



## INTRODUCING MAGA

### After Mother before Crone

### The Four Phase Feminine Way

### Evolution from the Triple Goddess

The Triple Goddess of ancient times lives on, as relevant now as in the Matriarchal cultures of “prehistory” (before 1000BC). She is the Maiden Mother Crone, Persephone Demeter Hecate. These three phases of a woman’s life were reflected in the Earth’s seasons. Maiden – spring, Mother – summer and autumn, Crone – winter. Each phase or season of a woman’s life has a rite of passage that set its theme and gives information to the woman about how her particular culture values her new role and what is expected of her.

Rite of Passage	Life Season	Rite of Passage
Birth	Maiden	Menarche
Childbirth	Mother	
Menopause	Crone	Death

The developments and discoveries of our modern scientific and medical technologies have over the last ten centuries given us another life season. Simply put, we live longer than our ancestors. In the time of the ancient Triple Goddess we had babies at 14, were grandmothers at 30 and dead at 45. Now if we are well, we can live to 100 plus years.

The ancient Triple Goddess now can be extended to the Four Phase Feminine Way.

Rite of Passage	Life Season	Rite of Passage	Age	Corresponding Earth Season
Birth	Maiden	Menarche	say 0-25	Spring
Childbirth	Mother		say 25-50	Summer
Menopause	Maga		say 50-70	Autumn/Fall
Retirement	Crone	Death	say 70-100+	Winter

During a recent visit to North America, just after my 47th birthday, I spent a weekend with my mentor and friend, Cedar Barstow<sup>1</sup>, in Boulder Colorado. The Rocky Mountain air was hot and clean, new baby birds chirped as they flew for the first time. While my sons slept in, Cedar and I sat on her back deck over looking her beautiful garden in full bloom, catching up after several years apart.

I told Cedar about the book I was writing on the wisdom of the cycles and proudly showed her the ‘Spinning Wheel – a Woman’s Oracle of the Truth’ that I had created. The ‘Spinning Wheel’ functions with a series of spinning wheels that enable a woman to line up her life season, the Earth’s season, the moon phase and where she is in her menstrual cycle, to “read” the energies that are influencing her on any given day. This tool that came to me in a meditation, helps a woman understand and make sense of her feelings, her thoughts and her

energy levels.

Cedar and I spoke about Rites of Passage that occur at the beginning and end of each life season and she told me about the ceremony that her spiritual community, Earthsong Ritual Dance Community, performed for her and other women to mark their menopause and transition from Mother to Maga.

Maga?

“I’m no Crone yet,” she said “far from it, I’m out there in the world earning my living and I have much to give. I’m not wondering what I’m going to do with my life anymore, I’m doing it! I have physical limitations, I’m not as young as I used to be, like my day has an earlier ‘quitting time’, but I don’t need so much detailed prep’ time for teaching and doing therapy. My life experience and the wisdom it has brought me provide a stable and rich foundation.” Cedar went on, “I have arrived at my Self in this life season. I’m not trying to prove myself and so I’m now driven by a desire to use my gifts and passions to give back. The name Maga came from one of the women in our community, Sylvia Keepersii. An apt and potent image, Maga was intended as the feminine version of Magus – the wise man, magician.”

Interesting, “arriving at my self.,” this phrase relates to Dr Christiane Northrup’s statement in her book “The Wisdom of Menopause” likening the symptoms of peri-menopause to labour - with the birth this time being giving birth to yourself.

Cedar described her feeling starting out her Maga phase as a time of “integration and pulling through and pulling together the biggest pieces of my life work, my offering to the world.” She described herself and her Maga sisters as at a level of competence within their self expression or careers. They were enjoying freedom from the intense responsibilities and demands of motherhood or the career climb. Comfortably confident, driven by a desire to give back. For some, no more children has meant a chance to give back in a way that there wasn’t space or time for before. For others, like Cedar at 60, it is “too late to start another career, my path is set.” Their unique contributions to the larger world are possible now and are motivated by what calls them. Cedar described being less social than she was in her Mother season, but very involved in her community. Mothers and Magas have an active and direct community influence. The Croness, on the other hand, influence from a well-developed presence visit and hold from the outer edges.

