

Η ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ

(THE EPISTOLE)

a newsletter for Hellenic polytheists

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THE NEOKOROI* are a group of Hellenic polytheists who feel called to a path of service and devotion to the gods. We support mysticism, hard polytheism, and tend to favor reconstructionism as an approach to developing Hellenismos, while also recognizing the importance of personal experience and local cultus. We are especially dedicated to fostering communities, festivals, and public shrines, and providing guidance and information on religious matters – all to ensure the strength and longevity of the worship of the Greek gods.

HE EPISTOLE (a “message” or “letter”) is published twice a year. We offer articles, hymns, prayers, poetry, reviews, information, rituals, community notices, fiction, recipes, and anything else of interest to the Hellenic polytheist community. We welcome feedback, and submissions from guest writers. He Epistole is a free publication and can be found in many locations nationwide. If you would like the newsletter delivered to you directly, subscriptions cost \$20 per year – contact us for more information. And please contact us if you would like to distribute copies in your area – in return you receive the issues in electronic format for free. Back issues can be downloaded in PDF form from the website for free.

To contact the editor, email: **He_Epistole@yahoo.com** - or visit the Neokoroi website: **www.neokoroi.org**. (We have even more articles online, as well as information on the gods, photos, links and more!) Our next issue will be coming out in **December 2009**. The deadline for submissions is **November 25th**.

*The word *neokoros* is derived from the Greek words *naos* (temple) and *koreo* (to sweep) and originally meant “the one who sweeps the temple” or “the temple keeper.” It was a humble position, but an important one, for it was the neokoros’ responsibility to make sure that the temple was kept clean and free of any pollution, and also to tend to the daily service of the god in whose temple he or she served.

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CELEBRATING PERSEPHONE'S RETURN

By Grizz (aka Marta)

The day was misty and foggy. The mist lifted as four celebrants gathered at Cunningham Falls in Thurmont, Maryland to celebrate Persephone's return. The woods surrounding the lake were quiet and the fog clung to the trees. And as the celebrants unpacked their cars and began to set up the altar the fog completely lifted. It seemed as Father Zeus was pleased that Persephone's ascension from the Underworld was being celebrated.

The altar was set up, the fire in the grill (for our offerings) was started, and Suz, John, Robert and I gathered to go over the ritual before we began. We began with a short pomp to the altar and our ritual had begun! We each took turns taking part in the ritual by saying prayers, making offerings and libations, and lighting the candles for each God that we asked to be part of the ritual. We told the story of Persephone's Return in a round-robin style with some drama and some laughter too. We made an offering of pork chops on the grill. As we said final prayers and made our final libations, we found that Persephone's presence was with us as Her candle was the only one that would remain lit. We ended the ritual and our feasting began!

We sat around the altar (which also serves as a picnic table), feasted, and talked about the ritual and how we each worship the Theoi. The bread and pomegranate wine were delicious. Persephone's candle continued to shine as we ate and conversed and Robert discovered a spider beginning her web using one of the other candles and one of the glasses. It was decided that Athene was also pleased with us. After a while, we began to clean up and found that the pork chops were not quite ready to be removed from the grill. We left them as a final offering to the Theoi and to the land. We finished packing up, pleased with how the ritual had turned out and excited at the possibility of our meeting again. And as we stood by our cars, we found Hekate's ravens trying to get at the hot pork chops. We were awed by this and, with all the other signs, we found that the Theoi were to truly happy with our ritual and we felt blessed by this.

We are now looking forward to our next ritual in June. I, for one, find myself elated to be able to worship the Theoi with others of like mind. And, I find myself blessed to have been able to participate in celebrating Persephone's return with Suz, Robert, and John as they each bring something unique to the worship of the Theoi.

Photos Taken By Grizz (aka Marta) & Robert

From Top to Bottom:

Ritual Site

The Altar

Suz, Robert & John - Pre-Ritual

Suz, John & Marta During Ritual



HEKATE'S OFFERING

By Elizabeth A. Kaufman

I am the Darkness,
Waiting, silent in stygian stillness.
I am the Silent Stillness,
Waiting, full, ripe with knowing, bliss.
I am the Amorphous Knowing,
Waiting, bringing truth, healing.
From Beneath, within the rich, redolent Earth,
I wait.
From Beneath, within the crystal, renewing Waters,
I wait.
From Above, within the Winds that Whisper and take,
I wait.
The Darkness holds and heals.
The Water blesses and heals.
The Wind cleanses and heals
These are My offerings. Will you accept them?
Here is My torch, I hold it for you,
Opening the Path.
Light within Darkness.
Here from Beyond.
Wisdom from Knowledge.
As you have offered to Me time and again,
Blood and honeyed wine, herb and egg,
Garlic and almond, fig and date,
Now, I offer to you.
From the Three Realms I come
To the Crossroads where you have called to Me.
Will you join Me there?
Will you journey with Me
To My Caverns of darkness and light, soft and still,
Mother's embrace?
Will you accept My gifts: visions, dreams,
Let your Spirit fill and flow?
Will you come, O Priestess of Hekate,
Priestess of Mine?
Come, be with Me, I am waiting.



ARTEMIS

By Elizabeth A. Kaufman

Artemis of the Moon
Blessed Crescent, Bluest sky,
Maiden of the Ways,
Melissa, Phoebe, Aristo,
Daughter of many names, Reverend & renowned among archers,
Huntress who also aids women in Childbirth,
Blessed One, You reign over the forests,
All wild places are Your domain.
We honor those places as we honor You.

Hear the call of these, Your Daughters of the Moon,
Servants of Wild Places, Priestesses of the Olde Ways.
We are Sisters to all Women!
We are Your earthly attendants, Aristo.

You, who protect the animals,
We bow before You.
You, who protect the Wild Places,
We pay homage.
You, who protect all Women,
We offer devotion, honor and praise.

Artemis, we ask for Your blessing.
Make us strong and balanced,
Help us to reach those goals we strive for,
Heal that which is vulnerable within us.
With Your torch, bring the light of Your wisdom.

All honor to you, Moon Bright!
All honor to you, Strong One!
All honor to you, Great Protectress!
Artemis of the Ways.
Artemis who lights the Night.
Artemis, Beloved Goddess.

AMBROSIA SALAD

By Neil

Ambrosia was and still is the food and drink of the Olympians. It is said that it bestowed immortality to those to partook of it. It is up for debate whether Ambrosia as referred to in Greek literature is actually a food or a drink... either way, I think that the Gods would be pleased with my version of both! I have read in several cookbooks that the secret ingredient in Ambrosia (the food or drink) was a hallucinogenic mushroom as prized as the modern day truffle... now if we want to go there, some people may want to include cannabis-infused ingredients (read: butter) but I neither advocate nor condemn one individual's devotional rites.

So here is what you will need to get started on making **Ambrosia Salad**... a word of warning, this yields enough to feed a small army, or typical Greek family... LoL.

Ingredients:

- 4 ounces heavy cream
- 1 ounce sugar (I prefer raw sugar, but refined will do perfectly)
- 6 oranges, cut into sections with the skin removed (you can use any genes or variety of orange, I prefer blood oranges for their flavor and color!)
- 1 can (12 oz.) of pineapple, diced (or if you really are into the culinary arts about one-half of a fresh pineapple!)
- Approximately 1 pound of peeled & sliced bananas
- 8 oz. of green seedless grapes, sliced in half (I like mine peeled as well!)
- 4 oz. dried unsweetened coconut flakes
- Honey to flavor (used as a condiment upon serving)

Instructions:

First we are going to toast the coconut flakes, so you will need to spread the shredded coconut out on a baking pan or cookie sheet. You should probably line it with a sheet of parchment paper, but it isn't essential. Pre-Heat your oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Toast the coconut flakes for about 5 minutes or until lightly browned. Remove from oven and put aside. Next we are going to whip the cream until it starts to become, well, whipped cream, slowly folding in the sugar until it has stiff peaks. Fold in the oranges, grapes, bananas, and pineapples. Let the salad rest in the refrigerator for at least thirty minutes.

Scoop the salad into bowls and top each serving with the toasted coconut flakes and honey to taste.

Ambrosia Nector (or Ambrosia Smoothie)

Ingredients:

- 2 scoops of Raspberry Sorbet (warmed to a blender friendly consistency)
- 2 scoops of Strawberry Sorbet (warmed to a blender friendly consistency)
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2.5 cups of Orange Juice (the fresher the better)
- 1.5 cups pineapple juice
- 4 bananas
- 1.5 cups green seedless grapes peeled
- A good scoop of dried unsweetened coconut flakes
- Honey to flavor
- 1 cup ice
- Blend together, chill, and enjoy!



