little Goddess of the Serpents" statue (Gray 70,74).

Asherah's key power is creation and fertility. She bore seventy children, including the god Baal and his sister Anat. Baal, as the dying and rising god, is most often rescued from death in the underworld by his sister Anat. Sometimes Asherah, rather than Anat, is responsible for Baal's resurrection, but Asherah's powers of creation and fertility are stressed, rather than her powers over the process of death and resurrection (Gray 72).
One other goddess is associated with fertility in Canaan - Astarte. But a tendency existed for the functions of Asherah, Anat and Astarte to fuse together (Gray 74).

INFLUENCE THREE: HERA AND THE GARDEN OF THE HESPERIDES

Of all the goddess imagery I have come across, the imagery in the story of Hera and the Garden of the Hesperides most closely parallels the imagery of the myth of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

In Greek mythology, Hera is consort to Zeus, who rules the pantheon on Mount Olympus. Like Athena, her origins are pre-Greek (Spretnak 18). Her story surfaced in the Ras Shamra texts, which I will expand upon later.

Hera, as the Great Goddess, controlled the Garden of the Hesperides, with its sacred tree, desirable fruit and guardian serpent. In the western Isles of the Hesperides, Hera's garden contained sacred trees with golden apples. Just what powers the apples represented remains unclear. The serpent Ladon guarded the tree. The Greek hero Hercules (Herakles) set out to obtain the apples. He succeeded, but the gods on Mount Olympus returned the apples to Hera, saying they were sacred fruit and belonged in the custody of the goddess, not with the gods or mortal men (Grant 224-25). Originally, the apples had been given to Hera as a wedding gift by her mother, the earth Goddess Gaia, the primeval prophetess at the shrine of Delphi (Stone 214; Eisler, "Goddess" 18).
This story incorporates most of the Great Goddess symbols, and Hera's most famous shrine, just outside of Argos in Greece, provides additional proof. As was the custom, her statue was of gold and ivory; she was crowned by the crescent moon; her sacred snakes were also kept in her temple (Stone 203). Pausanias visited her Heraeum (Heraion) and wrote:

She (Hera) holds a pomegranate in one hand.
Why is that? I'll have to pass that mystery by in silence (quoted in Goodrich 113).

Perhaps Pausanias does not know the answer because it is "women's knowledge". Perhaps he has the answer, but cannot reveal it for it is knowledge from the mystery religions which cannot be made public. Either way, the knowledge is secret.

Hera's powers were closely connected with pregnancy and childbirth. Her favourite plant was the willow, which eased the agonies of childbirth. She herself became pregnant several times, usually without a male partner. Visiting Romans apparently never tired of asking what plants had made Hera pregnant.

All they could conclude was that she ate one of two very powerful and therapeutic plants: either the pomegranate or the apple, often confused for each other (Goodrich 112).

Hera's favourite colour was red, the colour symbolizing menstrual blood, which indicated whether a woman was pregnant (Goodrich 112), and also the colour of apples and pomegranates.
Could the author(s) of the Adam and Eve myth have come in contact with this myth? Yes, if they were exposed to stories that had circulated in Ras Shamra.

The possibility of Greek influence on Hebrew tradition in Palestine in the period of the Judges (about 1225-1050 B.C.) used to be doubted. But archaeology has now revealed Mycenaean settlements at Minet al-Beida, the coastal quarter of Ras Shamra, and at Tell Abu Hawam (Gray 12).

This discovery answered the question of why so many parallels existed between the stories of the Israelite hero Samson and the Greek hero Hercules (Gray 112). These included similarities from the stories known collectively as "The Labours of Hercules", which also included the story of Hera and her apple tree in the Garden of the Hesperides (Grant 220-25). Thus, it is possible this myth influenced the author(s) of the Genesis story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

These three influences - Sumerian, Canaanite and Greek myths - could have crept into the story of Adam and Eve. Other influences may also have been felt², for goddesses such as Inanna and Ishtar were also powerful deities. There is a consistency in how these Goddesses are presented in myth: their affinity for serpents, trees, and fruits is apparent, along with their powers of creation and renewal.
HEBREW SCRIPTURES: THE GODDESS

Is there actual evidence within the Hebrew Scriptures themselves that indicates contact with goddess traditions? Raphael Patai documents substantial contact in *The Hebrew Goddess*. He goes further, positing that Asherah, Astarte and Anat were originally foreign in origin, but

... whatever the prophets had to say about her, (she was) no foreign seductress, but a Hebrew goddess, the best divine mother the people had had to that time (13).

According to Patai, the Goddess Asherah "was the earliest female deity known to have been worshipped by the Children of Israel" (16).

Patai says the cult of Asherah had been popular for three centuries among the tribes, before the cult was introduced into the Jerusalem Temple by Solomon's son, King Rehoboam, around 928 B.C.E. Then Patai calculated the scriptural references to Asherah's presence in the Temple, up until the Babylonian exile in 586 B.C.E. He summed up:

Thus it appears that, of the 370 years during which the Solomonic Temple stood in Jerusalem, for no less than 236 years (or almost two-thirds of the time) the statue of Asherah was present in the Temple, and her worship was a part of the legitimate religions approved and led by the king, the court, and the priesthood (38).

Only the voices of a few prophets apparently cried out for Yahwism, or complete monotheism.
Asherah is mentioned forty times by name in the Hebrew Scriptures; the Goddess Astarte is mentioned nine times. Anat, the daughter of Asherah and sister of Baal, is never formally mentioned by name in the scriptures, although places named after her are, such as Beth-Anath ("House of Anath") and the town of Anathoth (the plural of Anath) (Patai 47,53).

Theodor Reik, author of *Pagan Rites in Judaism*, believes that after Nebuchadnezzar liquidated the kingdom of Judah, "the refugees in Egypt associated Yahweh with two goddesses. The name of the Lord was blended with that of the goddess as Anath Yahu" (69). When the prophet Jeremiah arrived in Egypt, he lectured them on their inclusion of the goddess. The men brushed him off, saying that they would continue

... (to) make offerings to the queen of heaven and pour out libations to her, just as we and our ancestors, our kings and our officials used to do in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem (Jer 44:17).

Their wives also pointedly remarked to Jeremiah,

Do you think that we made cakes for her, marked with her image, and poured out libations to her without our husbands' being involved? (Jer 44:19)

Biblical texts indicate the worship of a goddess-figure among some Israelites, even in the Temple city of Jerusalem (Ezek 8:14).

*The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* sums up the biblical tradition with respect to Asherah:
It will be noted that in every case where the OT mentions the goddess Asherah it was to speak in condemnation of her or in approval of men ... who attempted to destroy her cultus among the Israelites (251).

So biblical texts indicate the worship of a goddess in the Temple in Jerusalem, as well as documenting clashes between her worshippers and Yahweh's prophets ³.

HEBREW SCRIPTURES: THE SERPENT

In addition to mentioning the goddess, the Hebrew Scriptures also refer to her key symbol, the serpent.

Moses, or his brother Aaron, was a snake shaman, defeating the Egyptian Pharaoh's throw-down-your-staff challenge ⁴. Moses led his people into the wilderness, but encountered a second serpent challenge, when serpents began biting his followers. Yahweh commanded Moses to make a bronze serpent and place it atop a pole. Thus Yahweh ensured safe conduct through Kadesh, where the serpent goddess was venerated (Num 21:4-9).

Not all scholars interpreted this as a show of Yahweh's strength. Instead, it was a condition of safe passage, for

... evidently Moses and Yahweh had to placate the angry goddess of Kadesh...by erecting her brazen image (Beltz 119).
This bronze serpent became a cult object for many Israelites until King Hezekiah took action, sometime before 720 B.C.E.

He broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it; it was called Nehushtan (2Kings 18:4).

Nehushtan, it seems, was feminine. "Nehushta" was the name of King Jehoiachin's mother. According to the author of 2 Kings, Jehoiachin was less than exemplary in his worshipping (or non-worshipping) of Yahweh, as he "did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, just as his father had done" (2Kings 24:8,9).

So the Hebrew Scriptures attest to problems with goddesses and serpents. The feminine principle kept re-emerging in early Yahwism as a major point of contention between the authors of the Hebrew Scriptures and many Israelite worshippers.

HEBREW SCRIPTURES: THE FRUIT

The Hebrew Scriptures remain silent about which fruit Eve offered Adam in the story of the Garden of Eden. However, in Plants of the Bible, A.L.Moldenke refers to an oral tradition:

Ancient legends say that the pomegranate was "the tree of life" in the garden of Eden" (191).

The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible echoes Moldenke:
The fruit played a prominent part in ancient art and mythology as a symbol of fertility; the [pomegranate] tree was even depicted as the Tree of Life (840).

The pomegranate remained an ancient, wide-spread symbol of fertility throughout the Near East, often also seen as a symbol of eternal life (Harper's, Achtemeier).

The pomegranate is mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures, but at a relatively late date, as a masculine symbol of royal and religious authority. For example, it alternated with golden bells as decorations on religious robes (Ex 28:33-34) and on the capitals of the temple pillars of Jachin and Boaz (1Kings 7:18). The erect calyx-lobes on the fruit "served as inspiration for Solomon's crown and, incidentally, for all crowns from that time on" (Moldenke 191).

The Hebrew word for pomegranate is rimmon, also the name of an Assyrian deity worshipped at Damascus. Variants of the word, such as Ramman, are associated with the Babylonian Adad and Syrian Hadad, god of thunder. It appears the pomegranate was connected with their worship, perhaps as a symbol of the deity (Moldenke 190).

Thus an oral tradition indicates the fruit that Eve proffered to Adam was a pomegranate, a dual goddess symbol of fertility-contraception. Its abundant seeds "denoted many children" for the early Israelites (Harper's, Miller). That the pomegranate was eventually adopted as a regal symbol for male rulers reinforces the contention that this fruit symbolized great power for Israeliite monarchs - a power that the monarchs themselves preferred to have under their control ⁵ .
EVE AS THE GODDESS

The key elements in story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2-3 are a woman, serpent, fruit, tree, and garden, along with a man and god. Sumerian, Canaanite and Greek mythologies, which may have influenced the author(s) of the Genesis story, show the serpent, tree, fruit, and garden as common symbols depicting a Goddess and her powers.

I have uncovered nothing to suggest masculine deities were depicted using this imagery. Serpents may have been associated with a few gods; trees definitely formed part of their iconography. But both serpents and trees were not paired with a god in one image, at the same time. The overwhelming evidence points to female imagery and iconography.

The very name "Eve" conjures up images of the Goddess.

The name Eve, *hawwah*, means "mother of all the living" but *Hawwah* also means "serpent" in many Semitic languages (Condren 7).

"Mother of all living" was the name Adam gave his wife (Gen 3:20). The Phoenician snake goddess was also called Eve (Beltz 66).

The idea of Eve as a Goddess is not new. Merlin Stone explored this extensively in her book, *When God Was a Woman*. Stone provides numerous examples of the pervasiveness of the goddess religions in the Mediterranean basin region, with the Goddess's accompanying serpents and trees.

If just the imagery is looked at in the story of Adam and Eve, then the authors of the Hebrew Scriptures have borrowed old goddess imagery. If Eve
is viewed as a Goddess holding substantial powers, then the myth of Adam and Eve takes on a new meaning.

**RE-INTERPRETATION OF THE TEXT**

Genesis 2-3 places both Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Yahweh has forbidden them to eat fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. The serpent sidles up to Eve, persuading her that the fruit will bestow wisdom and Yahweh's penalties will not be invoked. She takes a fateful bite and offers the fruit to Adam. Adam also tastes the fruit. The couple realizes they are naked, and Yahweh realizes they have disobeyed his express command. Yahweh imposes his penalties and the two are evicted from the Garden of Eden.

The lessons to be learned through traditional interpretations of this myth are still being debated. One of the most popular explanations is that this is a morality tale: women must obey their husbands, and both must obey Yahweh. Another explanation suggests this story is about sexual knowledge, specifically "the secret of sex - how to create life", knowledge that meant humans were becoming like the gods, with the power of creating life (Stone 217).

I offer a reinterpretation. Eve is the Great Goddess, standing in her garden, beneath her sacred tree of life and accompanied by her serpent, representing wisdom. She offers Adam a fruit, probably a pomegranate, symbolizing the knowledge of human fertility and contraception. Adam is not her equal, but a lesser god or man, for he does not yet possess the wisdom of the fruit. This reinterpretation adheres to familiar goddess imagery.
Into this garden scenario steps a rival male deity, Yahweh, who claims ownership. Yahweh warns the Goddess not to impart the sacred wisdom of the tree to Adam - in fact, not to taste the fruit herself. Eve listens to the wisdom of her serpent ally and offers Adam the fruit. She and Adam gain wisdom, but Yahweh is outraged. Adam and Eve are banished from the Garden of Eden. The Goddess's key symbol is debased; she is stripped of some powers, and is now subordinate to her husband. The outcome: the Great Goddess's power has been broken. She is reduced to being a consort and denied her serpent, the intermediary between the human and divine realms and provider of wisdom. Yahweh and Adam have triumphed.

Before discussing this reinterpretation in greater detail, I wish to deal with the problematic popular phrase "the tree of knowledge of good and evil", and the scriptural phrase "you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:5). It is difficult to believe Yahweh is condemning knowledge for its own sake, or that knowing the difference between good and evil would be forbidden on pain of death.

It is more realistic to posit that specific knowledge is being denied to Adam and Eve. "Good" and "evil" are relative terms: good or evil compared to what? For example, slavery was not considered evil in the Hebrew Scriptures. In today's world, it is. Massacring hundreds of Philistines or Canaanites as the Israelites established a homeland was not considered evil, but is today. I suggest the specific knowledge that Yahweh forbids to Adam and Eve is knowledge about the powers of creating life (good) and preventing the creation of life (evil).
SYMBOLS UNDERMINED

As a result of the Adam and Eve myth, Yahweh debased the Goddess's key symbol, the serpent, and brought or kept her other symbols under his control.

The serpent represented wisdom in the Goddess religions, and told Eve if she ate the forbidden fruit,

You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil (Gen 3:4-5).

