

# *The Good and the Terrible: Exploring the Two Faces of the Great Mother*

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There are few subjects more likely to stimulate an instinctual response in any of us—no matter whether that response be positive, negative, or ambivalent in nature—than that of the archetypal figure described by the term “mother.” Our individual experience of mother and of mothering plays a fundamental role in shaping how we see ourselves, how we relate to others, and how we connect to the physical world. In exploring the idea of “mother,” it is useful to recognize the existence of both a personal and biographical dimension and a collective and mythic one. While the individual childhood experience of having had a particular mother obviously plays a large part in forming one’s personality and character, our response to the collective dimension of the mother archetype predisposes our psychological and spiritual development in equally fundamental ways.

Through the lens of the mother archetype, we may glimpse both the historical evolution of human consciousness from prehistoric times and its recapitulation in our own individual psychological unfolding as conscious beings from infancy to adolescence. In addition, since the gods and goddesses are mythological reflections of archetypal energies, through the study of the archetype of the mother we can better understand the psychological power of mother goddesses as divinities. Moreover, by studying the mother archetype in relation to the findings of recent archeology, we can intuit much about the origins of humanity’s earliest conception of divinity in the form of the Great Mother.

Through the exploration of the archetypal mother, we can also see that from the personal to the collective and from the psychological to the spiritual, two prototypically opposing aspects are ever-present when we speak of “mother.” These twin aspects are generally referred to in Jungian psychology as the “Good Mother” and the “Terrible Mother” and both are primary features of the mythology of the Mother Goddess.

Jung himself defines these two dimensions of the archetypal mother, observing that the positive one reflects “all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, furthers growth and fertility,” while the negative aspect “connotes what devours, seduces, and poisons” (82). Jung’s disciple, Erich Neumann, extensively expanded on Jung’s work with the archetypal mother and predicated that this archetype reflected a bipolar “elementary character,” whose “negative pole is the Terrible Mother... and whose positive pole is the Good Mother.” For Neumann, “bearing and releasing belong to the positive side of the elementary character” and “in so far as the Feminine releases what is contained in it to life and light, it is the Great and Good Mother of all life.” On the other hand, he writes, “the Great Mother in her function of fixation and not releasing what aspires toward independence and freedom” assumes the qualities of the Terrible Mother (*Great Mother* 64-65).

During the course of this essay, I’ll be exploring these two faces of the image of the Mother Goddess as they appear in the interrelated realms of goddess mythology, depth psychology, and my own personal experience. As a part of this discussion of the underlying duality of the Great Mother as primeval divinity and archetype, I’ll also examine the question of how both goddess and archetype are essential to our psychological and spiritual growth as individuals. Finally, to both expand and deepen this exploration of the two faces of the Mother Goddess, this essay will also look at three divinities with roots extending back into the Bronze Age and earlier, all three of which reflect both distinctly beneficent and terrifying qualities. These three divinities are the ancient Egyptian goddess Hathor and her divine counterpart Sekhmet; the pre-Homeric Greek goddess Gaia; and the Hindu goddess Kali.

Regarding the great wealth of European and Asian prehistoric evidence uncovered in the past several decades, Marija Gimbutas writes that “it was the sovereign mystery and creative power of the female as source of life that developed into the earliest religious experiences” (*Civilization of the Goddess* 222). Anne Baring and Jules Cashford, commenting on the same body of evidence, suggest that “looking back so many thousands of years later at these earliest figures, it seems as if humanity’s first image of life was the

Mother.” They go on to point out that “images of giving birth, offering nourishment from the breast and receiving the dead back into the womb for rebirth occur in the Paleolithic as they do 10,000 years later in the Neolithic and 5,000 years after that in the Bronze and Iron Ages” (9).

As Gimbutas interprets the symbolic language of the Goddess, it’s clear that from earliest times the makers of these images and artifacts recognized both the birth-giving and nourishing, as well as the life-taking and rebirthing functions of the Mother Goddess. Gimbutas and other scholars have deduced, for example, that the Goddess as giver of life was widely symbolized in the form of repeated chevron, zigzag, meander, ‘v’ and ‘m’ markings on artifacts, as well as in the form of breasts, eyes, mouths, and beaks on images. Similarly, we see that as taker and regeneratrix of life, Goddess energy was depicted in such forms as the vulture, the boar, the stiff white lady of bone, the egg, the bull, the bee, and the butterfly. Symbolizing both aspects of the Great Mother was the snake, a symbol, observes Gimbutas, which “permeates all themes of Old European symbolism. Its vital influence was felt not only in life creation, but also in fertility and increase, and particularly in the regeneration of life of dying life energy” (*Language of the Goddess* 121). Commenting on both diversity and magical quality of these artifacts, Carol Christ comments that they “celebrated women’s roles not only as birth givers, but also as transformers of seed to grain to bread, of clay to pot, of wool or flax to thread to cloth” (59).