DEMETER IN WINTER

By Suzanne Thackston



I am a child of summer. I love long hot lazy days, floating in the pool under the blazing stars, being wrist-deep in rich fragrant soil to plant the garden, picking fruit, evening walks in clouds of fireflies, and dinners outside on the deck in the sweet long fall of summer twilight. When Apollon leaves for Hyporborea and my Goddess begins her long period of mourning, I've always felt bereft.

But I got a message last year while meditating on the change of the seasons. She said 'The winter is also mine.' One might think that such a simple change of perspective should be easy enough, but for me it has been both profound and challenging. Any book of meditations can give one the subtle joys of quiet season, the opportunities for introspection and deeper transformative work. These are not to be dismissed. However, as I went about my daily rounds of donning layer upon layer of polar fleece in order to be able to survive my horse chores, the benefits have always been hard to appreciate in the face of inescapable cold, beautiful agonizingly bitter nights that went on far too long, and painful joints that get a little worse each winter.

But last winter, for the first time, I saw not only the absence of my Goddess, but how on a deeper level She is always here. Not only with me, but right here, physically present, on my little farm. The stark beauty of the winter trees etched so delicately against the crystal sky speaks of her. The cloak of snow turning the orchard to diamonds in the sun is Hers. The iron-hard earth reminds one that the rich, warm depths, beloved of Ploutos and His Bride, lie beneath, accessible, but only with effort.

Her simple message did not tell me anything I didn't know. But in the way of most true epiphanies, it etched a truth in my heart. Maybe this is the way of all the Mysteries. Their mystery lies not in the occult nature of the information, but in their very openness. Everyone 'knows' this, but not until one is touched by the Theoi does it make sense.

HERMES

By Kriosia Lysia

One aspect of life Hermes presides over is commerce. In this function he is also known as a God of wealth, and a bestower of sudden windfalls, including that of gambling "luck." One of the suggested modern ways of worshiping Hermes is to gamble in his honor (see <http://www.neokoroi.org/hermes.htm>). The amount of money gambled is not important; I use lottery tickets that only cost a dollar. Any cash won in North America can be registered at www.WheresGeorge.com (or www.WheresWilly.com) so that after you spend it, others can find out how you got it and you can watch where it goes. This internet-based tracking of currency strikes me as particularly appropriate for Hermes.

I do recommend moderation with this practice, since I doubt Hermes will reward anyone for becoming foolish about it. In my case, I do this so rarely that whenever I do play the lottery in his honor it really is something special and different from my normal behavior. It's just one of the many ways I worship this complex God.



Hermes Photo By Kriosia

THE GODS AT YOUR FINGERTIPS: A DEVOTIONAL ACTIVITY FOR ARTSY-CRAFTY HELLENES

By Krysta S. Roy

Do you want an altar to honor your gods, but you're short on space? Do you need another outlet for your pent-up creativity? Ever heard of ATCs?

ATCs - short for Artist Trading Cards - are small cards showcasing an artist's favorite medium. Collage is the most popular medium, but some artists also use paint, colored pencils, markers or whatever's handy. While most ATCs are made to trade with other artists, many artists have started creating collections of ATCs for themselves with themes that are personally meaningful to their spirituality. There's only one rule: the finished size in 3.5x2.5 inches. You can cut these out of a ream of plain cardstock, or any type of sturdy, cardboard-type material.

I've created ATCs for each of the Olympian gods and goddesses, and some other popular Hellenic deities as well. You don't have to be a master artist to make ATCs; in fact, you may surprise yourself how well your creativity flows on these tiny canvases. For those new to arts & crafts or even those who have been at it for years, the small size of ATCs can be liberating. One, it allows you to create a little bit each day; ATCs are quick and easy, especially for those of us who seem to have less & less free time on our hands. Two, there's no pressure. If you don't like what you've done, you can just start over without worrying that you're going to "waste" expensive art supplies if you make a mistake.

If you're new to ATCs, collage is probably the quickest way to get started. Find yourself some packs of patterned or colorful paper. (For my Dionysus card shown here, I found a background paper with bunches of grapes and leaves.) You can also use patterns or images found around the house: magazines, junk mail and newspapers can all add to your ATC designs. Or if you're more digitally inspired, you can find patterned backgrounds online to use with your favorite imaging software, and just print out your cards when finished.

For images of the gods themselves, there are a number of copyright or royalty-free websites with large Greek & Roman mythology collections. One good website is:
http://etc.usf.edu/clipart/galleries/Religion%20&%20Mythology/greek_mythology.php

You can also buy Dover Clip-Art books, most of which come with a CD of the images as a variety of different file formats; look for the one called "Hope's Greek & Roman Designs."

Now after you've made cards for all your favorite deities, how do you display them? There are a number of different options, and

the only limit is your creativity. I have a set of ATCs that I carry around in a tin case, so that I always have a portable altar to the gods with me wherever I go. You could also keep them in a fabric pouch.

What I have done for my own personal altar is attach my god and goddess ATCs to an ATC Carousel, designed by 7 Gypsies. They make a punch to go with the carousel so that you can punch your cards and attach them. They also make pre-punched cards, and a set of them is included with the carousel. I chose to purchase the plastic slipcovers for my ATCs. The carousel itself retails for about \$32, and is available at many arts & crafts stores or online. Another alternative would be to go to your local office supply store and buy a Rolodex and their cards, though the size may be a bit different.

The appeal of a carousel (or Rolodex) is that you can have an altar space to all your gods without taking up a lot of room. You can flip to each god as you address them. And once they're all loaded on to the carousel, there's room for expansion. You can add more cards with the deity's hymns written or printed on them for easy reference, or add cards with festival and holiday information, ritual formats, your own poetry and prayers to the gods... the list is endless. And of course you can keep making more and more art to honor the gods, and have a stylish place to display it. Happy creating!



*My carousel, featuring ATCs
for Dionysus & Hekate*



CHOICE

By Kayleigh

- I.
Peacock, regal bird,
You fan your shining pattern
On a daisy-colored jar
A man filled with seeds.
- II.
Her bottle holds oil.
You pour this across a girl's
Shining skin where it curves down
To her soft buttocks.
- III.
Woo the fair one, make
A garland for her fine hair
With flowers you plucked and set
In a copper vase.



MIDNIGHT WORSHIP

By Allyson Szabo

The pearly moon shone down
Frosting each leaf and branch
In silver splendor.
All was still, silent, motionless,
Held in sacred stasis by
Streams of pure moonlight.
Encircled by deep night's dark caress,
The clearing seemed somehow
Infinitely large, encompassing the universe
And yet tiny, a singular microcosm, alone.
The world moved again, suddenly
Birthed painfully within the coyote's howl.
Yet, as with all nativities,
Life was accompanied by joy,
And the incessant brook's babble
Sounded like faint and holy laughter.



WINTER SYMPHONY

By Allyson Szabo

The Nymphae shed their autumn gear
As chilly winter storms draw near.
Instead they pull on scarves and muffs,
And coats of ice with cunning cuffs
Made with softest skin of deer.

Crystal'd water shimmers brightly
From tresses bathed in moonlight nightly.
Eyes as dark as midnight still
Gaze o'er river length and thrill
At their landscape painted whitely.

Long and deft, their fingers weave
Eider down the ducks did leave
Into quilts to warm their beds
Wherein they lay their sleepy heads
And watch the snow drift up each eve.

As the solstice time approaches,
Days shorten; night encroaches.
The Nymphae's beauty is frost-bound,
Frozen there in nature's ground
Until springtime their nature broaches.



HELIOGENNA, A WINTER SOLSTICE CELEBRATION OF THE REBORN SUN

By Cara Schulz

Hail Helios Terpsimbrotos!

The Heliogenna was created to commemorate the end of one solar year and the start of another one, the re-birth of Helios. Up until the solstice, the days become shorter and shorter and the nights grow longer. The northern parts of the world lay still and cold. Many of His creations, the animals of the Earth, spend the entire winter sleeping awaiting his rebirth. The short, gray days of winter cause some people to suffer Seasonal Depression. As His energy flags, so does ours. We are more withdrawn, reflective over the past year, remembering friends and family who have passed on.

Then Solstice morning arrives. He who Gladdens Mortals is reborn! Each day will be longer than the one before it. Hope and renewal have won over sorrow and death. We are ready to become more active, to make plans, and emerge from our burrow – well, perhaps in a few months. At least we are ready to think about being ready.