The serpent's wisdom was at least partially accurate. The couple did die eventually, but their eyes were opened to some form of sexual awareness. They realized they were naked, yet the only part of their bodies they covered were their genitals.

[Yet Yahweh is clearly in favour of sexual activity, for in Genesis 1:28, a later creation narrative than Genesis 2: 4-24, he tells humans: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth." If Yahweh is forbidding contraception to Adam and Eve, then his attitude may be reflected in a fourth century B.C.E. court case in Athens dealing with a successful abortion. The husband accused his wife of homicide, with the argument: "the crime of abortion was not the killing of a fetus or embryo but the depriving the father of his right to an heir" (Riddle 63).]

Eve feels the serpent has betrayed her ("The serpent tricked me": Gen 3:13). She rejects her ally and its powers. Yahweh immediately takes steps to distance the woman further from her old ally, successfully putting "enmity"
between the serpent and the woman (Gen 3:14-15) and between their offspring.

Yahweh's dislike of serpents continued unabated. Isaiah, in recalling Yahweh's past glories, asked "Was it not You who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon?" (Is 51:9). Isaiah envisioned judgement day, when Yahweh would "punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will kill the dragon that is in the sea" (Is 27:1) \(^8\).

The author of Psalms also praised Yahweh's powers over the Goddess's symbols:

You broke the heads of the dragons in the waters.
You crushed the heads of Leviathan (Ps 74:13-14).

For Richard Cavendish in Man, Myth and Magic, these battles against serpents

... are myths of central importance, signalling major religious upheavals and transitions...
It seems that every hero in myth and legend must at some time confront a monster which is usually reptilian (2529).

Yahweh overcame the serpent in the Adam and Eve myth, shattering the relationship between the serpent and the Goddess. The serpent's power shifted 180 degrees from its importance in Goddess religions. The serpent was responsible for the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. In crushing the serpent, Yahweh has denied women access to the serpent. They have lost their intermediary to the Goddess.
Yahweh debased the serpent, the powerful intermediary between the Goddess and women, but he did not appropriate the serpent symbol for his own use. However, Yahweh did ensure that other symbols attached to the Goddess remained firmly under his control.

Yahweh redoubles his efforts to ensure control of the Garden of Eden and its sacred trees. After Adam and Eve are evicted, Yahweh places new custodians at the entrance - the cherubim and a flaming sword "to guard the way to the tree of life" (Gen 3:24).

As for the fruit, the pomegranate was adopted as a suitable symbol for religious garments. For "as the Lord had commanded Moses", they "made pomegranates of blue, purple, and crimson yarns" on the lower hem of the religious robes (Ex 39:24-26).

The earth remained a basic building block of life, what Yahweh fashioned Adam out of, and where he must return. For "out of it (the earth) you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19). Yahweh continued his control over the earth.

The moon as a symbol does not appear in this myth, although Theodor Reik writes of

... another legend [which] relates that the Moon alone laughed when Adam transgressed. God grew wroth and obscured her light...[so] she...must be born and reborn again and again (96).

Reik adds that the crescent moon was "an emblem of the Israel that was again and again reborn" (96).
POWERS APPROPRIATED

Yahweh also wound up with some of the Goddess's powers as a result of this myth. At the beginning of this myth, before Eve tempted Adam, Yahweh announced his powers of creation. He showed his ability to create and sustain human life, as he

... formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being ... Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is ... good for food (Gen 2:7,9).

Then Yahweh added a zinger: men's bodies can bring forth life, not just women's wombs.

And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman ... Then the man said "this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken" (Gen 2:22-23).

According to Theodor Reik,

The myth-formation we know, the tradition that Adam gives birth to Eve, is a reversal of the original version that Adam was born from Adamah, the great earth goddess (69).

In contrast to the Sumerian myth of the god Enki, who demonstrated that he - a male - could create life, but not produce a fully-formed and fully-functioning human (Frymer-Kensky 17), Yahweh demonstrated that he had
the power to create fully-functioning human life from a male body. For possibly the first time, a man gave birth to a woman.

In his punishment of Eve, Yahweh took over what had traditionally been a Goddess function: the process of child-birth. Unlike a Goddess, Yahweh planned to make child-birth more, not less, difficult.

I will greatly increase your pangs in child-bearing; in pain you shall bring forth children (NRSV Gen 3:16).

The King James Version of this passage is somewhat different:

I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children (Gen 3:16).

In this rendering, Yahweh promised to increase Eve's ability to conceive. Carol Meyers, in Discovering Eve, agrees with this translation, offering her own 9.

I will greatly increase your toil and your pregnancies (105).

This increased fertility was not Yahweh's blessing, but his punishment for Eve. It raises questions, pointing to Yahweh's, rather than Eve's, ability to control conception. If Eve controlled conception in the past, this power is now effectively denied her.

By the end of the myth of Adam and Eve, Yahweh has taken steps to ensure his control of the procreative process 10. Yahweh relieved the
Goddess Eve of her autonomy. He informed Eve that her husband "shall rule over you" (Gen 3:16). This presupposes a time when a husband did not rule over his wife 11. Adam, too, is punished, condemned to till the fields. But unlike Eve, Adam is also rewarded for his crime: his wife must obey him. Adam is dominant, paralleling his god.

Yahweh offers Adam a form of immortality - Adam may live on through his children, knowledge already revealed in the Isis/Osiris death and resurrection myth (Kinsley, Goddesses 166). However, if immortality of the father is through the son, a man must know who his father is. To ensure this, a husband must control his wife's sexuality and her knowledge of procreation. The woman must remain in his house, under his laws. Controlling paternity is fundamental for generational immortality in a patriarchal society. For a man almost always knows who his mother is, but in matrifocal or matrilineal societies, knowing who his father is, was often problematic.

This myth of Adam and Eve overturned a religious hierarchy that placed the Goddess at the apex, followed by her priestesses, women, then men. Eventually Yahwism reversed that order: Yahweh, followed by priests, men, and women. However, in many of the old Goddess religions, men could serve the goddess in a religious capacity, as priests. A male figure or principle was generally present. Under Yahwism, that duality all but disappeared. Yahweh usurped feminine powers, and set himself up as head of a monotheistic patriarchy.

As Theodor Reik concluded,

Even the root of the goddess-idea was torn out: there is no feminine form of Adon, the name of the Lord (71).
CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have shown that Eve had the trappings associated with the Great Goddess in other cultures, and thus shared key symbols and powers vested in the Great Goddess. She refused to obey Yahweh, and lost the ensuing battle. Yahweh stripped her of much of her powers; he debased her key symbol, the serpent, and undermined her other symbols. Vestiges of the Goddess and her struggle have been uncovered in the Hebrew Scriptures.
CHAPTER FOUR: CHRISTIANITY AND THE GODDESS

Before God was a man,
God was a woman.
- Clement of Alexandria

If wives were good,
God would have had one.
- Georgian proverb

In the previous chapter, I showed how vestiges of the Great Goddess could be uncovered in the Hebrew Scriptures, especially in the myth of Adam and Eve. Yahweh has debased the Goddess's symbols and appropriated some of her key powers.

In this chapter I will show that vestiges of the Great Goddess linger in the New Testament, as well. I will examine how the Christian God takes control of the Goddess's two major powers: power over the process of death and renewal/rebirth/resurrection, and the power of creating and sustaining human life. I will also look at what happens to the Great Goddess's key symbols: the serpent, the tree, the earth and the moon.

In the Goddess religions, the Goddess often has a consort or son, a dying and rising god. I will show that in Christianity, God also has a son, a dying and rising god. The key difference between the Goddess-based religious stories and the Christian story is gender: God replaced the Goddess.

I will focus on the central Christian story of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. I will outline broad parallels between the Christian crucifixion
story and myths of dying and rising gods in Goddess religions. I will also examine two birth stories: the birth of Jesus and the birth of John the Baptist.

To re-iterate a point made in the previous chapter, I maintain that a milieu existed in which stories or legends with similar themes flourished. I do not maintain that Christian stories find exact parallels in the Goddess religions, but that they do reflect their influence.

Finally, I will establish that the authors of the gospels in the New Testament could have come in contact with the Goddess religions.

BACKGROUND

Details of Jesus' life and death remain controversial. It appears he was born between 6-4 B.C.E. in Palestine, preached his message for less than three years, and was executed during Passover season around 27-30 C.E. No neutral reports about Jesus exist, or apparently ever existed. Jewish literature virtually ignores him, so knowledge of his life depends almost entirely on the gospels. According to most scholars, the gospels of Matthew and Luke depend upon Mark, so there remains only one outline of Jesus' career, the one written by Mark. The most solid fact remains his crucifixion, as it was considered a disgraceful way to die (Keck 380).

No writings came directly from Jesus. About thirty years after his death the first gospel appeared. Most scholars believe Mark was written down around 60 C.E., with Matthew and Luke penned before the end of the first century (Manschreck 4-5).
Jesus preached in rural, agricultural Palestine, as a Jewish rabbi. He did not intend to start his own sect (as his refusal to baptise shows), even less to start a new religion. The one Jewish group to which Jesus was apparently closest was that of John the Baptist, who preached repentance in order to be ready for an impending Judgement Day. Jesus repeatedly affirmed the Torah and sought for reforms within Judaism (Keck 380-1). The word "Christian" does not appear during Jesus' lifetime, but first surfaces in Antioch, according to Acts (Manschreck 4). In 313, Christianity was established as the official religion of the Roman Empire, and in 380 the emperor Theodosius I decreed it to be the only faith permitted within the empire.

During the time of Jesus and the early church, the Goddess religions were still flourishing, despite the strength of Judaism and several male-dominated religions such as Mithraism. Temples to the Goddess could be found in Jerusalem itself, in Asia Minor and the eastern Greek cities where Paul preached, and in Rome where the early church fought for legitimacy\(^1\).

The Goddess often had a consort or son, a "dying and rising" god. This genre of myth always included a Goddess whose consort or son died each year and was re-born or resurrected each spring. The consort or son was the beneficiary of the Goddess's powers over the process of death and renewal.

Shrines for the Goddess and her dying and rising god were located throughout the Mediterranean basin. The Goddess Artemis was worshipped in her great Temple at Ephesus in Asia Minor, often with her consort Apollo\(^2\). Her temples were also found across the Aegean Sea, in places such as Corinth along the Greek mainland. The Goddess Cybele, also called the Magna Mater, was adored both at Pessinus in Anatolia and in Rome, where
her temple stood on the Palatinate. Her dying and rising consort, Attis, played a major role, especially in Anatolia. The Egyptian-based Isis and Osiris were numbered among the official deities of the Roman Empire, and had temples in Phoenicia (Nielsen 31).

In trying to spread the gospel of Jesus, his missionaries and disciples travelled to cities known for their goddess worship, such as Corinth and Ephesus. Even if early Christian authors remained exclusively within the confines of Jerusalem, they could have been exposed to the shrines of Ishtar. In addition, Roman soldiers and administrators involved in the occupation of the region brought with them their own gods and goddesses (Manschreck 18)

THE POWER OVER DEATH AND RENEWAL

The authors of the crucifixion stories in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John may have been influenced from several directions. I will look at three possibilities: Near-eastern myths, the myth of Isis and Osiris, and the myth of Cybele and Attis.

INFLUENCE ONE: NEAR EASTERN MYTHS

The core Near Eastern myth dates back to Sumer, involving Inanna, the Queen of Heaven, and her lover, the shepherd boy Dumuzi 3. They consummated a sacred marriage, and, according to Kinsley,

The overall intention of the rite is clear ...
to arouse and ensure the future fertility and

60
productivity of the realm by uniting two figures that symbolize the powers of sexual vigor and fertility (Goddesses 122-123).

Inanna travelled to the Underworld; Dumuzi agreed to exchange places with her, spending half the year in the land of the dead and half the year in the world of the living (Kinsley, Goddesses 134). With the dying and rising of Dumuzi, fertility was ensured. The link between death and renewal had been established.

   The powers of fertility, growth, and abundance had to be fed, as it were, nourished by the death of a powerful being, in this case, Dumuzi (Kingsley, Goddesses 135).

Dumuzi became Tammuz and the Goddess Inanna changed her name to Ishtar, when the Semitic Akkadians conquered the non-Semitic Sumerians, but the myth remained essentially the same.

   Could the authors of the crucifixion stories have come in contact with these myths? It is likely, for in reading the Hebrew Scriptures they would have encountered the prophet Ezekiel. Upset with pagan influences creeping into his religions, Ezekiel denounced what he saw in a vision: "Then he [Yahweh] brought me to the entrance of the north gate of the house of the LORD [in Jerusalem]; women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz" (8:14). He called this an abomination.

   The Jewish calendar also recognizes Tammuz, for the month of June/July is named for this god. The 17th of Tammuz is
... a fast day memorializing the seizure of Jerusalem by Babylon... It begins a three-week mourning period climaxed by the fast Tishah be'Av, which memorializes the burning of the Temple(s) (Crim 154-155).

The Jews mourned - not the death of their god - but the death of his place of worship, opting for the name of a Babylonian dying and rising god to commemorate the month.

It is possible to see similarities between the Christian and Sumerian/Babylonian stories: Dumuzi and Tammuz voluntarily offered to spend time in the Underworld. In the New Testament, Jesus also voluntarily offered himself up for death. He died and was resurrected. While Dumuzi or Tammuz offered the promise of renewed fertility upon their re-birth, Jesus offered the promise of spiritual salvation, or spiritual renewal because of his death and resurrection.

INFLUENCE TWO: MYTHS OF ISIS AND OSIRIS

The cult of Isis and Osiris originated in Egypt, and flourished from at least the third millennium (Young 126). The cult travelled to Phoenicia, and by the first century C.E. was recognized as an official religion of the Roman Empire (Nielsen 31).

Two key myths exist and in both, Isis is the Goddess and Osiris is her consort/husband, a dying and rising god. In the first myth, Osiris has been slain by his brother, his body stuffed into a coffin, and set afloat in the Mediterranean. The casket washed ashore at Byblos in Phoenicia. After
much searching, Isis retrieved the coffin, now encased in a tree. She could not
revive any part of Osiris except for his penis. However this was sufficient for
Isis to impregnate herself. Horus was born, dubbed "the new Osiris"
(Kinsley, Goddesses 166). The message: Immortality, or one form of it,
comes through your children.

