

## **PERSPECTIVES: WHAT'S IN IT FOR MEN?**

### **WHAT IF MEN ARE INCLUDED?**

**by Elizabeth Fisher**

I believe both men and women will gain strength and understanding from positive images of the female offered by diverse religious practices. I have found that women and men who are committed to equality between the sexes are heartened to find religious images that are clearly honoring the female. Whether or not individuals believe in extra human intelligence — such as deities — the fact that the female is *not* and has *not* been globally and universally viewed as secondary and servile is still a profound revelation to most who live within a traditional Western religious construct.

RISE UP is an effort to build a respect for a more balanced imagery of divinity by bringing into focus the richness of the divine feminine for both sexes to appreciate and benefit from. To learn the female was and is honored and the Earth was, and still is, considered sacred by numerous spiritual traditions, allows for many varied possibilities. When women become aware of the divine female, they report they feel freed from abuse created by misinformation resulting from multiple sources that all of us have been subjected to. When men become aware of the divine female, they often feel much more comfortable expressing some of their feelings and outlooks which, in dominant Western society, are considered feminine — for example, compassion for others and valuing relationship.

This appreciation of goddesses is not about female versus male biological traits. The goddesses we are experiencing, rather, teach significant lessons about the challenges of the human condition. For me, understanding the cycle of physical creation from conception through birthing vitality, maturity, waning, death and a recycling into new form is not primarily about physical reproduction. Unfortunately, the images that honor the female in Earth-based spiritual traditions have often been reduced by Western investigators to mere fertility fetishes, whose sole purpose is to glorify the female in her procreative role. In my view, this interpretation minimizes the real lessons of honoring female process that are so much broader.

What I have discovered is a range of human behavior these goddesses are related to that touches many people's deepest personal concerns. Most men and women, at some time in their lives, experience the need to nurture, provide protection, relate to others, love, be cared for, bring some form of new life into the world and release that which has been expended — in other words, to work with the cyclical process of Nature. This cyclical process, often associated with the female and female deities, can be a powerful metaphor designed to teach all of us about realizing our creative and compassionate potential in every avenue of endeavor.

In the cultural traditions explored in RISE UP, goddesses are part of pluralistic pantheons of deities of both sexes, honored equally by both women and men. Judging from the range of icons that honor female deities throughout the history of many varied religions, these goddesses carry considerable and wide-ranging power. They are valued by both men and women for their creativity and positive contributions. Men do not seem to feel, in these cultures, less valued or powerless because the female is honored. Men who practice religions that included female

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deities do not hesitate to honor these deities openly and with great feeling. In indigenous cultures, these goddesses are perceived as bringing wisdom and understanding to all the people — male and female. By extension, in healthy, Earth-based spiritual traditions women are perceived as wise people who are capable of being spiritual leaders who have many lessons to teach.

For these reasons, men who love women, who value their own feminine tendencies, respect the Earth, and who care about equality and fair treatment of all people and species need to know about these woman-honoring, Earth-based spiritual traditions. As women, I believe it is time to open the door to this knowledge, letting men know we truly feel we can count them *in the room* if they are willing to join us in this search for a fuller understanding of what has been, for many, a very integral part of their cultural heritage.

This is not to say we should not, sometimes, gather in women- or men-only groups for exploration and personal sharing. This separation of the sexes for sacred work has existed throughout time in Earth-based spiritual traditions. I believe, however, that ultimately we must strive to trust one another enough, regardless of gender, to feel we can sit down together to discuss and celebrate our most sacred concerns. To treat each other equally while exhibiting genuine caring, concern and respect for one another must be our ultimate goal.

This section of perspectives includes the viewpoints of three men — by coincidence, all Roberts! — on how they have been touched by goddesses and why they deeply honor the female divine. Each has spent considerable time and attention on the study of female divine presences which they all attest have enriched their lives. I invite you to interact with their viewpoints, and consider exploring the material in *RISE UP & CALL HER NAME* in mixed gender groups.

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### **WHAT "CAKES" MEANS TO ME**

**by Robert Fisher**

In the Spring of 1988 at the Berkeley Fellowship of Unitarian Universalists, I participated in the feminist theology curriculum *CAKES FOR THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN*, published by the Unitarian Universalist Association. Three pro-feminist men were in the group with a dozen women. It was a wonderful experience that I still remember. It was an opportunity to explore women's religious history and express many of my deeply held beliefs. I am intensely indebted to the women's spirituality movement for creating a space where my voice could be heard.

One of the gifts we men receive from the women's movement and the *CAKES* curriculum is clarification of a fresh interpretation of "power" and the relationship between the sexes. I realized that what women are concerned about is the "power over" ethic of the dominant social pattern, or paradigm, of much of contemporary culture. What many women oppose is the subordination of women and the domination by men that a hierarchical structure usually advocates. They also oppose a dominate deity. So why a deity at all?