The Heliogenna is a modern festival created by Hector Lugo, celebrated over three or nine days. The version below is one that I have modified from his original outline. The Heliogenna is celebrated in three sections over 2 days. As the sections to the festival are Sunset, Night, and Sunrise, I have found it best to celebrate each section at the time named. So Sunset is celebrated until the sun is set, Night is celebrated that night, and Sunrise is celebrated at dawn the next morning.

DAY 1, Day before the Solstice

Sunset

Day of Gratitude

Gods honored: Helios, Selene, Eos

Celebrate from morning until the sun starts to set

A time to Honor the Celestial Gods, look back over the previous year, and express gratitude for blessings bestowed.

I fill the small urn with beach sand and place it on my altar for Helios. In the afternoon, light the candles, burn an offering of incense, say a prayer or two and make other offerings/pour a libation in honor of Helios, Selene, Eos. Thank the Gods for their help and blessings.

Have a nice lunch with my family or friends, setting aside some of the food for offerings to burn. After that you could make the decorations to put on a tree (if you put up a tree). Dried orange slices make great solar decorations. Wait to decorate and light the tree the next morning, Solstice morning.

Offering and Libations:

Libation to Hestia

Lady of the Hearth,

Keeper of the sacred flames of Olympus

Enter this home and be welcome

Blessed Children of light

We welcome you this day.

Bright Helios traveling fair

Graceful Selene ever moving after you

Eos, opening the gates, heralding your arrival.

Libations To Helios, Selene, and Eos

Helios - thank you for your life giving power this year.

Thank you for your vigilance and your light.

Selene - you are the light in the darkness and the reminder that the night is as full of possibility as the day, if only we look closer.

Eos - you are the Beauty that is in the newness of all things.

Libation to Hestia

Lady of the hearth,

Keeper of the sacred flame of Olympus

Grant all who gather around this hearth your blessings.

Offering Prayer

Helios, Please accept my offerings of...

thank you for your blessings of... this year.

AFTER SUNSET, Evening before the Solstice

The Night

Evening of Remembrance, endings, and transition

Gods honored: Helios, Hekate, Hades, Persephone, Hermes

Celebrate from sunset until dawn

Helios descends to the House of Persephone to be reborn. The tone is somber. While watching the Sun set, pour libations to Persephone, Hades, Hermes, and Hekate. Burn offerings of incense at the altar and burn all of last year's Heliogenna decorations in the hearth: all the of the dried orange slice tree ornaments, the clove studded orange pomander, the tree topper. After these are burned, the fire is allowed to burn out.

Offerings and Libations:

Persephone: *Queen of the Dead, fruit of earth and sky*

Bride of Mighty Hades, dwelling in the lands below.

Keeper of secrets, wise and compassionate, giver of hope in hopelessness.

Hades: *King of the dead, son of Kronos the vanquished,
Husband of Persephone, dwelling in the underground palace.
Keeper of secrets, dark and unseen, giver of riches from below.*

Hermes and Hekate: *You who light my way
and guide my footsteps at every crossroads.
You who will lead me
when I make the final journey*

Offering Prayer:
*Lord of Many Names and His Dread Queen, please accept these offering
of ... Receive Helios with love and send him back as the Young God with
the year reborn.*

The hearth ashes are swept up. Candles are blown out and the stubs are thrown away. The evening is silent after prayers. No more food is consumed.

DAY 2, Solstice Morning

Sunrise

Morning of Victory and Hope – Renewal - Potential

Gods honored: Helios and the Protogonoi

Celebrate starting at Dawn

Wake up early and watch the Sun rise. As it rises, light candles and hold them while singing hymns of joy, modern or ancient, to Helios. Pour libations. Ring bells. This is a truly happy, joyous occasion!

If you wish, decorate your tree with the new dried orange slice decorations, put a Sun-In-Glory tree topper on and turn the lights on. Light a warm, toasty fire in your hearth. Wish one another well while making toasts and pour libations onto the fire. Make a huge breakfast feast, setting aside a portion for offering to burn that morning. Open gifts to celebrate the New Solar year. In the afternoon, stud an orange with cloves to make a Pomander and hang it up for the year, asking for Helios' blessing that you and your family may flourish in the upcoming year.

NOTE: I would like to express my gratitude to Hector for creating the festival's outline, prayers, etc. For a look at how Hector structures the Heliogenna, go to:

<http://iskios.com/page109/page114/page114.html>



FROM NAGYMAMA'S KITCHEN – HUNGARIAN GOULASH

By Allyson

During the winter, I like to keep a pot of soup or stew sitting on the back of the stove most of the time. It's a great way to warm up cold fingers coming in from outside, can be a quick lunch or dinner if you've forgotten to thaw something out, and is a fantastic use for left-overs. With the economy tanking out as it has been, it's impossible to stress too much that we must be vigilant in not wasting our personal resources. Soups, especially, can be very flexible in using up table scraps, because what is chicken soup tonight can easily transform to a mulligatawny by tomorrow night, depending on what didn't get eaten at dinner time. Another wonderful thing that you can do with older recipes, like the one below, is have a meal for and with your ancestors.

Around late October or early November, I start to think about ancestor worship. It is the time that I love to reconnect with my loved ones that have passed on. I often clean the ancestor altar, find new pictures, and bring them gifts throughout the winter months. In the cold darkness of late December, I always find my thoughts turning to my loved ones. At Solstice, especially, I like to take time to remember my Hungarian grandmother, my Nagymama (pronounced 'nudge-mama').

Straight from Nagymama's kitchen, this recipe has the flavor and scent of Hungary woven within it. The meat is tender, the broth rich and flavorful, and on a cold, winter day, nothing beats it! Remember that the delicate flavor of good, traditional goulash comes from a fine quality Hungarian paprika - look for the Szekezed label, which comes in a metal cannister in the spice sections of many grocery stores. There are usually two types available: hot and sweet. Both have a sweet flavor to them, but the hot one is QUITE hot. For this recipe you want the sweet one, although if you like your goulash to have a bit of bite, you can mix in some of the hot paprika, too!

Ingredients for goulash:

- 1 cup paprika
- 4 large onions, rough diced
- 2 lbs (or more) pork, cubed into 2 inch pieces (does not have to be exact)
- 1 lb (approximately) of meaty pork bones, either from a roast or pork chops
- 3 to 5 tablespoons of minced garlic, depending on your taste
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- water to 2/3 fill pot
- 1 bag of baby carrots, whole,
OR 1 bag of regular carrots, cleaned and coined

- 4 or 5 ribs of celery, diced
- one packet onion soup mix (low sodium is fine)
- approximately 5 lbs russet potatoes, diced (skinned or not, does not matter)
- 2 cups frozen peas
- sour cream, for topping (optional)

Ingredients for noodles:

- 1 to 2 cups all purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 to 2 eggs
- water or milk, if necessary, to form stiff dough

Directions:

In one end of a large roasting pan, make a pile of paprika. Take the pieces of pork and roll them in the paprika, as if it were flour. Coat each piece well, and push to the opposite side of the pan. When the meat is all coated, pour in your garlic and onions, and mix well with the remaining paprika. Drizzle lightly with olive oil, and put in a 350 degree oven until the meat is browned on all sides (it need not be cooked through - you want the meat in long enough to hear it "singing" or "hissing" in the pan). Stir the mixture a couple of times, to make sure the meat is browned on all sides.

Meanwhile, take pork bones (or, if you're in a rush, you can use beef broth, but the results will not be as tasty) and put them into a large stock pot. Fill the pot 2/3 of the way with hot tap water, and add the onion soup mix, and spices to taste. Bring to a brisk boil, then lower the heat to a simmer.

When the meat in the oven is ready (about 30 minutes, at 350 degrees), add the meat, onions, and garlic mixture to the soup broth. You may want to remove your bones, at this point, although some people leave them in until the very end. Add the carrots, potatoes, and celery, and simmer for at least an hour. Longer simmering will not hurt this soup, although it should not boil again. You can move on to the next step any time after the potatoes begin to crumble (they will lose their sharp edges and become rounded).

Add the peas, and then cut or grate your dough into the soup, to make the little noodles. Bring the soup to a swift boil for 2 minutes, and then take off the heat. This soup should be served in large bowls, with a big dollop of sour cream in it (low or no fat works very well, for those worrying about diet). Crusty french bread or rolls also go well with this, especially if they're warm. Hungarians often serve it with sour cabbage on the side, or pickles.