In the second myth, Osiris is again slain by his brother. This time, Seth
dismembered his brother's body, throwing the fourteen parts to the four
winds, and feeding Osiris's penis to the fish. This time, Isis pieced all of his
body back together except for one part, his penis. She could not retrieve what
the fish had eaten. However Osiris was revived, becoming Lord of the
Underworld or Lord of the Dead, immortal but infertile, presumably because
of his lack of reproductive organs (Kinsley, Goddesses 166).

These myths are complementary: in the first, Osiris's penis is revived
but his earthly body dies; in the second, his penis dies, but Osiris's body is
revived in the underworld. Fertility and immortality are key themes.

This promise of immortality in the Osiris myth "may have ... prepared
the way for Christianity" (Nielsen 31-32), for Jesus' death and resurrection
hold the promise of human immortality or salvation with God; Osiris's death
holds the promise of some form of immortality in the Underworld, which he
rules. Osiris's revival is only possible with the aid of the Goddess Isis, just as
Jesus' resurrection is only possible with the aid of God.

Certainly the cult of Isis and Osiris was widespread enough for authors
of the crucifixion stories to have come in contact with it, whether in Egypt
during exile from Herod, in neighbouring Phoenicia, or in Rome. Later
Christian iconography suggests this must have happened at some point, for
paintings and sculptures of the Madonna and child bear a striking
resemblance to Isis holding the infant Horus on her lap (Nielsen 32; Neumann
plates 38,44).

INFLUENCE THREE: MYTH OF CYBELE AND ATTIS

Of all the myths of dying and rising gods, the one bearing the most
similarities to the Christian crucifixion story is that of the Goddess Cybele
and the dying and rising god, Attis.

The myth of Cybele and Attis has parallels with the classic myth of
Inanna and Dumuzi, discussed earlier in this chapter, but with some twists.
Cybele is the Great Mother; Attis is another shepherd lover, but instead of
representing fertility through the date palm, as Dumuzi does, Attis is
represented by the pine tree and its cones.

In Cybele and Attis: The Myth and the Cult, Maarten Vermaseren
traces the myth of Cybele from the earliest appearance of the Great Goddess
at Catal Huyuk in Asia Minor, in the seventh millennium B.C.E. A famous
stone statue of the Goddess shows her gently patting two lions on the head as
she gives birth (14,15). Her cult travelled to Greece and finally to Rome. The
great statue of Cybele was transported from her temple at Pessinus, in Asia
Minor, to Rome in 204 B.C.E, and was credited with saving Rome from
Hannibal's onslaught. Cybele's most frequently used names or epithets are
"Magna Mater" (or "Great Mother") and "Mother of the Gods" (81).

Various versions of the myth of Cybele and Attis exist. In one popular
version, Cybele was in love with Attis, a handsome shepherd boy. He had
pledged eternal fidelity to the goddess, but fell in love with another woman. Cybele killed the woman; Attis went insane and castrated himself. He died; flowers sprang from his blood and Attis was immortalized as a pine tree. (Vermaseren 91-92).

For Vermaseren, a common thread runs through all versions of the myth:

The ever-recurring theme is that of Cybele's vengeance, when Attis meets another woman ... He has sworn to remain true to the Goddess ... and ... there is (his) renewed vow with the elimination of any possible risks (92).

The moral, for Vermaseren, is "Bow to the power and majesty of the Goddess; ... In exchange the Goddess will stretch out her hands protectingly over her slaves" (92). It appears that Cybele was a jealous goddess, just as Yahweh was a jealous god.

Initially, this moral echoes the Hebrew Scriptures' story of Adam in the Garden of Eden. As happened to Attis, a woman led Adam astray from obedience or fidelity to his deity. Other elements of human sexuality and fertility are also present in both myths, although not in parallel forms.

The dying Attis also echoed the dying Jesus. In searching out exact parallels in Soteriology and Mystic Aspects in the Cult of Cybele and Attis, Giulia Sfamini Gasparro does not uncover a physically resurrected Attis, but there is

... a certainty that the god has "reawakened"... the awareness of his "presence", beyond the doleful
moment of death (60).

Attis is "surviving in death" (125). Gasparro concluded that the annual dramatization of Attis's fate, the certainty of his survival, and

... his privileged position beside the Great Goddess, could appear to the devotee as a renewal of his own existential essence in an ordered cosmos...It could thus appear as a specific chance of "salvation" (125).

For Gasparro, the idea

... is thus established that life and vegetal fertility spring from the death of a deity and, more precisely, from parts of his body (the vires, blood) (125).

This sacrificial blood came from Attis's castration. Jesus also sacrificed his blood on the cross, and at the Last Supper had stressed the importance of blood. Pouring a cup of wine, Jesus told his disciples: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt 26:28).

Jesus' death and subsequent resurrection offers substantially the same thing as Attis's death and rebirth: an opportunity for renewal.

OTHER SIMILARITIES

The overall theme of a dying and rising god can be found in both the stories of Cybele and Attis, and God and Jesus. In addition, several
similarities exist in the death rituals. Details in the Cybele-Attis ceremonies hint at strong Goddess undertones in the Christian crucifixion story.

The key three-day celebration for Attis got underway on March 22, at the spring equinox, when "the entry of the tree" took place (Vermaseren 115). Vermaseren states,

This is, of course, the pine-tree next to which Attis is so often depicted and under which - according to the representations at Ostia and Glanum - he collapsed after his fatal emasculation (115).

During the "entry of the tree" ceremony an effigy of Attis, decked out in purple ribbons, was attached to the tree. This suggests Jesus, wearing his crown of thorns, carrying his cross on the road to Golgotha.

Details of where the cross originated are absent. In the Attis myth, just before sunrise the tree bearers had chosen their tree from a sacred grove of pine trees, located near every temple to Cybele. "The tree was then laid in state in the temple, as Attis himself" (Vermaseren 115). The tree itself is sacred to the Goddess, and this portrayal of Attis is reminiscent of the Goddess Asherah and her sacred wooden asherim in the Jerusalem Temple, asherim which may have represented the Goddess herself, or merely symbolized her existence.

Attis was symbolized as a pine tree, a versatile symbol, similar to the pomegranate: it encompassed both fertility and sterility. In one version of this myth, Attis is born to Nana, another name for Cybele, after she consumed a pomegranate seed (Vermaseren 115).
Pine cones contain hundreds of seed pods, symbolizing fertility. At the same time, pine resin is an agent of infertility. The Hippocratic treatise On Women's Diseases (fourth century B.C.E.) describes pine resin as an abortive suppository (Riddle 52)⁴. Pine cones were also vehicles for pollinating fruit trees. In addition, the pine tree was evergreen, a symbol of immortality (Vermaseren 115). Trees also represented knowledge. So Attis in his guise as pine tree, represented knowledge of both fertility and sterility. This fertility-sterility aspect was reinforced with Attis's castration. The cycle of death and renewal continues: through Attis's sterility and death comes fertility and new life.

Another connection with blood is also apparent. On the Day of Blood, Attis's priests flagellated themselves until they bled. They sprinkled their blood over the effigy of Attis and on his temple altars. On this day a taurobolium also took place. A bull was killed with a sacred spear, and its blood dripped down through holes drilled in the platform, and onto the priest or worshippers beneath (Vermaseren 103)⁵.

Gasparro believes a beneficial effect of the taurobolium involved "that of the 'regeneration' which the rite will obtain for man" or "the sense of 'rebirth'...which the devotee thinks he has experienced as a result of celebrating the taurobolium" (113). Certainly Christian authors believed that Jesus himself offered this renewal, for redemption comes in terms of "being washed in the blood of the Lamb". For in addition to tauroboliums, there were crioboliums where lambs were sacrificed.

The symbolism of lamb and shepherd was carried further. Attis, in his mortal form, had been a shepherd; Cybele was the goddess overseeing her
flocks (Gasparro 87). The early authors described Jesus in similar terms, as shepherd protecting his flock. In John 10:11, Jesus was quoted as saying "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

The author of Luke reminded his readers that Jesus was betrayed for sacrifice on "the day...on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed" (22:7).

Similarities between the Attis rites and Jesus' crucifixion also extend to the length of the death rituals: they lasted three days. On the third day, both Attis and Jesus experienced a rebirth or resurrection. Both took place in the spring, the traditional time for renewal.

With these similarities, it is possible that the Cybele-Attis myth influenced the authors of the crucifixion stories.

These three influences - Near-eastern myths, the cult of Isis and Osiris, and the myth of Cybele and Attis - could have been integrated by the gospel writers as they attempted to gain acceptance for the story of Jesus' death and resurrection.

**POWER OF CREATING AND SUSTAINING LIFE**

In addition to power over the process of death and resurrection, the Goddess also had power over creating and sustaining life. However, by the beginning of the Common Era, Yahweh had control over her procreative powers. In the Hebrew Scriptures Yahweh had created Adam and Eve, then went on to help barren wives conceive: Sarah had her first child at ninety. However, Yahweh does not claim paternity. Through his auspices the
women's wombs have been opened and their husbands' seed firmly implanted and carried to term.

With Yahweh's role in the Hebrew Scriptures as a mainstay, the gospel authors expanded the Christian God's role. God took responsibility for not just one, but two, special births. The first involved Elizabeth, soon-to-be mother of John the Baptist. In the Gospel of Luke the angel Gabriel talked with Zechariah, Elizabeth's husband. A problem existed, for "they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years" (1:7). God intervened, Elizabeth conceived, and said "This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people" (1:25). The disgrace of infertility was the woman's alone, and God demonstrated his powers to end her barrenness.

In the second example, God took his procreative abilities one step further. Besides making the womb fertile, God became the impregnator, the father of the child. Once again, the angel Gabriel did God's bidding, telling Mary "You have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son" (Lk 1:30-31). Ever practical, Mary asked "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" (Lk 1:34) and Gabriel replied that "nothing will be impossible with God" (Lk 1:37). So Mary bore a son, Jesus.

God insisted on personally naming both the sons. He informs Zechariah "You will name him John" (Lk 1:14), while he tells Mary "You will name him Jesus" (Lk 1:31).

With these special births, God has shown his power to create and sustain human life, a power that had initially rested with the Goddess.
POWERS APPROPRIATED

In the Hebrew Scriptures, Yahweh appropriated the Goddess's powers of creating and sustaining life. He did not completely appropriate her powers over the process of death and renewal. God completes this task in the New Testament.

Once again, with the pregnancies of Mary and Elizabeth, God shows his power. This time he goes one step further, acting as impregnator.

Then he appropriates the Goddess's power over death and renewal. God raises his only son from the tomb, bringing him back to life after death. The Goddesses have done virtually the same thing for their sons or consorts, also raising them from the dead. In broad thematic terms, the sole difference in the myths is the gender of the dominant deity. In the Goddess religions, it is feminine; in Christianity it is masculine. God has adopted all the powers vested in the Goddess.

SYMBOLS

In addition to appropriating the Goddess's powers, early Christian authors also employed Goddess symbols to support or validate Jesus' actions. The tree, or cross, played a major role, eventually becoming the key symbol of the religion. Sympathetic actions by the earth and the moon provided support during his crucifixion. They sanction his sacrifice, his death and his resurrection.
THE TREE

Trees played an integral part in the life of Jesus, according to the gospel stories. His custom was to pray on the Mount of Olives (Lk 22:39). On the night Judas betrayed him, Jesus was meditating under a tree in the Garden of Gesthemene. He died on a wooden cross. From the perspective of a Goddess religion, the tree was sacred. Gods such as Attis were represented by a tree, wooden pole, or wooden image in cults of the dying and rising god. Osiris, in his wooden casket, was protected by a tree. The rebirth of Dumuzi and Tammuz each spring caused the fruit trees to bloom. Dumuzi represented the fertility/sterility properties found in the date palm; Attis represented those same properties found in the pine tree. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the Goddess Asherah's wooden poles had been venerated in the Temple of Jerusalem. In the first century C.E. this use of the tree by early Christian authors may have given an additional aura of sanctity to the Jesus story for people familiar with the Goddess traditions.

THE EARTH

The authors of the crucifixion stories employ the Goddess symbol of the earth to support Jesus during his ordeal on the cross. The earth shudders in horror at the outrage of his death.

According to the author of Matthew, an earthquake occurred just after Jesus died. In the three synoptic gospels, "the curtain of the temple was torn in two" (Matt 27:51; Mk 15:38; Lk 23:45). The author of Matthew immediately added,
... and the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened (27:51) ... when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified (27:54).

The author of Matthew added a second earthquake, when Mary Magdelene and Mary arrived at the sepulchre.

And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone (28:2).

The authors may have added these events to show that Mother Nature/the Earth was offended by this unnatural act of crucifixion. The Earth, and therefore the Goddess, was sympathetic to Jesus' death and resurrection, providing him with a show of support. In providing witness to the story of Jesus' resurrection, the Goddess helped to legitimize this new male deity.

THE MOON

In addition to the earth, the authors of the crucifixion stories may have used the moon's symbolism to support Jesus and fit his death into the broad theme of dying and rising gods.

Goddesses such as Artemis, Athena and Inanna were mistresses of the Moon ⁸. The moon represented death and re-birth, particularly during the
three-day period of darkness each month when the old moon had died and the 
new moon had yet to appear as a silver crescent in the night sky.

The new moon's three-day period of darkness, of "death and re-birth" 
may have a parallel in the three-day period of Jesus' death and subsequent 
resurrection or re-birth. The early Christians celebrated Jesus' death and 
resurrection at the beginning of each lunar month, coinciding with the new 
moon, and on subsequent Sabbaths (Crim 153-154).

The traditional time for celebrating the "dying and rising" gods had 
become the vernal equinox, heralding the end of winter and the beginning of 
spring on March 22. Attis's death marks the end of winter; three days later, 
on March 25th, his worshippers celebrate his re-awakening and the spring-
time fertility of renewal of vegetative growth. This also marks the date 
ascribed to Mary's "awakening" and annunciation of her pregnancy.

