

## [Gifts Goddesses Offer](#)

November 7, 2016 by [Liz Fisher](#)



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We are currently in a time of great transition. The questioning of the patriarchal, hierarchical mindset is widespread. Many women, with the support of large numbers of men, are demanding their right to full participation in the public sphere, insisting nothing should be denied an individual based on physical characteristics. The current political campaign in the United States forced this issue into the limelight.

Spiritual exploration is also changing as the female divine cross-culturally is gaining visibility. The multicultural Goddess traditions and woman-honoring icons bring us many gifts to aid this process of evolving. Men as well as women are discovering what these images and personages have to offer them.

This vast array of female divinities and spiritual guides is now drawing far reaching interest, perhaps because they both enrich our interior lives and expand our vision. They inspire courageous actions, shift expectations, open our hearts, and stimulate social justice actions. Here is a brief sampling of what they have to offer.

The ancestral figure most commonly in the work of contemporary black women writers is an outraged mother. She embodies the values of sacrifice, nurturance, and personal courage – values necessary to an endangered group. She employs reserves of spiritual strength.

The great African-American female writers, including Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker, all represent this maternal ancestor in their works – this strong woman who protects her children as she fights for justice for the community. This archetype is traced back to African spiritual traditions where the female plays a

prominent spiritual role and female divinities are called upon for support, sustenance and guidance.



In 1851 Sojourner Truth, pictured here, attended an Ohio Women's Rights Convention where she made a famous speech entitled "Ain't I a Woman?" in a Universalist Church in Akron Ohio. Her presence and speech linked the feminist and abolitionist causes. The attendees, at first skeptical, gave her a "roar of applause" when she finished. She has remained an inspiration to feminists and activists.

Women and the goddess have always woven, whether it be the weaving of cloth, the spinning of tales and spells, the weaving of tissue to bone inside the uterus, or the spinning of time and destiny in the universe.

Among Native Americans of the Southwest, the weaving of the world is in the hands of Changing Woman, or Spider Woman. She is responsible for maintaining the universe and for keeping this sacred dream of life alive. Spiders are, therefore, sacred to her and are never killed, for to do so is thought to insult the grandmothers, our ancestors.

This painting entitled *Changing Woman*, was created by mixed race Native American-Anglo artist Helen Hardin and is featured in *Rise Up & Call Her Name*. Used by permission.



Tonantzin is the seed goddess of fertility. Although Tonantzin lives on the earth, because she is so powerful she has no specific abode but rather "she is everywhere." She was perceived by early Christian clergy as being a major deity for the indigenous people; they observed people from all parts of the country attending her feasts.



The Virgin of Guadalupe appeared at the site of Tonantzin's main shrine only ten years after the Spanish conquest in 1531. Guadalupe is a "Christianized" version of Tonantzin. Thus she represents a continuity of Indian belief within modern Mexico. It is not surprising, then, that Guadalupe and Tonantzin are combined in the thoughts of many modern Indian peoples. The icon pictured is a pocket altar.

Here is a public altar honoring the Mexican Goddess of the Earth and our beloved ancestors. It was created on November 1st, *Día de los Muertos*, by Hi Jos del Sol Productions, a community non-profit in Salinas, Ca. This unique organization provides opportunities to celebrate both community and individual self expression through the arts. In addition to the altar, this group held a celebration of the Day of the Dead at the John Steinbeck Center in Salinas, a place that acknowledges the important role Steinbeck played in opening up cross cultural communication. On this altar appeared images of the Virgin as well as the Earth Mother.



The celebration featured women dressed in folk costumes made popular by the Mexican artist Frieda Kahlo and face painting, another practice of this holiday.



These images are now imbedded in our collective culture, especially in the West and Southwest US. Unitarian Universalists are benefiting from this cultural tradition. At this time of year, an altar is created at the San Francisco Church. Its presence and purpose was announced by saying: "*Día de los Muertos* (October 31-November 2) is a Mesoamerican holiday acknowledging ancestors/people who have passed away and our continuing relationship with them. **Starting October 30th and continuing through November 6** and our All Church Potluck, there will be a communal altar in

the Gallery under the social justice boards, so that we as a congregation can honor those among us who have died, including those killed by police brutality and immigration enforcement.”

See [Immigration Reform](#) for more information about UUA positions on immigration and what can be done to enact more humane policies.

Connecting to each other across racial and gender divides will continue to deepen and expand. The global network of adventuresome folks who appreciate the power of networking and cross fertilizing among a broad range of human societies is gaining influence.

Movements emerging such as the Native American Water Protectors and Black Lives Matters have prominent female leadership. They respect all humans equally. Unitarian Universalists have embraced these movements because they see a commonality of values.



The Native American movement is raising ecological awareness and holding up the belief that Mother Earth is sacred. Water is the lifeblood of the planet. These are the values that UU Paganism embraces as well.

See [Joining Standing Rock Protectors](#) for UUA President Peter Morales call to action and comments about his decision to travel to Standing Rock to support the protectors.

**(Continued)**



The Outraged Ancestral Mother is not far away. Black Lives Matters was started by three women. African American mothers of slain youth are outspoken. Not willing to tolerate injustices in silence, they advocate for equal protection by law enforcement and remind us racial profiling is unconstitutional. African American women such as Sandra Brand have died under suspicious circumstances in jails across the country after being arrested for minor infractions. Her parents have become advocates for reform. Their actions have encouraged diverse groups across the human spectrum to join their efforts in their own communities.

See [Supporting Black Live Matters](#) for details about how to take action in your local community.

How relationships will be conducted among human beings, then, is fast metamorphosing. Gender, if that is even an acceptable term anymore, is being redefined continually. Understanding of racial issues has been aided by public education, the arts and spiritual cross cultural appreciation.

The Female Divine can be a motivator, supporter and guide in these efforts. The power of these beings/images is becoming ever more obvious. Who would have thought this could happen so rapidly? Having participated in social change movements since the 1960s, I can hardly believe the enthusiasm I see in the global community for expanded possibilities. Professor Joanne Braxton, an expert on the Outraged Ancestral Mother tells us: “The outraged mother is more afraid of what is behind her than what is in front of her; she must create the New World and with it a new way of life.”

Art credits:

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*Changing Woman* by Helen Hardin used by permission of her estate.

Photos of Black Life Matters and Standing Rock Water Protectors banners appear on the UUA website.

San Francisco altar image courtesy of the UU Society of San Francisco.

All other photos taken by Bob Fisher.

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