

THE BLACK MADONNA
A DIVINE MYSTERY VEILED IN BLACKNESS
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DARKNESS is the one true actuality, the basis and the root of light, without which the latter could never manifest itself, nor even exist. Light is matter, and DARKNESS pure Spirit. H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine* 1:70

Isis spoke the following words to Horus when instructing him about the Secret Doctrine: Give heed, my son, Horus, for you shall hear the secret doctrine of which our forefather Kamephis was the first teacher. It so befell that Hermes heard this teaching from Kamephis, the eldest of our race. I heard it from Hermes, the writer of records, at the time when he initiated me into the Rite of Black Perfection, and you shall hear it now from me... [Words of Isis from *Kore Kosmu*, the sacred book of Hermes Trismegistus. *Meditations of the Tarot*, Arcana 9, The Hermit.]

The Black Madonna, an image of Divinity shrouded in darkness, is enshrined in countless pilgrim churches, in remote monasteries, in tiny chapels and vast cathedrals, down in dark crypts and up on high altars, in Sicily, Spain, Switzerland, France, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Turkey, and as Black Tara in China, as Kali in India, and as "Our Lady of Guadalupe" in Mexico. She has been visited by millions of people for hundreds of years.

More than five hundred of the world's Madonna images are black or dark. Who is The Black Madonna? What does she represent to the world? What is her message? It is possible to consider The Black Madonna as the archetypal counterpart of the Virgin Mary, in which they interrelate as the Yin/Yang of the Taoist symbol create a whole and each half contains the other. The Black Madonna is known as the Queen of the Earth and as Mary as the Queen of Heaven; The Black Madonna is fertile and generative as Mary is the icon of the Immaculate Conception and Incorruptibility. The Black Madonna is the Virgin who is consort to no man or deity, as all life emanated from her as Mother Nature. Mary received the seed of God in the form of the Holy Spirit. Yet, although it is possible to consider them as archetypal counterparts of the Divine Feminine, both The Black Madonna and Mary, in the essence of their being, represent the Ark of the Covenant and the Holy Grail, bearing divine wisdom and containing the divinized soul.

"On her face is an expression of utter solitude so intense that the child on her knees or in the embrace of her left arm seems strangely appended. Her eyes are opaque, blank, veiled in the deepest interiority. She sits deeply, a curtained container, a tabernacle of God's wisdom, the eternal bloody cave of birth, disintegration and rebirth." (Meinrad Craighead, Benedictine sister)

Historically, Isis of Egypt was the first recorded appearance of the Black Madonna, other than the Paleolithic Venus figurines. The cult of Isis was the dominant religion of the Mediterranean during late Roman times, and had spread into Roman-occupied lands,

including Gaul. The city of Paris was devoted to Isis, as Lyons was to Cybele and Marseilles to Artemis. Like other Black Goddess figures, Isis is the life-giving and healing goddess of the Earth. In *The Golden Ass* of Apuleius, Isis speaks: "I am Nature, the universal Mother, mistress of all the elements, primordial child of time, sovereign of all things spiritual, queen of the dead, queen also of the immortals, the single manifestation of all the gods and goddesses there are." The text goes on to state that she is identical with Cybele, Artemis, Aphrodite, Persephone, Demeter, Juno, and Hecate.

Subsequent to the presence of the cult of Isis, during the fourth century C.E. St. Helen, mother of the Emperor Constantine, brought the Madonna known as Our Lady of Częstochowa to Constantinople from Jerusalem at a time when there were formative debates and explorations on the meaning of Christ and Christianity. By the end of the fourth century, the basic tenets of Christianity had been formed, primarily from the work of St. Augustine, (354-430 AD), and Black Madonnas began to appear in various parts of Europe, seeding the presence of the divine feminine.

When the infamous Council of Constantinople occurred in 869, it was legislated that the human being is a two-fold being, purely body and soul. Any reference or understanding of the spiritual nature of humanity was considered heresy. However, slowly but surely, the Black Madonnas started to populate the landscape. The healing impulse intended by the incarnation and resurrection of Christ began to transform into religious and secular power under Roman influence. As the Council of Constantinople legislated away the consciousness of the spiritual nature of humanity, two of the most famous Black Madonnas, (Montserrat and Einsiedeln,) appeared and became prominent around 869.