The moon did not appear per se during the crucifixion. However, "the 
sun's light failed" (Lk 23:45) and "there was darkness over all the land" (Matt 
27:45; Mk 15:33; Lk 25:44). If this implied a solar eclipse, then the moon 
was responsible. This darkness lasted for three hours, instead of three days, 
while Jesus hung on the cross. The authors may have been portraying the 
moon in sympathy, blackening the sky in protest of the crucifixion and 
preparing the reader for the re-birth or resurrection that followed.

THE SERPENT

The Goddess's key symbol, the serpent, appears only rarely in the New 
Testament. Its authors held mixed views on its role. For example, the author
of Matthew wrote that Jesus cautioned his followers to "be wise as serpents" in their evangelism (10:16). As for true Christian believers, "they will pick up [poisonous] snakes in their hands" (Mk 16:18)⁹. The author of John admonished: "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (3:14-15). However, in Matthew 23:33 Jesus offered this outburst: "You snakes, you brood of vipers! How can you escape being sentenced to hell?".

The early authors of the New Testament did not appropriate this Goddess symbol. However, the later Ophitic Christian sects associated Jesus and his wisdom with the serpent, tracing this connection back to the Garden of Eden. According to Joseph Campbell, these sects honoured "the serpent of the garden as a first appearance of the Saviour" (Mythic 296). In the fourth century, the sect kept a sacred snake in a cista mystica, and performed ceremonies celebrating the snake (Mythic 296). So this sect has appropriated the old Goddess's favourite symbol to represent Jesus.

**ROLE OF WOMEN**

The authors of the gospel stories may have used women to support or validate the Christian belief that Jesus held special powers.

This technique is not new. When the old pre-Greek Goddesses were being overthrown by the new Greek gods, the final seal of approval on the new male-dominated religion was delivered by a Goddess. In her role as Goddess of Wisdom, the pre-Greek Athena presided over a trial, deadlocked between supporters of the older, Goddess-dominated tradition and supporters
of the new, masculine gods. By casting the deciding ballot in favour of the hero, Orestes, Athena, in her wisdom, overthrew the old system and ensured a patriarchal triumph. Women in the New Testament gospels have performed a similar function: they appear to endorse God and his son, the new male prophet/saviour.

The author of Luke had Mary delivering a "paean to women's passivity" in the Magnificat (1:46-55), praising God for his Goddess-like power of creating life. Mary is passive: her controversial pregnancy is not of her doing or her choosing. She has given up control of her pregnancy and has endorsed God for making her passive. This acceptance of female passivity was probably very important to the authors, for they virtually ignored Joseph, a shadowy background character. In a society where paternity is all-important, Joseph received short shrift from the gospel authors. He is not the one the authors have chosen to trumpet God's abilities.

While Jesus was still an infant or child, his parents took him to Jerusalem. Simeon, who had hoped to see "the Lord's Messiah" (Lk 2:26) before his death, was the first to recognize him. The second was the prophetess Anna of the tribe of Asher, an old woman with impeccable credentials. She "never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day" (Lk 2:37). Anna began "to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem" (Lk 2:38).

The author of Luke probably included this second recognition because of its importance. The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible defines the word asher as "to be a bearer of salvation" (249). Because of its location, the tribe of Asher had close contact with the Canaanite seacoast peoples. The tribe had
a "half-caste nature ... little ... respected among the true Israelites" (249).

Elsewhere, The Interpreter's Dictionary points out that Ashera is "the name of the Canaanite mother-goddess" (252). It remains odd that a prophetess from the least-liked tribe in Israel should be granted the honour of recognizing Jesus as a child, unless that recognition, in some way, validated Jesus in the eyes of his adherents.

Women are the first to recognize Jesus after his resurrection, to testify to its truth. In Matthew, Mary Magdelene and "the other Mary" (28:1) found the stone rolled back and Jesus' tomb empty.

Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" ... then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me" (28:9-10).

The authors of Luke and the short version of Mark did not include this incident, but they still wrote that Mary Magdelene, Mary the mother of James, and the other women arrived before the men at the empty tomb. They were informed that Jesus had arisen, and were commissioned to give the resurrection message to the disciples (Mk 16:7; Lk 24:6-9). The long version of Mark included Jesus meeting with Mary Magdelene (16:9). The women, not the men, were the first to see the risen Jesus; the women, not the men, were entrusted with the gospel message for his disciples. Women were validating Jesus' resurrection, just as women and the Goddess validated Attis's and Tammuz's resurrection, and Isis was responsible for both of Osiris's resurrections.
In another example, Jesus has gained a reputation as healer. A "Gentile, of Syro-phoenician origin" approached and "begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter" (Mk 7:26). The New Testament is full of healing stories and the authors included a variety of illnesses spread out among an assortment of nationalities. In this case, a woman from a Goddess-dominant region sought out Jesus. The author of Mark made it clear that she was a Gentile, not a Jew. The implication, or hidden assumption, was that her Goddess did not have the power to heal her daughter. Jesus did. (The same logic holds true for all other curing stories: old deities are ineffective and cannot do the job; Jesus can.)

MARY

The gospel authors may have used women to support and validate Jesus' powers, but Mary, the mother of Jesus, posed special problems.

By 400 C.E. Christianity had triumphed and rival religions were being outlawed throughout the Roman Empire. The Emperor Theodosius had ordered the closure of all temples dedicated to the Great Goddesses. In Rome, the temple of the Magna Mater, or Great Mother, was shut down. In Ephesus, his minions marched up the steps of the seventh wonder of the world, the Temple of Artemis - that bane of Christian missionaries - and shut it down. The worship of the Goddesses was over (Stone 194).

Yet a scant 31 years later, the Church Council met in Ephesus in 431 and proclaimed Mary theotokos, the Mother of God. The Church fathers had encountered a sticky theological problem, starkly reflected as late as the 12th
century, in the writing of Odo of Cluny. "To embrace a woman," wrote Odo, "is to embrace a sack of manure."

As Rosalind Miles commented somewhat acidly on Odo's summation:

One thing was clear. Our Lord, the Son of God, the Redeemer of Man, could not have been born from a sack of shit: the Christian fathers had to protect Mary's purity in order to protect his (98).

So, in the terms of the old Goddess religions, Mary became the "Mother of God". Despite God having appropriated or subverted the Goddess's powers and symbols, the Goddess re-emerged in Christianity.11

(Mary) took on many of the characteristics of the archetypal Mother Goddess and was idolized and worshipped in much the same way, with her statuettes to be found in every church (Bancroft 167).

However, in the old religions "Mother of God" also meant "Great Goddess" and that stature was never granted to Mary. She remained a necessary - but often unwanted - adjunct, whose greatest strength was not strength per se, but passivity. God had finally - in a sense - 'emasculated' the Goddess.

FURTHER EVIDENCE

Is there any proof to suggest the gospel authors might have deliberately incorporated aspects of the Goddess tradition into their stories of Jesus? The
answer is probably yes, for there are examples where the New Testament authors manipulated the texts.

If John Dominic Crossan's assessment is correct in *The Historical Jesus*, then Jesus was crucified - but his disciples were not present at his two trials and Jesus' physical resurrection remains in doubt. The stories of his two trials are, in Crossan's words, "consummate theological fictions", as are details of Jesus' resurrection (390). Intellectual converts could appreciate a spiritual resurrection, in that Jesus' religious message did not die. But for the *hoi polloi*, Crossan argues, a physical resurrection was necessary, details of the trials were mandatory, and the myth-making began. Crossan documents part of that process, which involved authors stealing from, or plagiarizing, or adapting well-known myths, and plugging in Jesus' name instead of the hero's name. This is similar to the job done by Hammurabi's priests, as they wrote Marduk back into the old myths, making him the triumphant new god.

Crossan raises the possibility that the gospel authors indulged in some myth-making in the crucifixion stories. In addition, New Testament authors apparently took great care in emphasizing that Jesus met the specifications for a Jewish messiah. They appeared intent on providing him, and the new religion, with a solid Jewish provenance. Jesus insisted that he had come "not ... to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill" (Matt 5:17).

In Luke 4:21 Jesus was preaching in the synagogue, and informed the congregation "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"; and he continued later in Luke, saying to his disciples: "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the
prophets will be accomplished" (18:31). In John 19, Jesus had been crucified; his legs were not broken, but one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear. The author concluded: "These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, 'None of his bones shall be broken.' And again another passage of scripture says, 'They will look on the one whom they have pierced.' " (Jn 19:36-37). The authors clearly, and with great deliberateness, ensured that the reader recognized that Jesus fit the Jewish scriptural requirements for a messiah. The authors had an agenda.

Given that the New Testament authors were canny enough to point out how Jesus fulfilled the Jewish paradigm for a Messiah, presumably in their quest for Jewish adherents, there is little reason to suppose they would not take similar action in their attempts to woo potential converts from rival Goddess religions. In minimalist terms, Jesus the man died on a wooden cross and his spirit (and possibly body) lived on. Osiris the god was killed in a wooden coffin and he lived on in the Underworld. Attis the god died under a tree, and his spirit, too, was re-born each spring. Inanna, Ishtar, Anat, Artemis: the Great Goddesses all had their dying and rising gods 12.

These parallels may have been too similar for the New Testament authors to ignore, for any good author attempts to help the audience understand his or her viewpoint by providing context. In order to help people understand the new religion of Christianity, the authors may have fit their Jesus story into a framework the Gentiles understood. The Gentile audience was already familiar with the major themes and expected outcome of the dying and rising god in the Goddess religions. The new Christian religion merely adapted that theme to its own purposes.
For as Paul, an early non-gospel author and missionary in Asia Minor, coastal Greece and Rome, stated matter-of-factly,

To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law ... I have become all things to all people (1Cor 9:20).

Paul admitted becoming a chameleon to sell his message, summing up his own attitude in the battle over whether Gentiles must, like Jews, be circumcised to partake in the new religion,

Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything (Gal 6:15).

One question remains: Were these Goddess stories well-known to the average person, and would that person care? Lucy Hughes-Hallett's Cleopatra chronicles the life of the last Queen of Egypt, Cleopatra VII, who died in 30 B.C.E. She was Julius Caesar's mistress, Mark Antony's partner, and Rome's adversary (dust jacket). The divine Isis was incarnated in Cleopatra, and in the eyes of her subjects, Cleopatra was a goddess (78). She took pains to reflect the Isis culture, for she had censers wafting perfume from her barge as she made her way up-river to meet her rival, Mark Antony, outside of Tarsus in Asia Minor. The reason: the presence of the Goddess Isis was said to be apparent through sweet odours (78). The male political leaders also patterned themselves after gods and heroes. Antony tried to emulate Dionysus and the resurrected Osiris (Cleopatra and Antony posed for double portraits as Isis and Osiris)(84); Julius Caesar preferred Hercules; Octavius
billed himself as "son of the god Apollo", saying his mother conceived him in the Temple of Apollo, thanks to the temple serpents (93).

Goddesses, gods, and sons of gods played prominent roles in the lives of well-known historical personages around the time of Jesus. Many rulers encouraged the idea of their divinity: that they were "sons of gods" or gods incarnate. Given the gospel authors' attempts to have Jesus fit the Hebrew scriptural definition of a messiah, backed by Crossan's supposition that details of the trials and resurrection of Jesus are fictitious, it is reasonable to conclude that the gospel authors were also influenced by the Goddess traditions.

CONCLUSION

For some scholars, the New Testament reveals two opposing religious traditions that were never quite reconciled. James Bailey suggests that the Lord's Prayer, which is attributed to Jesus,

... reads like a recruiting drive by sun-worshippers among earth-worshippers. The insistence upon "Our Father" supposes a denial of "Our Mother". "Who art in heaven" supposes a denial of "who art beneath the earth" (314).

The Father won out; the Mother lost. In this chapter, I have shown that Jesus fulfilled the paradigm for the dying and rising god. In so doing, Jesus also altered the religious equation. The deity he interacted with was not feminine, was not the Goddess. He was masculine, the Christian God. Christianity
broke new ground, for a masculine god now claimed the centuries-old Goddess’s power over death and resurrection/renewal, and solidified his power to create and sustain life. God now controlled all facets of human existence, from creation to salvation.

Thus vestiges of the Goddess can be discerned in Christianity, through God’s appropriation of her powers and the use of her symbols to support the new religion. Jesus fulfills the paradigm of a dying and rising god with one exception: he dies and is resurrected as the Son of God, and not as the son/consort of a Goddess. The sole change has been a gender shift in the principal deity. The Christian God has replaced the "pagan" Goddess but there is no fundamental change in the meaning of the myth. The fact that Mary was eventually given the old Goddess’s title of "Mother of God", that is, mother of the dying and rising son, merely reaffirms that the Goddess's powers and symbols were appropriated by the new religion.
CHAPTER FIVE: BUDDHISM AND THE GODDESS

Aditi is the mother and the father and the son. Aditi is all gods ... Aditi is all that has been born and shall be born.
- Rigveda 1.89.10

In the preceding two chapters, I demonstrated how the Great Goddess's powers and symbols had been appropriated and/or undermined in two Western religions, Judaism and Christianity, and that vestiges of the Goddess were apparent within the Hebrew Scriptures and Christian canon.

In this chapter, I will show that the Goddess's symbols and powers met a similar fate in an Eastern religion, Buddhism. I will outline how the Buddha appropriated the Goddess's key power of creating and sustaining life, and the power over the process of death and resurrection. I will also look at what happened to the Goddess's symbols of the tree, the serpent, the earth and the moon.

I will examine three episodes in Buddhism: the Buddha's birth, his enlightenment and nibbana (nirvana), and the five dreams that he experienced the night preceding his enlightenment, and I will show how the Goddess tradition has influenced these stories.

I maintain that a religious milieu existed in India, both during and after the Buddha's lifetime, with a strong female ambience, wherein broad themes enjoyed popularity. I am not suggesting that the authors of the Buddhist stories
selected a specific Goddess tradition from this religious milieu to serve as a model. Rather, common threads ran through the Indian religions of the Buddha's day. Buddhist authors tapped into this source, making the Buddha's life and message more accessible and more easily understood to non-Buddhists.

