

This column is devoted to one of my passions—conceptualizing about the meaning, power and impact of the re-emergence of the Goddess in popular culture. She often comes to me in a quick flash, an age old worldview re-emerging, or a new combination of elements, which I hone and then contribute to our group imagining of Goddess-centered spirituality.

On September 11, I had just begun a pilgrimage to sacred sites on two tiny Mediterranean islands called Malta and Gozo. On these islands stand the oldest Neolithic stone temples still existing on earth. These are believed by many scholars, spiritual questers and artists to be places where the Goddess of both earth and the heavens was the focus of cultures thousands of years ago.

The female honoring nature of the place is what drew many of us to this pilgrimage. The more than forty sacred structures to the Goddess on the Maltese Islands are built in the shape of the body of the Goddess. Some believe they belong to a tradition that stretches back to the cave.

The group of women I was traveling with had just exited a short film entitled "The Malta Experience" when word came to us by cell phone that two planes had crashed into the twin towers of New York City. The cause of the crashes was not yet known. Speculation about hijackings and terrorists was just beginning.

The irony of the timing made the impact even greater. We had just finished viewing a linear rendition of this small island's history which began with magnificent Neolithic stone temples, built by people of peace, followed much later by massive bombing during World War II. After seeing film clips of the bombing, and before we knew of the current crisis, many of us commented that we could not get over the amount of destruction these bombings caused.

Hearing the announcement that no commercial planes were flying toward the United States made us all the more anxious. After taking an evening to share our personal reactions, we each seemed to feel more comfortable about resuming our original purpose – a pilgrimage to places of peace. No one left when flights began again and a woman who had planned on coming a day or two after the pilgrimage began finally was able to join us, making her way despite difficult travel conditions.

A pilgrimage, according to Houston Smith, well-known world religion expert, is not about rest and recreation but its purpose is to throw down a challenge to everyday life. Coinciding with the onset of international violence, ours certainly met Smith's definition.

As our journey continued, many of us felt the heavy weight of modern history mixed with the presence of a much longer span of time. We created extended ritual meditations in three locations: one at twilight and into nightfall at the monumental Ggantija; another during

the day but in near darkness in the exquisite underground sanctuary of the Hypogeum. The third occurred at Mnajdra, which was recovering from recent vandalism. Here, in the dark of night preceding sunrise, we began an informal procession down a long walkway to the fenced ruins. Inside the temple, after awaiting the cloud cover to lift and reveal the sun just as it was rising over the horizon, we welcomed the morning light of the autumn equinox. It shone into the entrance to the temple, striking a place in the rear chamber as it has done

for thousands of years, in this exact spot at this time of year. At each location, a sense of protection emanated from the stones.

To celebrate these sacred moments, we sang chants, danced spiral dances, communed individually with the stones and surroundings. We affirmed personal connection with one another, based in a shared desire for world peace and respect for

the power of reflection. Most of us were strangers to one another before we journeyed together...the events beyond our control brought us into a circle of support.

The reality of religiously motivated conflict, no matter what other reasons may also be involved, starkly contrasted with the ancient stones and underground rock chambers. What were the people like who built these places of reverence, both above and below the earth? How did they view the world and live in it without weapons? We know they built everything in round shapes. During our travels, a chant kept repeating itself over and over in my head. "We are a circle within a circle, with no beginning and never ending."

Now that I am back home, at this time of worldwide struggle and inevitable ecological destruction, it seems more important than ever to remember and visit frequently a place in my psyché where peace is possible: a place where I forget about competition and feel the confines of separate identity fall away; a place where merging with all that is does not threaten me; a place of mutual support and acceptance without feeling a need to obliterate harmless difference. I find it is a place that grows with nurturing. To visit here is to Return to the Mother of Us All.

Elizabeth Fisher is author of Rise Up and Call Her Name, a multicultural multimedia curriculum exploring goddesses. The ad on page 33 of this issue describes this program and how to purchase it. Liz can be reached at foxfables@earthlink.net and welcomes comments. Check her website www.foxfables.org for other reflections and publications she has written. The pilgrimage to Malta was lead by Jennifer Berezan a songwriter/musician who made a powerful meditative recording in the Hypogeum entitled "Returning." For information on how to order, check her website Edge of Wonder.com.

Goddess Alive, Magic Afoot Places of Peace

by Elizabeth Fisher