In volume III of *Karmic Relationships*, lectures three and four, Rudolf Steiner describes that before the age of the cathedral schools humanity experienced a living presence, a living knowledge of the spiritual world and the living spiritual beings present in nature. In the seventh and eighth centuries, there was a dimming sense of this connection with the spiritual world. It was during this time of dimming consciousness that the Black Madonnas appeared in greater number, and were being placed in many of the cathedral schools and centers where spiritual knowledge was still cultivated.

The largest number of Black Madonnas was brought to Europe through Crusader or Templar hands during the time of Bernard of Clairvaux, the Crusades, the building of the cathedrals, and the flowering of the great Mystery Schools, particularly of Chartres. St. Bernard received his inspiration from the Black Madonna at Chatillon, where three drops of milk flowed from the Black Madonna's breast into his mouth. He credited this experience for his devotion to Mary. Upon this foundation, he preached the intimacy of the human soul with the Divine.

Rudolf Steiner states that the Crusades were the preparation for the Age of Consciousness Soul, which began in 1413. Consciousness Soul infuses consciousness into human deeds, where the soul rises above personal desires or needs and unites with the eternal, serving

the true and the good. The eternal spirit shines into the soul, it unites its existence with the eternal.

It is notable that the Black Madonnas became a fixture in the time of the Crusades, to help shape the coming birth of the consciousness soul era.

The Black Madonna symbolizes the intimacy of the human soul with Christ, a symbol of the human capacity to birth the Christ within. Bernard of Clairvaux, the Cistercians with their influence on the Templars, sought to form a culture that could be a vessel for Christ. They carried Black Madonna images throughout the Continent of Europe seeding an imagination and invitation for this cultural ideal, as a force for creating a civilization founded on cosmic, transformative, sustaining love.

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What do these statues and paintings of The Black Madonna signify? What is Her message? The Black Madonna brings us into the presence of deep, black, unsolvable mystery. Yet, though veiled in a cosmic mystery of darkness, some aspects of the magnitude of Her divine essence can be perceived. Just as Christ Jesus embodied multiple facets in his ministry, as healer, teacher, priest, the Good Shepherd, the Lamb of God, the Guardian of the Threshold, the Alpha and the Omega, so The Black Madonna also manifests various capacities. The vast magnitude of her divine essence begins to open when She is beheld from multiple perspectives: as the Cosmic Mother, the Earth Mother, the Sorrowful Mother, the Mother of Compassion and the Mother who removes all illusion from the ego.

THE BLACK MADONNA AS THE COSMIC MOTHER:

The Black Madonna is the darkness of the void from which even the light is born, the final mystery that is drawing all things into deeper and deeper union with it. She is the formless void at the beginning of the Rig Veda in Hinduism and the Book of Genesis in the Bible. The Black Madonna is the great cosmic Mother on whose lap all creation exists, the seed and source of creation, the manifested counterpart to the transcendental being of the Heavenly Father beyond all creation. The universe itself is embraced and mothered by Her. She is the mediatrix of unity, uniting all aspects of creation, without separation into nations, ethnic groups, or religious sects. She is the primal void from which everything has emerged.

THE BLACK MADONNA AS THE EARTH MOTHER:

The great Earth Mother emerged out of primordial chaos. Dark and fecund, from her fertile womb all life springs; she gives birth to the mineral kingdom, the plant kingdom, the animal kingdom, and the human kingdom. She sustains and nourishes all life through her body and, at the completion of each life cycle, all living things return to her. As such, She is the source of all the dark, rich, fertile processes of Nature, the agent of all fertile transformations in external and inner nature—in the outside world and in the psyche.

The Knights Templar introduced Black Madonnas into Christianity, in part to reawaken the reality of the Earth Mother as a living being. With the shift to a patriarchal sky-god religion, followed by the Judeo-Christian monotheistic traditions, the nature-reverencing

goddess religions of the ancient world were suppressed, desacralized and in many cases demonized. With the rise of materialism and a merchant economy, and the ensuing corruption of politics and religion, there was a longing to return to the purity of the early apostolic age. Into this cultural soil the Black Madonnas appeared in Europe.

