

Mesopotamian Goddesses

Unveiling Your Feminine Power



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Chapter 2

Tiamat

Goddess of the Salt Sea

Once upon a time in ancient Mesopotamia, there lived a goddess of the sea named Tiamat, also known as Namma (feminine) and Nammu/Namou (masculine), the latter name meaning blessing. She mated with Apsu, the god of fresh sweet water, and their consummation created younger gods who spread over the land to serve various purposes, most notably the building of the cradle of civilization. Like all couples with children running loose, their home became rowdy and chaotic, more intolerable for the husband than the wife.

Apsu detested this change to the point of one day telling his wife, Tiamat, that conceiving the children was a dire mistake and, therefore, the children ought to be destroyed. Of course, she, the mother, was against such a horrid idea. She loved her children dearly, but she couldn't seem

to appease and deter her husband from destroying them. Determined to get rid of the children and finally regain peace, Apsu turned to his vizier Mammu for help.

Needless to say, the younger gods were not in favor of being destroyed, so they fought back. They formulated a plan to have Enki, the god of magic and patron of all arts and crafts, cast a spell upon Apsu and Mummu and then kill them both. Enki carried out this plan successfully to the shock and horror of Tiamat, who wanted neither her husband nor her children killed. Outraged, she decides to avenge her husband's murderers by creating an army of chaos to help her.

In the *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian epic of creation which mostly focuses on the battle between Marduk and Tiamat, Tiamat creates an army of monsters led by her new consort, Kingu. She also tries to establish Kingu as the leader of all the gods by handing him the Tablets of Destiny. In return, the younger gods appoint the storm-god Marduk to destroy Tiamat. Marduk agrees with the condition that, if he destroys Tiamat, he becomes their leader afterward. They accept this offer and he prepares for the battle.

Marduk makes a bow, fletches arrows, grabs a mace, throws lightning before him, fills his body with flame, makes a net to encircle Tiamat with, gathers the four winds so that no part of her could escape, and creates seven horrible new winds such as whirlwinds and tornados. He also creates his mightiest weapon, the rain-flood. Then he sets out for battle, mounting his storm-chariot drawn by four horses, or in some versions of the story riding a dragon. In his lips he holds a spell and in one hand he clasps an herb meant to work against Tiamat's poison.

He arrives to the battle ground and challenges Tiamat, who stands amongst her army, to a single combat. She accepts and advances toward him while shouting spells. He encircles her with the net, blows her up with the winds, and shoots an arrow into her belly, splitting her down the

middle. Marduk makes from her ribs the vault of heaven and earth, the Tigris and Euphrates from her weeping eyes, mist from her saliva, mountains from her breasts, and her tail becomes the Milky Way. He defeats the rebel gods and slays Kingu, whose red blood is mixed with red clay of the earth to make the body of mankind, created to act as the servant of the younger Igigis, the gods of heaven.

Marduk takes the Tablets of Destiny, which are fastened to Kingu's breast, making sure it lays on his own breast. There's an ancient image of Marduk where he's clearly seen wearing them. Tablets of Destiny, assumed to be a type of Babylonian Book of Fate since its description and contents aren't available, gave the owner a position of considerable power and importance. After his battle victory, Marduk is given fifty names and honored as king of the gods. The story of *Enuma Elish* ends here.

Tiamat's legend has two parts. In the first, she is a goddess who peacefully designs, through a sacred marriage between salt and fresh water, the cosmos by birthing continuous generations. She epitomizes the beauty of the feminine and is described as the glistening one. In the second part, she is considered the monstrous embodiment of prehistoric chaos, often described as a dragon or sea serpent, wreaking havoc on the younger generation of gods. Some even compare her to the Hebrew entity Leviathan.

In Babylonian religion, the Akitu Festival was dedicated to Marduk's victory over Tiamat to celebrate the taming of primitive chaos. But originally, Akitu marked two festivals celebrating the beginning of each of the two half years of the Sumerian calendar, the sowing of barley in autumn and the cutting of barley in spring.

