

MEET CERES – THE GREAT MOTHER

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At the beginning of the 19th century, several small planets or asteroids were discovered orbiting between Mars and Jupiter. Almost 200 years later, as the women's liberation movement moved into full swing, astrologers began to experiment with these new archetypes. The first asteroids to be discovered were named after four major Olympian goddesses – Ceres, Juno, Vesta and Pallas Athene. All four were important in Greek mythology, overseeing the important initiations and stages of life and interestingly enough, their cults predate those of their male counterparts. Prior to the discovery of these asteroids, astrologers recognised only two female archetypes - the Moon (woman as mother and nurturer) and Venus (woman as seductress and lover). As they gradually began to use the asteroids in chart interpretation, the cults of these ancient goddesses were rediscovered and celebrated. The rise of the feminine had begun!

This month we examine the mythology and astrological symbolism of the Roman goddess and asteroid, Ceres.

Ceres is the Corn Goddess or Earth Mother who presides over the cycles of fertility, birth, harvest, decay, death and rebirth. Her symbol is a sheaf of ripe wheat. The word 'cereal' comes from Ceres. Patron of farmers, nature and vegetation, her sanctuaries were placed near farmlands, where pilgrims would come to pray to the goddess for bountiful crops and feast on her offerings. Ceres is also the mother archetype, representing maternal instinct finding fulfilment through pregnancy and motherhood. Ceres also represents those who provide psychological, spiritual or physical nourishment, such as cooks, caregivers and counsellors. A predominantly Ceres type woman whose nurturing urges are thwarted may be disposed to depression, weight gain or eating disorders.

The story of Demeter (the Greek Ceres) and her daughter Persephone symbolises the return of spring and was the inspiration for one of the most famous initiation rites of the ancient world - the Eleusinian Mysteries. These mysteries (similar to a shamanic ritual) re-enacted the journey of Persephone into the underworld forcing participants to face their terror of death and return from their ordeal thankful for the gift of

life.

The myth is a story of closeness, separation, grief and reunion. One day, Persephone, was picking flowers in a meadow when the earth opened beneath her revealing a chariot drawn by four horses. In the chariot was Hades (Pluto), Lord of the Underworld. He seized Persephone, took her down to his dark kingdom, raped her and crowned her as his queen. Her anguished mother Demeter wandered aimlessly in search of her daughter. Finally after nine days she met Hecate, goddess of the crossroads. Hecate had heard Persephone scream, the only clue to the abduction.

Demeter in rage and grief at losing her beautiful daughter withdrew the gift of fertility from the earth causing permanent winter and great famine. Finally Zeus intervened and demanded Demeter make the crops grow again. She refused unless he agreed to release Persephone. Zeus gave in to Demeter's demand and Persephone was eager to be reunited with her mother. But before she left the underworld Hades gave her a pomegranate seed to eat. (The pomegranate has long been a symbol of juicy, female sexuality, believed by many to be the original 'apple' of the Garden of Eden.) Persephone innocently ate the seed, binding her to Hades for eternity. Eventually a deal was struck whereby Persephone was allowed to spend eight months of the year with Demeter, who rejoiced at her daughter's return, but had to spend the other four months in the underworld with Hades. For these winter months, Demeter mourned the loss of her daughter and the fields were barren.

As the mother archetype, Ceres/Demeter indicates the desire to nurture a creative project or child even though this means eventually suffering the pain of letting go. By relinquishing an attachment, one phase of the cycle can end, preparing us for a new beginning. The brutal breaking of the mother-daughter relationship symbolises the rite of passage that each woman must undergo to separate from her family and undergo sexual initiation. Some versions of the myth suggest that Persephone was more than willing to make the descent!

We can easily spot the woman who vibrates energetically to the Ceres archetype. She is focussed on bearing, raising and nurturing children and being the family matriarch. Excelling in gardening, cooking and domestic arts, she seeks a partner for security rather than intellectual or sexual companionship. In this way, the security he offers allows her to concentrate on what matters most to her. Love is primarily expressed via

her role as a mother, rather than as a wife. Notice that no father features in the Demeter/Persephone myth.

If you are a woman with a prominent Ceres in your chart (e.g. conjunct a personal planet, Ascendant or Midheaven), you are likely to excel in the traditional role of nurturer and family caretaker. Or you may be a fabulous cook or gardener. Or perhaps your role is to help other women better understand the wisdom of the feminine and reconnect with their feminine power. You instinctively understand the rhythms of life and are able to work co-operatively and empathetically with others. Men with a prominent Ceres are able to appreciate and display nurturing, wisdom, creativity and empathy. These men make excellent parents.

Both men and women may experience a period of loss or separation, however, this experience is likely to open them up to deeper levels of understanding. As a result they can be a caring and supportive companion during times of bereavement, helping loved ones face their grief and gain a new sense of hope. They can also stand up for their rights and be an advocate for the under-privileged.

Astrologically, the placement of Ceres also shows how we deal with the issues of attachment, separation and loss. Ceres is closely aligned with the archetypes of Pluto and the Moon and is especially strong when the Moon aspects Pluto in the birth chart. Some parents refuse to let go of their children, wanting them to remain in a dependent, innocent state. This applies to both sons and daughters. In the myth, Hades/Pluto is portrayed as the rapist, yet he took Persephone as his queen and initiated her into the mysteries of sexuality. A good parent will help their child through this stage of life and know when to let go.

For those wishing to read more on this interesting topic, I recommend Demetra George's excellent book *Asteroid Goddesses*.