In the period of the earliest of prehistoric evidence of goddess worship, the late Paleolithic age which saw the rise of Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon Homo sapiens, scholars speculate that the relationship between humans and the goddess was dominated by physical and instinctual responses to world. Ken Wilber suggests that, at this stage, “the Great Mother was probably not more than an impact, a non-verbal shock at separate-self existence, and an expression of simple biological dependence” (122-3). Commenting on this same period, Marion Woodman and Elinor Dickson write “the Mother was the one who fed, who provided the necessities of life through plants, seeds, and animals.” For these people, Woodman and Dickson comment that “caves afforded the protection of her womb, which eventually became the tomb in the cycle of life and death” (17).

It is important to remember that, at this point in human history, there was probably no conscious delineation made between the two seemingly opposite aspects of the energy of the Goddess-as-Mother; for these Paleolithic peoples, there was as yet no sharp distinction between the goddess who creates new life and the goddess who brings death to all things. “The Great Mother who gives birth to all creation out of the holy darkness of her womb,” writes Gimbutas, “became a metaphor for Nature herself, the cosmic giver and taker of life, ever able to renew Herself within the eternal cycle of life, death, and rebirth” (*Civilization of the Goddess* 222). Perhaps most significantly, these people did not yet sense themselves as being separated or distinct from the natural world represented by the Mother Goddess.

The tremendous archeological evidence unearthed in the 1960’s at Catal Huyuk in central Anatolia have provided a glimpse of what religious life might have been like toward the end of this prehistoric period, late in the Neolithic Era approximately 8,000 years ago. In commenting on this evidence, David Leeming and Jake Page write that the religion of Catal Huyuk “embodied the whole cycle of life, including birth and death, in the same feminine Supreme Being.” They go on to observe that the goddess depicted in the images unearthed at Catal Huyuk “was a being who nourished even as she took her offspring back to herself. Death and life, blood-letting and procreation, light and dark – all the opposites of existence – were intricately entwined and united in the Great Mother as they had been since Paleolithic times” (22).

This prehistoric period meshes with the stage represented in Erich Neumann’s writings, heavily based on and influenced by Jung’s work on the archetypal mother, by the symbol of the uroboros, the cosmic snake whose mouth is consuming its own tail. Defined by Neumann as symbolizing “the psychic state of the beginning [. . .] a state in which chaos, the unconscious, and the psyche as a whole were undifferentiated” (*Great Mother* 18). For Neumann this symbol represents both a stage in the psychological and mythological evolution of the human species, as well as a phase in the psychic development of every newborn child. More precisely, this stage reflects both the phase during which the child conceives of itself as psychologically one with its mother and the period when early humans conceived of themselves to be an undifferentiated aspect of the natural world.

Following this uroboric stage, Neumann predicates a period typified by the gradual dawning of the recognition of separateness from the mother. For the child, this stage represents the beginnings of ego development, while for the evolution of human consciousness in the late prehistoric era, this development represents the growing awareness on the part of early humans of their separateness from the natural world. Speaking as much about the significance of this post-uroboric phase for early childhood development as for the evolution of human consciousness thousands of years ago, Neumann writes that the arrival of this stage “means being born and descending into the lower world of reality, full of dangers and discomforts.” He concludes, “the nascent ego becomes aware of pleasure-pain qualities, and from it experiences its own pleasure and pain,” as a result of which “consequently the world becomes ambivalent” (*Origins and History of Consciousness* 39). Similarly, as human beings became more conscious of their differentiation from nature during this period in evolutionary history, note Woodman and Dickson, “the primitive emotions of life and joy became differentiated from those of death and pain” (17). As a result, the side of the Great Mother which was seen as responsible for life and joy became increasingly separated from the side which was perceived as the source of death and pain.

