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## Death and Rebirth

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### Healing with the Eleusinian Mysteries of Ancient Greece

*The timeless story of a mother and daughter's love, loss and return grew to be immortalized and re-enacted yearly on an epic scale in ancient Greece as a path of initiation for those seeking love, liberation from grief and death, and ultimately rebirth in the lap of the goddess. These sacred rites in homage to Demeter and Persephone came to be known as the Eleusinian Mysteries which were celebrated annually for thousands of years, beginning c. 1450 B.C.. Through scholarly research and a conscious reenactment of the nine day ritual at the core of the Mysteries, the author finds healing amidst the intense grief experienced upon the deaths of her own mother and daughter within the same year.*

Gracing the cover of Meinrad Craighead's art book, *The Mother's Songs: Images of God the Mother*, is a beautiful painting of an embracing mother and daughter facing each other and locked in a blissful state with eyes closed, touching forehead to forehead with braided hair intertwined. In their hands each holds a bouquet of poppies and a bundle of wheat while the waxing and waning moon hover separately overhead and a large cut-open pomegranate appears in the hollow space between them. Craighead simply identifies this painting as "Mother and Daughter" and briefly speaks in a caption inside of her midwestern journey to her grandmother Memaw's home each year as her mother put her on the train and "every summer sent me on the journey of return" (11). But it is clear to see from the loving and yet poignant embrace alongside the nature symbols of poppies, wheat, and pomegranate that this painting illustrates a far greater story—that of Demeter and Persephone of ancient Greece.

This timeless story of a mother and daughter's love, loss, and return grew to be immortalized and re-enacted yearly on an epic scale in ancient Greece as a

path of initiation for those seeking love, liberation from grief and death, and ultimately rebirth in the lap of the goddess. These sacred rites came to be known as the Eleusinian Mysteries celebrated annually for thousands of years.

The major theme of this paper emerged from my study of the Eleusinian Mysteries and my attempts to make sense of their historical presence in Greek culture and the complexity of their importance to the evolution of that culture. I also wished to ascertain any possible meaning for our culture today as part of my quest in my *Woman's Spirituality* doctoral studies to examine and reconstruct ancient women's stories as a tool for empowerment and healing for modern women, including myself.

As I dove deeper into the scholarly material, I was amazed at the many connections and possible origins of the Mysteries from ancient Crete. I had experienced Crete first-hand while on a sacred pilgrimage with a group of women in 2003, so this became a valuable lens with which to explore the material of Athens and Eleusis. Upon further reflection, I realized that I had unknowingly experienced a series of purifications and an ultimate transformative healing event while in Crete that echoed many of the themes of the Eleusinian Mysteries.

Furthermore, my experiences were precipitated by own attempts to understand and reconcile the grief and abandonment I felt at the death of my daughter and mother within the same year. These emotions had consumed me and constricted my experience of life, although I did not realize that at the time I journeyed to Crete. When I learned more about the rituals of the Eleusinian Mysteries with their homage and ultimate celebration of the Mother-Daughter death and rebirth reunion story of Demeter and Persephone, I knew that I had entered into this mystery unconsciously.

What follows is my attempt to process my journey and healing in Crete through a conscious reenactment of the nine-day ritual at the core of the Mysteries.

*Day One: The Gathering.* The Eleusinian Mysteries began after sundown on a starlit evening near the annual turn of the calendar known as the Autumn Equinox. They were re-enacted annually for thousands of years (beginning c.1450 B.C.) in ancient Greece. They had a profound effect on the social and religious life of the people and ultimately upon the general psyche and evolution of their culture.

My own journey to Crete began at this same time of year, yet a mere six years ago. After saying good-bye to family, friends, work and home in Philadelphia, I journeyed alone 5,000 miles through the air, touching down briefly in Paris and Athens before the final plane ride whisks me into the hot and crowded Heraklion airport of Crete. I feel burdened, exhausted and thrilled as I'm greeted with the warm Greek hello of *yasas*. Although I have never been

here and I do not speak the language, I immediately feel completely at home. I wait and wait and wait and my suitcase does not arrive. Thus, the initiation and letting go begins.

