

Isis

Mythic Goddess of Egypt

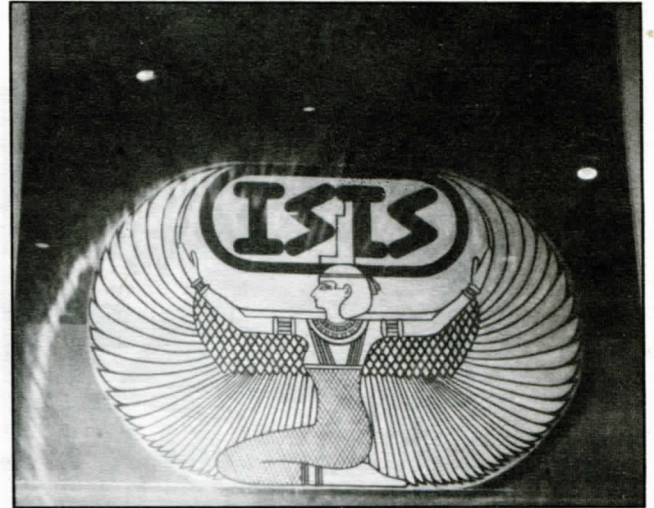
Who is Isis? A lot of people have been asking us this question. A standard answer from most of us is: She's a goddess! But, what kind of goddess is she? What are her powers? Her domain? Her personality? Isis is from Egypt but her tales are spun from different parts of the world. In this section, we feature her many faces, stories, images. Perhaps you know a legend about her, or have some photos. We'll be glad to feature them.

In Egypt, the royal family's lineage was matrilineal during most periods, and daughters, not sons, inherited rulers' titles at birth. In addition, there was a preference for property to pass through the female line, and as a result the Pharaoh usually gained his title on coronation day through marriage to his sister.... The extent of her power was great, for she ruled in Heaven, Earth, the Sea, and the Underworld. Known as Mother of Heaven and Queen of all Gods and Goddesses, she was one of the most widely worshipped deities of Egypt.... According to legend, Isis exerted great influence in the development of civilization. She taught women the arts of grinding corn and weaving cloth, was associated with magical charms and bestowed the knowledge of healing.

SOURCE: The Dinner Party, Double Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, publisher, Judy Chicago, editor, 1975.

Isis ... was "the Oldest of the Old," who existed from the beginning, "the goddess from whom all becoming arose." ... (Isis was) said to have given birth to the sun.... The usual emblem of the ... Goddess (Isis) was the sun disc lying between the horns of the Moon-cow.... The disc was sometimes a full circle, sometimes a flattened oval, ... or the oblate shape of the sun as it rises or sets.... The cult of Isis became enormously popular throughout the Roman empire. Roman writers called her the "eternal savior of the race of men." The image of her, suckling her child, Horus ... became the archetypal model for similar images of the Virgin Mary.

SOURCE: Barbara G. Walker, The Women's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects. San Francisco: Hayes and Row, Publishers, 1988



The goddess is here and now, and no longer sleeping or lost in patriarchy's winter trance. The process of re-claiming her, re-learning, remembering and re-visioning her skills, knowledge and rituals is discovering of women as well, a healing of humanity and the earth. The re-claiming, re-visioning, discovering and healing are what women spirituality is.

...and since in goddess worship every woman is a part of the creative mother, every woman participates in creation by her own acts of birthing and shaping. While the woman who chooses motherhood is seen in this light, the woman who creates in other ways is the creative aspect of goddess Be-ing just as strongly. A woman whose writing births a book brings life into the world, or who performs a ritual or a piece of music, weaves a cloth, creates a painting, makes a home for herself and others. The woman who actively takes control of the power of her own life participates in the Be-ing and creation of goddess that exists in all women. This Be-ing is symbolized and made manifest in many ways, is present and seen in all of life, but is first found within. The goddess was there in the beginning and has been there always; she will be there always to come. The great goddess, mother of the universe, is creator of the world, of all Be-ing, and is part of the Be-ing of all women's lives.

(This passage was excerpted from a book on women's spirituality, and although it does not discuss the goddess Isis in particular, it is a poignant expression of her true spirit.)

SOURCE: Diane Stein, The Women's Spirituality Book, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 1987.