For early humanity, this process of separation from the uroboros – and with it from a sense of genuine unity with the Great Mother and her natural world – was largely completed by the late Bronze Era. Concomitant with this psychic detachment from the world of nature was the rise of patriarchy, with its belief that nature was a force to be intellectually comprehended and controlled. As a result, Neumann observes regarding humanity’s relationship to the Great Mother, that “the overpowering dynamism of the archetype is now held in check; it no longer releases paroxysms of dread, madness, ecstasy, delirium, and death.” As an additional outcome of this development in the history of human consciousness, writes Neumann, “from the image of the Great Mother the Good Mother is split off, recognized by consciousness, and established in the conscious world as a value.” In the West, Neumann concludes, “the other part, the Terrible Mother, is in our culture repressed and largely excluded from the conscious world,” with the ultimate effect that “as the patriarchate develops, the Great Mother becomes simply the Good Mother, consort of Father-Gods” and “her dark animal side, her power as the uroboric Great Mother,” gets forgotten (*Origins and History of Consciousness* 324).

If we look back to the to the mythological world which preceded the diminishment of the Great Mother to purely beneficent mother and consort, we can still find examples of mother goddesses which retained both their nurturing and loving qualities, as well as their destructive and terrifying ones. Examples of such Mother Goddesses from the ancient Mediterranean region are the paired goddesses Hathor and Sekhmet from pre-dynastic and Old Kingdom Egypt and the goddess Gaia from pre-Homeric Greece.

Numerous sources confirm that Hathor is among the very oldest deities in Egypt and that she has been worshipped in many different forms since the pre-dynastic times. Often overshadowed by the goddess Isis in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, Jean Houston reminds us that Hathor was, in fact, the prehistoric prototype from which the later Isis emerged (346). Fully as popular as Isis in pre-Hellenistic times, Hathor was very much a goddess in keeping with the all-encompassing Mother Goddesses of the Neolithic period. Later paired as the female counterpart of Re, one of the Egyptian sun gods, Christine Downing describes Hathor as “a primary creatrix who was perpetually conceiving, creating, and rearing,” a deity who “was the mother of her father—and of every god and goddess” (“Beginning at the Beginning” 35). So potent was Hathor’s creative impulse, note Andrew Harvey and Anne Baring, that the ancient Egyptians believed that “everything she imagined or conceived in her heart instantly became manifest” (40).

Principally worshipped “as the goddess of love and pleasure, of beauty and art, of the vine and of joy,” Downing writes that Hathor was above all associated with “the nurturant wild cow and [was] most often represented as a cow or a lovely woman with the ears and horns of the cow. (“Beginning at the Beginning” 35). Associated since Neolithic times with nurturant aspect of the Mother Goddess, the image of a milk-rich cow is among the earliest conceptions of Hathor. Muller writes of burial chambers decorated with the image of Hathor as a celestial cow whose four legs stand at the cardinal points and whose underbelly, spangled with stars, adorns the tombs’ ceilings. He also writes that the sun god Re was thought to hide himself in the body of this heavenly cow during the night, entering her mouth as dusk and being reborn anew from her womb each dawn (38). In another version of this story, as retold by Harvey and Baring, Hathor initially gave birth to the sun and thereafter “carried it between her horns as she swam in the ocean

of her divine being,” as the “rain-milk, flowing like a flood from her udders, nourished and sustained the whole earth” (40).

Not only a goddess of nourishment, love-making, and birth-giving, Hathor was from earliest times also conceived of a goddess with underworld associations. In her aspect as a goddess of the underworld, write Baring and Cashford, Hathor was said to feed the dead from her sacred sycamore tree. For this reason, royal coffins were made from wood of this tree, they note, “in which the goddess and her life-giving milk were incarnated, so that dying was conceived as a return to the womb to be reborn” (234-5). ‘Take my breast that you may drink, so that you may live again’, says Hathor movingly to her son in one of the Pyramid texts quoted by these authors. They also write that Hathor was also frequently pictured “as the cow coming out of the mountain of the dead, welcoming the deceased person home.” As such, she was “called the ‘Golden One’ and the golden cliffs of western Thebes, which catch the last rays of the setting sun, were regarded as the domain and even actual body of Hathor, with her children lying inside the mountains in her womb” (235).

In one of her most powerful aspects, Hathor was known as, or took the form of, the goddess Sekhmet. Sir Wallace Budge indicates that Sekhmet’s name is derived from the ancient Egyptian root word meaning “strong and mighty,” a descriptive term which he indicates is equally applicable to her aggressive and destructive fierceness, her enormous sexual power and ability to arouse desire, and her power to heal and restore (515). A daughter of Re, Sekhmet was “identified with the power of the noonday sun,” writes Downing, and was most commonly represented as female human figure with the head of a lioness (“Beginning at the Beginning” 36).