Undaunted at the moment by this sudden twist of events, I journey onward to the Olympic Hotel for the initial gathering of our sacred group of pilgrims, here to explore the path of the Goddesses of ancient Crete. I emerge onto the rooftop deck at sunset, gasping at the beauty of the setting sun over the now golden rooftops and gasping in recognition of the eight other women gathered there waiting for me. Although none of us has previously met, I instantly feel I recognize each of them. It turns out that there are three women with the name Margaret, including myself—a name that I have never been called although it is my birth name. This “official” name, needed because of passport issues, feels alien and yet strangely comforting.

This name is also my grandmother’s name and I now realize that Hekate had entered the pilgrimage with me, to protect and guide me much as my grandmother had done for me when my own mother was falling apart during my childhood. Hekate played a little known and yet important part in the Demeter and Persephone story. She appears early on in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* soon after Persephone was abducted while flower-picking on the Nysian plain:

The lord Host-to-Many rose up on her with his immortal horses, the celebrated son of Kronos; he snatched the unwilling maid into his golden chariot and led her off lamenting. She screamed with a shrill voice, calling on her father, the son of Kronos highest and best. Not one of the immortals or of humankind heard her voice, nor the olives bright with fruit, except the daughter of Persaios; tender of heart she heard it from her cave, Hekate of the delicate veil. (Foley 2)

In her commentary on her own translation above, Helene P. Foley comments that, “Even Hekate, like Demeter, only *hears* the cry, from her cave, a place between the bright world above and the dark world below, which closes off her vision” (36).

At age five, I with my family moved from the Midwest to the East coast, far away from my grandmother’s warm house and loving embrace. Yet, somehow I always felt she was the only one who could *hear* my cry as her own son, my father, turned a deaf ear to my lament for my mother’s dark descent into a world of paralyzing anxiety and prescription drug and alcohol abuse.

I was at once both Persephone and Demeter in my childhood. I was Persephone abducted into the underworld by my mother’s own darkness, and Demeter searching and grieving always in my futile attempts to pull my mother out

of that darkness. Little did I realize in this sunset gathering on the roof that my own descent into the living and breathing caves of the Goddess's womb in Crete would become the catalyst for the healing of my own Mother and Daughter story.

We gathered the next day amidst the ancient artifacts of Crete in the Heraklion Museum, staring at the trance like eyes of the Minoan Snake Goddess, the golden horns of the sacred Bull, and the ancient scripts circling round the Phaistos Disc evoking memories and establishing new connections in our sleeping brains. Senses heightened, we journeyed on to Knossos, the magnificent temple complex at the heart of Crete and then on to an unexpected surprise, the sacred tree at the Paliani Convent in the village of Venerato.

According to Anna Kofou, in her detailed guide to Crete, the Paliani Convent is one of the oldest convents in Crete, having been mentioned in texts by the name Palia or Pala as far back as 688 a.d. (144). The church is dedicated to the Dormition of the Virgin Mary (*Koimisisitits Theotokou*) containing beautiful icons to honor her and symbols of thankfulness for her healing blessings. Kofou also guides us "To the rear of the convent is a myrtle bush, over a century old, in the trunk of which, according to tradition the miracle-working icon of the Panaghia Mytrtidotissa (feast day on September 24) was hidden" (144).

Is it a coincidence that the feast day for the icon of this bush/tree is celebrated within the same timeframe as the Eleusinian Mysteries? We were all drawn to and gathered under the tree, reading poetry and placing our prayer ribbons of intention in her branches which seemed to reach down and embrace us. The nuns spoke to us of spending their entire lives in devotion to this sacred tree. A little girl visiting her aunt (who was a nun here) stomped on the ground as she insisted that she would never again leave that tree and she also wanted to spend her entire life caring for the beloved tree.

