

My Journey into the History of Persephone

For thousands of years before the classical myths were recorded by Homer and Hesiod, the Goddess was the focus of religion and culture. The story of Persephone and her mother, Demeter embodies elements of mystery, nature-inspired spirituality, the bond between mother and daughter as well as exploring the duality of life and death.

*These are four good reasons
why this Galeria Gitana theme
was not only very attractive, but lead
me on a journey of self awareness.*

(Thanks to Karen)

*Please take one of these brochures
if you want to join the journey.*

The “Homeric Hymn to Demeter”, assigned to the seventh century B.C., is a story written to explain the Eleusinian Mysteries*, which honored Demeter. The tale became famous as “The Rape of Persephone,” who was carried off to the underworld and forced to become the bride of Hades. However, prior to this Olympian version of the myth, there was no mention of rape in the ancient cult of Demeter and her daughter.

Whatever the impulse behind portraying Persephone as a rape victim, evidence indicates that this darker plot was added after the societal shift from matrifocal to patriarchal.



*The Eleusinian Mysteries were initiation ceremonies held every year for the cult of Demeter and Persephone based at Eleusis in ancient Greece. Of all the mysteries celebrated in ancient times, these were held to be the ones of greatest importance. These myths and mysteries, begun in the Mycenaean period (c. 1600 BC) and lasting two thousand years, were a major festival during the Hellenic era, later spreading to Rome. The name of the town, Eleusis, is a variant of the noun éleusis, arrival. The rites, ceremonies, and beliefs were kept secret, as initiation was believed to

unite the worshipper with the gods and included promises of divine power and rewards in the afterlife. There are many paintings and pieces of pottery that depict various aspects of the Mysteries. Since the Mysteries involved visions and conjuring of an afterlife, some scholars believe that the power and longevity of the Eleusinian Mysteries came from psychedelic agents.

Wikipedia

The other tale, an extremely ancient and widely revered sacred story of mother and daughter long predates the Judeo-Christian deification of father and son. It was here that I found inspiration for my work, “Persephone’s Offerings to the Underground” and the Pomegranate: Food for the Gods.”



Certainly all the various versions and details of the myth are very compelling, including more recent psychological analysis of Persephone which are quite amusing and dare I say, relevant.





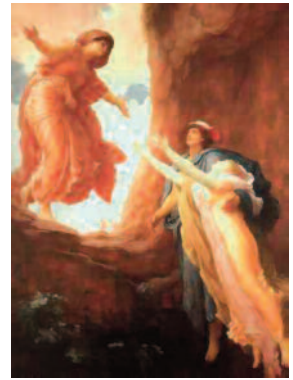
Olympian version:

(more widely known)

Persephone was the daughter of Zeus and Demeter, a beautiful young woman that everyone loved. Even Hades wanted her for himself. One day when she was collecting flowers on the plain of Enna,

the earth suddenly opened and Hades rose up from the gap and abducted her. Broken-hearted, Demeter wandered the earth looking for her daughter, so saddened that she withdrew herself in loneliness and the earth ceased to be fertile.

Knowing this could not continue much longer, Zeus pleaded for the release of Persephone. Hades grudgingly agreed, but first he served Persephone the seeds of pomegranate which bound her to underworld forever. Thereafter, she had to spend one-third of the year in the underworld, where in some versions she was content to eventually rule along with Hades. During the other months she returned to stay with her mother.



Ancient Version:



Demeter had a fair-born daughter, Persephone, who watched over the crops with her mother. Persephone was drawn especially to the new sprouts of wheat that pushed their way through the soil in her favorite shade of tender green. She loved to walk among the young plants, beckoning them upward and stroking the weaker shoots. Later, when the plants approached maturity, Persephone would leave their care to her Mother and wander over the hills, gathering narcissus, hyacinth, and garlands of myrtle for Demeter's hair. Persephone herself favored the bold red poppies that sprang up among the wheat. It was not unusual to see Demeter and Persephone decked with flowers dancing together through open fields and gently sloping valleys. When Demeter felt especially fine, tiny shoots of barley or oats would spring up in the footprints she left.

