

Maha Shakti ~ The Great Goddess

Chapter excerpt by Erin Gahan Clark

“Goddess is that shimmering field of pure potential within, where every story in the universe lives.” - Chameli Ardagh

Each of us have within us a powerful, ancient well from where we can draw inspiration, compassion, protection and unconditional love. As we move through our lives, this never-ending source tends to become buried, denied or distorted because societal and cultural pressures discourage a connection with this innate tap of divine insight.

We are told to be rational and we go about our lives forgetting about this wellspring within. But this ever-present power does not go away. It lies at the center of our being, humming, calling to us in whispers or booming wails, waiting patiently until we hear and ultimately answer the call to nourish this source and bring it forth into our daily lives.

Once we say yes to this invitation, that mysterious fountain bubbles and overflows into the heart and we begin a lifelong journey of re-awakening, re-engaging and remembering who we are and why are here.

In science there is a great mystery, a “missing” bridge between the macrocosm, the theory of relativity and the microcosm, the theory of quantum mechanics. Mystics and yogis have long tuned into this underlying connection between all things, this “implicit order” as coined by the American scientist David Bohm, they call her Maha Shakti, The Great Goddess. Her body is the universe and she is our Great Mother.

Maha Shakti is our true being, our inherent wholeness. Her blessings, knowledge and power give rise to our own gifts of manifestation and evolution. In Myth, her battles with “demons” represent our inner conflicts with ego, craving and aversion as well as our outer challenges with those around us and the world at large. The Great Goddess is the source, the mother of all that is; The creative matrix that birthed space time and all that is into being and she will draw us back into her loving womb at the end of time.

This all-loving and compassionate Great Mother, as you will see, is filled with many paradoxes. By her very nature, she carries out the actions of concealment and revelation. Even though she is the fabric of being (Tantric sages tell us that she is

indeed in every atom, cell and molecule of the universe), she desires to experience life as the many. To do this, she must engage her power of concealment, creating the illusion of separation. Only through her gift of grace, she alone will lift the veil to reveal her presence and awaken us to our true nature.

Since ancient times, Goddesses have been worshiped, loved and invoked in many cultures and traditions. The goddesses that we will be working with, the goddesses of yoga, appear in the Vedas which are some of the oldest Indian scriptures. Around the 5th century CE, texts from a yoga tradition called Tantra began popping up in India. In these later scriptures, the goddess took her true place as the Great Mother of the universe.

The word TAN means “to expand” and TRA means “to liberate,” therefore, Tantra can be defined as a practice that expands our awareness and liberates us from suffering and the illusion of separateness. One substantial difference between Tantra and other schools of yoga that came before, is that Tantric practices are not focused on transcending the body. Rather, Tantra embraces all of reality as sacred. All beings, all ideas, all bodies are made of Shakti (Feminine Power) and therefore are divine in their very essence. Every experience, whether it be joy, pleasure, destruction, illness or pain is an opportunity for awakening.

While we will be honoring and learning about the Divine Feminine, we must remember at every level of consciousness, Sacred Masculine (Shiva) and Divine Feminine (Shakti) are balancing and complementing one another. Without the still background of awareness radiating from the sacred masculine, nothing could come into being. And without the feminine qualities of dynamism and energy, nothing could grow or transform. Shiva receives his power from Shakti and Shakti takes refuge in the grounding point of Shiva. Both are always present as one cannot exist without the other.

The Great Mother is at work within each of us and we have an opportunity to co-create life with her. When we are tuned into to her and she is awake within us, her energy is unstoppable and seemingly limitless. This is the energy that compels us to step up to protect ourselves, others and the planet. She offers us clear vision and direction and can transform impatience or anger into the ability to cut through any difficulty.

The Great Goddess can also bring to the surface rage, addiction, fear or grief that is needing to be seen, experienced and released. And she reveals the capacity we

have to sit with these challenging emotions in order to work toward transformation and healing. She shows us our strength.

This ebb and flow of the goddess is a pulsation in the fabric of the feminine universe. Yogic texts refer to this pulse as Spanda, a natural contraction and expansion that is happening on all levels of existence. This rhythm is Shakti's dance, her creation of illusion and her graceful revelation. When we settle into the quiet beneath the tossing and turning of the thinking mind and we learn to cultivate tools to tune into her music, we can feel her dance within our bodies, thoughts and emotions.

There are many goddesses from different traditions around the world and every goddess represents a kernel of the mysterious, divine feminine vibration of the universe. The Great Mother has many sides, moods, faces and ways of being which are represented by the different goddesses. Every aspect that is brought to life through the myths, images and practices of each goddess exists within every one of us.

The complex mystery is unfathomably infinite and innately present in every molecule of life from the largest formations of the universe like galaxies and planets to the tiniest structures of atoms and quarks. Every human, without exception, has access to these depths. Working with the goddess can offer a doorway to discover and explore these gems within us. Her divine power is present in our beings; hidden in forgotten pockets or thriving exuberantly in the qualities of our personalities.

Maha Shakti's energy moves in two directions. One path is from the mysterious source of consciousness down to the earthly, tangible plane. We experience this as the sudden flash of insight. Like a dam that has been opened, information pours from the infinite into the finite in the form of inspiration and ideas. Now, if we sit around waiting for these moments of pure knowing, it might feel like they are few and far between.

The good news is we can strengthen and refine this line of communication. We can learn how to request insight and vision and then practice remaining patient, open and receptive; Paying close attention, listening attentively. Because the truth is, this channel is always open and available to us, it's just that sometimes it can be difficult to discern the insight from the mundane flow of every day thinking. Both of which, by the way, are the goddess in her revealing and

concealing natures respectively and it is through cultivating her gift of viveka (discernment) that we learn to tell the difference.

The other way that Maha Shakti's energy flows is from this earthy body upward to the divine source. Through our work we send out an invitation, a beacon to the Great Mother asking her to come and be with us. We do this through our desire, our dedication and our discipline. We wake up early for our meditation and yoga practices, we study music or writing. We toil away at math or science problems. In this way we lay the ground work, we clear the channel, as it were, so that we can receive and hear clear guidance and intuition. In times when inspiration feels unavailable, we remain conscious, patient and active in our pursuit toward communing with this infinite source of creativity. In other words, we don't just sit around and wait for inspiration, we get down to work. This active dedication and discipline *is* The Great Mother, alive and awake in our cells.

We all know the powerful, pulsing intensity of the creative process that is Maha Shakti. Like dark energy in the universe, this creative force within, pushes and shapes the seeds of ideas which burst through the surface of the mind, erupting in creativity and action. Every person knows the messiness that can accompany this process and everyone at some point, experiences the joy of a beautiful new creation.

Once this process has begun, it is an impossible force to stop. Like we embrace both the terrifying and tender aspects of The Great Goddess (and ourselves), we also learn to accept and relax into the rhythms and cycles of life and death. This can be an uncomfortable and scary process, but Our Great Mother is there with us every step of the way, holding us, guiding us from within and clearing away anything that prevents us from living our fullest lives.

She is always available and ready to help. Sometimes she comes without our asking, because it's time for radical transformation. Other times, we might desire and long for creativity and change but it seems like nothing is happening. We must remain humble and learn to ask for her help and her blessings. She is listening. She is waiting for us.