Again, I was drawn back into my childhood when gathering amidst the trees became my healing refuge. As the line from the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* mentioned above laments upon Persephone's abduction "Not one of the immortals or of humankind heard her voice, nor the olives bright with fruit..." (2). I feel this phrase implies the deep connection of the Greek people at this time to nature, to the common belief that even the olive trees could hear our cry.

Crete is filled with this palpable and ever present sense that the surrounding nature is here to embrace and nurture us, and that we are called upon to embrace and nurture her. The ancient iconography and mythology at every turn speaks of a regenerative Mother Goddess in multiple forms revealed in the mountains, the caves, the olive groves and the constantly humming bees of the hillside hives. Worship of these myriad manifestations remains in the culture today, and was evoked by our gathering in prayer around this myrtle tree.

This prevalent nature kinship, common at the time of the Demeter and Persephone mythology, makes the story even more poignant as Demeter's grief leads to the loss of this ancient connection, and the death of the vegetation on Earth (now symbolized as the yearly cycle of the dormancy of winter). There is a great deal of evidence that Demeter may have been born in Crete and thus was an offspring of this culture.

Pamela Berger validates this ancient connection to nature in Crete in her book *The Goddess Obscured*:

Though numerous material remains document the religious life of ancient Crete, texts to assist and control interpretation are lacking. Nevertheless, it is possible to distinguish certain features of the Minoan religion, in particular the dominance of the female deity. The Minoan as distinct from the Mycenaean phase of Cretan religion was dominated by a goddess, one of whose manifestations was linked to a sacred tree. Palaces, shrines, and sanctuaries have produced votive offerings, frescos and seals that suggest a tradition of vegetation worship dominated by a goddess.... (15)

Now I was gathering beneath this sacred tree, circling around in ancient homage within this ancient land. I truly felt as if this tree and the fruit-laden olive trees all around could certainly hear my cry. I lovingly caressed her branches while tying my prayer ribbon upon them. I have entered into the secrets of the Greater Mysteries by re-entering into the old religion of the Great Mother Goddess and my day of gathering and remembering comes to an end.

*Day Two: Purification In the Sea.* Now that I have answered the call of the Eleusinian Mysteries and gathered with my fellow initiates, I am ready for my day of purification in the sea. We begin the journey to the sea by stopping to explore the ancient temple of Phaistos, site of the discovery of the still undeciphered Phaistos Disc. I stare at this disc and see an ancient journey or instructions for a series of rituals depicted in symbols that appear to tell their story in the shape of a nautilus seashell.

Kofou provides us with a wonderful description of this captivating disc:

The most important hieroglyphic text is the famous clay disc from Phaistos which is dated to 1700-1600 B.C. and is definitely of a sacred, ceremonial nature. It is stamped on both sides of the disc, spiraling in from the edge to the centre, where impressions made by movable seals depict human forms, parts of the body, tools, implements, weapons, animals, plants, a boxing glove and even ships. (44)

I ponder upon the possible meaning of these symbols and their distinct groupings separated by vertical lines. Could these be depictions of specific days of a ritual like the Greater Mysteries? Could this be evidence of community rituals originating on Crete that predate the Eleusinian Mysteries by thousands of years? Fortunately, by the time of these mysteries in ancient Greece, writing had been invented and many texts survive with first hand accounts of events surrounding the rituals and the historical context has been examined extensively by many scholars. Yet, the core of the rituals remains a mystery as initiates were forbidden to talk of their specific experiences. We are only making plausible assumptions about what actually took place, so in many ways the core of the Eleusinian Mysteries remain as undecipherable as the Phaistos Disc.

I circle around the magnificent ruins of Phaistos climbing The Grand Staircase and peering into her circular wells until I gravitate toward a sparse grove of trees on her periphery. Our group gathers here and sits in grateful relief from the heat while gazing out upon the valley of olive groves below. We read poetry and sigh at the immense beauty before us before boarding the bus for our journey to the sea. A chant arises in my mind and I teach it to the group—“Mother carry me, your child I will always be, Mother carry me down to the sea.”

Chanting and laughing in our air-conditioned bus, we quickly arrive at the seaside village of Kalamaki on the Libyan Sea. Within minutes, we plunge into the salty and bracing azure sea and our purification begins.