To make the noodles, use a fork to mix together all purpose flour, an egg, and a tablespoon of oil. Mix, until a stiff dough is formed. You can add a bit of milk or another egg, if you feel it's necessary. If you have a spetzel maker, you can use that to make the noodles, or you can use any wide-holed grater, or even pinch it into bits a little larger than two peas together. Or, some people cut them into tiny squares. These are small, and cook extremely quickly, and last well in the soup. If you make extra soup for freezing, don't add noodles until you re-heat, as they tend to get mushy.

When I make this as a meal for my ancestors, I will take a bowl outdoors, and leave it at the base of a tree or bush. I like to leave a bit of bread, too. I will stop, speak to my Nagymama for a few minutes, and then go back into the house to enjoy my own meal. Sometimes, I will even have a picture of her with me in the kitchen. By ritualizing the process of creating this meal, I take a whole day and make it sacred and special, and I bring the love of my ancestors into my home.



HESTIA: THE ETERNAL FLAME

By Amanda Sioux Blake

From her forthcoming book *Journey to the Gods: A Modern Spiritual Odyssey*

“Daughter of Kronos, venerable dame,
who dwellest amidst great fire’s eternal flame;
in sacred rites these ministers are thine,
mystics much blessed, holy and divine.
In thee the Gods have fixed their dwelling place,
strong, stable basis of the mortal race.
Eternal, much formed, ever florid queen,
laughing and blessed, and of lovely mien;
accept these rites, accord each just desire,
and gentle health and needful good inspire.”

– *Orphic Hymn 84 to Hestia*



We begin with Hestia because She is the center around which Olympos revolves. Hestia takes part in few myths, yet it would be arguable that no deity received more worship than Her. The lack of stories about Her is due to her Her nature – Hestia values not power, nor change and adventure, but peace and tranquility. She is almost always depicted veiled. Whether shown sitting or standing, She has remarkable posture. Her face is serene and calm, gentle and dignified.

Some may consider this Goddess of the home a sexist patriarchal hold-over, an ancient Greek predecessor to the Victorian “angel in the house.” Having only freed ourselves roughly forty years ago, women especially may find Hestia distressing, perhaps preferring more independent Goddesses such as Athena or Artemis. I myself once had an uneasy truce, of sorts, with Hestia. I was aware of Her importance in Greece, but I still found myself uninterested in Her in all but the most superficial ways.

Then, in January of 2007, I lost my job, and found that I was no longer the breadwinner. After a few weeks of enjoying my freedom to sleep in and do whatever I pleased, I began to panic at my loss of independence. No longer were my boyfriend and I equal partners in paying the bills. Despite my (admittedly rather paltry) unemployment checks, I saw myself as completely dependent on

him. There were few jobs immediately available in the struggling economy of my little town, and I had no wish to trudge through the deep-shifting snows of January in Michigan to find them. It didn't help that I lacked a car, and so had to walk if my boyfriend or my father were not around to lend me transportation. In my desperation, I reached out to Hestia to try to help me deal with my newfound position as "housewife" (house-girlfriend?).

What I found is that Hestia is not simply a patriarch's deified image of the perfect wife. Rather, She is the glue that holds communities together. The majority of Hestia's worship took place in the home, as is appropriate for a Goddess who protects home and family. No Greek went a day without at least one moment of contact with this Goddess. She was the first divinity that a Greek baby was introduced to, as the newborn baby was carried around the hearth before he or she was accepted by the family. The first bite of every meal was sacrificed to Hestia by throwing it onto the fireplace, where it was consumed by the flame. Hestia is the Goddess that keeps families, and by extension, societies together.

The public hearth, or *prytaneum*, was the center of every Greek city the same way it was the center of every home. The house was built around the hearth. The fire was always burning, always tended to. When a girl married, her mother brought fire from the her house to light the hearth of the home her daughter would share with her husband. When a city decided to establish a colony, the colonists would bring fire from the hearth of their mother city, to ensure a continuing connection between the two communities. The importance of Hestia's fire cannot be underestimated.

The fire would be extinguished in times of mourning, such as a death in the family or the end of a household. But for it to go out on its own was never good, and was usually considered a bad omen. Ginnette Paris, in her book *Pagan Meditations: the Worlds of Aphrodite, Artemis, and Hestia*, states that "If Hestia's fire went out in the home or in a city of ancient Greece, the significance was tragic, and there were complex rituals for relighting it. Thus, when the Persians laid siege to Athens and extinguished the sacred fire, the Athenians, after defeating them, sent for fire at the great temple of Hestia at Delphi to re-ignite the fire of their own city."

Hestia and the meaning of Family

An interesting aspect of Hestia is the fact that She is one of the Virgins – the three Olympian Goddesses who never married. How can this be? The Goddess of hearth and home, the deity who values family above all else, never married?! The mythic reasoning for this is that both Her brother Poseidon and Her nephew Apollon sought Her hand in marriage. The two of Them, who had formerly gotten along just fine, began to fight and quarrel. This so upset the peace-loving Hestia that She ran away, and swore to never marry. As Paris states "Her virginity is not so much a refusal of man as a refusal of the upheavals or marriage and conjugal life." Although few marriages are as tumultuous as that of Her brother and sister Zeus and Hera's was in myth, all relationships come with some amount of upheaval and emotional turmoil. Marriage would require moving to Her new husband's home, and in Poseidon's case, that would be under the sea, far from Her life and family on Olympus. Sharing quarters with someone requires a degree of compromise and sacrifice.

So Hestia does not choose to have children and start a family of Her own, but instead finds fulfillment in devoting Herself to the family She already has. It is only very recently that the nuclear family has come to dominate our Western world-view. Until the Industrial Revolution and the World Wars, it was not uncommon for three, sometimes four generations to dine at the same table. Mothers and fathers were not the only ones responsible for the raising of children, but aunts, uncles, and grandparents took part as well. Children were reared not only with siblings, but cousins as well, so they never lacked for a playmate. In that busy and stimulating environment, one need not detach from the family that brought you into the world, unless the desire is there already. There was no ugly image of the bitter and lonely "old maid". When weighing the pros and cons of staying with the comfort and familiarity of this kind of family versus the risk and stress of breaking off to found your own dynasty, we begin to understand Hestia.

Honoring Hestia

The first portion of every meal and every public sacrifice was offered to Hestia. She often received a mention at the beginning of prayers and hymns. One of the Delphic Maxims is, after all, "Begin with Hestia," meaning "Start at the beginning."

Still, in my experience, Hestia is not a Goddess who demands grand rituals. I believe that the best way to describe the worship of Hestia is "actions speak louder than words." True worship of Hestia requires honoring Her in more than words, and keeping your home clean, bright and inviting. It is not necessary that your house be spotless – in fact, too sterile an environment is off-putting and decidedly anti-family.

Promoting an atmosphere of peace and tolerance is another act of worship for the peace-loving Hestia. Being a peacemaker can be quite a tall order at times. We are but human beings, and we cannot always stay above the fray. However, a refusal to take sides, as Hestia in myth refused to take sides in the many Olympian conflicts, can be the best way to keep peace in the home and keep

problem from being exacerbated, especially in the case of family squabbles.

In coming to know Hestia, I came to understand a problem in society that many others have named, but I had not given much thought to. In too many families across the nation, the fire is dead. Divorce, that specter blamed for destroying a full half of all marriages, is not at fault. Divorce is merely a result, not a cause. To paraphrase Paris, a person cannot remain in a home where the fire no longer burns. The true tragedy is when a formal divorce may never come about, but the family is internally dead just the same. As a child of one of these shams of a marriage myself, I personally know what happens when Hestia is ignored.

There are many factors that contribute to this phenomenon I'd like to take some time to discuss.

Many families, especially those with teenagers, no longer eat together. The ubiquitous fast-food joints dotting the countryside turn meals into a lonely, assembly-line affair. Get in, get your food, get out. The act of breaking bread with others forms community. Why do you go out to eat on a first date? Because sharing food and conversation is the primary way of building relationships. Food is survival. Food is life. To share a meal, is to share life.

Even architecture affects the people who live within. Standard suburban houses seem built more for show than for family. Large living rooms, three car garages and impeccably manicured lawns which are in reality quite useless, are all status symbols. The actual family quarters, the bedrooms, the kitchen, tend to be smaller and more cramped. Too many so-called "family homes" are not built for bringing families together but to show off. The more "outward-focused" the house, the more at risk the family is of being disconnected from each other. Ginette Paris states the issue like this:

The living-room, which serves more for social than for family life, is in some houses more spacious and luxurious than the rooms used by the whole family. As for the kitchen, still the domain of women and children, only recently have the architects, decorators, and the women themselves given it as much attention as the more "noble" rooms in the house. There are also houses that are little more than crash-pads, and those who evolve in them feel indeed that their home is without life. Inevitably, in such homes the woman is considered, and considers herself, a servant rather than a Hestia.