I soon learned the power of the Goddess was different than the omnipotence of a traditional male God I had been acquainted with. One of the most crucial questions that women have raised is, "What do we mean by power?" The Goddess religion spoke of "power within," not dominance and "power over." The divine in many religions that honor goddesses is experienced as immanent in oneself and in the natural world, not only a transcendent power that manipulates human activity.

The *CAKES* curriculum pointed to the pre-patriarchal religions of the ancient world searching for lost female roots. We learned that these ancient religions revolved around a powerful Goddess who was at one with the cycles of Nature. In a supportive environment we asked ourselves the question, "What would it have been like to grow up in a world where God was a woman?" This search truly affected me and opened up my heart to a direct connection with the Goddess.

We also learned about a new way of carrying on social relations. Women who have become aware of their "power within" understand how critical it is that we challenge the S.P.I.R.E.<sup>4</sup> formations of the dominant culture wherever they oppress women. Pro-feminist men acknowledge that we also need to look at the structure of society — and oppose violence against women, affirm a women's right to choose whether and when she wants to be a mother, support comparable worth and so on — not just become a movement of men trying to reclaim something that is lacking in our own lives.

During *CAKES* we spent time seeking the divine feminine presence in Judaism and Christianity. This struck strong emotions within me as I recalled my ties to the Virgin Mary and Catholicism, a tradition within which I was raised. Discovering the contributions of ardent women who have

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<sup>4</sup> Social Political Intellectual Religious Economic — a way of presenting the current paradigm.

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had an effect on Church history, such as the writings of female mystics, has opened new vistas for me. Analyzing the contributions of Gnostic Christians from around the time of Jesus has put a twist on early Christianity. Knowing that women were Bishops at one time gives strong support to the fact that suppression of women in the Church was carried out for political reasons, not theological ones, and is a distortion of Christianity.

The CAKES journey also ventured into a Goddess religion that never really died out, but is still practiced today as Paganism and Witchcraft. The activity of expressing our feelings in pictures while a narrative was read about the terrifying Burning Times had a transformative effect on the group. We explored the historical reality that being labeled a heretic — which could mean anyone who was unmarried (such as a woman alone) or anyone participating in an unacceptable group — had resulted in torture and terrible executions. Estimates of researchers run from a hundred thousand to as high as nine million people killed in the "witch hunts." It is thought that eighty percent of those killed were women, which means that twenty percent of the victims were men. My guess is these were sensitive, non-macho men who invariably lived by the ways of nature, the so-called "green men" among our ancestors.

When describing our drawings, we were able to share fears that such persecution could occur again and reflect on what we needed to do to prevent this from happening. During that session, many of us vowed to keep alive the truths of the Old Religion, "to see ourselves as divine, our bodies as sacred, the changing phases of our lives as holy."<sup>5</sup>

One of the lasting legacies of my CAKES experience is that I continue to develop a direct connection with a female deity who puts me in touch with the creative power of the universe. I see the Goddess as Creatrix. To me the Goddess is real, She materializes as natural forces, and can be seen in trees and rivers. This is why it's so important to set aside time in our busy schedules to commune with nature and meditate in natural surroundings. By feeling Her presence in the rocks and weather, it becomes instinctive to call her Mother Earth. When relating to Mother Earth, I am able to gain knowledge of the unending cycles of the continual process and spirals of nature, birth, growth, decay and rebirth.

When the opportunity to work with my wife on developing this curriculum surfaced, I was excited. The exploration of the ways goddesses have been honored around the globe has both enriched my own search for meaning and expanded my appreciation for the woman-honoring traditions — both historical ones and those that are still alive and well in many diverse locations around the globe. I feel this curriculum will give many men, along with women, an exciting format for finding ways to discover in their own lives what a personally affirming experience it can be to "Rise Up & Call Her Name."

Blessed Be!

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<sup>5</sup> *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* by Starhawk, Harper San Francisco, 1979.

**BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

*Robert Fisher has been a Unitarian Universalist since 1982, active at the local, district and continental levels. He's been an advocate of human/civil rights and non-violence since the late 60's, and is an idealist and optimist who feels the world can be a better place for our being here. Bob was co-regional coordinator for the UU Service Committee in Northern California for two years and is a founding member of the local chapter of the Covenant of UU Pagans. He was moderator of the Pacific Central District Board for two years. Bob lives with his wife Elizabeth, the author of this curriculum, and their two cats Jasper and Lilith in Richmond, California. He is a Senior Consultant on global computer networking.*

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### **WHY MEN NEED TO RECONNECT WITH THE GODDESS**

**by Robert Gass**

*Following are excerpts from material published by Robert Gass who is a producer of music about Goddesses, including the CDs entitled ANCIENT MOTHER and FROM THE GODDESS: ON WINGS OF SONG (used in the last segment of the RISE UP video). For information on how to order these CDs, see the section "Recommended Music and Songbooks" at the end of Part One of the Sourcebook.*

*From the liner of ANCIENT MOTHER:*

The archetype of the Great Goddess, the Ancient Mother who has appeared throughout history in Her many forms, is re-emerging. The rise of feminism in our times has sparked a renewed interest in the feminine face of the divine, images that were historically widespread until their suppression by the male-oriented religions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

Reconnecting with the Goddess is important not only for women and their spiritual journey. Men, especially in our western cultures, have been taught to fear and reject the "feminine" qualities of their own nature such as the ability to feel deeply, compassion and the instinct to nurture. The great social challenges of our times demand that all of us, women and men, become more sensitive to the suffering of others. The honoring of the Goddess has also always been associated with a deep connectedness to the Earth and nature. Our urgent need to learn to live in balance with the Earth ultimately depends not only on an intellectual understanding of ecology, but also on an experience of the natural world as sacred.