The Tiamat myth is one of the earliest recorded versions of the *Chaoskampf*, a German word which means "struggle against chaos," depicting a battle between a cultural hero deity and

a chaos monster. Robert Graves considered Tiamat's death by Marduk evidence for his theory that there had been an ancient shift in power from a matriarchal society to a patriarchy.

Grave's ideas were later developed into the great goddess principle by Marija Gimbutas, Merlin Stone, and other writers. The theory suggests Tiamat and other ancient monster characters were presented as former supreme deities of peaceful, woman-centered religions that were turned into monsters when violent. Their defeat at the hands of a male hero corresponded to the manner in which male-dominated religions overthrew ancient society.

“Marduk, the new god of this rather new city, certainly had no right to appropriate to himself the glory of so great a deed ... But in Hammurabi’s time Babylon was the center of the kingdom ... Marduk, backed by Hammurabi’s armies, could now claim to be the most important god in the land,” wrote Professor Edward Chiera.

Jean Shinoda Bolen, M.D., believed that the Great Goddess became the subservient consort of the invaders’ gods, and attributes of power that originally belonged to a female deity were expropriated and given to a male deity. Rape appeared in myths for the first time, and myths arose in which the male heroes slew serpents, symbols of the Great Mother. A coiled serpent resting at the base of the human spine is the symbol of Kundalini, latent divine female energy. American comparative religions scholar Joseph Campbell, who went to India as a young man, describes the concept of Kundalini as follows:

The figure of a coiled female serpent – a serpent goddess not of “gross” but “subtle” substance—which is to be thought of as residing in a torpid, slumbering state in a subtle center, the first of the seven [chakras], near the base of the spine: the aim of the yoga then being to rouse this serpent, lift her head, and bring her up a subtle nerve or channel of the spine to the so-called "thousand-petaled lotus" (Sahasrara) at the crown of the head...She,

rising from the lowest to the highest lotus center will pass through and wake the five between, and with each waking, the psychology and personality of the practitioner will be altogether and fundamentally transformed.

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The people who killed her husband expected Tiamat to be removed from her emotions. Her rage at this heinous crime was considered so violent and inappropriate that Marduk agreed to destroy her in exchange for gaining lordship over the gods, for the first time in Babylonian history reaching a level of worship close to monotheism. In this way, Tiamat, the female principle who wanted to protect her family, who wanted to stand up for injustice and create a peaceful environment, was silenced. The wound for women was planted.

For thousands of years, there has been a notion that a woman must be silenced, oppressed, and kept in her place to stop her from speaking the truth, especially as it pertains to men. This notion didn't only exist in the Middle East. Almost 3000 years ago in Western culture, Homer's *Odyssey* had a passage that portrayed a similar attitude.

In the story, Penelope, the wife of Odysseus, comes down from her private quarters into the great hall of the palace. She discovers a poet performing to a crowd, singing about the difficulties the Greek heroes are having reaching home. She doesn't particularly like this song and in front of everyone asks him for another, cheerier one. Her young son Telemachus intervenes and says, "Mother, go back up into your quarters and take up your own work, the loom and the distaff... speech will be the business of men, all men, and of me most of all; for mine is the power in this household." So she goes back upstairs.

Author Mary Beard elaborates on this, writing:

In the early fourth century BC, Aristophanes devoted a whole comedy to the “hilarious” fantasy that women might take over running the state. Part of the joke was that women couldn't speak properly in public—or rather, they couldn't adapt their private speech (which in this case was largely fixated on sex) to the lofty idiom of male politics. In the Roman world, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*—that extraordinary mythological epic about people changing shape (and probably the most influential work of literature on Western art after the Bible)—repeatedly returns to the idea of the silencing of women in the process of their transformation. Poor Io is turned by the god Jupiter into a cow, so she cannot talk but only moo; while the chatty nymph Echo is punished so that her voice is never her own, merely an instrument for repeating the words of others. In Waterhouse's famous painting she gazes at her desired Narcissus but cannot initiate a conversation with him, while he—the original 'narcissist'—has fallen in love with his own image in the pool.