This journey to the sea was not quite so easy for the initiates on Day Two of the Eleusinian Mysteries. In fact, Jane Ellen Harrison comments that “The procession to the sea was called by the somewhat singular name *elasis* ‘driving’ or ‘banishing’, and the word is instructive. The procession was not a mere procession, it was a driving out, a banishing.... The bathing in the sea was a purification, a conducting out, a banishing of evil, and each man took with him his own *pharmakos*, a young pig ... the driving, may have been literally the driving of the pig, which, as the goal was some six miles distant, must have been a lengthy and troublesome business” (152).

It is not clear whether or not this pig was actually sacrificed at the end of this ritual or simply that its presence was the symbol of purification. Harrison asserts that, “The pig of purification was a ritual element, so important that when Eleusis was permitted (350-327 b.c.) to issue her autonomous coinage it is the pig that she chose as the sign and symbol of her mysteries” (153).

I did not carry a pig to the sea, but I carried my leather wallet which I promptly lost. My driver’s license, my charge cards and my money were all gone. The underlying theme of this journey that seemed designed to force me to let go and face my grief was beginning to intensify.

*Day Three: Sacred Offerings.* We begin each ritual throughout this Cretan

pilgrimage with sacred offerings for the various Goddesses of honey, wine, milk and olive oil. Today is my day to bring honey for our ritual to honor Aphrodite high atop a mountainside in one of her many shrines. We pour the libations and read poetry of love and beauty by Sappho, an ancient Greek female poet from the beginning of the sixth century B.C. I am overwhelmed with feelings of love and gratefulness for the immense beauty of our planet and for my abundant life upon her nurturing lands.

The golden honey glistens on the sacred objects we have each brought to the altar that day and we laugh and cry together at love gained and lost. I feel at one with the gentle wind and the incessant humming of the honeybees in the hives lining this fertile mountainside. On this journey, I have been introduced to the sweet bee goddess of Crete and have fallen in love with her iconography, such as the Golden Bee Pendant found in Malia. Suddenly, my reverie is interrupted by a shrieking from one of the women in the group as she is stung by one of the bees and she is deathly allergic. She was tended to immediately by many healing hands and was ultimately fine. Yet I was left shaken and my mood broken. Why amidst such beauty and joy in this world is there also such pain and grief as we are “stung” with sickness, death and the violent abduction and rape of so many women in our patriarchal culture?

In many ways the Eleusinian Mysteries symbolized the ancient Greeks response to this fact of life as they sought to both honor and reconcile this great story of Demeter and Persephone as it was played out in their own lives. Sacred offerings were brought to both celebrate the abundant harvest at that time of year and also, I believe, as part of a common cultural ritual of the times to appease the Goddess and ensure her favor for blessings in the future.

In her book, *Portrait of a Priestess: Women and Ritual in Ancient Greece*, Joan Breton Connelly refers to the many agricultural festivals of the calendar year in which the priestesses of Demeter and Persephone had responsibility for. Connelly elaborates that, “evidence attests to her role in the *Kalamaia*, an agrarian feast celebrated in early summer.... The priestess also presided at a festival known as the *Haloa*, a women’s ritual that took place during the season for cutting grapevines and tasting wine.... Of course, the priestess of Demeter and Kore played a central role in the great women’s festival of the *Thesmophoria*” (65).

Archaeological excavation at Eleusis has revealed a specific vessel, the *kernos*, which may have been used to hold these sacred offerings. As we toured Crete, I remember several of these more primitive and larger vessels on display in the ancient sites of Gournia and Malia and they appeared to be large stone circles with multiple evenly-spaced indentations that could have been used for holding grain, seeds, nuts, or oil.

