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Introduction

USING THIS INTEGRATED book-and-CD as your guide and companion, I invite you to step onto the Magdalene Path. The Magdalene Path is a stream of spirituality in which Mary Magdalene is the principal figure, and all meditations, devotions, and rituals focus on her in one or more of her myriad aspects and forms. Though this particular path has been practiced in many forms for millennia, it must be re-imagined in every age. There are many entranceways to the Magdalene Path—*Invoking Mary Magdalene* is simply one among many. Indeed, you may have already embarked on this spiritual path and are now seeking direction and camaraderie in your quest.

Invoking Mary Magdalene is a complete set of experiences initiating you onto the Magdalene Path. By setting up an altar and working with these meditations, guided visualizations, and prayers, you invite direct and personal

experience with the energies of the Magdalene. No previous knowledge of Mary Magdalene is assumed; both neophytes and advanced students will benefit greatly from incorporating these practices into their daily lives.

The Magdalene Path is a non-hierarchical, grassroots movement, inspired by a growing body of scholarship, literature, arts, and spirituality that honors the Divine Feminine. The Magdalene Path is self-defined, non-doctrinaire, and grounded in the experience of *gnosis*, or inner knowing. Those men and women who traverse this path answer the call of the Magdalene in countless ways—as solitary or group practitioners, authors, artists, dancers, healers, parents, priestesses and priests, teachers, and visionaries.

Mary Magdalene may be accessed by anyone regardless of ethnicity or religious tradition or background. Historically speaking, we know she was a Jewish woman and therefore is not only important to Christianity but to the Jewish tradition as well. Moreover, those devoted to the Goddess, as well as those who work within more esoteric systems like Kabbalah and Gnosticism, also have rightful claim to her.

Today, there is a groundswell of interest about the Magdalene, fueled by books such as *The Da Vinci Code*. Dan Brown, author of *The Da Vinci Code*, launched his thriller at a most opportune time—when the reading public was ready to encounter a new vision of Jesus and Magdalene. This book and others tapped into a deep hungering for knowledge about the feminine force that has been so long eclipsed in Western religion. It answers to a yearning arising from many quarters.

Authors, historians, psychologists, and filmmakers envision Mary Magdalene in a multiplicity of ways: as archetype, goddess, priestess, Tantric adept, saint, or some combination of these representations. Currently, men and women are partaking in Magdalene spirituality through churches,

orders, and covens; by reading a channeled manuscript; or by enrolling in the many available workshops, tours, and retreats.

As I became aware of the great variety of contemporary Magdalene practices, I sensed an inner call for a book on this subject. Chatting with shopkeepers, baristas, and colleagues around Boulder, Colorado, affirmed my vision. Those I spoke with were intrigued by the many Magdalene groups and practices that my research unearthed, including James Twynan's experiments with the use of spikenard oil (said to be the "nard" with which Magdalene anointed Jesus), Tom Kenyon's channeling work, and Margaret Starbird's provocative historical excavations.

As the daughter of a Jewish mother and an Irish-American father, I have found Mary Magdalene to be of significant help in my own spiritual life, enabling me to skillfully traverse the liminal realm between Jewish and Catholic traditions. I have long been interested in the Magdalene's mysteries: how she weaves through the Jesus mythos and on through the Grail legends; the stories of her sailing to Glastonbury and to the South of France; and her possible connections with the Black Madonnas of Europe. Also, as the dark maiden of the *Song of Songs* and the beloved of Jesus, she figures prominently in my own contemplative and ritual practice, where she appears to me as a refraction of the Dark Mother who has also taken the forms of Kali (Hindu), Sekhmet (Egyptian), Hecate (classical Greek), and the Black Madonna (Christian), among others. The Dark Goddess shows herself to people in various ways, and one's relationship with any god or goddess is intensely personal and ultimately self-defined. Some devotees see her as an impersonal cosmic energy; some invoke her as a independent spiritual being in the form of a traditional goddess; and others call on her as an aspect of the self. It is possible, of

course, to hold some or all these understandings simultaneously as one's experience with the Dark Goddess grows and changes.

When I ponder the Magdalene phenomenon, the concept of *kairos* comes to mind. Kairos is a Greek word, signifying the eternally full and present moment, the opportune time. Kairos (as opposed to *chronos* or linear time) denotes a moment when forces constellate to break through time as we perceive it, and something new appears. I believe that this new era of Magdalene consciousness promises to revolutionize Christianity and Western culture in ways we cannot yet conceive.