Although Jesus treated women with respect, not as inferiors, and spoke to them in public about various matters including spirituality, in the Bible women are discouraged from speaking, as noted in Timothy 2:12. “I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent.” This cultural view that existed during Jesus' time survived despite His efforts, through demonstration, to give women a voice.

Women leaders today still fear voicing their opinion, as it comes with a price. They might be ostracized, criticized, or rejected, their ideas shrugged off as another feminist complaint or drowned out by male voices or her own critical voice. If they express any anger, they're

considered unfeminine and oftentimes given offensive labels. Women tend to be overly emotional as a result of bottling up their words for too long and not knowing how to clearly articulate their needs, feelings, and desires to their loved ones, let alone to the world. When the words finally come out, it may be as an outburst, like bullets shot frantically into the air without an aim or understanding of the bullet.

Many still honor Tiamat and believe that she can be called upon for magical works that deal with harsh truths and confronting chaos before passing on to the next phase of their lives, or the afterworld. She helps us see our darkness, therefore protecting us from gullibility and deceit and allowing us to harmoniously live with others without having to completely subdue our instinctual desires so we can express our whole being.

Psychiatrist Carl Jung suggested we each have a dark side, called “the shadow,” which is comprised of all the traits that we want to deny we have. By repressing rather than acknowledging feelings such as anger, jealousy, selfishness, certain sexual desires or needs, we risk projecting the shadow self onto others, causing them harm and suffering. In acknowledging and accepting these traits, you take responsibility for yourself and they stop having control over you.

I studied shamanism for four years, under the apprenticeship of bestselling author and mystic Lynn V. Andrews. Through this ancient teaching, where we learned to choreograph energy, I began to view mental disorder differently, especially in women who, compared to men, are more prone to anxiety, depression, and hysteria—although this is now increasingly affecting both sexes in Western society. People often end up taking pills, deflecting, avoiding their feelings, and trying to control the outcome solely through positive thinking.

The truth is, in the end, prayer, positive thinking, and affirmations are not enough. If we don't deal with our inner condition head on, facing the good and the bad, the opportunity to reconcile our energies within the physical and spiritual world will slip away. Dealing with our inner condition head on will help us not only heal and grow but also bridge a way between Heaven and Earth. Before we go out into the world and speak our truth, whether verbally or nonverbally through creation, we must first speak it within ourselves. This is where silence is golden.

Until you are balanced and know how to remain in your center, where outward situations or harsh words aren't able to easily throw you off track, it's healthy to become invisible for a while, partly by participating in a good dose of silence. Silence allows us the opportunity for self-reflection, to tune in to nature, and it guides us on our own sacred path. Silence protects our thoughts, words, and ideas, and then, after nurturing and replenishing our spirits with a sacred dialogue—through various sacred tools including prayer, meditation, journaling, and communicating with those who've walked similar paths before us—we too will attain a certain state of wisdom that we can verbally share, if we choose to, with the world.

My Native American teacher passed down to his students this simple but profound exercise. The exercise helps you identify your shadow self and heal it, so that when you speak about yourself, there is less anger and more peace, less judgment and more self-worth, less unkindness and more self-love. Make a list of ten things you like about yourself and then make a list of ten things you dislike about yourself. Keep the list for seven days, reading it daily. On the seventh day, create a quiet atmosphere of ceremony—for instance, light candles and burn incense or take a walk in nature. Surrender yourself with an attitude of gratitude. Start a bonfire or fireplace or fill a bowl with water and Clorox. Give thanks for all the attributes that you like

and dislike about yourself as you watch the list burn in the fire or dissolve in the water, returning to the universe that gifted you with those attributes to begin with.