BACKGROUND

The Buddha's precise birth year is unknown. Scholars attribute the date anywhere from 624 B.C.E. to 448 B.C.E. The most popular dates are 566 or 563 B.C.E. (Oxtoby 221). Part of the confusion arises from the Pali canon, the sanctioned version of the Buddha's life and preaching, for none of the contents of the canon can be dated with any certainty. An oral tradition existed, later written down over a number of centuries, probably ranging from the fourth century down to the first century B.C.E. (Chen 134).

According to the Pali canon, Siddhartha Gautama was born in Kapilavastu, which lay in a fertile, irrigated plain of modern Nepal, near the Indian border. He was the first-born son of the ruling raja. At age sixteen or seventeen Gautama married Yasodhara, who bore him a son, named Rahula, or "Hindrance".

At age twenty-nine, he left home to seek enlightenment. Six years later, after meditating under a tree, Gautama achieved his goal, becoming the Buddha. He spent the next forty-five years preaching his Four Noble Truths and his Eightfold Path, outlining the way to end human suffering, in northern India, in the cultural centers of the fertile Ganges river basin. According to all accounts, the Buddha died at age eighty (Drummond 122) 1.
The religions of the Buddha's era evolved somewhat differently than did the religions of Judaism and Christianity. Unlike these two western religions, religions in India tended to grow and mature by a process of inclusion, rather than exclusion. Even today in India, religions run the gamut. The range includes serpent and tree worship, Jainism, Hinduism, and esoteric Tantrism. People worship village and tribal deities, and popular Hindu gods. Others accept only philosophical concepts of a deity, such as Brahman and Atman. These religions co-exist, and the wider a following a particular deity has, the more likely that deity's religion incorporates rival deities into its pantheon.

These same religions also existed in the sixth century B.C.E. (Koller 135-7), when Buddhism was struggling to establish itself. What Koller wrote about the trend evident in one of Buddhism's major rivals, Hinduism, applies equally well to Buddhism.

Most new Gods and Goddesses that enter the ... pantheon do so by an initial identification with an already existing deity. Eventually, as they become accepted and established in their own right, these earlier identifications fade into the background (Koller 233-234).

This "fading into the background" often makes it challenging to uncover how a rival deity, such as the Goddess, has been defeated or transformed. However, as Klaus Klostermaier pointed out, the Goddess in India shared similar characteristics with the Goddesses in Syro-Palestine.

The Indus civilization again may be considered part of a larger culture, spreading from the Mediterranean in the west to Central India in the east, in which the Great Mother was the creator;
the lady of humans, beasts, and plants; the liberator; and the symbol of transcendental spiritual transformation (Survey 140).

The Goddess went by several names: Earth Mother or Terra Mater, Sita, Kali, Shakti, Aditi, plus many tribal goddess names. Whatever her name, "Mother Goddesses were worshipped at all times in India" (Basham, Wonder 311). From the seals and figurines unearthed from the Indus Valley civilization,

It seems clear that goddesses were central to the religion of this ancient civilization in Northwest India and that they had something to do with agriculture, fertility, and vegetative life generally (Kinsley, "Goddess" 278).

These goddesses held varying degrees of power around 500 B.C.E., the era of the Buddha. I will take a closer look at several of these Goddesses, their symbols and their powers.

EARTH GODDESS

The Earth goddess reflected the sacrality of the earth itself. The Atharva Veda, composed around 500 B.C.E. in northern India, included a hymn to the Earth Goddess (Basham, Origins 18).

Truth...universal order...the sacrifice, support the earth. May this earth, the mistress of that which was and shall be, prepare us for a broad domain (Young 272).
The hymn continued, extolling the Earth's fundamental nature:

... the earth upon which the sea, and the rivers and the waters, upon which food and the tribes of men have arisen ... the all-begetting mother of the plants (Young 272).

The earth was personified as a Goddess in this hymn. Other Goddesses were not personifications, but associated with the earth's power of creating and sustaining life. For example, Sita, the much-loved wife of Rama, was originally connected with this agricultural fertility. Her name meant *furrow* or "the line made by a plow" (Kinsley, *Goddesses* 93). Kinsley, quoting from the Harivamsa, said she was called:

Sita to those who hold the plough, and Earth to all living beings (93).

Sita was Terra Mater, the Great Mother, the Earth Goddess.

In addition to Earth Goddesses, *yakshis* or earth spirits also appeared in popular folk lore as well-endowed women, often with serpents and trees in the background.

For example, at Sanchi, a first-century B.C.E. Buddhist site, sculptors included in one panel of its famous gateways: a goddess or *yakshi*, with a serpent around her neck, sitting above three winged lions, two birds, the coiled symbol of the serpent, elephants, trees and a tree goddess (Basham, *Wonder* plate xxvii).
As a second example, a yakshi is depicted standing on an elephant, a serpent coiling around her feet. The yakshi’s arm encircled a tree, while one hand reached for the tree's fruit (Basham, *Wonder* plate xxv).

These symbols and powers are consistent with those representing the Great Goddess throughout the Mediterranean basin.

**SERPENT AND TREE GODDESSES**

The serpent goddess from Bengal was Manassa, sister of the cosmic serpent Ananta. While Ananta (or Shesha, as he was also known) and the Nagas, or masculine serpent gods, remain better known, the feminine also lies behind their stories. According to J. Vogel in *Indian Serpent Lore*, the myth of the origin of the Nagas was recounted this way:

They are the sons of Kadru ... who is a personification of the Earth....(this) Serpent-Mother is (also) called Su-rasa (47).

Other texts added that Manassa was also the daughter of Kadru (Ions 97). In addition to serpent goddesses, tree goddesses also abounded. Indus Valley seals showed the veneration of tree goddesses (Campbell, *Mythic* 266); sculptures around the earliest Buddhist temples featured tree goddesses (Campbell, *Mythic* plates 236, 237, 238). Their groves remain sacred sites throughout India.
KALI

While earth, serpent and tree goddesses appear, for the most part nameless and somewhat generic or interchangeable, Kali is the ultimate independent Hindu Goddess (Orr, "Kali"), given power over the process of death and renewal ³.

Some scholars suggest that before Kali was incorporated into the Hindu pantheon,

Kali was originally an indigenous goddess worshipped with blood sacrifice by "wild" tribes (Kinsley, Sword 92).

Kali brought together the goddess symbols of the serpent, moon, and trees. She has been described as

... wear(ing) a necklace of snakes, the half- moon rests on her forehead ... her sacred thread is a snake, and she lies on a bed of snakes ... and on her head is Ananta, with a thousand heads (Kinsley, Sword 81).

Kali is often depicted hunched red-fanged over a corpse, sheltered by a tree, the moon shining in the background ⁴. Serpents encircled her feet. As "the black goddess", Kali devoured her victims at night. The root of her name refers to black as well as to time, which like Kali destroys all beings (Koller 238). As Danielou explained:

Le teint de Kali est noir comme la nuit de la nouvelle lune. C'est ... la nuit éternelle (55) ⁵.
Kali remained extraordinary among Hindu goddesses: after Shiva wed Parvati, Parvati exerted substantially less power than her new husband. When Kali took Shiva as her consort, he had less power than Kali. In broad terms, he became like the dying and rising gods of Mesopotamia and Asia Minor. When Kali danced on Shiva's corpse, Shiva awoke. Tantric texts from around 1000 C.E. described Kali's revival powers this way:

If Shiva becomes joined with Shakti [Kali] he is able to be powerful. If not, then the god is not even able to move (quoted in Dexter 81).

Shakti is the feminine principle, and, quoting a famous Sanskrit pun, or play on the written words, "Without Shakti, Shiva is Shava, or lifeless". He is called "the dead body, the corpse", the "lifeless Solitary One". The activating or enlivening principle is "the Goddess, Shakti, the supreme representative of movement and life...She is the Maya that produces the world" (Zimmer 206-7).

This power held by the goddesses in India evolved into a stated principle. Shakti means power personified in the Goddess, the feminine principle, the eternal female (Koller 243). The three main gods of the Hindu pantheon - Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva - are responsible for the creation, maintenance and destruction of the world, but they cannot act without the help of Shakti. They remain powerless (Dexter 81). (These gods, in fact, represent the splitting up of the Great Goddess's powers of creating life, sustaining life, and the power over death and renewal. Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are each given one of these attributes, but still require the feminine principle, or shakti to use their powers.)
*Shakti* also defines the mystical or esoteric element: the hidden power at the base of the human spine, the *kundalini*\(^6\). Coiled serpents represent this untapped feminine power which must be released before enlightenment can be attained (Klostermaier, *Survey* 256).

**SYMBOLS IN BIRTH STORIES**

The story of Gautama's birth illustrates both goddess symbology and the Buddha's power to create and sustain life.

Different branches of Buddhism have differing versions of the Buddha's birth story, although they follow a pattern, wherein purity remains a primary focus. Both Gautama and his mother remained pure during and after the birth process, and to ensure her sexual purity, the queen died seven days later, "reborn in the Heaven of the Contented" (Nanamoli 4).

In *The Life of the Buddha as It Appears in the Pali Canon*, Queen Maya gives birth to Gautama standing up, not seated or lying down. When Gautama emerged from his mother's womb, he did not touch the earth. Then a "great measureless light" appeared in the world, and the world of the deities "shook and quaked and trembled" (Nanamoli 4-5).

Non-canonical authors later embellished these few details, emphasizing the conception of Gautama and the birth scene. In general, they agreed that Gautama's mother, Queen Maya, remained chaste during a religious festival, learning of her pregnancy in a dream. The Queen gave birth to the future Buddha in a grove of trees, in or near Lumbini, specifically under a sacred sal tree (Schumann 7-8; Musaeus-Higgins 202).
In *Jataka Mala*, Queen Maya asked to be taken to the pleasure garden of Lumbini.

When she came to a Sal-tree in a grove, the tree bent down one large branch, to make a bower for her, and Maya took hold of it with her right hand (Musaeus-Higgins 202).

This emphasis on the sacred sal tree is evident in the *Nidana Katha* version of the birth story as well. Queen Maya and her entourage approached a pleasure-grove of sal trees, called the Lumbini grove.

When she came to the monarch sal-tree of the glade, she wanted to take hold of a branch of it, and the branch, bending down, like a reed heated by steam, approached within reach of her hand. Stretching out her hand she took hold of the branch, then her pains came upon her ... Standing, and holding the branch of the sal-tree, she was delivered (Fausboll 67).

The queen was standing, not crouching or reclining, as she gave birth to Gautama. This description echoed the bas-reliefs of the Earth and Tree Goddesses (Campbell, *Mythic* plates 236-238), showing virtually identical iconography between Queen Maya and the old goddesses (Campbell, *Mythic* plates 232,233). As Campbell wrote, "We note that the goddesses are all in the pose of Queen Maya in the birth scene" (*Mythic* 264).
POWERS APPROPRIATED

Queen Maya was not the active force, responsible for creating life. The future Buddha had adopted that power. In the guise of a white elephant, the future Buddha came to her in a dream, entering her womb. In some versions, the queen was stripped of her power to give birth naturally. Gautama sprang from her right side, already a young child, not an infant (Campbell, Mythic 260, plates 260, 261). Shortly afterwards, Queen Maya died.

The Buddha has shown he had the power to create and sustain life, to make a woman's womb fertile: the Buddha, not the goddess, dictated Queen Maya's fertility.

SYMBOLS DURING THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND NIBBANA

Like the birth stories, the stories of the Buddha's enlightenment illustrate the inclusion of old Goddess symbols within the religion, along with the Buddha's power over death and re-birth.

The authors of the Pali canon employed personifications of the goddess's symbols, or allies, to validate the Buddha's experience. They become credible witnesses to his achievement.

In Buddhist Birth Stories, translated by T.W.Rhys Davids, Gautama sat on the earth in a cross-legged position under the Bo-tree, or Tree of Wisdom (96). Mara (roughly corresponding to the Christian devil) tempted him. Gautama called on the earth goddess to support his claims of right-doing.

And the great Earth uttered a voice, saying, "I am witness to thee of that!" (101).
After Gautama has defeated Mara, the Nagas or serpent kings, announced, "Come, let us honour the Victor!". The Bo-tree "paid him homage, as it were, by its shoots like sprigs of red coral falling over his robe". Throughout the universe, "flowering trees put forth their blossoms, and fruit-bearing trees were loaded with clusters of fruit". The waters of the Great Ocean "became sweet, down to its profoundest depths" (Rhys Davids 101-3). Old gods paid homage to the new "god".

A later biographer, Ashvahosha, combined many of the traditional Goddess symbols in one story, in his Buddhacharita.

Then Kala, the best of Serpents ... uttered this praise of the great Sage ... on the point of attaining supreme knowledge: 'Inasmuch as the earth, pressed down by thy feet, O Sage, resoundeth repeatecly ... thou shalt surely to-day enjoy the desired fruit. Inasmuch as rows of birds fluttering in the sky offer thee reverential salutation ... thou shalt certainly to-day become the Buddha.' Being thus extolled by the best of Serpents, and having taken some pure grass from a grasscutter, he ... sat down to obtain perfect knowledge at the foot of the great holy tree" (Vogel 99).

Buddhist iconography incorporated old Goddess symbols. The Buddha continued to be associated with trees and sacred groves throughout his life, often meditating and taking his disciples on retreats to sacred groves. The Buddha himself predicted to his favourite disciple Ananda that he would die under a pipal or sal tree, during the full moon (Nanamoli 1).

"It is the last watch of this coming night, between the twin sala trees in the Mallians' sala-tree grove
at the turn into Kusinara, that the Perfect One will finally attain nibbana” (Nanamoli 317).

These twin sala trees were "quite covered with blossoms" even though it was not the season for them, and the Buddha informed Ananda that the trees would "scatter and sprinkle and strew" these blossoms on "the Perfect One's body out of veneration for him" (Nanamoli 319).

With the Blessed One's final attainment of nibbana there was a great earthquake, fearful and hair-raising, and the drums of heaven resounded (Nanamoli 329).