I look forward to being your guide as we make this journey together on the Magdalene Path. May the Holy Magdalene and her Companions, those in the visible and invisible worlds, illuminate our work together. There is a blessing on those who serve.

Siobhán Houston
Boulder, Colorado
October, 2005

The background of the entire page is a blue-tinted photograph. It shows a close-up of a person's face, with their eyes closed and a serene expression. In the lower foreground, there is a cup of coffee, possibly a latte, with a dark surface. The overall mood is calm and artistic.

CHAPTER ONE

Who Is Mary Magdalene?

WHY ARE WE mesmerized by a woman who lived 2,000 years ago? And especially a woman who, until recently, was generally vilified as a prostitute, only of note because Jesus cleansed her of seven devils? Granted, this is not the only manner in which she appears in history and culture. In large part, she has been perceived through the ages as a redeemed woman turned disciple, someone who played a bit part in the drama of the Gospels, and a saint of fairly minor significance. Even though Mary Magdalene is mentioned more than any other woman in the New Testament, she has been accorded little importance in the mainstream Christian tradition.

A brief sketch of her life begins with her appearance in the Gospels as a Jewish woman from the Galilean town of Migdal. Most probably a single woman or widow of some wealth, she became a devoted follower of Jesus

after he healed her of her affliction, described in the Bible as “seven demons.” She traveled with Jesus and his disciples and helped support the fledgling movement financially. The Gospels place her as a witness to the crucifixion and burial of Jesus, and after the burial when she went to Jesus’ resting place to dress his body, she discovered his empty tomb. Perhaps most importantly, the New Testament tells us that Mary Magdalene was the first to see the resurrected Jesus. She conveys this glorious news to his other disciples, thus earning herself the title “Apostle to the Apostles.”

By the early Middle Ages, the Church conflated the stories of three different women mentioned in the New Testament and concluded that Mary Magdalene was a redeemed prostitute. Pope Gregory the Great made a formal pronouncement validating this view in 591 CE and it became official Catholic teaching, although it has no historical grounding. The Church rescinded this declaration in 1969, but Mary Magdalene’s persona as a harlot turned faithful follower is still lodged in our collective consciousness. Despite this view, Magdalene emerged as the most popular saint during the Middle Ages, highly praised by the Church as a paragon and model of repentance. Traditional devotional practices to St. Mary Magdalene generally uphold the erroneous view of her as prostitute, and so I have chosen not to include them in this program. Instead, I draw on contemporary practices in which Mary Magdalene is imagined in more positive ways.

While Mary Magdalene’s history as a religious and cultural icon is far too long to relate here, I want to call attention to one significant historical development. In the 1940s, a cache of ancient documents surfaced in the Egyptian desert, an event I discuss in Chapter Five. One result of this find is that some of the early Christian texts discovered mention Mary

Magdalene in revolutionary ways—as a teacher, a leader in the Christian community, and even as an incarnation of Wisdom.

As more primary documents of the early Christian era come to light, scholars are discovering that much of Magdalene's story seems to have been suppressed by rival factions in the early church. Little by little, the layers obscuring Mary Magdalene's role in the early Jesus movement are being worn away; new gospels are unearthed and new interpretations of Biblical texts emerge. Moreover, the public is learning of the countless ancient legends about Mary Magdalene, transmitted for the most part through the oral tradition in Europe. Wondrous tales of her marriage to Jesus, her mothering of a daughter, and her travels to Western Europe are now discussed openly, and many have an almost unquenchable desire to find out more about this enigmatic woman.

Admittedly, the reality of Mary Magdalene's earthly life will never be fully grasped but will always be slipping from us, concealed behind a shroud of myth, supposition, and mystery. For those who worship her as a form of the Goddess or an incarnation of the Gnostic wisdom-figure Sophia, for those who pray to her as a saint or who follow her channeled alchemical teachings, I suspect historical accuracy fades into the background.

As author Nicholas Whitehead noted in a 1997 interview, "I think that people respond to symbols and archetypal patterns, and if the Christ life is anything, it's an archetypal pattern. We need to remember that there's never one level on which you can interpret any kind of sacred history, because history is something that always expresses a certain point of view."¹

For further exploration of the history of the Magdalene, I recommend the highly acclaimed *Mary Magdalene: Myth and Metaphor* by Susan Haskins. Jane Schaberg's book, *Resurrection Of Mary Magdalene: Legends, Apocrypha, and the*

Christian Testament, is also a fascinating read and provides a solid foundation for future studies.