*From the liner of FROM THE GODDESS:*

I lay in the spring-green meadows by our house in the foothills of the Rockies. The afternoon sun was setting over the high peaks; the wildflowers and grasses danced softly in the breeze. As I closed my eyes, I felt the presence of the Goddess. I sensed the wave of energy that is spreading through our world, as Her spirit is revitalized and reborn.

All at once, I understood in a new way the importance of the spirit and message of the Goddess for our time. Our Western religions have encouraged a split between ourselves and the natural world. This alienation is leading us to destroy our own habitat. The Goddess invites us to feel our connection to the Earth and total life, to embrace a spirituality that makes sacred our hearts and bodies as well as our spirit.

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### **RESOURCES ON MEN AND FEMINISM**

***Being A Man: A Guide to the New Masculinity*** by Patrick Fanning and Matthew McKay, Ph.D., New Harbinger Publications, Oakland, 1993. This easily accessible book covers many areas including appreciating gender differences, making partnership work, expressing your feelings, making male friends and taking care of your body.

***For Men Against Sexism: A Book of Readings*** edited by Jon Snodgrass, Times Change Press, Albion, CA, 1977. This anthology reflects the consciousness of men profoundly influenced by the women's liberation movement. While acknowledging the pervasiveness of sexism, these men seek to transform themselves and to revolutionize patriarchal society. Included are articles by working class and gay men on their special experiences of oppression.

***Women Respond to the Men's Movement: A Feminist Collection*** edited by Kay Leigh Hagan with the Foreword by Gloria Steinem, Pandora Books, Harper San Francisco, 1992. Is the Men's Movement a backlash against the women's movement, an insidious, even fashionable new form of woman-hating? Or is it a sign that men are sincerely interested in challenging the patriarchal culture that shapes and limits us all? Some of the most astute feminist thinkers of our time speak to all women and men concerned with ushering in a new era of true partnership, shared power, and gender justice.

***Men Confront Pornography*** edited by Michael S. Kimmel, Meridian, New York, 1990. Twenty-five men take a candid look at how pornography affects their lives, politics, and sexuality.

***Against the Tide: Pro-Feminist Men in the United States 1776-1990, A Documentary History*** edited by Michael S. Kimmel and Thomas E. Mosmiller, Beacon Press, Boston, 1992. It is important to know that there have been men in the past [and today] who spoke up and took risks on behalf of gender justice. This book supplies that history.

***How Men Feel: Their Response to Women's Demands for Equality and Power*** by Anthony Astrachan, Anchor Press, Doubleday, New York, 1988. The author is a prize-winning correspondent for the *Washington Post*.

***New Men - Deeper Hungers*** by Tom Owen-Towle, Sunflower Ink, Carmel, CA, 1988. Tom has been involved in the men's movement since 1972, leading seminars, retreats, and support groups for adult males, and is the author of several books. He is currently co-minister at the San Diego UU Church, and is a founder of the UU Men's Network. Tom can be reached at 3303 Second Avenue, San Diego, CA 92103.

***Green Man: the Archetype of our Oneness with the Earth*** by William Anderson, Harper Collins, London, 1990. Beautifully illustrated by photographer Clive Hicks, this book explores folklore, religion, art and architecture, from prehistory to the present. The reawakening of the male counterpart of the Goddess, the *Green Man* emerges to heal our relationship with nature.

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***Robin Hood: Green Lord of the Wildwood*** by John Matthews, Gothic Image Publications, Glastonbury, 1993. Robin is seen here as the semi-divine embodiment of the mysterious, all-pervading life-force of the land. The *Green Man* in truth, whose spirit lives on in the stories which are still told of his exploits.

***Gods in Everyman: A New Psychology of Men's Lives & Loves*** by Jean Shinoda Bolen, M.D., Harper San Francisco, 1989. A blend of ancient Greek mythology and twentieth century psychology, this is a sensitive and stimulating guide to the different qualities of the human psyche, by the author of the best-selling *GODDESSES IN EVERYWOMAN*.

***The Courage to Raise Good Men*** by Olga Silverstein and Beth Rashbaum, Viking, New York, 1994. In this book, the authors, a family therapist and a freelance book editor, and writer, challenge cultural conventions governing mothers and sons. They call for mothers and fathers alike to refuse to sanction the emotional shutdown traditionally demanded of boys, thus enabling sons to grow up to be not only strong men but whole people.