Thus the earth goddess and the tree played a prominent role in the Buddha's enlightenment and nibbana. The serpent deities also took part, and although the Nagas were portrayed as masculine, their origins were feminine. They were the sons of Kadru, a personification of the Earth (Vogel 47). Kadru, or "Mother of Serpents" was sometimes called "Aditi", the powerful Vedic Goddess (Vogel 54). The abode of the Nagas was situated in "the womb of the sea" (Vogel 51).

The moon, closely connected with the ocean because of its pull, causing tides, also remained under the control of the Goddess. The lunar calendar marked key Buddhist celebrations.

POWERS APPROPRIATED

The Buddha's enlightenment and nibbana marked his assumption of the goddess's powers over death and re-birth, for the Buddha effectively ended the
cycle of "samsara", or eternal re-birth, with the successful practice of his Four Noble Truths.

According to The Life of the Buddha as It Appears in the Pali Canon, the Buddha proclaimed upon his enlightenment,

Birth is exhausted, the Holy Life has been lived out, what was to be done is done, there is no more of this to come (Nanamoli 25).

For the Buddha had come to understand that:

Birth is there when ageing and death come to be; birth is a necessary condition for them (Nanamoli 25).

With enlightenment, death and re-birth are no longer necessary. The Buddha has taken control of the goddess's powers over death and renewal and rendered them obsolete.

OTHER EXAMPLES OF THE INCLUSION OF SYMBOLS

The Hindu god Vishnu provides another clear example of Indian religions incorporating rival gods into their iconography.

In a "prelude to creation", a popular motif, Vishnu reclined on the cosmic serpent Ananta, afloat upon the primordial ocean. A lotus blossom emerged from Vishnu's navel (or "womb"), while the earth goddess watched from the shore. The world is being conceived (Ions 24-25).
Other depictions show Vishnu dreaming the universe. Again, Vishnu reclines on Ananta. Beneath the serpent, a female figure stands in the earth/tree goddess posture; and five men or gods accompany her, also standing in various poses. This was carved at the Dasavatara Temple in central India, around 500 C.E. (Campbell, *Mythic* plate 4).

In an undated Nepalese stone carving, the theme continues. Vishnu sleeps, afloat upon the ocean, lying on his back, one hand by his side, recumbent upon the coiled Ananta (Campbell, *Mythic* plate 124). Campbell describes the carving this way:

> Alone upon the immortal substance of the ocean, ... he takes delight in slumber ... There is no one to behold him, no one to comprehend him; there there is no knowledge of him, except within himself (*Mythic* 144).

Vishnu dreamed and created the new world-to-come. The sculptors and biographers of the Buddha have included the same symbols to support their god as did the artisans and story-tellers of Vishnu. A final example of Indian inclusiveness: when Hinduism finally triumphed over Buddhism, the Buddha was incorporated into the Hindu pantheon, becoming the ninth avatar, or incarnation, of Vishnu (Klostermaier, *Survey* 138).

**THE BUDDHA'S FIVE DREAMS**

The Buddha's five dreams just prior to his enlightenment have never been adequately interpreted. Canonical authors believed that his dreams presaged
details of the new religion: its structural make-up and some delineation of duties 7. But this official explanation falls short, for it lacks overall coherence. Modern scholars Roy Amore and Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty offered partial explanations, also admitting their solution offered no overall cohesiveness (Amore, "Comparative").

The following explanation, based upon religious rivalries and the Buddha's appropriating the Goddess's powers and symbols, offers an alternative solution which encompasses all five dreams.

To re-capitulate, the Buddha was born in the fertile, well-irrigated plain of Nepal, and spent his life preaching in the Ganges basin region. This area, like the Nile flood plain in Egypt, and the "fertile crescent" of Mesopotamia, especially between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, gave rise to a strong agricultural society. Agricultural societies depended upon the fertility of the soil or earth, which was governed by an Earth Goddess or Great Goddess. Often the Goddess was accompanied by a son or consort, a dying and rising god, who helped ensure the earth's fertility.

If the theme of fertility was all-important in a Goddess-dominated religion, then the Buddha's new religion was rejecting the main raison d'être of the Great Goddess religions, for he is denying the need or necessity of on-going re-births and the eternal cycle of existence. With this information in mind, it becomes reasonable to interpret the Buddha's five dreams as his overcoming a Goddess tradition. The Goddess's powers of fertility (and over death and re-birth) were no longer required by the Buddha-to-be. He was a dying and rising god, who incorporated the Goddess's powers into his own body and from that vantage point, set out to establish his own religion.
Gautama may have been on a vision quest, similar to a shamanic or Native American ritual. His dreams foretold his power over old rivals - his successfully overcoming old goddess beliefs, involving the theme of a "dying and rising" god. I will show that these dreams could have emanated from a Goddess tradition. While not every dream may clearly illustrate a Goddess connection, the five dreams, taken as a whole, do suggest Gautama's triumph over a Goddess tradition.

DREAM ONE

According to The Book of Gradual Sayings, or the Anguttara-nikaya (iii.240-242) in the Pali canon, the pre-enlightened Buddha dreamed:

that the earth was his bed of state upon which he lay; the mountain king Himalaya was his pillow; his left hand rested on the Eastern sea; his right hand rested on the Western sea; and both his feet rested on the Southern sea.

In this new interpretation, the earth on which Gautama lay is Terra Mater or Mother Earth. Himalaya was a rival god [single hills or mountains were regarded as masculine; a pair of hills or mountains was regarded as breasts (Erndl 35)]. Gautama dominated: he was not lying face down, making obeisance or suggesting sexual contact. He gazed heavenward, where the male sky gods had their abode, rather than contemplating the hidden mysteries of the earth.
Gautama also dominated the three oceans, the source of much life, just as Vishnu dominated the ocean as he reclined upon the cosmic serpent Ananta. Gautama's body formed a cross, an ancient symbol of life.

Gautama's first dream gave him physical dominion over the earth, mountains and oceans. His body was a symbol of life, more potent than the earth goddess or Terra Mater.

**DREAM TWO**

In his second dream, Gautama saw:

that *tiriya* grass or *kusa* grass grew out of his navel and didn't stop until it touched the clouds.

In this dream, he was proving his fertility, his power of creating and sustaining life. Just as Vishnu had a lotus growing out of his navel when he dreamed the world, so the future Buddha had grass growing from his navel or “womb”. In a more precise comparison, the dead Egyptian god Osiris had grass emerging from his body, as a symbol of his regenerative powers (Campbell, *Sacrifice* plate 58)⁸. Osiris was a dying and rising agricultural god, and in keeping with an agricultural fertility theme (Dream Three), it is possible the Buddha "died" in this dream, and an agricultural staple, grass, grew from his navel.

Identifying the *tiriya* or *kusa* grass remains problematic. I have not discovered which grasses they represent. However in Akkadian, the word *kuse'u* means *moon* and several Indian flowers which bloom only at night
share this root word. So it may be possible to associate kusa grass with the moon, another symbol associated with the goddess.

In *Indian Serpent Lore* J. Vogel summarized the *Mahabharata*’s story of Garuda, the bird, winning the soma, or nectar of immortality, guarded by "the two poison-eyed snakes" (53). Garuda promised the nectar to his enemies, the Nagas, or serpents, and placed it on "a litter of *kusa* or *darbha* halms" (53). The god Indra seized the nectar of immortality; the serpents arrived to find their nectar gone.

All they could do was to lick the sharp *kusa* blades to which some of the precious substance still adhered. The result was that from that day the snakes became double-tongued, and the *kusa* grass obtained its purifying virtue by its contact with the nectar (53).

A grass with purifying properties grew out of Gautama's navel, towards the heavens. The grass was associated with immortality and serpents, two old goddess ideas.

**DREAM THREE**

This dream has always been the most problematic to interpret. In this dream, Gautama saw:

that white worms with black heads crept up over his feet as far as his knees and covered them.
These worms were not associated with rot and decay, but with agricultural fertility of the earth. Worms break up the earth and aerate the soil, creating arable land. Like serpents, worms dwell both beneath the earth and atop it; worms enjoy a form of immortality: they have regenerative powers. They can reproduce asexually and if cut in two, can regenerate their missing sections.

The genesis of this dream probably originated in creation myths. According to Anne Bancroft in *Origins of the Sacred*,

The Creator enters the primordial waters either as an anthropomorph or as a water creature and brings back from the bottom of the sea the material to make the world (29).

This is a popular myth, known around the world. Such a myth is found among the Santals, who are, numerically, the largest tribe in contemporary India. A pre-Dravidian agricultural people, they inhabit the same area where the Buddha lived and worked (Mukherjea 46).

[The Santals venerated some of the same things as Buddhism: the sal tree, sacred groves where rites were performed and the Jaher Budhi dwelt. She was the wise woman, the "Old Lady of the Sacred Grove". Manassa the serpent deity played a prominent role in their lives, acting as intermediary between humans and animals (Mukherjea 275-6).]

The Santals' creation myth, recorded in the *Horkoren Mare Hapramko Reak Katha*, states that in the beginning there was only water, and underneath the water, soil or earth. The spirit of God created the aquatic animals such as "the crab, alligator, crocodile, whale, tortoise, earth-worm, lobster and others" (Mukherjea 8).
But when Thakur Jiu (the spirit of God) made the birds, they had nowhere to land.

Then Thakur Jiu sent for the crocodile and when he came, said, "Can you get the soil from the bottom (of the sea)?" The crocodile agreed. But as he was bringing up a piece of earth, it dissolved. So he failed (Mukherjea 9).

The lobster, the whale, and the crab also failed. Then the earth-worm stepped forward, promising to bring up the soil if the tortoise stood still for him.

The Earth-worm...reached the subsoil (of the sea) with his tail on the back of the tortoise. He began to eat the soil with his mouth and transmitted it through his hind portion. And thus the earth stuck on the back of the tortoise. For a long time, the Earth-worm continued the operations and when he ceased, the earth was created (Mukherjea 10).

The earthworm thrust the fertile earth above the sea, creating a place for humanity to live. 10

Similarly in Gautama's dream, the earthworms are thrusting up the about-to-be Buddha, creating or sanctioning this new life that will alter how humanity lives (according to Buddhism).

The meaning of the two colours of the earthworms remains unclear. It is possible white refers to purity, while black refers to wisdom.

To recapitulate, in Dream One Gautama took dominion over the earth and ocean, from where all life arises. In Dream Two, Gautama showed his body could create and sustain life. In Dream Three, he was re-born, supported
by earthworms and the earth, following the agricultural pattern of a dying and rising god.

DREAM FOUR

In this dream, Gautama's re-birth was vindicated or sanctioned. He saw:

that four birds of varied colours from the four quarters of the world came to him, fell at his feet and turned all white.

This dream appears to be straightforward. In many traditions birds are omens, harbingers of the future. They are of this world, yet transcend the earth and soar heavenward. From this vantage point, they can foresee the future (Waida 224). In this dream, the birds arrived from the four cardinal points, representing the world in its entirety (Zimmer 13), with Gautama forming the fifth or central point. They landed in obeisance at his feet. This act purified the birds, for they turned white. In the case of St. Francis of Assisi, the birds perched on his shoulders or fingers, as a sign of trust. The Buddha's birds flew to his feet, as a sign of homage.

These birds may or may not be associated directly with the Goddess, and the importance of the birds' colouring remains unknown. However birds were messengers of the deities and presagers of the future: they endorsed Gautama.

Gautama has been sanctioned by creatures representing both the underworld and the heavens, two of the three levels of the universe. In Dream Three, the worms represent a life-bestowing, fertilizing element from beneath
the earth, while in Dream Four, birds represent the firmament - the upper, celestial ethereal realm. Together, they are champions of heaven and of the underworld.

DREAM FIVE

This dream was about Gautama's triumph, for he saw:

that he walked to and fro on a great mountain of dung, but was unbesmeared with dung.

There is consensus about the interpretation of this dream: Gautama is pure, undefiled by worldly things. Roy Amore sums up:

Here we have a variant of the common motif of a sage remaining pure within a polluting world, like a lotus growing out of foul water. This image is so common in Buddhist literature that it needs little comment (Amore, "Comparative" 5).

In this final dream, the world or the earth has decayed, becoming a mountain of manure. This is fertile soil for the Buddha's new message.

In Dreams Three and Four, Gautama was sanctioned by representatives of two of the three realms of the cosmological universe - the underworld and the heavens. In Dream Five, Gautama completed his domination, for he was also triumphant in the third and final realm, where humans exist.
DREAM CONCLUSION

Taken as a whole, the Buddha's dreams show a remarkable cohesiveness. In his dream quest, Gautama was in the world, with power over the earth, mountains and seas (Dream #1). He died to this world (#2); was re-born (#3); was sanctioned (#4); and ultimately was triumphant (#5).

The Buddha was, in a broad sense, a dying and rising god in these dreams. He illustrated both his powers of creating and sustaining life and his power over the process of death and renewal - the traditional powers of the Goddess - but achieved this without her help.

It is difficult to believe that the early authors of the Pali canon could have failed to recognize the reference points for these dreams. Perhaps the knowledge had been lost by the time the dream stories were written down. Perhaps the authors preferred not to acknowledge that the Buddha may have dreamed of triumphing over a Goddess tradition 11.

ROLE OF WOMEN

The authors of the Pali canon may have deliberately used women to support or validate the Buddha's new religion.

These authors recounted that the Buddha’s step-mother, Mahapajapati, and her five hundred high-ranking women friends, wanted to join so desperately that they shaved their heads and walked for miles along dusty roads to reach the Buddha, rather than travel according to their social standing. They begged for admittance, not once but three times. They were unsuccessful. It required the Buddha’s favourite disciple, Ananda, acting as intermediary, to
provide the Buddha with convincing reasons the women should be admitted (Nanamoli 104-6).

This is a strong endorsement. A stepmother - for all intents and purposes, a blood relative - and her wealthy friends begging for acceptance. Their actions suggest that Buddhism contains truths not found in Goddess religions, truths that are worth pursuing, no matter what the cost.