The Maga phase is the extended Mother phase of the Triple Goddess, after Mother and before Crone. Maga is the Autumn season of a woman’s life, the harvest, the integrative place of the west on the wheel. The Crone is the winter season, the season of “retirement”, life review and letting go. The Crone’s life is inwardly focussed, she is in contemplation mode, a distillation of her life lived. She philosophises, tells stories, prays, gardens, gathers with other Croness. The changes to her body and brain necessitate a quieter existence, which enables a ripened access to spirit. There is a spaciousness to her being-ness that takes her into the place of the ‘big picture’ as opposed to detail. She is a wise woman.

Our culture has seen the development over the last couple of decades, of an upward trend in maternal age in western minority cultures. Many women put off their first childbearing in favour of pursuing careers, often waiting until well into their 30’s and even 40’s to start their childbearing. This has given rise to Assisted Reproductive Technology, resulting in many multiple births and caesarean section deliveries. In these cultures, in addition to the creation of the Maga phase, the Maiden phase and the Mother phase are also effected by scientific and medical technological developments. The effects of this will be another story in a few decades or so. Regardless of the effects of technology, these life seasons are defined by the natural fertility cycle of a woman’s life, menopause ends the Mother season and starts the Maga season.

When a woman arrives at her Maga season as Mother Nature intended, her children are older, well into their teens or having left home as young adults. Her children need her less and their process of separation has probably already begun. The turmoil of this separation process combined with the labour pains of menopause truly does give the woman the opportunity to give birth to a new version of herself. Her role as Mother

is very different now: her children need her less and may reject her as part of their individuation process. How this transitional period is negotiated and supported by family, friends and society will determine the way she comes through this rite of passage and who she will be on the other side.

The negative Maga is the 'empty nester', she is a woman who has lost her sense of self as mother and nothing else comes. Her life may feel empty, depressing and without meaning. She could, with this mindset, become a premature Crone – withdrawing from her life. Or, she could hear with 'the ears of her heart' or her "third ear or intuition" (Jeannine Parvati Bakeriii) for what has 'heart and meaning' (Angeles Arrieniv) for her and direct her still very strong and potent energy wherever she chooses. Many women in their 50's pick up careers and interests from their Maiden phase that may have gone 'part-time' during their mothering. Some women start new ones. They have time now, focussed time. Cedar described it as "finding a motivation more powerful and more effective than Will." She calls it an organic and heart centred motivation that is much more pleasurable and sensual than Will. She said, "we need to surrender to this powerful force as we surrendered to the birth force."

The Maga season seems to be a modern privilege and responsibility. The privilege: Our lives today are "cushy" compared to even 100 years ago. Machines have replaced many of the tasks that would have taken up most of our time to just survive. Cars, supermarkets and ovens have substantially changed the time it takes to get a meal on the table. We go to the gym for the exercise that we would have gotten from daily life tasks. In some respects, this takes meaning away from our lives and in other respects, it gives us freedom to use our time and energy in unlimited ways. This then leads to...

The responsibility: the Maga woman is needed as a strong conscience for the community and society. She can, as Cedar explained "hear and tell the truth without shame or blame," and "stand in her strength while staying in heart". Perhaps the essence of the drive 'to give back' comes from all that was 'given' to the Mother - a way for her 'to give thanks'. Becoming the Grandmother she cares about the world her grandchildren will be born into and does all she can to help it be a safe, sustainable place. The Grandmothers of times past held the final say on such matters as war. If this were still the case, the world might be a different place now..

In "The Women's Wheel of Life" Elizabeth Davis and Carol Leonard describe this season of a woman's life with the archetypes of the Amazon, the Matriarch and the Priestess. Keywords and phrases for the Maga are: harvesting one's life skills and talents, confidence, competence, assimilation, integration, power, giving back, contributing, community-mindedness, maturity, presence, security, abundance, sharing, storing for the future, queen and magician, knowing self.