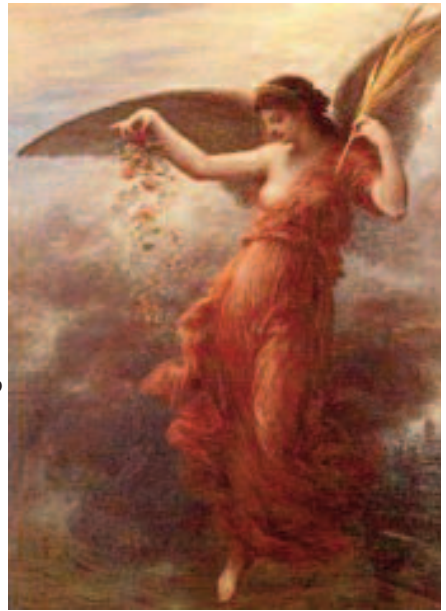
One day they were sitting on the slope of a high hill looking out in many directions over Demeter's fields of grain. Persephone lay on her back while her mother stroked her long hair idly. "Mother, some-

times in my wanderings I have met the spirits of the dead hovering around their earthly homes and sometimes the mortals, too, can see them in the dark of the moon by the light of their fires and torches.”

“There are those spirits who drift about restlessly, but they mean no harm.” “I spoke to them, Mother. They seem confused and many do not even understand their own state. Is there no one in the netherworld who receives the newly dead?”

Demeter sighed and answered softly, “ Yes, I know very well the realm of the dead, but my most important work is here. I must feed the living.”

Persephone rolled over and thought about the ghostly spirits she had seen, about their faces drawn with pain and bewilderment. “The dead need us, Mother. I will go to them.”



Demeter abruptly sat upright as a chill passed through her and rustled the grass around them. She was speechless for a moment, but then hurriedly began recounting all the pleasures they enjoyed in

their world of sunshine, warmth, and fragrant flowers. She told her daughter of the dark gloom of the underworld and begged her to reconsider.

Persephone sat up and hugged her mother and rocked her with silent tears. For a long while they held each other, radiating rainbow auras of love and protection. Yet Persephone's response was unchanged. They stood and walked in silence down the slope toward the fields.

Finally they stopped, surrounded by Demeter's grain, and shared weary smiles. "Very well. You are loving and giving and we cannot give only to ourselves. I understand why you must go. Still, you are my daughter and for every day that you remain in the underworld, I will mourn your absence."

Persephone gathered three poppies and three sheaves of wheat. Then Demeter led her to a long, deep chasm and produced a torch for her to carry. She stood and watched her daughter go down farther and farther into the cleft in the earth.

Persephone was startled by the chill as she descended, but she was not afraid. Deeper and deeper into the darkness she continued, picking her way slowly along the rocky path. For many hours she was surrounded only by silence. Gradually she became

aware of a low moaning sound. It grew in intensity until she rounded a corner and entered an enormous cavern, where thousands of spirits of the dead milled about aimlessly, hugging themselves, shaking their heads, and moaning in despair.



Persephone moved through the forms to a large, flat rock and ascended. She produced a stand for her torch, a vase for Demeter’s grain, and a large shallow bowl piled with pomegranate seeds, the food of the dead. As she stood before

them, her aura increased in brightness and in warmth. “I am Persephone and I have come to be your Queen. Each of you has left your earthly body and now resides in the realm of the dead. If you come to me, I will initiate you into your new world.”



From *Lost Goddesses of Early Greece: A Collection of Pre-Hellenic Myth* by Charlene Spretnak, M.A

Charlene Spretnak, a co-founder of the Green Party movement in the United States, is a professor of philosophy and religion at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS)—a graduate institute in San Francisco. In 2006 she was named by the U.K.’s Environment Agency as one of the “100 Eco-Heroes of All Time.”

Today's interpretation (selections from goddess-power.com)

Psychological Overview of Persephone

Psychologically, Persephone is immersed in the collective unconscious--absorbed and molded by it. She acts out those "unacceptable" aspects in her environment, which others will not acknowledge, therefore she activates that which others perceived as dangerous. This becomes her personal problem. She belongs to the category of 'vulnerable goddess' - suffering pain in relationship--humiliation by abduction and rape. Her consciousness is diffuse, taking in all, rather than focused.