In sanctioning this new religion, these women accepted their inferiority to men. No matter how much learning or seniority the bhikkunis (nuns) may have acquired, any novice bhikku (monk) ranked higher. The Buddha himself, according to his biographers, complained to Ananda that instead of his religion lasting one thousand years, it would only endure for five hundred years because of female adherents (Nanamoli 107).

In the Jataka birth stories, women are relegated to the back benches. As John Garrett Jones pointed out, after studying more than three hundred stories of the Buddha's past lives:

The most striking single fact is that, in spite of the tremendous diversity of forms which the bodhisatta assumes, he never once appears as a woman or even as a female animal (20).

Ananda Coomaraswamy also states that a "good number" of the Jatakas are designed to "point (out) the moral of feminine iniquity" (159).

Buddhism may have offered more freedom to women than rival Hinduism or Jainism. But this strong endorsement from Mahapajapati suggests it was important, for the authors, that women sanction Buddhism.
CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have explained how the Buddha appropriated the Goddess's key powers of creating and sustaining life, and power over the process of death and renewal. I have shown that Buddhist authors used her symbols to validate or legitimize the new religion, for vestiges of the Goddess's presence are apparent in the birth stories, the Buddha's enlightenment and nibbana, and in his five dreams.
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Better the badness of men
than the goodness of women.
- Ecclesiasticus 42:14

In the preceding three chapters, I have demonstrated how the authors of three patriarchal religions - Judaism, Christianity, and Buddhism - overthrew and/or undermined symbols of the Goddess tradition, especially the serpent, the tree, the earth and the moon. I have also demonstrated how their particular deity or key figure appropriated the Goddess's two key powers, of creating and sustaining life and the power over the process of death and renewal.

In this chapter, I will offer some comparisons - similarities and dissimilarities - in how the authors of Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism achieved the triumph of their god or founder.

I will also conclude my thesis, having demonstrated that vestiges of the Great Goddess have been uncovered in these three patriarchal religions.

COMPARISONS

The Great Goddess is associated with the splendours of the night, with its starry skies and eternally waxing and waning moon. The night skies guided
seafarers and explorers, and provided astronomers with an endlessly changing pattern of constellations and rising and setting planets to observe.

With daylight came maya, a veil that obscured the night sky, rendering it all-but-invisible. But the daylight brought the gods "illumination", and a shifting emphasis away from the old goddesses and towards the new sky, or solar, gods. The sky, not the earth, is preferred; sun and light replace the earth, moon and darkness. The old goddess symbols begin to decline in importance.

The authors of the three patriarchal religions under discussion - Judaism, Christianity, and Buddhism - start the process of excluding the feminine from the essence of religion.

Their story-tellers adopted similar approaches in instigating this decline. Yahweh debased the Goddess's symbols, which generally disappeared from orthodox Judaism. The Christian God subverted some of the Goddess's symbols, using them to sanction his new male son and heir. Buddhist authors followed a similar path of subversion, using the Goddess's symbols to endorse the Buddha.

Parallels also exist in how the triumphant male figures assume the Goddess's powers. In the Goddess traditions, the male played a minor role but was generally not excluded from religious rituals. His participation was required for creating and sustaining human, agricultural, and animal life. In the three patriarchal religions under discussion, the goddess has been excluded from meaningful participation. The assumption of her powers is gradual, beginning with Judaism and culminating in Buddhism. The trend is not chronological, nor geographical, but it is apparent.
In Judaism, when Yahweh first created life, he acted as a facilitator, not as an impregnator. He opened Sarah's womb, enabling her to conceive. Sarah's husband, not Yahweh, provided the sperm, and a traditional birth ensued of their son Isaac. Even for Moses, the hero of the Torah, Yahweh did not become directly involved in his conception.

In Christianity, the authors took God's powers a step further. God is more than a facilitator: he has become the impregnator. Unlike Sarah, a married woman who had sexual relations with her husband before becoming pregnant, Mary is portrayed as a virgin. The sex act is not required for her pregnancy. A traditional birth ensues (although some theologians insist her hymen remained intact). She does not remain a virgin, but has other children after Jesus. As impregnator, God has incarnated himself as Jesus.

Buddhist authors granted the Buddha even greater powers to create life. Like God, he miraculously impregnated a chaste woman, without any form of sexuality involved - an asexual pregnancy. In some versions, an unnatural birth occurred, for the Buddha did not pass through the birth canal. He is depicted emerging as a child from the right side of Queen Maya, for the normal birth process was considered polluting. The Buddha's mother died seven days later, without further sexual activity, allowing her to remain sexually pure. In Christianity, God incarnated as his own son, setting up a father/son dynamic. In Buddhism, the Buddha incarnated as himself.

These views on sexuality and childbirth are reflected in the expectations for the sexual life of the religion's leaders. In Judaism, priests (and later, rabbis) were expected to marry, to "be fruitful and multiply". (For example Moses was married.) In early Christianity, chastity and celibacy
were favoured for clerics and true believers. The gospel authors remained silent, but orthodox theologians believe that Jesus was celibate, never marrying. The Buddhist authors were clear: Gautama married and fathered a child, but once Gautama attained enlightenment, that is, once he became the Buddha - further sexual activity ceased. If a religious leader wanted to follow strictly in the Buddha's footsteps, sex, marriage, and children were out of the question.

In addition to adopting the Goddess's powers of creating and sustaining life, the authors of Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism also attempted to "end" the great cycle of existence, involving life, death, and renewal, which formed the basis of the Goddess's second great power.

In Judaism, Yahweh offers redemption to his chosen people. His history promises to be linear, culminating in the final days when Yahweh's glory is revealed. The dead will be resurrected and join Yahweh for eternity. This breaks the cycle the Goddess has, until now, been essential for. It suggests there is no expectation of human rebirth or reincarnation.

The Christian authors are more explicit. Yahweh is not a dying and rising god. Jesus is, but he promised his solitary death was sufficient to save all humanity - one sacrifice is needed, not the annual sacrifice of a dying and rising god. There is no cycle for the Goddess to guard and maintain. Like Judaism, Christianity offers one shot at salvation, achievable only during one lifetime. There is no evolution or purification of the soul possible during subsequent rebirths, as the belief in reincarnation offers.

Buddhism is more explicit than Christianity. The Buddha openly promises an end to the cycle of human death and rebirth - an end to samsara,
to rebirth on the wheel of life and the continuance of the Goddess's great cycle of existence. Unlike Jesus, the Buddha does not sacrifice himself for his followers. Enlightenment or "salvation" comes through an adherent's own actions, and only in later Buddhism does the concept arise of the Buddha's power of grace. And unlike Christianity, if the adherent fails there is always another chance for rebirth and opportunity for improvement.

The culmination of this process is profound. It is the belief that creating human life is not necessary for enlightenment or for salvation. Part of the Great Goddess's power was her special relationship with women. Her ability to create and bring forth life was incarnated - was latent - within women's bodies. She did not have this exclusive relationship with her male worshippers. By denying the necessity of creating human life, Christian and Buddhist authors undermined the Great Goddess's powers. Instead, Christian authors believed that God incarnated himself in Jesus. The Buddha replaced the idea of a Goddess incarnate within women with the concept of a transcendental reality inherent, or latent, within all humanity.

This development is also marked by a shift in attitude, favouring the mind over the body. In Judaism, how people live in this world remains important. In Christianity and Buddhism, the emphasis shifts towards what happens to your soul, or spirit, or mental aggregates in the future. This results in a mind/body split, a dualism associated with gender: male/mind/active/light versus female/body/passive/darkness. This further distanced the Goddess and her powers and symbols from the new religions.

In all three religions, the Goddess's powers over human death and rebirth have become irrelevant, for a male god has promised new knowledge,
making the Goddess's powers obsolete for their worshippers. The Great Goddess's powers centered on life in this world - the on-going survival of humanity as a whole, a collective approach to survival. The cycles of nature, the seasons, the rhythms of the earth were the Goddess's forte: how to create and sustain life, and how to turn death upside-down, yielding new life once again.

The authors of Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism offered new knowledge, a new perspective - that gods or religious founders can create life and that they can offer power over the forces of death, in a manner that does not involve rebirth.

The outcome is an emphasis in all three religions on the heavens, as the place where Yahweh and the Christian God reside, and where later Mahayana Buddhists place the Buddha. The underworld, formerly associated with the Goddess, becomes undesirable, off-limits for their believers. In Christian parlance, it eventually becomes Hell. The earth-based Great Goddess has been defeated. The rival sky gods have triumphed.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I set out to uncover vestiges of the Great Goddess in three patriarchal religions, Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism.

I have shown that the cult of the Great Goddess, or the Goddess tradition, was widespread, ranging from the Mediterranean basin across to India. The phrase “Great Goddess” was a short-hand or generic term for this deity, for the Goddesses went by many names, and held varying degrees of
power in numerous religions. One over-arching "Great Goddess" did not exist.

I have shown that the Goddess's symbols were similar throughout this region. They included the serpent, the tree, the earth and the moon. In addition, I have shown that the Great Goddess held two key powers: the power of creating and sustaining life, and the power over the process of death and renewal, rebirth, or resurrection.

This Goddess tradition created a milieu, environment, or ethos that influenced the authors of the upstart religions of Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism. The authors wanted their male deities to triumph, and for them to achieve this end, they had to conquer or subordinate a rival Goddess. I have shown how these authors subverted the Goddess's key symbols, and appropriated the Goddess's key powers for their own gods.

I have not argued that the authors of Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism targeted specific Goddesses to overcome or vanquish. Instead, by targeting the role of the Goddess - through her symbols and powers - these authors helped to overthrow the Goddess tradition, replacing it with a patriarchal tradition.

Initially, the similarities between the Goddess religions and the patriarchal religions were probably apparent to new converts. As the patriarchal religions gained ascendency and the goddess-based religions declined, the points of similarity faded into the background. Knowledge that some of the symbols and powers in the patriarchal religions came out of a Goddess tradition became unnecessary, even detrimental, to the future of the
new religions. After the initial founding of these new religions, their authors downplayed the feminine, and often sought to exclude it entirely.

This exercise of overthrowing the Goddess tradition occurred in a similar manner in these patriarchal religions, despite their differences in geography and chronology, and despite whether the patriarchal religion was inclusive or exclusive.

In examining the Goddess tradition, and studying the sacred scriptures of these three patriarchal religions, I have exposed remnants of a Goddess tradition. Vestiges of the Great Goddess have been uncovered in Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism.

The authors of Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism had an agenda: the elevation of the masculine at the expense of the feminine. By limiting our fundamental view of history to the written word, scholars have served patriarchal interests,

... because societies for which there are substantial and decipherable written records were and are patriarchal (Plaskow 20).

Frymer-Kensky, outlining the subordination of the goddesses in Sumer, home of the first written records, believes this marginalization was not random. "There is a constant direction to the movement, one in which the areas under goddess control are shrinking, with more and more occupations taken over by male gods" (Frymer-Kensky 43).

But in general, scholars have failed to realize that the intention of the early authors or biographers in Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism were not
benign. Religious power was at stake, and the authors preferred to see their chosen candidate outdo his rivals - one-upmanship, if you will.

One question has not been answered satisfactorily until now: What powers of the Great Goddess were usurped? As Marija Gimbutas pointed out, the earliest Goddess held absolute power over life and death. In their haste to "re-discover" a feminine side of patriarchal religions, feminist scholars have located a goddess figure and, in general, have been satisfied with the proverbial "eureka" or the current "aha". They have remained circumspect in their discovery. The goddess existed; she was primarily a fertility deity. They have, for the most part, not delved into what happened to her other great power - over death and regeneration.

Instead, many scholars have focused on what Eliade calls "the myth of eternal return", with its emphasis on the dying and rising god, rather than focusing upon the principal holder of power, the person who enables the god to return: the Goddess.

Many scholars have missed, overlooked, or chosen to ignore the key element: the Great Goddess was stripped of BOTH her key powers, which were transferred to the new male deity or religious founder. They have stopped short of the final "re-discovery" - her key role in the process of death and rebirth.

[These days, the Goddess's power of fertility and procreation tend to be downplayed as not particularly relevant to the late twentieth century, the assumption being that "technology" has rendered her power obsolete. The manifestation of her power may have shifted, but the power itself is still invoked. Most gynecologists and in vitro fertilization specialists are men; the
family farm is disappearing, replaced by agri-business, run by male-dominated corporations; male scientists are perfecting seed technology, creating hybrid seeds which cannot reproduce themselves; humans themselves may be genetically altered in the near future.]

Often, scholars fail to realize that the Great Goddess's powers were not incidental in her world. At a minimum, they represented an ethos or view of how the cosmos operated. Some, such as Kathleen Erndl, opine that

The general thrust, then, of Goddess theology is to affirm the reality, power, and life force that pervades the material world ... the Goddess is the totality of all existence ... She takes on both gentle and fierce forms. Creation and destruction, life and death, are two sides of reality (32).

Alain Danielou expands on this:

Il n'y a pas de vie sans mort, pas de mort sans vie. Il doit exister une base commune de la vie et de la mort ... Elle (la deesse) est le seul secours des vivants, le seul secours des morts (56).

[There is no life without death, no death without life. A common base must exist between life and death...She (the goddess) is the only help (or aid) for the living, the only help for the dead.]

This view was prevalent in agricultural-based societies. The Great Goddess's powers began eroding as the structure of society changed. Joseph Campbell offers this explanation.

As more and more people emigrated to the
cities, the emphasis shifted away from the work of "enlivening the fields" to the works of "enlivening the soul" (Masks: Creative 26)

This focus upon "enlivening the soul" became important in many male-dominated religions, especially in Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism.

The emphasis shifted away from the Great Goddess's manifestation of power, symbolized by the earth. The earth was the "womb" of humanity, sustaining human and animal existence, and was also where the souls of the dead returned, awaiting rebirth. In essence this was a womb-to-tomb, earth-based religion, replaced by the gods' sky-based or heaven-based religion, with its all-encompassing "creation-to-salvation" powers.

In the West, the rise of Judaism and Christianity, coupled with the death of classical paganism, led to a further loss of "intellectual accommodation". The "pagan" view of the unity behind the gods disappeared. The same aspect of divinity, just under a different name, was anathema to Judaic and Christian writers. John Holland Smith believes the early Christians were branded as atheists because they practised intolerance and exclusiveness.