At the origin of human life on the earth, a defining event took place with the fratricide of Abel, when human blood spilled upon the earth for the first time. As Abel's blood united with the soil of the earth, the virginal quality of the Earth was lost, and the heart of the Earth Mother was forever changed. Human beings violated the sacred gift of life. Robert Powell, in his lecture on the Black Madonna in Sebastopol, CA., June 18, 2016, described that to aid humanity the Earth Mother withdrew into the heart of the Earth to protect the undeveloped human "I" that lives in the blood, and that She will remain there until the time when human beings develop the maturity to redeem the deeds of the past through a spiritual birth of Christ within. This withdrawal was the ultimate sacrifice of the Mother. She united Herself with the destiny of humanity's fall from grace and holds near to her heart each human "I" to preserve its sanctity. The Black Madonna sits with the Christ Child on her lap, offering Him to us to heal the past and reclaim our "I" in its sovereignty.

THE BLACK MADONNA AS THE SORROWFUL MOTHER:

Her scarred dark face peers out from behind the dancing flames of candlelight. She does not seem of this earth. It is as if she is a window between the worlds, as if when looking at her one is looking into the abyss of the cosmos. Through her penetrating stare all the failures of humanity swirl about, all the violence, rape, wars, fears, sickness, pollution, oppression, and economic injustice. The heartbreak of the world is Hers. She bears the cost, the price, the anguish, and the sacred agony of the Divine Feminine in each of us. She is that part of us that is burned, wounded, seared, and broken by the world, by what we suffer in the world. She is the woman who has been burned by love, by the constant, unavoidable opening of the heart to the suffering of life, to the injustice of human beings, and to the cruelty of the false self. In standing in front of us in her burned, black dignity she embodies the strength of enduring endless suffering without closing her heart, of standing in the fire and being burned and charred without ever turning away from the necessity of loving in a complete and total way.

So many of the Black Madonnas have been scarred, burned, broken, buried, and yet they prevail, they mend, they endure through the centuries. This may be one of the reasons the Black Madonnas have such appeal. Since the advent of the Black Madonnas into human history, there has been an unleashing of previously unimaginable evil onto the planet. Wars, religious strife, genocide, plagues, willful environmental destruction have tested the strongest of resolve. Yet by their very blackness the Black Madonnas serve as reminders that even while suffering through the darkest of nights, love, wisdom, endurance and resurrection are possible.

The Mater Dolorosa, the Madonna of Solitude and Sorrow beholds and bears within Her even our most unbearable pain. "This aspect of the Black Madonna is an initiation into the

burning furnace of charity. She takes you into the depths of the mystery of the Mother because the Mother is not simply the great, dark cloud of final mystery that is uplifting everything from revelation to revelation. She is not simply the Queen of Nature, the Queen of all the fertile processes that transform life itself into a mirror of the Divine. . . The Black Madonna is that force of pure suffering mystical love that annihilates evil at its root and engenders the Christ-child in the ground of the soul even as the world burns." — Andrew Harvey, *Radical Passion*. North Atlantic Books, 2012. p.62.

THE BLACK MADONNA AS THE MOTHER OF COMPASSION:

The word *compassion*, meaning *to love together with*, is derived from the Latin *con*, meaning *with*, and *passus*, meaning *patient* or *one who suffers*. In Biblical Hebrew, the word for compassion is *riḥam*, which is derived from *reḥem*, which means *the mother, womb, or to show mercy*. The Arabic word for compassion, *rahmah*, also translates as *womb*. The meaning of the name *Isis* is *throne*, as the Egyptian word for Isis, Ast or Aset, means *Throne or Seat*. *Isis* is an onomatopoeic Asianic word, *Ish-ish*, meaning *she who weeps*. The Black Madonna—the womb of the universe—provides the cosmic lap where all creatures gather. The Black Madonna is the Throne of Compassion, the Divine lap.

