

Monaghan, P. *The Goddess Path: Myths, Invocations & Rituals* (1999)

Can Pagan Rituals Help You Get Unstuck? Try This Book on Goddess Myths

Book Review by Alexandra Pett

Have you ever thought that the goddess Athena could help you sell your product? Probably not. But if you want to start marketing with some new visuals and stories at hand, take a look at a popular study of goddess myths by Patricia Monaghan called *The Goddess Path*.

For those familiar with Joseph Campbell's books on the archetypal journey of the hero as explored in myth and dreams, based on global religions and beliefs, Monaghan's book on the search for the goddess may offer some creative approaches to workplace and spiritual renewal.

This book opens with this intriguing statement about the goddess path: "To walk it, you must develop your inner resources and strengths. . . . She is always there, providing the love and strength and power you need" (p.6). When I first read this, I thought: well, okay, but such generalizations do not seem to mean much without details or reference to specific religions. Is the goddess singular or plural? What about the belief in one God, who is usually referred to as male? Is all of this talk taking me in the direction of heresy, as defined by Christianity and by other religions?

What Monaghan does well is to pose questions of the kind that many people want to ask of Christianity and other religions but are fearful to pose lest both the question and the questioner appear heretical or even crazy. For example, in her introduction she asks us to ponder whether the goddess is outside or inside us. She extends her discussion in this way: "The question of whether divinity is immanent (within us) or transcendent (outside us) is one that is argued in many religions. Both visions can be held simultaneously in the same religion, or even within the same worshiper" (p. 8). She tells us that the goddess path is evolving as a religion, and that most contemporary visions of the goddess see her as an inner being who is not immortal. Connecting to a divinity within can help women to become empowered in their lives.

The concept of goddess assumes multiple manifestations such as Astarte, Diana, Isis, Hecate, Athena, Bridget. For Monaghan, it is possible to believe simultaneously in a religion where there is one male god. The main point of her book, however, is that the belief in one male god has excluded women from divinity and from important other forms of spirituality. Instead, society needs to recover the goddess, whether one or many, as "the very power of feminine essence in the universe" (p. 13).

To appreciate this book, readers should keep in mind the need for inclusion in the organizations where they work and play. Recognizing other religions, cultures, and religions is part of global culture. Monaghan warns against seeing goddesses as commodities: "Spirituality is not a drugstore; don't automatically assume you can fill your cart with whatever you find appealing" (p. 16). Instead, those seeking the goddess path should listen to the voices and global experiences of a number of goddesses, asking themselves of personal motives like greed and be prepared to be challenged.

I kept wondering also if there would be any relevance for those seeking also to take their business to the next level. Of course, all descriptions of the odyssey of the hero or heroine will bring concepts of leadership to mind and many folks who have been in therapy know about the shadow self. Maybe toxic workplaces are actually stories of ancient goddesses

running amok in the modern world! Certainly, the pluralism of many goddesses can open us up to the possibilities of change, even drastic transformation.

A lot of the rituals described to help us relate to each of the goddesses are designed to initiate us to new and different ways of being. One clear purpose of working on your relationship with the goddess is to “foster growth in neglected or blocked areas of your life.” The aim of the book is to encourage individuals to create for themselves rituals to generate solutions to problems. These rituals should be personal and should be repeated as often as necessary.

For me, the goddess Athena had already appeared to me in my use of goddess cards as part of spiritual meditative play. I turned to the chapter on Athena with the need to find creative ritual (as opposed to liturgical rituals). I was aware also of the four key faces of the goddess monomyth (maiden, mother, cheerleader, and crone). In the descriptions of the myth and meaning of Athena, I discovered that she is a Greek goddess who is usually depicted holding a snake over her head (like Medusa) and a powerful symbol of home and hearth; she is associated with owls and has qualities of wisdom, strength, fierceness, and a need to protect others. To connect with Athena, I should find a statue of her and set up a place in which to bathe her. Men should not be present since the naked goddess must be imagined as virginal. After completing the ritual of bathing and redressing the statue of the goddess, I must consider questions such as this: In your work life and your personal life, are there areas where you feel frequently invaded or beaten? What do you do to stand up for yourself? How could you be more effective?

Clearly, this book is written with both men and women readers in mind. All readers will see the polarities of good and evil, positive and negative aspects of self, in the stories of the goddesses. Men can use the rituals and see the goddess as the anima (or female side of their identity). Yet, admittedly, women readers are more likely to find the descriptions of the goddess as depicted artistically and historically, as well as globally, more evocative of emotional needs. Similarly, women who believe in chakra energy and healing, crystals and emotional intelligence, or intuitive knowledge as the basis of life's experience will grasp many ways in which this book can be useful on a daily basis and should find a place in a virtual or physical bookshelf for it.