Meanwhile, the household television has become the focal point of our living rooms, holding the place of honor once reserved for the family hearth. "Think of any image from history that depicts a happy home, and invariably it shows a family grouped around a hearth." comments A. Bronwyn Llewellyn, the author of "Goddess At Home." She goes on to say that this image endures, even in an era where few houses have fireplaces and the television, or perhaps the kitchen refrigerator, is indeed where the family gathers.

In coming to honor Hestia, I became aware of how Western culture has truly devalued women and the family. Despite politicians never-ending talk of family values, we as a culture do not really believe that family and children are important. If we did, we would make every effort to ensure that the millions of families living below the poverty line had adequate health care (if only for the children of these families), that all parents had the option of paid paternity/maternity leave if they so desired, tax incentives for corporations that provide childcare for their employees, and better education for everyone, not just the rich.

Hestia speaks with a "we," not an "I." She is the family, the city, the collective. Hestia is the Goddess of community, and She is pleading with us to return to a more communal way of living. We must acknowledge Hestia to find peace in our homes again. Fire is an apt symbol of this sense of community that many today have lost, but many are rekindling. Llewellyn correctly states that "Like people, pets, plants or relationships, you must tend to [fire] or it dies."

Author Bio:

Amanda Sioux Blake, 21, lives with her boyfriend, 2 guinea pigs, chinchilla family, dog, snake, and 1 human roommate, in South Bend, Indiana. She has been 'officially' Hellenic Pagan for 9 years, since age 12, but remembers being called by Athena at age 7. She is a self-labeled history geek. She is a published writer, artist, part-time student and does whatever pays the bills in between her studies, writing, and volunteering. She has also taught two classes at Spiritual Frontiers Fellowship, "Greek Mythology" and "Native American Spirit Guides." She enjoys writing, reading, painting, teaching, walking in the woods, and caring for the many animals that find their way to her home.

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BOOK REVIEW: PERCY JACKSON & THE OLYMPIANS SERIES

By Jessi Robinson

"The gods of Olympus are alive and well in the 21st Century!"

Percy Jackson & the Olympians is a series of adventure books based on Greek mythology written by Rick Riordan. 12-year-old Percy Jackson is not only the most accident-prone boy to ever live, he also has ADHD and dyslexia, all of which combine into a force that has gotten him kicked out of school over and over again. Suddenly, his math teacher is trying to kill him, he's surrounded by monsters and his best friend is not only a satyr, but also that he, poor bumbling Percy, is the son of a God or Goddess!

Throughout his adventures, Percy meets other Half-Bloods (the modern terminology for Demigods), Gods, Goddesses and any number of mythical monsters; friend and foe. He spends his summers (and much of his school years) at Camp Half-Blood, where Chiron is still teaching heroes and heroines and The Oracle is still providing sage advice--despite how confusing it may be at first. He also finds out that his father is Poseidon, one of the Big Three (Zeus, Poseidon and Hades), who all made a pact to not sire anymore children when the Oracle prophesied that the next child sired by one of them would decide the fate of the Gods when he or she turned 16.

Riordan has pieced together a wonderful series of books that actually have a good basis in the Greek mythos. Of course he has taken some liberties (Athena has a daughter), but I find the portrayals and descriptions of the Gods very acceptable and amenable to what They would have become in the 21st century. His research is firm, and his sites contain links to some sites that every Hellenic Polytheist has bookmarked. I've only read the first three out of five books (the last is coming out in mid-2009), but I'm hooked. One friend explained them to me as "Harry Potter for Hellenics" and I can't agree with him more, although the Percy books are shorter (and better, but that is my own opinion). They are written for the young adult group, but are a quick, enjoyable read for adults interested in the Sci-fi/Fantasy genres, mythology and/or Hellenic Religion.

If you are interested in finding out more about the books, there are a couple of websites I suggest:

<http://www.rickriordan.com/index.php/books-for-children/> (Rick Riordan's site)

<http://www.percyjacksonbooks.com/> (official book site)

The Books:

The Lightning Thief, The Sea of Monsters, The Titan's Curse, The Battle of the Labyrinth, The Last Olympian (May 5, 2009)



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PANATHENEAN RITUAL

Co-written By Heather Eschbach and Amanda Sioux Blake for the UU South Bend women's ritual.

This ritual is meant to be presented by two priests/priestesses, but it can probably be easily done by one alone. You will need a statue of Athena dressed in a robe, a new robe to replace the old, kernips, barley, a plate of olives, scissors, and a glue gun. Before the ritual, the worshipers gather to decorate Athena's new robe together. Have each participant bring a small token, such as a feather, or a coin, or a pendant. Hot-glue the symbols and trinkets onto the new robe with the glue gun. You can also use this time to make the stephinoi, ritual garlands to wear in your hair.

Meditation

Priest/ess #1 reads the myth of Athena's birth, preferably in modern language.

Procession

Proceed to Leeper Park Island (the ritual area) in silence. Chose a site with access to water if you can. One Priest/ess carries the Goddess's statue, the other Priest/ess carries the new robe. The rest of the worshipers carry the kernips, olives, and barley, and scissors. Meditate on the story of Athena's Birth as you proceed. Contemplate on how to stand your ground and not be moved without using aggression.

Cleansing

Priest/ess #2 talks while Priest/ess #1 takes the kernips bowl to each worshiper to let them wash their hands.

We have chosen Leeper Park Island (or whatever the name of ritual area you choose is) as the symbolic site for this ritual. Traditionally, Athena would be bathed in the sea below Her city. As you come up to the waters, please cleanse yourself to rid yourself of aggression. Then form a circle around the statue of the Goddess.

Calling of the Quarters

Can be done by the Priest/esses or by the worshipers, depending on how many are attending.

East: Goddess and Queen Hera, wife and sister of Zeus, grant us the power of Air, bless us with clear skies and nourish us with rain.

South: Goddess Hestia, gentle Goddess of the hearth fire, eldest sister of Zeus, grant us the power of Fire, just as you tended the fires on Olympus.

West: Goddess Persephone, Queen of the Underworld, grant us the power of Water, moistening mortal springs with tears.

North: Great Earth Mother Gaia, born from Chaos, mother of all Gods, grant us the power of Earth, bless us with silence to listen to our hearts and minds to balance Hestia's fire.

Offerings and Epithets

Priest/ess #1:

The olive is the sacred plant of Athena, Her gift to Athens. Her gift has many uses. The olive tree provides shade, the wood is used in building, the oil in cooking and ,medicine, and olives are, of course, a very nutritious food. As the bowl is passed around, take one as a sacrament, and meditate on Her names and the various forms as you partake in Her gift.

Athena, Virgin Goddess, Your worshipers gather today to pay tribute to Your glory and greatness. We call upon You by the names You have been named millennia ago, by the titles given to You in Your sacred city, in the land of Your birth, on the shores of the Mediterranean.

Said by Priestess

Glaukopis
Nikê
Parthenos
Areia
Eryma
Pronoia
Paiônia
Sthenias
Poliatris

Said by Worshipers

*Owl-Eyed
Victory
Virgin
Of War
Defender
Foresight
Healer
Of Strength
Keeper of the City*

Said by Priestess

Anemotis
Agoraia
Erganê
Xenia
Alea
Polias
Amboulia
Oxyderkês

Said by Worshipers

*Subduer of the Winds
Of the Marketplace
Worker
Hospitable
Escape to Refuge
Of the City
Counselor
Sharp-Sighted*

Barley Offering

As the Hymn is read, the bowl of barley is passed around, and the worshipers all take a handful and throw it towards the statue of the Goddess as an offering.

One of the worshipers reads the Homeric Hymn #28

To Athena

*I begin to sing of Pallas Athena, the glorious Goddess, bright-eyed,
inventive, unbending of heart,
pure virgin, saviour of cities,
courageous, Tritogeneia. Wise Zeus himself bare her
from his awful head, arrayed in warlike arms
of flashing gold, and awe seized all the gods as they gazed.
But Athena sprang quickly from the immortal head
and stood before Zeus who holds the aegis,
shaking a sharp spear: great Olympus began to reel horribly
at the might of the bright-eyed Goddess,
and earth round about cried fearfully,
and the sea was moved and tossed with dark waves,
while foam burst forth suddenly:
the bright Son of Hyperion stopped his swift-footed horses a long while,
until the maiden Pallas Athena had stripped the heavenly armour from her immortal shoulders.
And wise Zeus was glad.
And so hail to you, daughter of Zeus who holds the aegis!
Now I will remember you and another song as well.*



Re-Robing Athena

Priest/ess # 2 talks while Priest/ess #1 removes the old robe of Athena, sprinkles the khernips on the statue, and places the new one on her.