Since my return to Australia, I have shared this Maga tale with women's circles, in my Women's Mysteries workshops and with many of my friends and the prevailing, dominant response is "YES!" "This makes sense, this feels right." "A whole new chapter in my life!"

As with all transitions, there is no one point when everything changes, like the seasons the change is gradual, not instant. Peri-menopause, peri meaning around, can take anywhere from 2- 13 years. Once black hairs start appearing on a woman's top lip its about six years before her monthly bleeding pattern starts to change.

Caroline, in her early 40's, feels the Maga phase beginning to affect her. "I am less social and less interested in what's going on in the social world. Where once I would have got a big kick out of being somewhere smart all dressed up, now I avoid large impersonal gatherings, they feel like time wasted. I am less interested in how I appear to the world, because I cannot help any more but be me. I feel that I make more sense as an older person than I did in my 20's." Caroline has four children aged 13, 11, 8 and 5, all were born in her 30's. Using the framework of the Four Phase Feminine Way, she is able to understand her internal struggle in juggling her children and her needs. "Whilst my advancing age is leading me to begin the inward turn and to focus elsewhere, my small children keep dragging me out of that place and at times I find that very hard. The pulls are equal and opposite."

Irene at 53 feels “better in my skin than ever before, more at peace and at one with what I perceive as my place in the universe. I am not as driven by other peoples’ ideas or their acceptance. I can look back with empathy to the woman I was and the challenges I faced in my mothering phase. Although I feel an occasional sadness that I can no longer bring to birth my own children, I have the joys of grandchildren to look forward to.” Through menopause, a single mother of two adult children and 13 year old Tristan, Irene feels the essence of the Maga phase “After getting through menopause a year or so ago I did not feel the isolation and ‘wintering’ of the crone, Maga makes so much more sense. I have in fact spent the last 12 months with a renewed vigour for study, both esoteric and technological, and have many career related goals in mind.” “I shall sail through the Maga season, heart and mind billowing with fresh insights and consolidated truths.”

Anna, 57, remembers when she first starting thinking about menopause “I thought of it as a death sentence. Women were depressed about it coming, we weren’t well informed. I was frightened, I thought I’d be old and shrivelled up. Actually it was a gradual transition into a light space, not a dark space. Once my menopause symptoms stopped, I woke up. I have more time now so I see things differently, I see more beauty. I feel more responsible for myself and to myself. I have a different kind of energy than I have had, a slower pace with a renewed enthusiasm and newfound confidence. I please myself now.” Anna and I talked about the movement through the life seasons and we decided that it could be characterized like this.....

Maiden ~ carefree, Mother ~ responsibility, Maga ~ carefree responsibility, Crone ~ responsibly carefree!

At 70, Barbara feels the inward draw. She literally stays inside more, simply because its more comfortable and with her sometimes difficult movements, easier. She moves slowly from her place where she sits and knits, either dolls for great-grandchildren or hats for the earthquake-stricken people of Pakistan, to the kitchen. She prepares the meals, most impressed with her use of every part of the ingredient, she hates waste. On her daily visit to the chicken pen, she pulls the weeds from the garden for their food. She counts the ducks and notices how many more baby rabbits there are. She speaks her mind, she cries, she feels angry at injustices and joyous about her grandchildren’s exploits. She tells me of her grandchildren, my children, “You can’t protect them from themselves.” These sound wise words. The cronespeaketh.

*Jane Hardwicke Collings 2006*

<sup>i</sup>Cedar Barstow, 2005, personal communication; Cedar@RightUseofPower.com ii Sylvia Keepers, 2000, personal communication; tdkeepers@shamanicarts.com iii Jeannine Parvati Baker, 2004, personal communication; www.birthkeeper.com

<sup>iv</sup>Angeles Arrien, *The Four Fold Way: Walking the Paths of the Warrior, Healer, Teacher, Visionary*. Harper Collins: 1993