Carol Christ, the leader of our pilgrimage to Crete and author of a book on her personal odyssey with this pilgrimage, offers a great description of one of these vessels utilized during ritual:

The kernos stone is a flat circular grey slab about three feet across with thirty-four shallow round indentations around the outside, and two larger and deeper ones in the center, for offerings and libations. We placed the fruits of the earth on the stone: beans, onions, garlic, apples, tomatoes, eggplants, and squash; purchases I had made from a gypsy's truck at Nirou Hani. We thanked the Goddess for the harvest that had provided the wonderful food we had been eating in Crete. Then we named and gave thanks for the spiritual harvest. (*Odyssey With the Goddess* 111-112).

Other implements which may have been used in ritual have been excavated, such as a very intriguing cup mentioned by Carl Kerényi in the preface to his book *Eleusis*. He states that "... the cup which I now assume to be the earliest extant representation of Persephone. It is from the beginning of the Middle Minoan period (shortly after 2,000 B.C.) and was found by Professor Doro Levi in 1955 in his excavation of the first palace of Phaistos" (xix).

Kerényi's argument is that this cup represents a triad of personages, such as Persephone and her companions at play with Persephone bent over admiring the flower. Kerényi asserts that this scene is recognizable as the same scene preceding the abduction of Persephone. I am further intrigued with the placement of this excavated cup, which was found at the same site as the Phaistos Disc I refer to above and dated to several hundred years before the dating of the disc. Is it possible that the Demeter and Persephone story was that old and indeed originated in Crete? Is it possible that the disc reveals steps in a ritual in honor of this story as I mentioned earlier?

*Day Four: Healing Dreams.* I have offered my libations and given thanks before retiring to a deep sleep. I awake with awe after a beautiful dream of my daughter who died midway through my pregnancy. She is playing with dolls inside an enormous seashell (like a giant clamshell) under the sea and she is happy and radiant with joy and love. The dream sequence is suffused with rippling prisms of rainbow light. I am sad to awaken and move away from this blessed dream state and return to my present reality in which grief has begun to arise within my being again.

Tears are stinging the back of my throat as I recognize those dolls as those of my childhood—my beloved Barbie dolls that I played with for hours. Then I remember the beautiful clothes that my mother used to make for these dolls, often creating outfits that matched my own. My daughter seemed so happy



without me ... happy without me by her side, making clothes for her and her dolls. The lineage has been broken. My daughter is dead and I will never have these treasured moments with her. A beautiful dream is not enough solace for my aching heart.

Then I realize that I have been unconsciously collecting little gifts for my daughter, and in honor of my mother's gift with sewing and embroidery, for the entire journey. I have been picking up little beaded dolls, teacups and lace; embroidered pillowcases, napkins and tablecloths; and thimbles which my mother always collected. I realize I have been buying them in a type of dream state, as if I could return home and give them as gifts to my mother and daughter, but they are both dead.

I contemplate the dreams of the initiates on this fourth starlit night and wonder how many dreamt of loved ones that had passed on? How many awoke to share their dreams with healing attendants or each other with a yearning to physically reach out and touch their beloved dead?

*Day Five: Procession.* Every day is a sacred journey, but when immersed in the midst of ritual and ceremony, each step takes on a new meaning of purpose, connection and remembrance. On this day of the rites, according to Mara Lynn Keller in her article "Eleusinian Mysteries: Ancient Nature Religion of Demeter and Persephone," the initiates and the community journeyed westward from Athens to Eleusis, carrying at the head of the great procession the boychild 'Iacchus' (49).

It is believed that the priestesses of Demeter carried baskets containing sacred objects for ritual or the *hieria* (holy things). Connelly explains that:

Women who led these processions marched in a spotlight that underscored their agency and highlighted their symbolic capital within the larger group ... we saw that the priestesses of Demeter and Kore led the procession of initiates in the Mysteries from Eleusis to Athens, and back again, carrying the holy things as they marched (167-168).

*Day Six: Nightlong Revelry.* Keller utilizes a classical literary reference as she expresses the collective importance of this type of ancient "worship" when highlighting the ritual aspects of this *pannycheis*, or nightlong revelry which:

... included dancing by the women near Callichoron, the Well of Fair Dances. According to Euripides (about 484-406 B.C.) in his play *Ion*, all of nature responded to the dance of the women:  
the starry ether of Zeus takes up the dance  
the moon Goddess dances, and with her  
the fifty daughters of Nereus dance in the sea

and in the eddies of the ever-flowing streams  
so honoring the Daughter with the golden crown  
and the holy Mother [Demeter]...