The degree to which Hathor and Sekhmet were intertwined in the minds of ancient Egyptians can be seen in the famous story in which the goddess, after having gone berserk in the bloody slaughter of insufficiently respectful humans, was finally calmed down and made drunk through the ruse of spilling vast quantities of red-dyed beer on the battlefield. This popular story has come down to us in a number of forms, and while some of them attribute the carnage and drunkenness to either Hathor or Sekhmet alone, most seem to delight in the image of Hathor being transforming into Sekhmet as the battle begins.

Sekhmet was the wife and sister of Ptah, the Memphite god who created the world by speaking its name. According to Memphite tradition, writes Houston, Ptah was said to represent the power of intuition, while Sekhmet represented the power of action needed to materialize the effect of divine intuition. Symbolic of the enormous power of her creative force, Houston observes that Sekhmet was sometimes portrayed with an erect phallus (357). It is important to note, however, that Sekhmet’s great power was viewed by her devotees as an ambivalent force in human affairs. Known as the eye of Re and perceived as the deity responsible for the defense of the divine order, Sekhmet was also regarded as a punisher of the damned in the underworld, much as Hathor was seen as the provider of nourishing milk needed for rebirth. Just as the rain was seen as milk issuing from the celestial udders of Hathor, observe Harvey and Baring, in her guise as Sekhmet “she could withhold the water of life, inflicting draught and starvation.” Nevertheless, they note, “although she could bring destruction, she could also reverse or set limits to what she had done,” for which reason “she is always shown wearing the *menat*, the sacred necklace of healing” (41).

In the end, I think it is critical to bear in mind Downing’s heartfelt observation that Sekhmet, even at her most terrifying, does not represent evil, but rather “an acceptance of the deathbringing energy that sometimes possesses her as integral to her nature.” As a divinity always “associated with the tragic dimension of human existence,” she sees in Sekhmet’s face “the look of someone who sees the irreducible tragedy of life which she can do nothing to avert and which, indeed, she knows she herself has helped bring about – but who does not hide from the pain” (“Beginning at the Beginning” 36). As will also be true for the other Mother Goddesses discussed in the paper, Downing’s words describing her reaction to dark side of Hathor-Sekhmet are deeply meaningful for our culture: “Sekhmet reminds us that there are darker energies – in us as humans, as natural beings. She helps us recognize that these energies are natural ones – not evil or satanic, but part of a whole – as Sekhmet is an aspect of Hathor” (37).

While there are far fewer extant images of the archaic Greek goddess Gaia than of Hathor or Sekhmet, it should be clear from the study of Homeric and classical Greek civilization that this ancient Mother

Goddess still left a deep impression on her culture. “Mother of all, the foundation, the oldest one,” says the Homeric Hymn to Gaia (303). As portrayed in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, Gaia is self-born out of Chaos, the first principle, and then without the aid of any male, gives birth to Uranus, her husband and god of the sky, as well as to the mountains and the sea. It is interesting to note that while the few images we have of her are remarkably spare and without detail, Baring and Cashford observe that this “very absence of particularity makes her seem the most ‘archetypal’ of all the goddesses (305).

Beyond her role as Great Mother, the source and foundation of the natural world, Harvey and Baring remind us that she was also both “the active and dynamic consciousness guiding and structuring the ordering of creation” and “the life ensouling it and the law directing it” (69-70).

Walter Otto writes that even for post-Homeric Greeks, Gaia “was worshipped as the holy source of all wisdom.” As a result, he continues, “in the venerable figure of Gaia converge most profoundly the ideas of birth and death, blessing, curse, and holy justice.” As an indication of the sanctity of her role, Otto also tells us that her statue was placed next to those of Pluto and Hermes in the sanctuary on the Areopagus in Athens, at the place where “sacrifices were offered by happy men who had been acquitted by the court of homicides” (152).