Now that we have looked in brief at Mary Magdalene as a historical figure, we can proceed to the next chapter, which discusses how to construct a personal altar to the Magdalene as a prerequisite for the actual Magdalene Path practices. ❀



CHAPTER TWO

Creating Sacred Space for the Magdalene Path

THE FIRST PHASE of the Magdalene Path is to construct an altar, a special place where you will go on a regular basis to relate to the Magdalene. Most people will find it advantageous to have a tangible, established site for meditation and reflection, even though making a personal altar to the Magdalene is not essential in order to walk her path. Since this is your personal shrine, you are free to include anything of meaning, whether or not it is traditionally considered religious or spiritual. This is a time to look at your spirituality with a fresh eye—to be playful, imaginative, resourceful, and perhaps irreverent. Perusing a book like *Altars and Icons* by Jean McCann*, which portrays the sacred personal spaces of a diverse group of individuals, is a great way to start this creative process.

* For more information on books, companies, and organizations mentioned in this book, please see the Additional Resources section on page 99.

An important caveat for all the practices in this book, including the suggestions in this chapter, is that you should choose those activities with which you resonate and that you can fit into your schedule without undo strain. These practices are offered as havens that allow you to *be* for a time, rather than *do*. Turning them into goal-oriented chores to somehow fit into your busy schedule is counterproductive. And since prayer and meditation are non-linear activities, their quality is not determined by the amount of time spent on them. Remember to treat yourself kindly.

A low table in the corner of a room, a shelf or bookcase, or even a windowsill is a perfectly acceptable site for your shrine. If your altar is set up in a room that you also use for other purposes (which is the case for most of us), there is a simple way to mark out your consecrated space: obtain a rug or mat specifically designated for use during your meditation time, and then fold or roll it up and stash it away when you are finished. The unfurled rug or mat denotes the area as a *temenos*—or sacred precinct—and temporarily differentiates it from the other activities taking place in the room. With regular use, the sublime energies generated by your practice will permeate your temenos, which will in turn assist you in entering a meditative state more quickly.

Your shrine may be adorned in a simple or elaborate way, depending on your personal tastes and the amount of time you wish to devote to it. For the most part, constructing a shrine starts with some favorite and evocative objects—such as pictures of special places and people, statues, natural items like stones and feathers, and other mementos—and then evolves organically as you add and take away objects over time. A candle and a Magdalene icon or print is a wonderful focal point, and that may be all you need or want for your altar, at least initially.

One way to start creating your altar is to ask yourself: what colors evoke the Magdalene for me? The altar clothes, stones, candles, and other decorative elements may then reflect these suggestive hues. For example, my current devotion to the Magdalene focuses on her Dark Goddess aspect, and so my altar to her is decorated in crimson, black, and gold, reflecting this orientation. It consists of a small, low table against a wall in my home office, adorned with a black and red embroidered cloth from India, red candles, and a little handmade ceramic bowl my daughter made to hold water, flowers, or other offerings. Several deities (sacred statues) crowd my tiny shrine space, including the Black Madonna of Notre Dame de Meymac, an imposing and vividly colorful Kali, and smaller deities of Kali and Shiva carved from soapstone. I also have a brass *ankh* (the Egyptian symbol of life), a piece of basalt (a rock associated with Sekhmet, a powerful Egyptian goddess), a photo of a French Magdalene statue, and stones from holy sites like Glastonbury, Cornwall, and Rennes-le-Chateau. My Magdalene altar is only one of a number of shrines—my spouse and I call our décor style “Little Altars Everywhere,” since our home and garden teem with both formal and whimsical shrines, like the one composed of plastic wind-up animal toys.

Certain symbols are historically associated with Mary Magdalene, and you may wish to have these represented in your place of worship. She is often shown with a skull, an alabaster jar, a book, and a red egg. The skull most probably represents the transient nature of this earthly realm: the Magdalene may be gazing at it meditatively, as in Domemico Feti’s painting “The Repentant Mary Magdalene,” or the skull may be resting at her feet, as it does in the statue of her in the famous medieval French church of Rennes-le-Chateau. Another ubiquitous image is a book, either open or closed, which alludes to her role as guardian of the mysteries and of wisdom in general.