The ancients believed that if these rituals were suppressed, if the collective purpose of the community would no longer find expression, the cosmos would fall apart. (49)

While in Crete, I walked in procession with the other women in the group down many Sacred Ways of the vast temple-complexes of Knossos, Phaistos, Gournia and Malia. We hiked in single file down a sacred gorge through Minoan cave tombs above Kato Zakros in reverence and awe or hiked up a mountainside to an ancient shrine atop Mount Juktas to give our thanks to the ancient goddesses with our silent meditative prayer.

Often these sacred moments gave way to spontaneous laughter, song and dancing. We danced in circles to the beat of ancient Cretan music high in the Psiloritis Mountains and danced in the moonlight around a seashell labyrinth built upon a seaside cliff near the fishing village of Mochlos. Throughout Crete, archaeological excavation has revealed a dancing and celebratory culture as evidenced in the surviving frescos and artistry of such artifacts as terracotta clay figurines in circles of dance or golden seal rings.

One such ring mentioned by Anne Baring and Jules Cashford in their book *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image*, shows four women who appear to be dancing and raising their hands in worship. Baring and Cashford theorize that this ring, which was found in a tomb at Isopata, near Knossos, and dated from c. 1450 b.c. illustrates an “Epiphany scene showing the Bee Goddess, priestesses and child in a field of lilies” (118). Again, there is a possible connection here between the iconography of the adult woman and child in a field of flowers and the mythology of Demeter and Persephone, similar to Kerenyi’s interpretation earlier of the cup found at Phaistos.

The most remarkable frescos of Crete often show a sacred procession followed by a type of acrobatic dancing and revelry known as the leaping of the bulls. Both young boys and girls are shown doing this marvelous and joyous leaping. Again, these seemed to be community events. Our dancing in Crete indeed evoked worship of the goddess, homage to the nature around and within us, and a deep strengthening of our community bonds.

*Day Seven: Descent.* After a night of song and dance, it was time for the initiates to enter the sanctuary of Demeter and Persephone at Eleusis. They first had to cross a bridge over a river where they were subject to teasing and ridicule by tricksters in their path. All of this was designed to humble the participant and further break down the self-imposed pretensions and

arrogance that may stand in the way of receiving the full impact of the core of the Mysteries.

Distilled to its essence, the crossing of this bridge represents another form of purification. The pattern and intent of my series of purifications while on my sacred pilgrimage in Crete, such as the loss of my suitcase and wallet, left me feeling exposed and vulnerable. All of my lifelong defenses of control and attachment to “things” around me were being stripped away. The bubbling up of my childhood grief and anger, amplified by the recent loss of my mother and daughter, was becoming unbearable.

The caves of Crete became my sacred sanctuary of Eleusis into which I began my final descent into the mysteries of Demeter and Persephone. I had become increasingly preoccupied and confused on the journey, and initially banged my head quite strongly while entering the cave of Eilithia, the Goddess of Childbirth. Women had journeyed to this cave for thousands of years to ask the goddess for fertility and assistance in the actual birthing process. Recent tokens of worship were in evidence on this day. My anger at this goddess rose as I felt her abandonment and betrayal for the death of my daughter while still in my womb.

Later we prepared to descend deeply into the series of caves at Skoteino by lurching first on homemade moussaka in a neighboring village. Many of the local women waiting on us were widows, dressed in all black that they had worn since their husband’s death and would continue to wear until their own. Their gentle compassion and open acknowledgement of their grief triggered a new wave of emotion rising up within me. I felt consumed by severe anxiety and stark fear at the very idea of death and became almost paralyzed with dread at the thought of crossing the threshold and entering the Skoteino cave.