They were thought godless not because they put their trust in a different god from most men, but because they refused to recognize certain aspects of divinity obvious in the gods worshipped by their fellow citizens (7).

However in the East, Buddhist authors continued to see divinity reflected in divers beings, despite a concerted emphasis on "enlivening the soul". This religious inclusiveness was tempered by the structure of Indian society. Its
firmly entrenched patriarchal hierarchy tolerated the existence of Great Goddess religions because they did not threaten the existing structure of society. Despite reverence for the Goddess as Absolute Deity, her worshippers formed a tiny minority of the Indian population. The status quo of male dominance remained intact.

There is a sense of inevitability that patriarchal religions would eventually triumph. Like Darwinism - the theory of evolution of the fittest - many scholars and religious adherents believe, perhaps unconsciously, that male-dominated religions and patriarchal monotheism are more "fit" or highly evolved than feminine-based religions. The Great Goddess religions were just stepping stones along the way, a lower level in religious evolution. Real progress is towards the Godhead and the Oneness of God.

This evolutionary theory is reflected in, and bolstered by, the philosophical theory of the Great Chain of Being, wherein - in ascending order, there is woman, man, and the ultimate (male) deity.

More important is how this translates into today's terminology. The key assumption is progress: that the future is better than the past. If this assumption is held, then logically patriarchal monotheism MUST be better than Goddess-dominated religions. A priori Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism are improvements over the older religions. In my view, this assumption is faulty. James Bailey points out, "There is no law of necessary human progress" (27).

[Perhaps there is also an element of fear as well, for as Cato the Elder stated around 195 B.C.E., "Suffer women once to arrive at an equality with
you, and they will from that moment become your superiors" (quoted in Morgan, 34).

In general, there has been a critical failure to recognize the extent of the Great Goddess's powers and her true influence upon Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism. We must acknowledge the appropriation of both her powers and symbols before we can fully come to terms with the Great Goddess's legacy and her importance in these three patriarchal religions.

The Goddess tradition provides the basis for their existence. A paradigm shift occurred - the god or male religious founder replaced the goddess. The Goddess was not "incidental" to these new religions but, rather, She was fundamental. Without her concepts of power, Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism would not have the energy and momentum that has helped sustain them for the past two thousand years.
ENDNOTES

CHAPTER ONE


CHAPTER TWO


2. For example, the Sumerian goddess Tiamat embodied both the principle of chaos and the principle of harmony. After she was slain by Marduk, Marduk represented the principle of harmony; Tiamat represented chaos. Thus Marduk was the god responsible for bringing harmony out of chaos, for creating order in the world.

3. Some Christians and Jews may argue that Yahweh or the Christian God is genderless. However, scriptures consistently refer to a masculine deity, who is occasionally granted a feminine side. Recent scholarly attempts
to de-gender the Christian God have met with vigorous opposition from critics, even when those critics permit inclusive language everywhere else in the bible. Yahweh and God remain a masculine concept for most people.

4. See, for example, Michael Grant and John Hazel, Who's Who in Classical Mythology; Samuel Noah Kramer, Mythologies of the Ancient World; Veronica Ions, Indian Mythology.

5. For a review of Gimbutas's work, see the Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, Fall 1996. Six articles are devoted to an analysis of her life and work.

6. One of the few well-known exceptions to goddess control of procreation is Zeus, who gave birth to Athena, the Greek Goddess of Wisdom. She sprang fully-formed from Zeus's forehead, the result of his creating an ideal or mental image of her similar to Genesis creation stories: In the beginning was the word.

7. The Greek goddess Demeter or Circe had a daughter Kore or Persephone, instead of a dying son. Some scholars believe the initial relationship in the dying-and-rising myths involved the mother-daughter. The son supplanting the daughter at a later date. See Charlene Spretnak, Lost Goddesses of Early Greece.
8. Alexander the Great visited the oracles at Delphi and at Siwah in North Africa before marching off to conquer the known world. His mother kept cult snakes and attempted to give Alexander a divine father, instead of Philip of Macedon. Legends offered options: Zeus came to his mother disguised variously as a brisk west wind, the last Pharaoh of Egypt, or as her pet snake (Fox, *Alexander* 215-17).

9. Not many examples of the positive power of snakes exist today in the western world. The most readily apparent is the caduceus, two serpents entwined around the staff of Asclepius, the god of healing. This remains one of the few instances of positive association between a god and the serpent. The caduceus remains the symbol of Canadian and American medical doctors.

10. For example, some serpent deities may be masculine, such as the King of the Nagas, rather than feminine, such as Manassa. But both are old deities making obeisance to a new god such as Vishnu or the Buddha.

11. The number 40 is significant. It appears to be followed by an act of creation or the beginning of something new. For example, 40 is the number of days and nights that Noah's Ark floated on the flood waters before Noah found dry land and began life anew; 40 is the number of days Jesus fasted in the desert before his doubts were answered and a new spiritual life and ministry began. Perhaps the number 40 has its origins in contraceptive and fertility practices.
12. German references to a "Fatherland" refer to a political entity, and not to the earth itself.

CHAPTER THREE

1. The Greeks refined this concept: Aristotle believed sperm were tiny, fully formed men, and the womb merely provided an environment in which to mature. An accident during the incubation period resulted in the birth of a female. In The Eumenides, Apollo is succinct: "A mother is only a nurse to a fetus, and then to the child. Its parent is the father." (quoted in Goodrich 145)

2. The myth of Isis and Osiris may have also influenced the early Hebrews or the author(s) of Genesis 2-3, either during slavery in Egypt or after the cult reached Byblos in Phoenicia. Isis is the Great Goddess; Osiris is her consort, the dying and rising god, and two of their major myths revolve around human procreation and immortality. See Ch. 4.

3. In addition, the Israelites were aware that after Saul's defeat, his armour was displayed as a war trophy in the temple of the Philistine goddess Ashtart (1Sam 31:10).

4. The choice depends upon which version of the story is preferred, Exodus 4:3 or Exodus 7:9.
5. Pomegranates were stamped on several Maccabean coins, the best depiction being on the shekel, according to Miller in Harper's Bible Dictionary.

6. This is clear in The Slavonic Book of Eve. The archangel Joel said to Adam, after Eve handed him the fruit to eat: "Thus saith the Lord: I did not create thy wife to command thee, but to obey; why art thou obedient to thy wife?" (43). In The Books of Adam and Eve, the devil ensnares Eve twice, as she disobeys Yahweh. The first time was in the guise of the serpent, the second time as Eve is doing penance for her first transgression (13).

7. The great twelfth century Jewish philosopher Maimonides complained that "the absurdity that the consequences of disobedience should be intellect, thought, and the capacity to distinguish between good and evil". Quoted by John Phillips in Eve: History of an Idea (79).

8. These episodes are similar to the Babylonian god Marduk slaying the serpent goddess Tiamat.

9. The Vulgate states, "I will multiply your toils and your conceptions" (Meyers 95). Speiser indicates the literal rendering would be "your pangs and your childbearing" but for him, the "idiomatic significance" renders it "your pangs that result from your pregnancy" (24).
10. The Goddess's powers of creating and sustaining life were further eroded with the commandment of Genesis 1:28, written later than Genesis 2-3, as Yahweh ordered humans to "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth". By Exodus 23:26, Yahweh was openly boasting of his powers of fertility, saying that "no one shall miscarry or be barren in your land".

11. This may have been an attempt to end mother-right or bina marriages, where a husband joined his wife's tribe, or where a husband continued to live with his own tribe while his wife remained living with her tribe. In this latter case, the husband paid periodic marital visits to his wife's home. Samson enjoyed such a marriage with his Philistine wife (Judges 15:1).

CHAPTER FOUR

1. See Robin Lane Fox, Pagans and Christians and John Holland Smith, The Death of Classical Paganism, among others.

2. Artemis is one, if not the only, goddess that the earliest New Testament authors mentioned by name. In Acts 19, Paul was preaching in Ephesus. A silversmith who revered the goddess feared that "the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be scorned, and she will be deprived of her majesty that brought all Asia and the world to worship her", if Christianity triumphed.
3. Dumuzi was also known as "the one great source of the date clusters" (Kinsley, Goddesses 113). Like the pomegranate, the date palm is one of the five plants known to possess true oral contraceptive powers. In addition, the date regulates menstruation (Riddle 52).

4. In addition, Dioscorides (first century C.E.) described the pine as an abortifacient; in the sixth century pine bark was recommended as a contraceptive suppository (Riddle 52).

5. In Mithraism priests sacrificed a bull in a similar manner, allowing the blood to drip over the initiates.

6. This concept of a god fathering a human being is not novel or unique to the New Testament. Alexander the Great's mother suggested her son had been divinely conceived, with the aid of Zeus and without the aid of her husband, Phillip of Macedon (Fox, Alexander 216-217). In Greek mythology the hero, Hercules, had a mortal mother and the god Zeus as his father.

7. Neither under the name God nor Yahweh did the deity openly intervene in favour of, or facilitate, the birth of a female child.

8. In her great Temple at Ephesus, Artemis was pictured with the crescent moon.
9. This verse resulted in the establishment of snake-handling Christian cults in the Appalachian region of the United States in the early 20th century. The practice continues today.

10. This story is recounted in The Eumenides, a play by Aeschylus (458 B.C.E.). The Furies, ancient female deities associated with death and represented by serpents, openly warned Athena about the consequences of her choice: she was overturning ancient laws that supported mother rights, not father rights (Young 146-47).

11. The cult of Mary continued to thrive under later Roman Catholicism. In 1854 Catholics were asked to accept that from the moment of Mary's conception, she was "kept free from all stain of original sin". In 1950 Pope Pius XII pronounced that Mary had been taken up to heaven bodily and was to be known as the "Queen of Heaven" (Bancroft 167). "Queen of Heaven" is also the title of the old Sumerian goddess, Inanna.

12. John Dominic Crossan also points out that New Testament authors also gradually wrote out of the scriptures, or marginalized, one of Jesus' competitors, John the Baptist. See The Historical Jesus.

13. For believers in Jesus' physical resurrection, God outperformed the Goddess. With the dying and rising gods, the Goddess caused a spiritual renewal of a god. The result of his rebirth or renewal was manifested, but the god himself was not seen alive. Many Christians believe Jesus was physically
resurrected, and seen by his disciples after his return to life. In these terms, God raised a human being from the dead. The Goddesses' powers did not extend this far.

CHAPTER FIVE

1. See also H.W. Schumann, The Historical Buddha and Thomas Berry, Buddhism among others. Various sects view the Buddha differently. Theravadans believe the Buddha was a "man of righteousness", a human teacher. The later Mahayana tradition views him as a kind of saviour, bestowing grace upon his adherents. In broad terms, a transformation occurred, as also happened in Christianity as Jesus the man was transformed into the Christ. See Huston Smith, The Religions of Man, for a concise comparison of the Buddha under Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism.

2. For example, hard-core Yahwists deliberately sought to exclude feminine deities from veneration, especially after the return from exile in Babylon. The aim was a monotheistic, male godhead tolerating no rivals. Christian authors also attempted to exclude rivals, with God and Jesus offering the only route to salvation. On the other hand, the Buddhist authors included old goddesses and gods in the pantheon surrounding the Buddha. They retained their old powers, merely bowing to the superior power of the Buddha.
3. Kali's renowned bloodlust echoes that of the Near Eastern warrior goddess Anat, who haunted the battlefields looking for victims. Anat also rescued Baal, a dying and rising god, from the underworld (Gray 80). One of the first written mentions of Kali was in the Bhagavad Gita, on the battlefield with Arjuna and Krishna as they prepared for war.

4. Today Hindus popularly view the moon as masculine. However, in the oldest written goddess cultures, the moon was always associated with the feminine, and menstruation. For example, in Sumerian mythology, Sin is the moon god, but is ruled over or dominated by Inanna, Queen of the Heavens. Similarly, both the moon and the concept of time may be masculine in Hinduism, but Kali rules over both of them.

5. Author's translation: "The colour of Kali is black like the night of the new moon. It is ... eternal night."

6. Shakti cults, which probably dated back to pre-Aryan times, flourished in the fourth century. They involved sexual intercourse, where the chosen woman "had the status of a divinity with whom alone the male devotee could attain a mystical and sacred union. The deification of one chosen female symbolically led to the divinization of the other women present, with whom their male partners might hope also to attain the same spiritual union. Sexual impulses were not restrained...but were exploited to reach salvation" (Basham, Origins 112).
7. The text itself offers the official Buddhist explanation. For example, see *The Life of the Buddha as It Appears in the Pali Canon*, p.22.

8. The Mayans depicted male sacrificial victims with corn growing out of their bellies (Campbell, *Sacrifice* plate 59). In 1350, the Christian iconographer Christofor Simone dei Crocefissi painted "The Dream of the Virgin". Mary is shown with a tree emerging from her womb. Christ hangs crucified, in the shape of a cross, upon the tree. A bird perches atop the tree (Campbell, *Sacrifice* plate 70).

9. Another example of shared points: A Santal oath has a man placing his hand on his son's head, under the shade of a wild fig tree, "with head to the north and feet to the south" as in Dream One (Mukherjea 403).

10. Other folk stories show the worm in a positive light. For example, in "The Story of Haftvad and the Worm", a Persian woman befriended a worm. As a result, she and her friends could spin cotton into yarn very quickly. Her town prospered, the worm grew large and fat. Following the traditional pattern, the hero Ardashir could not become king until he slew this worm or reptile, which he did successfully. The word for *worm* was *kerm*, and this story is told to explain how the town called Kerman (in Iran) received its name. This story is part of the eleventh century work, *The Shah-Nama* or *The Book of Kings* by the great Persian poet Ferdowsi.
11. A third explanation suggests itself: the interpretation was written down when several sects were fighting for control of the new religion. The winners put meanings into the Buddha's dreams to back their own religious views about how Buddhism should be interpreted or upheld. This presupposes that the original interpretation of the dreams had been lost; or its meaning was so inconsequential, or unacceptable, that the winning sects could impose their own interpretation.
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