As the old robe is removed from the Goddess, pray for the wisdom to discard old ways and old attitudes in your own life.

As the Goddess is bathed, pray for purification and inner strength.

As the Goddess is re-robed, invoked the strength to combat oppression in your life, to defend yourself against those who would injure you. Imagine yourself being girded again to do the

Goddess's battle against those who would take what is rightfully yours – emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually, as well as physically.

One of the worshipers reads Orphic Hymn to Athena

*Only-begotten, noble race of Jove,
Blessed and fierce, who joyest in caves to rove:
O, warlike Pallas, whose illustrious kind,
Ineffable and effable we find:
Magnanimous and famed, the rocky height,
And groves, and shady mountains thee delight:
In arms rejoicing, who with Furies dire
And wild, the souls of mortals dost inspire.
Gymnastic virgin of terrific mind,
Dire Gorgon's bane, unmarried, blessed, kind:
Mother of arts, impetuous; understood,
Rage to the wicked, wisdom to the good:
Female and male, the arts of war are thine,
Fanatic, much-formed dragoness, divine:
Over the Phlegrean giants, roused to ire,
Thy coursers driving, with destruction dire.*



*Sprung from the head of Jove, of splendid mien,
Purger of evils, all-victorious queen.
Hear me, O Goddess, when to thee I pray,
With supplicating voice both night and day,
And in my latest hour, give peace and health,
Propitious times, and necessary wealth,
And, ever present, be thy votaries aid,
O, much implored, art's parent, blue-eyed maid.*

Translation by Thomas Taylor

Cutting of the Robe

Priest/ess # 1 talks while Priest/ess #2 cuts the old robe with a pair of scissors and passes the pieces to the worshipers.

Take with you a piece of Athena's robe. Hold within yourself the image of the goddess. Our skills have decorated her robe, just as your skills provide a basis for defense against any who would take from you. Catalogue the defensive skills you possess. Pledge to use Athena's wisdom to distinguish which of your actions are undertaken in defense, and which are overreactive and aggressive. May these pieces of Athena's old chiton serve to remind you of Athena, offering strength throughout the year.

Closing the Quarters

Again, can be done by the Priest/esses or by the worshipers, depending on how many are attending.

North: Gaia, Great Mother, thank you for the silence we hear when our mind is clear.

West: Goddess Persephone, thank you for the ability for us to understand our own pain.

South: Goddess Hestia, we have felt your protection and power like the warmth of home fires.

East: Queen Hera, thank you for your consecration, help us to see the sacred in all.

All: Hail and farewell!

THE REAL ZEUS & HERA

Excerpted from the author's forthcoming book

Journey to the Gods: A Modern Spiritual Odyssey By Amanda Sioux Blake

The moral characters of both Zeus and Hera, the King and Queen of the Gods, have in recent centuries been greatly maligned. It is true that Zeus was never faithful, and Hera did have a terrible temper. But these Gods are much more than the caricatures of philandering husband and vengeful wife.

Zeus: King of the Gods

Zeus, grandson of Earth Herself, is the King of the Olympian Gods. As such, Zeus is the God of the state, patron of Kings and law-makers, and the one who bestows the wisdom and strength to rule. He is a God of justice, and He punished anyone who broke the law. But He is not the one who decides what justice is. That job fell to Themis. Zeus is nearly all-powerful, but there are some laws that all Gods must obey. Zeus is under the influence of Themis, as well as the Fates.

Zeus is not a God who is popular with Neo-Pagans. As a Sky-Father God, he probably reminds many people of Yahweh, the Christian Father-God that many Pagans are running from, including myself in my earlier years. Zeus has been called authoritarian. The fact is, someone has to take responsibility. As much as we love them, the world cannot be made up of trickster Gods. There has to be order. There have to be boundaries, there have to be rules, or there is no meaning in a trickster God crossing the boundaries, no rules to break in the first place.

Even the ancient Greeks didn't quite know what to think about him. Homer saw Him as a principle of abstract justice. Yes, He could be temporarily distracted. True, He was partial to a few humans, his children especially, but what God didn't have a favorite



among mortals? But ultimately, He cannot be deterred from acting out justice. Aischylos, the playwright who wrote *Prometheus Bound*, thought He was a evil, selfish, drunken tyrant. Euripides saw Him as destiny, “He who brings the unthought to be.” Poets wrecked hell with some of the stories. Plato vehemently declared the poets to be liars. As I said before, the myths are not literal truth.

Socrates and his disciples believed that he represented unity, and his followers discarded many of the myths surrounding Zeus as blasphemous. Perhaps unsurprisingly, most of those myths were the tales of His sexual exploits. But they also cut out His jolly and playful sense of humor, and tried to make Him a more philosophical and severe God. This is one of the reasons that the Athenians didn't like Socrates, and he was even accused of atheism.

Zeus was sometimes called simply The Good God. He was the protector of travelers and strangers especially, and was the God who upheld Xenia, the law of hospitality. Anyone who violated the sacred bond of host and guest had Him to deal with. Murders were another crime He especially hated, and He sent the Furies to pursue those who committed them. Zeus was also the God who made sure that you kept your oaths. Both He and Haides were invoked in oaths, and both saw that anyone who willfully violated an oath was punished.

As ruler of the sky, Zeus is the God of weather, called the “cloud-gatherer.” His legendary weapon was the lightning bolt. In ancient times, temples to Zeus were built where lightning had hit the ground. They were also built on mountain-tops.

Some might be surprised to learn that Zeus is also a household God, as well as God of the State. He was considered the God who protected the pantry, where He was believed to guard the family's food in the shape of a serpent. Zeus is associated with the family as well. He is the Divine Husband, and He is a loving father to His children, if a strict one at times. Under the title of Zeus the Mild, He is a protector of children. Oddly enough, in this same aspect He is considered a Khthonic Deity, meaning He is associated with Earth and Death. In this aspect He was depicted as either a bull, or a snake, again. He is also God of Purification, an aspect He shares with His son Apollon.

Zeus's most sacred animal is the eagle, which is He sends to earth with omens for seers to read. The bull, the goat, the wolf, and the serpent are all holy to Him as well. His trees are the oak and the white poplar.

Epithets & Titles of Zeus

The Gods had many titles and epithets that revealed certain aspects of that deity. A study of these epithets can be quite enlightening, showcasing aspects and jobs of the Gods that are never mentioned in myth. You'll find that I have collected some of the titles and epithets for each of the Gods, and have included them for this reason, along with their translations and a summery of any stories that might go with them. These lists

are by no means exhaustive or meant to be representative of all the titles of the Gods. I have left out some when they became redundant, and there simply are so many!

Basileus (“King”), Koryphaios (“Chief/Leader”), and Hypatos (“The Most High”) are obviously declarations of Zeus's sovereignty. Zeus is also called Panhellenios (“Of All the Greeks”). He is the only God I have seen referred to like this. You see, some times Gods shared titles. Both Zeus and Dionysus are called Soter (“Savior”), and Athena was called Soteira, which is the feminine form.

Zeus is generally not considered a War-God; that is, war is not His primary focus. As God of the state and protector of the city and its people, He discourages needless wars. But there are times when war is a necessity, and Zeus is no slouch in this area. Khrysaoreus (“Of the Golden Sword”), Tropaios (“Defeats” or “Defeater”), Phyxios (“Banishes”), and Areios (“Of War”) are a few names that showcase His war-like aspect. But although Zeus can be an aggressive God, his titles Sosipolis (“City Saviour”) and Eleutherios (“Of Freedom”) show that he is primarily a God of defensive and protective war.

Zeus was considered to the giver of everything that is good in life. He has many titles of this sort. Meilikhios (“Gracious/Merciful”), Apêmios (“Averter of Ills”), Philios (“Friendly/Kindly”), Xenios (“Of Hospitality/Strangers”) are but a few. He was also called Kosmêtês (“Orderer”).

As Weather-God, He was called Ombrios (“Of the Rain”), Maimaktês (“Boisterous” - referring to strong winds), and Euênemos (“Of Fair Winds”). He is especially the God of lightning and thunder, His primary weapons. Keraunios (“Of the Thunderbolt”), Kataibatês (“Descending”), address him in this manner.