As was true of Hathor-Sekhmet, Gaia is a goddess who, Downing writes, “is for life but for ever-renewing life and so for life that encompasses death” (*Goddess* 150-1). In this manner, as was true for many of the other goddesses whose roots extend back to the Neolithic, Gaia appears to have been worshipped as a chthonic as well as a fertility divinity. Otto notes, for example, that she was always the first deity invoked when the dead were conjured (152). Though a chthonic goddess, Gaia was not perceived as a goddess of death, but rather as the dark womb of the earth to which the dead return. Still, as Downing points out, Gaia’s antiquity and her close relationship with death as an inescapable aspect of the cycle of life “represents a protection against those feminist reinterpretations of goddess religion that seek to deny or explain as patriarchal overlay the dark side of the goddesses” (*Goddess* 154).

It is interesting to note that of all the earth goddesses known to world mythology, observe Harvey and Baring, it is Gaia who now “mysteriously returns to inspire and focus our longing to respond to the planet’s need.” They suggest that this is because “the name Gaia gives us someone to imagine and relate to, rather than something to dominate and control, and [thereby] restores our lost feeling of relationship with Earth as Mother” (69-70). On the other hand, perhaps Gaia’s fascination for us—both as a both a symbol for our increasingly fragile planet and as a call-to-arms to save all life on this planet from extinction—is, as Downing observes, Gaia’s ability to remind us “that the divine is transhuman and prehuman—there from the beginning—not simply human projection.” Perhaps she has been chosen at this time because, as Downing writes, “Gaia is the source as no human like mother can be” and that Gaia represents “the answer to that deep longing for homecoming which no mother... can assuage” (*Goddess* 140).

While neither Hathor-Sekhmet nor Gaia are divinities actively worshipped by large numbers of devotees in the modern world, there is at least one Mother Goddess still worshipped daily by millions of followers who combines the dual aspects of the good and terrible mother: the Hindu goddess Kali. Joseph Campbell has described Kali as the divinity “who with her right hand bestows boon and in her left hand holds a raised sword.” He also says of her that “she gives birth to all beings of the universe, yet her tongue is lolling long and red to lick up their living blood” and that she represents “Black Time, both the life and the death of all beings, the womb and tomb of the world” (24). In a similar vein, David Leeming and Jake Page observe that Kali symbolizes “the essence of all perishable things,” noting further that, for her devotees, Kali “is the creative and destructive breathing of the universe itself” (24).

Consort and female form of Siva, the destroyer deity within the central Hindu trinity collectively known as Brahman, Kali is typically portrayed as dripping with blood and arrayed in wreaths of human skulls. A powerful and venerated goddess in her own right, Kali is also seen by Hindus taking on the role of terrible goddess whenever other, more gentle, goddesses need to express their destructive natures. For example, Parvati is a generally benign and kindly goddess who, from time to time, is said to manifest a fierce, yet justifiable, outrage. Much as Sekhmet is said to be Hathor’s ferocious and terrifying counterpart, Kinsely observes that when Parvati takes on a frightening demeanor, Kali is sometimes said to have been brought

into being (118). In a similar way, Kinsley says whenever Kali is portrayed in association with other goddesses, “she appears to represent their embodied wrath and fury, a frightening, dangerous dimension to the divine feminine that is released when these goddesses become enraged or are summoned to take part in war and killing” (120).

Yet, even as “Kali dances with joy at cremations amid the lamentations of women,” comment Leeming and Page, “she selects those corpses whose souls shall go on from the bitter world of sorrow to eternal life and happiness, and she gathers them as seeds to begin anew the everlasting creation” (24). Indicative of this ambivalent quality of Kali is the story, retold by David Kinsley, of how Siva assumes the form of an infant to calm Kali during one of her rampages by eliciting the goddess’s motherly instincts. In a scene reminiscent of Sekhmet’s battle frenzy, Kinsley writes that, having beaten most of her enemies on the field of battle, Kali “began to dance out of control, drunk on the blood of those she has slain.” To save the world from total annihilation, Siva appears in the midst of the slaughter as a loudly-wailing infant. “Seeing the child’s distress,” Kinsley tells us, “Kali stops her dancing, picks him up, and kisses him on the head” and then “suckles him at her breast” (131).

As in the sculptures of her consort dancing as Siva Nataraja, the symbolism of Kali dancing amidst the ashes of the burning ground holds deep significance to her worshipers as an image of the inherently paradoxical nature of the relationship between life and death. “In the burial ground of Kali’s heart,” write Woodman and Dickson, “Kali’s enlightened devotees see beyond literal death to the death of values rooted in fear.” Indeed, they continue, it is only when we can come to accept death as a necessary step in our own transformation” that “Kali can dance her dance of perpetual becoming,” only then that “those who love her are free of their fear of death, free of their own vulnerability, free to live her mystery” (16).