Compassion is that state when one sees all living beings as part of one's own self, and when everyone's suffering is seen as one's own suffering. Only the Great Mother could provide the compassion needed by the sorrowful human condition. The Black Madonna is the sorrowful mother, the mother who weeps tears for the suffering in the universe, the suffering in the world, the brokenness of our very vulnerable hearts. In the Christian tradition she holds the dying Christ in her lap. The crucified Christ represents all beings—it is the cosmic Christ as well as the historical Jesus that she is embracing, for all beings suffer, and the Black Madonna, the Great Mother, knows this and empathizes with us in our pain. She embraces us like a tender mother with a compassionate heart for all the world. She invites us to enter into our grief and to learn what suffering has to teach us. The wisdom gleaned from the grieving heart becomes the fertile womb to birth the new. Grieving empties the soul of its pain, it opens the womb to gestate the unfolding future. The Black Madonna is the essence of love, and her love without condition is what heals the deepest wounding of the soul. She embodies the living presence of the transformative power of compassion and acceptance.

THE BLACK MADONNA AS KALI:

In Hinduism Kali is a manifestation of the Divine Mother. The name Kali comes from the Sanskrit root word *Kal*, which means both *time* and also *black*. She is equated with the eternal night, is the transcendent power of time, and is the consort of the god Shiva, the destroyer of unreality. There is nothing that escapes the all-consuming march of time. As the consort of the destroyer of unreality, She reveals the illusory self-centered view of reality and compels the disillusion or destruction of the false ego. In Hinduism, Shiva and Kali grant liberation by removing the illusion of the ego and identification with the body, awakening the eternal I AM.

Her black skin represents the womb of the unmanifest quantum field from which all of creation arises and into which all of creation will eventually dissolve. She is depicted as standing on Shiva who lays beneath Her with white skin, in contrast to Her black or sometimes dark blue skin. He has a blissful detached look. Shiva represents pure formless awareness—sat-chit-ananda (being-consciousness-bliss)—while She represents "form" eternally supported by the substratum of pure awareness.

Of all the forms of the feminine principle in Hinduism, Kali is the most compassionate because She provides *moksha* or liberation to Her children. She destroys only to recreate, and what she destroys is sin, ignorance and decay. The ego trembles with fear when it sees Mother Kali because the ego sees in Her its own eventual demise. If one is attached to one's ego Mother Kali will appear in a fearsome form. A mature soul who engages in spiritual practice to remove the illusion of the ego sees Mother Kali as very kind, affectionate, and overflowing with incomprehensible love for Her children.

In the Black Madonna you have an all-encompassing symbol of the divine feminine, the wildness, the fury, the ferociousness, the grandeur of destructiveness, the rage against illusions, the rage against cruelty and injustice that is also part of the sacred feminine.

The holiness and acute precision of her destruction, strips away the illusions of the ego, after which, she will pour a wholly new vision and new awareness into the dark empty void that she has prepared in your psyche.

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The Black Madonna, in all her manifestation, is ultimately the blackness of divine mystery celebrated by the great mystics who see the divine as forever unknowable, mysterious, beyond all our concepts, hidden from all our senses in a light so dazzling it registers as darkness. The Black Madonna is the black womb of light out of which all of the worlds are always arising and into which they fall, the presence behind all things, the darkness of love and the loving unknowing. The Dark Queen of Heaven guides us into the Highest Mysteries.

PART 2 OF THE ARTICLE ON THE BLACK MADONNA WILL APPEAR IN THE SPRING EDITION OF THE STARLIGHT JOURNAL. SEE A PREVIEW BELOW.

The Queen of Sheba spoke to King Solomon, "I am Black but I am Beautiful" (Song of Solomon 1:5). She is depicted twice in the Cathedral of Chartres, associated with the Prophets and Kings of Israel who are considered to be the foundation of Christianity. Rudolf Steiner indicated that the Queen of Sheba was the reincarnated Eve, the Mother of All, the progenitor of humanity. She then appears as the Black Madonna in her incarnation as the Queen of Sheba, and then as the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Virgin Soul and Queen of Heaven.

This sequence of incarnations contains a key to the mystery of spiritual evolution, the significance of the Black Madonna, the Hermetic principles of alchemy, and the creation of the Philosopher's Stone.