Yet, I faced this fear and began the descent guided by many gentle and encouraging hands. My torchlight was my miner’s flashlight that illuminated the steep and rocky path ahead. It was a truly frightening and difficult experience as we slid and crawled our way deeper into the sculpted caverns. What seemed like hours passed and we finally reached the bottom floor of the cave, which appeared to have been hand carved into the shape of a magnificent temple, yet it was all natural.

We sat near each other in silence and awe and then we were asked by our guide to extinguish all our lights. The darkness was overwhelming—the blackest black I have ever experienced. Breathing through my fear and anguish, I felt the finality and apparent nothingness of death all around me. Tears were stinging my eyes and throat and then suddenly I felt the actual heartbeat of the earth and heard singing from the rocks. The singing was actually a sweet lullaby of joy and love sung by one of the women in the group in honor of her precious mother who used to sing it to her.

My heart cracked open and out of the darkness and grief, love came pouring in. Suddenly the cave-temple was illuminated with all of our lights coming back on, and my healing began. I felt safe and caressed within the womb of the Mother Goddess herself, and my void was filled with the regenerative energies of love. I experienced this love as an embracing, enveloping energy field capable of perpetual rebirth.

At the time, I experienced this energy as the regenerative power of the ancient Snake Goddess of Crete. Now, through my study and personal exploration into the Eleusinian Mysteries, I also experience this energy as the ever-renewing power of the Mysteries honoring the story, love, death and rebirth of the great Goddesses Demeter and Persephone. For me, the great fire or flash of light revealed to the initiates within the sacred sanctuary at Eleusis is love.

*Day Eight: Ascent.* My profound healing and transformation within that Cretan cave from an inner worldview clouded over with grief and anger to a life permeated with the sustaining, nurturing and regenerative power of love was also the same story of the initiates of the Eleusinian Mysteries thousands of years ago. I had descended into the darkness, heard the hymn of Demeter to Persephone and experienced the mystery and fire of love permeate my being.

The similarities between my experience and the re-constructed experiences of the initiates by scholars such as Keller are uncanny. The very fact that my experience took place in a cave after many days of purification and ritual is astounding, for as Keller writes:

The seventh and eight nights were the nights of the mysteries, when the *mystai* entered the *Telesterion*, the temple of Demeter, the hall of initiation. (Perhaps in more ancient days they had gone down into a womblike cave, the cave at the edge of the sanctuary, later named the *Ploutonion*, doorway to Hades)... During initiation, the *mystai* may have felt abducted into the underworld, there remembering whatever they had lost to disease, pain, or death...; felt overwhelming grief; and then experienced the healing, joyful embrace of the sacred union and the arrival of new life. (50)

I climbed up and out of that cave toward the light and toward a new life. I boarded the bus for our final journey in Crete, back to the capital city of Heraklion and the flight home to my loved ones.

*Day Nine: Celebration in the Lap of the Goddess.* Keller describes this ninth and final day of the Mysteries as a day for “further prayers, pouring libations to the dead, and returning home” (50). Our group poured our final libations of milk, honey, wine and olive oil in a ritual ceremony of thanksgiving and

closure. We returned to the Olympic Hotel for final packing and dressing up for a celebratory feast. I was glowing as we gathered on the rooftop once again for our final meal together and a gift exchange.

A call came through to our group leader from the tourist police. They had found my wallet! It was turned in by a woman cleaning out a museum bathroom. This miraculous return was so symbolic of my death and rebirth experience. In celebration I bought a gold reproduction of an ancient seal ring which portrays a scene of three women or goddesses, in an apparent relaxed and playful pose surrounded by trees with a lily patch growing up out of the center, similar to the Phaistos cup.

I see and feel deep emotions as I stare at this precious souvenir on my finger. I see Demeter and Persephone reunited in love and adoration with the abundant vegetation of the earth surrounding them. I see that the two goddesses are somewhat elevated while the third is busy on the ground bent over tending her tree. I now perceive these two goddesses as my mother and daughter, united in Heaven, while I am busy here on Earth tending my garden and surrounded by their love. I am surrounded by the love revealed in the Mysteries celebrating the great story of Demeter and Persephone's death and rebirth.

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