It is very telling that India’s two greatest mystics of the Mother Goddess – Ramprasad and Ramakrishna – worshiped Kali as the eternal reality. The thoughts of these two mystics express some of the most fundamental and eternal truths about the Great Mother in all her bountiful and terrifying wholeness. In summarizing what these two spiritual leaders had to say about Kali as Divine Mother, Harvey and Baring write:

In their fearless adoration of the Mother as destroyer as well as creator, Ramprasad and Ramakrishna offer us the most glorious possible antidote to any sentimental visions we may have or want to have of the Divine Feminine. Seeing the Mother as purely tender and benign cuts us off from her (and our own) full being, as much as imagining her as either purely transcendent or purely immanent. The Mother is death, terror, horror, agony, hurricane, disaster as well as every marvelous and kind power. Learning how to adore her in her terrible as well as her benign aspect is the only way [. . .] of entering her total bliss, serenity, and power. [Kali’s bliss and joy] are unshakable and absolute precisely because they embrace all aspects of the Mother and so of the universe and life; they refuse contemptuously to identify with only those aspects that keep the ego happy. . . . Knowing the Mother’s laws of transformatory paradox, Ramprasad and Ramakrishna assure us, helps us turn terror into love, disaster into grace, nightmare into the shattering of illusion that prefigure the dawn of liberation; it takes us, in fact, right into the heart of the paradox of life itself and helps us birth that bliss of nondual acceptance that is the Mother’s essence and her gift of freedom to anyone brave enough to consent to being torn apart by her and in her. (156)

In examining my personal interest in the dual nature of the Mother Goddess, I recognize that my fascination with this image stems from my experience of growing up with a mother who was – to quote an astute observation once made by an astrologer looking at my natal chart – a “force of nature.” Often she could be as warm and embracing as the most loving matriarch, though it must be acknowledged with an embrace that could smother as easily as comfort. At other times, the mother of my childhood experience could become as cold as ice and hard as stone, as fiery and explosive as an erupting volcano, or as tearful and grieving as the mother of the most thankless child.

Not understanding that these enormous changes in mood were largely the result of major hormonal imbalances in my mother, I must have instinctively assumed that they were in some way the result of my behavior. To placate this awesome force, I early became adept at sensing which way my mother's emotions were tending and learned to anticipate what might follow. If any behavior were expected of me, regardless of my unwillingness or resistance, the merest hint of the appearance of the indifferent or angry mother would almost always induce compliance. As I grew older and the stony and explosive forces grew less effective, the appearance of the tearful mother would rarely fail to induce a guilty acquiescence on my part.

Of course, being a gay adolescent and young adult, this failure to insist on reasonable psychological boundaries with my mother greatly increase my psychic pain. On the other hand, I am fairly certain now that my gayness was a great gift, ultimately forcing my psychic differentiation from the power of the mother's energy. Nevertheless, as it tuned out, I could not muster sufficient reserves of my own anger to confront the terrible aspects of my mother until I reached my mid-twenties. By that time, my rage and tremendous resentment were powerful enough to afford me the courage, both to come out and to declare my emotional independence from my mother in terms which she could not mistake.

Amazingly to me, when faced with the choice of losing contact with her only son or learning to let him have a life of his own, my mother accepted me as I was. For the last decade of her life, I can honestly say that I finally came to know what truly unconditional love was. When she died in 1988, my grief was deepened by the thought that I had lost the mother I always had wanted and waited so long to find. What I've been blessed to learn in the years since her death is that so long as I live, she will remain a part of my deepest truth and that her gift of love will be with me always. In the end, her all her gifts to me – both as the Loving Mother and the Terrible Mother – will have shaped me in ways I will never fully comprehend but nevertheless know were essential to my evolution as a man and as human being. I also deeply recognize the truth of Downing's observation about our personal relationship to our own mothers vis-à-vis our collective relationship to Gaia:

Discovering the archetypal character of the Great Mother who lives in the imagination of each of us also makes possible a different relation to our personal mother. We can forgive her for not being what she could not have been—the transhuman all-giving source—and understand that she, too, began as an unmothered daughter. As we are able to return our mother to her source, to see her in relation to but distinct from the archetype, as its necessarily frail and fallible carrier, we may at last be able to bless what is communicated through her and to forgive what she could not give. For now we see her as standing in exactly the same relationship to Gaia as do we. (*Goddess ###*).

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