

Awakening the Dorothy Within: The Primordial Female

“Toto, I have a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore.”

Ever feel that way? If so, good. It means you’re half way home. How did Dorothy get to Oz? When did it all start? As with most things, it all started with a simple desire: the desire to be free -- to be free from suffering. “A place where there isn’t any trouble... Do you suppose there is such a place, Toto? It’s not a place you can get to by a boat or a train. It’s far, far away. Behind the moon, beyond the rain...”

Dorothy gets her wish and travels via cyclone. Having barely arrived in this strange new land, she sees this great big bubble of light approaching, and out steps Glinda, the Witch of the North. Dorothy turns to Toto and says, “Now I know we’re not in Kansas. We must be over the rainbow.” Glinda says, “Are you a good witch or a bad witch?” And this is critical. For you see, we’re all witches deep down, whether we want to be or not. Dorothy had to learn this the hard way. Being over the rainbow or in the Land of Oz, she just found more trouble. Yet through a series of tasks, she discovers that she always had the ability to stand forth on her own, and that it stemmed from the very thing that she thought was causing all the trouble to begin with – desire for freedom, symbolized by the ruby red slippers. Out of all the hero myths, none renders the telling of this truth clearer than the tale of Dorothy’s quest.

Dorothy’s home is transformed into the most important place in the world because now she looks at it with new eyes; eyes that see through, beyond, and in between -- eyes that see things the way they really are. This new vision transforms all pain and suffering because these are the eyes of a witch – a tantrika – and a master of dzogchen.

Home is a symbol for that source of wholeness, unity, absolute reality, nondual awareness where everything and everyone is rooted. We never leave home. We just think we do. We get so caught up in the world of duality, materialism, and personal soap opera that it appears we are anywhere but home. When we wake up in this dream that has turned into a nightmare, that’s when we turn to Toto and say, “I have a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore.” But as Dorothy found out, we don’t get back home by running away from our problems, but by confronting them. She had to claim the witch’s broomstick as her own. The broomstick is a symbol for what the Eastern schools refer to as the *kundalini* – the serpent energy coiled at the base of the spine that enervates the energy centers in the body known as *chakras*.

Many people flee their spiritual homes of origin in search of something better for the wrong reasons or under the wrong conditions. Many folks, disillusioned with Christianity, flock to alternative religions, New Age groups, or the exoticism of Eastern religions like Buddhism. While exploring other spiritual perspectives and traditions has its own merit, it usually doesn’t solve the problem because the problem is in the person – not the religion or the spiritual tradition. Truth is truth. If human beings want to disregard the truth, distort the truth, and desecrate it with hypocrisy, even killing others in the name of it -- that doesn’t do a damn thing to the truth. Doesn’t change it one bit. The truth is still the truth. No religion or spiritual tradition is immune to human corruption and greed. That is why it is so important to find one’s *own* way

home. And that's what Dorothy does.

Dorothy recruits necessary friends along the way – Scarecrow (mind/ intellect), Tin Man (emotion/feeling), and the Cowardly Lion (courage/will.) Though they each have a separate role, they all work together to accomplish a mutual goal. In the West, this working together, synthesis, and integration is accomplished through gnosis, ritual magic, alchemy, and transmutation. In the East, it's a result of practicing tantra, dzogchen, and esoteric yoga. Yet no matter how it's done, in a Western style or Eastern, the ultimate outcome is the realization of that nondual awareness we call home. It's easier than we think. The trick is learning how to sustain that realization through all our thoughts, feelings, and actions while living in the ephemeral state of duality. It's all about finding heaven in earth. Once this hidden treasure is found, it doesn't abnegate the need to work toward making the world a better place for others. On the contrary, one feels a greater need than ever to be of service because one sees more clearly how to be most effective in that regard.

In Christianity, the Garden of Eden symbolizes the state of nonduality where there is no good or evil. All creation myths are different versions of the same story. In *The Power of Myth*,^[i] by Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, twelve pages contain examples that classically illustrate this truth. Bill Moyers reads a line out of the Book of Genesis, and Campbell responds with reciting text from another spiritual tradition or mythology with the same meaning. Unfortunately, the orthodox Christian interpretation is tainted with a great deception – not that of the devil, but of man: male supremacy and devaluation of the feminine aspect of the divine.

Patriarchy and/or dominator society has not always held the world in a stranglehold. Scholars, historians, and archeologists, such as Harriett Lerner and Riane Eisler, have unearthed more than enough evidence in support of this.^[ii] This is good news because what was created can be uncreated. Patriarchy is on its way out, thanks in part to these esoteric orders. But religion is a powerful tool that can be used to uplift or to crush, as we all know too well. Still, looking behind and underneath and through and beyond and in between, we find the ancient clues. The sacred feminine principle is still at the root of everything – no matter how some may want to redress her, disguise her, or eliminate her altogether.

The Wicked Witch of the West and Glinda the Good Witch of the North, in Eastern spiritual tradition, particularly Tibetan Buddhism, are obviously dakinis. One is a mean mother and the other is “the good guy.” Both serve Dorothy in her journey. Therefore, one could not exist without the other. So what's a dakini? Generally, “the dakini represents the ever-changing flow of energy with which the yogic practitioner must work in order to become realized. She may appear as a human being, as a goddess – either peaceful or wrathful – or she may be perceived as the general play of energy in the phenomenal worlds.”^[iii] Dakinis are important in Eastern esotericism because tradition says they brought the sacred mysteries to humanity.