He was prayed to under the name of Sêmaleos (“Giver of Signs”) or Amboulaios (“Counsellor”) when someone needed a guidance. Along with His son Apollo, He oversaw the rites of purification and cleansing. The epithets Aphiesios (“Releasing”), Katharsios (“Of Ritual Purification”), Prostropaios (“Turner of Pollution”) emphasize this aspect.

Offerings to Zeus

Greek ritual essentially boils down to the sacrifice or offering to the Gods. Besides communing with Them, a favor was sometimes asked in return. But many times all that was asked for was the presence of the deity. There were many other sacrifices given in Ancient Greece besides meat. Offerings that were common in Ancient Greece were fresh fruit, barley, flowers, and music, and libations of honey, wine, and olive oil. (Remember, a libation is a glass of liquid that is poured onto the ground.)

Offerings that would be appropriate for Zeus would be the leaves of His sacred oak tree, snake skins, or black sheepskins (black sheep were sacrificed to him under his Underworld names). Statues or figurines of eagles, bulls, and snakes would

also be good. If you are artistic, drawing or painting some of His animals or the God Himself would be a fantastic offering. This was often done in ancient times. Anything you put effort into is greatly appreciated.

The best way to honor Zeus is to live a good life, obey the law, honor your commitments. Be mindful of His presence when it's raining. Sit on a porch or in a car in order to listen to the thunderstorm. Standing in the rain with your hands raised to the sky can be a beautiful experience.

In ancient ritual, after an animal was sacrificed, it was cooked and everyone in the town ate together at a banquet. Animal sacrifice has no meaning today, but getting some steaks and inviting your friends to a barbecue is a great thing to do. I like to take the first bite of all the food and leave it on the alter on a plate as a offering. Of course, because of the bugs it would attract this is an offering that has to be cleaned up in a few hours. Leaving them outside to feed any animals who are around is a nice practice if you are able to do it.

Who exactly IS Hera?

Hera is much more than the Goddess of marriage. She is the patron of all women, and their protector all their lives. She is the earthy Goddess of fertility, and the stately, celestial Queen of Heaven. She was even seen as one of the creators of the universe -- the Milky Way Galaxy was said to be made from Hera's breast milk. She was worshiped as Zeus's equal, and co-ruler of the world. She was a greatly loved and benevolent Goddess.

Why, then, do we have this ugly image of a bitter, scheming shrew of a woman? Hera *is* a benevolent Goddess, but not necessarily a gentle one. Hera is, at Her core, the Goddess of change. All Her manifestations can be traced to this core concern. It is Hera who causes growth. She is the force that sparks the growth of the human soul into maturity. H. Jeremiah Lewis, the author of "A Temple of Words" and "Gods and Mortals," says in his essay "Thoughts on Who Hera Is," "Hera is a catalyst, an outside force which sets things in motion, which nurtures growth and the transition from one state to another... She is not a manifestation of the nurturing, fruitful earth out of which all material substance arises and to which it must inevitably return. No, Hera is the force that acts upon that substance, which causes the lilies to bloom, young girls to grow into women, cows to give birth in the proper season. But none of these happen within her, from her, but rather she is the force that acts upon them, from outside, like a potter shaping clay at his wheel, or a maiden plaiting a garland of flowers she intends to offer on Hera's altar at her marriage. And in the lives of most women in antiquity, this was the single biggest transition that they would make, for without it, they could not become women. In ancient Greek, the word for bride and woman is the same."

Many of Her children were bringers of change as well, although each had a specific type of change or area in which it was applied. Ares, God of War, certainly heralds a brutal kind of

change for any country or person at war. Eileithyia is the Goddess of childbirth, an event which obviously is a huge change in a person's life, and quite a painful one for the mother! Hephaestus makes beautiful things from the raw minerals in the earth. In each case, a person, country, or thing goes through an extreme metamorphosis from one state of being to another.

As further evidence, She is attended by the Deities who preside over the seasonal cycles of the world, the Horai. Hera is even sometimes depicted with the Moirai, the Fates. This is extremely significant. No one could turn the will of the Fates, who brought the greatest change for a human life, death. Even the the greatest of the Gods were subject to their weaving of reality. The fact that Hera is at times shown in Their company is a testament to Her power.

Herakles (more commonly known by his Roman name of Hercules) is widely considered the greatest Greek hero. He is certainly the most well-known today. The myths tell us that Herakles was tormented by Hera. She conceived the idea for his 12 Labors, plotted to get him sold into slavery, and even drove him mad and made him kill his family. It certainly seems like She wanted nothing more than to make him miserable. And yet, when he was deified upon his death and became a full-fledged God, She welcomed him onto Olympus with open arms, even giving him Her daughter Hebe in marriage, and therefore accepting him as a son. That certainly does not sound like She hated him! The truth is that if Hera had not "tormented" him, he never would have become anything great, and probably would not be remembered as anything more than a name on a genealogy chart. Because Hera interfered, he not only became known as the greatest Greek hero of all time, he became a **God!** Even his name testifies to this -- Herakles, "Glory of Hera."

Another example of this is Dionysos. This mortal-born God was another son of Hera's husband Zeus by yet another mortal princess. The stories say that it was through the trickery of Hera the Dionysos's still-pregnant mother, Semele, became curious to see Zeus in all His Godly glory -- a sight to magnificent for human eyes to witness. As a result, she was burnt to a crisp. Zeus managed to save the six-month child in her womb, and sewed him into His own thigh to carry him to term. It was this final gestation in Zeus's thigh that made Dionysos immortal; had Hera not interfered and Semele given birth to the child, Dionysos would have been a mortal. Dionysos owes his very Godhood to Her!

According to some syncretic Greeks, even Io, a lover of Zeus who he had turned into cow to try to hide her from Hera, was eventually deified because of Hera's influence -- but as the Egyptian Goddess Hathor. Prior to this transformation, Io had even been Hera's priestess. This is a very different interpretation than most children are taught in school.

Hera can be a hard Goddess, that is very true. It's not that She isn't nurturing; She is. She is associated with the raising and nurture of children, after all. But Hera never crosses the line from

nurture into coddling. There is a point where the baby birds have to be pushed from the nest. It seems cruel, but it is the only way that they learn to fly. There comes a time for growing up, and if you don't get a move on when you should be, Hera will **make** you.

Hera pushes us, forces us to move forward and strive and reach higher. Hera throws obstacles in your way, and it can seem very cruel. But these obstacles are not plots meant to trip you up, She does not want you to fail. It is the very opposite. Hera wants you to grow and become a better person. She understands that the only way to grow is through challenges, and often it is painful. But this pain is like when a sword is tempered in the forge. The metal it comes from has to be melted in order to undergo the transformation. Without the fire, without being pounded by the hammer, the sword would have never taken its shape or been strong enough to be useful. Without pain, we can never grow past childhood.

Hera's most sacred animals are the peacock and the cow. Both animals were eaten in Greece, the peacock being a special delicacy in both Greece and Rome. The cuckoo bird, which heralds the approach of the rainstorms that water the crops, is also sacred to her. The symbolism of this is important. Hera is strongly associated with the animals that nourished life. The peacock has other symbolism as well, as a sign of royalty, wisdom, and immortality.

Another of Her animals was the lioness. A lioness is an incredibly potent symbol of the strong female. A lioness is a fierce hunter, and it is she who provides food for the lion pack. The lioness is a caring mother, and a protector of her cubs. She is the perfect companion to the Queen of the Gods. Hera was sometimes depicted riding a lioness, or with one sitting calmly by her throne.

The willow is Hera's tree and the lotus or waterlily Her flower. She is often depicted carrying a scepter with this flower blooming out of the top.

Epithets & Titles of Hera

The word Hera usually means "lady" but it may come from the pre-Hellenic Greek word Herwa meaning "Protectress."

As it's been stated before, Hera is the lifelong patron of women, and as such as epithets that reflect the stages of a woman's life. *Païs* ("Girl"), *Nymphuomenê* ("Betrothed Bride") *Teleia*, ("Adult Woman"), *Khêra* ("Widow"). It is interesting, however, that "Mother" is not one of these titles. Despite being associated with the raising of children, she is not a All-Mother Goddess.

She is called *Gamelia* ("Of Marriage"), an obvious reference to Her position as Goddess of marriage. She was also *Zyia*, the "Uniter," She who brings people and families together. Zeus has the accompanying title of *Zyius*.

One unusual name of Hers is *Hêniokhê* ("Of the Chariots"). I would guess that this refers to the Chariot races dedicated to her in the Herean Games, a seasonal title She carried was *Antheia* ("Blooming" / "Of the Flowers"). Interestingly, this is also the name of one of the Graces.