- Typically, Persephone woman possesses a youthful face at any age.
- She is a pleaser type whose tendency is not inclined toward assertive directness.
- Her nature is sympathetic, highly tuned into people's feelings and needs
- She is responsiveness to the needs of others and has difficulty saying 'no'—difficulty recognizing and asserting her own boundaries.
- Strong connection to spirit - deep ambivalence toward outer world and her sense of being misunderstood and alienated from conventional society
- A primarily Persephone type, keenly sensitive, typically possesses a fragile ego structure, therefore, easily overwhelmed by feelings and impressions from her unconscious
- Keen ability to cross over into other realms of psychic consciousness. Very at home in the world beyond the physical senses
- Attracted to metaphysics, healing, intuitive, service-oriented work
- By nature she is reclusive/retreating, secretive, possessing a sensitive system requiring time away from external stimulation.
- She experiences episodes of depression, and/or bouts of mysterious, difficult to diagnose illnesses.

Challenges facing Persephone

Persephone's child was named Kore, she was forced to live in the Underworld for part of the year. Persephone woman is, likewise, required to acknowledge and visit her own inner underworld, her dark side. The consequence of this avoidance is exposure to considerable suffering.

- Prone to attracting people with severe problems or possibly abusive behaviors
- Prone to mysterious illnesses difficult to diagnose or treat
- Sense of deep alienation, isolation, depression

Persephone's wound

A woman overly identified with the Persephone archetype will find herself repeatedly attracted to situations, people or health issues that diminish her sense of personal power. These situations/events do not appear to be her own doing--they seem to happen to her, out of the blue. Yet, she seems strongly drawn to these happenings, again and again and cause her repeated grief.

Persephone as a mature woman

- Has grappled with the maiden, Kore, aspect of her nature. She is learning to 'tell her truth' - rather than avoiding and/or lying to others in fear of displeasing them. She is learning to set healthy boundaries--saying 'no', rather than acting in manipulative, indirect or blaming ways to meet her needs--avoiding conflict.
- Is learning to take care of herself, learning to meet her own needs, responsibly, as she understands, now, how she has blamed others in the past.
- Is developing a conscious relationship with her 'inner male', in Jungian terms, her animus, which means, developing her assertive/action nature.
- Finds value and meaning in spiritual ritual.
- Has undergone her transformative experience in Hades is, now, equipped to guide others in their descent into the underworld. She is most compassionate, intuitive and wisely guides others in connecting with their own depth and meaning.

- May be found working as a healer, therapist, herbalist, Tarot card reader, astrologer, writer, photographer, musician, medical intuitive, gardener.
- Requires sufficient 'alone' time to regenerate her energies because she so absorbs the vibrations/emotions of those around her. Music, nature and mystical experiences recharge her batteries.
- May be connected to her children in intuitive, psychic ways and less focused on their physicality.

Persephone's gifts

Her receptivity, intuition, empathy toward the suffering of others, her keen powers of imagination, inspiration, ability to read the hearts and minds of others. Persephone, once matured through her own inner work, is the guide to the Underworld.

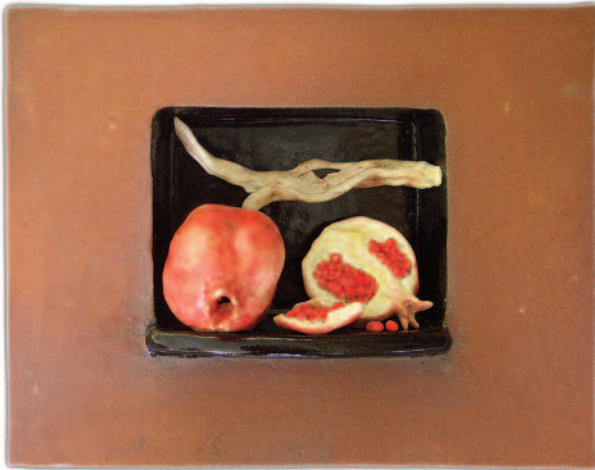




Persephone Serving Nectar



Persephone's Gifts to the Underworld



Fruit of the Gods

Ellen Rundle