In Tibetan Buddhism, the primordial female is the Great Mother of all things, but still something beyond even that. Buddhist author Tsultrim Allione quotes Trungpa Rinpoche:

In phenomenal experience, whether pleasure or pain, birth or death, sanity or insanity, good or bad, it is necessary to have a basic ground. This basic ground is known in Buddhist literature as the mother principle. Prajnaparamita (the perfection of wisdom) is called the mother-consort of all the Buddhas . . . As a principle of cosmic structure, the all-accommodating basic ground is neither male nor

female. One might call it hermaphroditic, but due to its quality of fertility or potentiality, it is regarded as feminine.[\[iv\]](#)

Allione points to a similar concept illustrated by Starhawk's description of the Great Mother Goddess from the Wiccan perspective: "In the beginning the Goddess is the All, virgin, meaning complete within herself. Although She is called *Goddess*, she could just as well be called *God* – sex has not yet come into being. . . . Yet the female nature of the ground of being is being stressed – because the process of creation that is about to occur is a *birth* process. . ."[\[v\]](#) And birth is seldom a pleasurable experience for the mother or the baby.

The Biblical fall can be interpreted in many ways on many levels. It even has a literal basis in truth in relation to our extraterrestrial origins. But here, figuratively speaking, we have the son, Adam, being expelled from the Garden of Eden – his mother's womb. In this way God (or the Goddess) is acting through Eve or is Eve. So women get a bad rap for this. When asked why, Campbell says because "They represent life. Man doesn't enter life except by woman, and so it is woman who brings us into this world of pairs of opposites and suffering."[\[vi\]](#) In the Greek trilogy by Aeschylus, Orestes gets so upset about this that he kills his mother, and is later acquitted of the crime by the insane reasoning that he's not related to her. The jury was tied, however. The backstabbing goddess Athena – symbolizing female complicity in advocating male supremacy and establishing patriarchy – cast the tie-breaking vote. It was another instance of divide and conquer that worked for the time being.[\[vii\]](#)

The serpent fares no better than the woman in the orthodox Biblical interpretation. However, the Old Religion reveres the Serpent. The great Serpent protectively hovered over the meditating Buddha. The mystical Qabalah teaches that Christ and the Serpent are two sides of the same force. Yet many people revile the snake. Campbell reminds us that the Garden belonged to the Serpent long before the advent of the Judeo-Christian tradition. "We have Sumerian seals from as early as 3500 B.C. showing the serpent and the tree and the goddess, with the goddess giving the fruit of life to a visiting male. The old mythology of the goddess is right there."[\[viii\]](#) Campbell also sees in the story of the fall a reflection of the historical conflict between the Hebrews and the people of Canaan. "The principle divinity of the people of Canaan was the Goddess, and associated with the Goddess is the serpent. This is the symbol of the mystery of life. The male-god-oriented group rejected it. In other words, there is a historical rejection of the Mother Goddess implied in the story of the Garden of Eden."[\[ix\]](#)

With that said, what does the Serpent have to do with women? For one, snakes live a large part of their lives underground, and the Earth has always been associated with the Mother Goddess. In addition, the serpent is linked with recognizing and honoring the law of cycles that usually comes more naturally to women than men. This principle was the central organizing theme behind matriarchal society. The snake has the power to shed its own skin and still survive, just as women once a month shed their blood and continue to live. Yet the power of life within that blood and its shedding enables new life to come forth.

Sometimes the image of the serpent biting its own tail is used to represent eternity, immortality, and life in general. According to Campbell, it represents the primary function of life, which is eating. "Life consists in eating other creatures."[\[x\]](#) He continues, "The serpent is a traveling alimentary canal, that's about all it is. And it gives you that primary sense of shock, of life in its most primal quality. . . Life lives by killing and eating itself, casting off death and being reborn,

like the moon. This is one of the mysteries that these symbolic, paradoxical forms try to represent.”[\[xi\]](#)

Even without the historical perspective, it all boils down to one thing: Taking one sacred fruit in its wholeness and dividing it into two pieces – duality – the world of opposites – the world of phenomenal experience. There was a reason for that. Dorothy’s journey is not in vain. Dakinis -- manifestations of this great feminine principle were to appear and teach her a valuable lesson. Not only that, they were going to show her how to use tools she didn’t even know she had in ways she never imagined.

[\[i\]](#) Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, Anchor/Doubleday Books, 1998, pp. 50-61.

[\[ii\]](#) Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy (Women & History, Vol. 1)*, Oxford University Press, 1987; Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade*, Harper Collins, 1988.

[\[iii\]](#) Tsultrim Allione, *Women of Wisdom*, Snow Lion Publications, 2000, p. 103. Reprinted with permission.

[\[iv\]](#) *Id.*

[\[v\]](#) *Id.*, p. 109.

[\[vi\]](#) Campbell, p. 55.

[\[vii\]](#) Eisler, pp. 78-80; See also *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* by Mary Daly (Beacon Press: 1978) for a brilliant and thoroughly detailed explanation about the function of Athena and her modern day emissaries.

[\[viii\]](#) Campbell, pp. 54-55.

[\[ix\]](#) *Id.* p. 55.

[\[x\]](#) *Id.*, p. 53.

[\[xi\]](#) *Id.*

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there's no place like home