One of Her titles was *Hyperkheiria*, which meant "She Whose Hand is Above." It was meant to refer to Her hand protecting a person or city. She was primarily worshiped under this name in Sparta.



Offerings to Hera

Peacock feathers, from Hera's most sacred animal, are available for an inexpensive price at many craft stores and would make a lovely offering or altar pieces. Paintings, figurines or other images of Her peacocks would emphasize Her position as Queen of the Gods. The lioness would show Her fierce and protective side, and heifers would serve to connect Her to the earth and to life. Any which you choose would serve to bring to mind a different aspect of this most complex Goddess. Beautiful, delicate jewelry, richly embroidered cloth, and anything that brings to mind Hera's regal and Queenly nature would be greatly appreciated as well.

The pomegranate is Her fruit, the fruit of marriage, and sacred to Persephone, Queen of the Underworld as well. The water lily, the flower which blooms from Her scepter, is said to symbolize purity of heart. Flowers speak their own language and have their own meanings. A few that would be especially appropriate for Hera would be the amaranth, symbol of fidelity and unchanging love, the heliotrope, devotion and faithfulness, and *stephanotis*, happiness in marriage. I must be clear that these meanings have not come from ancient Greek thought, but I believe that Hera will appreciate the gesture.

Of course, you must honor Hera in actions as well. Honor the oaths of marriage – do not break your vows or cause someone else to break theirs. Put in the effort to make your marriage work. Remind your spouse how beautiful they are and how much you love them. And there are many other ways to bring Hera into

your life. Act like a queen, regal and self-composed in all you do. Support men and women who have been widowed or lost their spouse. Donate money to a charity for the protection of Her sacred animals. Embrace change, as difficult as it may be at times, and remember, hardship and challenges are Hera's gift to those She loves, Her way of making you strong.

The Story of Io

I would like to re-tell the myth of Io. Some see this as an example of Hera's cruelty, but I feel differently. As a direct result of Hera's actions, Io went on to become a powerful Egyptian Deity. Io was even a priestess of Hera, something that I think lends credence to my theory.

Zeus had once fallen in love a half-mortal nymph Io, daughter of a river god Inakhos. One day, as Hera surveyed the skies, she noticed a tiny dark rain cloud hovering that did not quite seem to fit. Considering that it was a clear & balmy day, and Zeus was nowhere to be found, the Queen of Heaven suspected that the cloud was one of Zeus's tricks. She quickly flew down to investigate the true nature of the cloud.

Inside was Zeus and his newest lover. Zeus saw Hera coming, and to protect Io from her wrath, he hurriedly changed her into a snow-white heifer. When Hera entered the cloud, she found her husband hugging the beautiful cow. Hera was not fooled, but she pretended she had no idea what was really going on.

"Oh, what beautiful little cow!" she cried. She begged her husband to let her have it. Zeus was apprehensive, but he could not refuse, as that would let Hera know something unusual was going on. So he reluctantly gave Io to Hera.

Hera did not harm her, but left her in the form of the heifer. She took her to her garden and tied her to an olive tree. All poor Io could do was graze. Her big, expressive brown eyes betrayed her sadness. Hera had her favorite servant, the giant Argus, guard the cow. Argus had a hundred eyes placed all over his body. When he slept, only half his eyes closed and the other fifty stayed open. So he was the perfect person to guard something.

Homer tells us that Hera hoped to catch Zeus sneaking into the garden to free Io. But he didn't dare try. One day, Io escapes on her own, and unable to communicate for lack of arms, facial expression, and voice, travels to the stream her father is the god of. She weeps, because she is a stranger to her own father. So Io

writes her name in the ground with her hoof, and reunites herself with him. Inakhos cries too, for he remembers all that he intended for her. Quickly, Argus finds her and brings her back to where he can watch her more closely.

Tender-hearted Zeus can no longer bear the pain that the situation is causing. So Zeus consulted his son, Hermes, who was very crafty. Hermes dressed himself in the humble guise of a shepherd of the fields. He wandered past the garden where Io was being kept, pretending to be lost. Argus, who was very bored, called to him and asked him to sit with him. The two talked for hours, and when Argus began to nod off, Hermes began to tell a long and boring story. He droned on and on and on and on. Argus fell asleep, and, as usual, only half his eyes closed. But Hermes still went on and on and on, and one by one each of Argus's other fifty eyes closed. When the last eye closed, Hermes leaped to his feet and cut off the giant's head. And so the Son of Zeus earned the title Argeiphontês, "Slayer of Argus." Hermes then absconded with Io and hid her in his brother Apollo's herd of cattle.

To honor the memory of her faithful servant, Hera put the hundred eyes of Argus on the tail of her favorite bird, the peacock. The hundred eyes could not see any more but beautifully decorate the tail of the peacock. Hera, supposedly furious at Io's escape, sent a swarm of gadflies who stung and pursued the heifer Io relentlessly. Io wandered far from her home, trying to escape from the torment of the bugs. Finally, she reached Aiegyptos (a Greek name for Egypt). According to the poets, Zeus asked Hera for permission to restore Io her original form. Hera finally relented, but only after Zeus swore by the River Styx to never so much as look at her again. When the Egyptian people saw her, a snow-white cow who spontaneously turned into a beautiful woman, they began to worship her. And so Io settled in Egypt, gave birth to Zeus's son, and became the glorious Egyptian Goddess Hathor. Thanks to Hera's so-called jealousy, another person, this one her former priestess, became much, much more than she could have been before. Indeed, became an immortal Goddess.

Lewis, H. Jeremiah. Quoted from Sannion's Sanctuary. "Some Thoughts On Who Hera Is." <http://www.winterscapes.com/sannion/hera.htm>.
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TO APHRODITE

By Amanda Sioux Blake

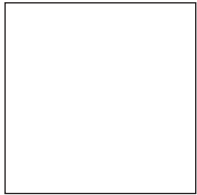
Praise be to the Kypressian!
She fills my heart with such love
A deep-flowing ocean of feeling
How dare I restrict the tide?
Let me remember
that each pang of jealousy
is an opportunity
to enter more fully in open-hearted love
For each pang I've felt,
For each tear I've shed
The swelling bliss of compersion*
Outweighs them all.
I chose a thorny path
And found it laid with flowers
I love many
and am loved by many
Golden Goddess,
Most Beautiful of the Gods
Most Powerful on Olympus
I swear to let love flow freely
Between all whom I love
I dedicate the love in my heart
The pleasure of my body
To You, Sweet Goddess
Let me be your daughter,
Your emissary
Your beacon of light
Let your waters flow over me
Baptize me in passion
Cleanse me of false sin
Free me of inhibition and guilt.
Let me stand naked in the garden,
And be not ashamed.
Make my body your temple,
That all who delight in my flesh,
Delight in yours.
Goddess, I give you my thanks
For sending me my lovers,
For sending them their lovers,
For the opening their hearts
To the beauty and joy of plural love.
Aphrodite Urania,
Heavenly One,
May our hearts be bound together,
With a golden thread
A golden thread beginning with me
And going out to my lovers
And their lovers,
And their lovers,
A great web
Circling 'round the world
and coming back to me.
May our love heal the world.

* Compersion is a word used in the polyamorous community to mean the opposite of jealousy. It's being happy for your lover when he or she is happy from loving someone else. It's that warm, fuzzy feeling I got when I watched my boyfriend and his girlfriend play-wrestling on our bed, and I laughed and was just happy to see two people I love so happy with each other. It's not just a pretty idea; it is real, it is amazing, and it is what convinced me that polyamory can really work.

I view polyamory as, in part, a religious path. To me, Love is so sacred, so beautiful, that it seems miserly to restrict it by making it a thing that can only be shared between two people, and jealously guarding it to makes sure no one else takes away the love that belongs to you and you alone. By allowing myself and my boyfriend multiple partners, I am honoring Aphrodite and her gifts by allowing love and relationships to flow and develop naturally, without putting restrictions on the heart, by saying "you can only be my friend and nothing more, ever."

I am a gregarious, outgoing person, and I make heart-connections with people whether I want to or not. To cut off that flow of love, just because you already love another, seems like a terrible tragedy to me. And I know from experience how heart-rending it can feel when you love two people and you think you have choose. How can you? They are two completely different, beautifully unique souls. You love people for different reasons, admire different qualities in each, they fulfill you in different ways. And that is wonderful, and right! One love is not better than another! Merely different, because all people are different, and so all relationships are different.





Η ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ

(HE EPISTOLE)

a newsletter for Hellenic polytheists

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Hestia - The Eternal Flame • Panatheneia Ritual • Recipes, Poetry & More!*

HE EPISTOLE - CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS!

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