



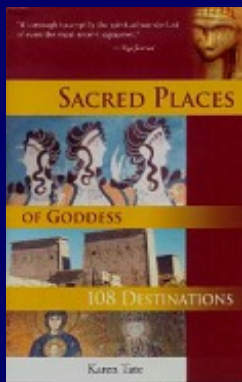
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The Author's Corner



Karen Tate

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Sacred Places of Goddess

Sacred Places of Goddess:

TWPT Talks to Karen Tate ©2006TWPT

TWPT: Tell me about when you personally found the Goddess in your 30's and what the circumstances were that surrounded this eye opening experience?

KT: I was raised in the Bible Belt. New Orleans, LA to be exact. I was brought up a Catholic and I can tell you, despite Voudon being somewhat of a minor presence in the Big Easy, Paganism and Goddess were not subjects anyone had much, if any exposure to. Even university curriculums barely touched the subject in any meaningful way, and certainly not suggesting Women's Spirituality or Goddess Spirituality might be a viable option for a contemporary religious route.

Looking back, I now see how isolated so many people are about many faiths and cultures and lifestyles in general, in some parts of the United States.

At 30 years of age, I moved to Los Angeles where I stumbled onto this "fluff class" distantly related to Goddess Spirituality offered by The Learning Annex and it piqued my curiosity. Then I went on to Merlin Stone's When God Was a Woman and Rianne Eisler's Chalice and the Blade.

My life was forever changed. And it's been a slippery slope from then on. I was insatiable. I felt angry and duped that I had had no exposure to this Feminine Face of God until I was 30 years old and would probably NEVER HAVE had I stayed in New Orleans. I began combining my passion for travel and seeing other parts of the world and how others lived with seeking out sites of Goddess - perhaps subconsciously validating this reconstructed spirituality for myself. I found myself particularly drawn to Isis. Looking back now, I think it was very interesting when I was 4-6 years old I was drawn to images in books related to Egypt and Pompeii. Today I wonder if I was tapping into some cellular memory imprinted in my DNA.

TWPT: Was it difficult for you to step away from your Catholic upbringing and begin an exploration of the feminine divine?

KT: Not at all. Honestly, Catholicism held no warm and fuzzy feelings for me. A vengeful god, this image of a man dying on a cross. I never verbalized it then because I was brought up to believe this was the norm, but with some distance, knowledge there was a choice, and broadened horizons, these were not ideas I wanted at the center of my spiritual paradigm. Catholic Church was no more than a Sunday obligation. The only fond memories I have are of the nuns that taught me in my early years going to Catholic school. My romantic notions of their mysterious sisterhood were much more intriguing. And these women were nurturers and teachers, unlike the distant priests in our parish.

TWPT: What did you do to start exploring this new path and to make contact with the Goddess community that you didn't even know existed a short while before?

KT: After reading the two aforementioned books, it just seemed avenues, groups, and more information on the subject appeared, not unlike that saying about how when the student is ready the teachers appear. I think through flyers in a metaphysical bookstore I found a group of women that were farther along on the path than myself and they welcomed me into their ranks and I soaked everything up like a sponge. I learned to be a practitioner and ritualist. I continued to immerse myself in the practitioner and academic side of the equation, while I was trying to serve community as a Priestess. I began leading tours to sacred sites because being at sacred locales was so powerful and validated the spirituality for me. Some of the people I've organized tours for were Morning Glory Zell, Kay Gardner, Ruth Barrett, Catherine Wright, Deborah Rose, Brenda Matarazzo, deTraci Regula - then I began leading the tours myself. During one of those journeys I was ordained within the international organization, The Fellowship of Isis, by Lady Olivia Robertson at Clonegal Castle in Enniscorthy, Ireland. I founded the Iseum of Isis Navigatum based on the authentic ritual of Isis, the Isidis Navigium and we began having rituals honoring Isis throughout the year, with the cornerstone ritual being a modern recreation of the ancient Isidis Navigium held in Greco Roman antiquity.

TWPT: Having looked over your bio I know that you are an ordained minister and that you graduated from the Women's Theological Institute. Tell me about your studies at the institute and what it was that prompted you to pursue your new path through academic studies as well as on an experiential level.

KT: The Women's Theological Institute is basically a 4 year program that's very detailed and wide reaching. It covers everything from Goddesses around the world and across cultures to Comparative Religions, doing magic and learning about energy work, personal development, creating ritual, learning to be an administrator, women's mysteries, ecology, and many other topics, then gets into specific areas of study. For instance, if you want to be a healer, or your calling is to serve from more of an artistic perspective, it helps you develop your skills and learn to apply them as clergy of Goddess and serve the community.

After I graduated I continued my own personal development along lines that were particularly of interest to me. I was ordained within the Temple of Isis, headquartered at Isis Oasis in Geyserville, CA. I wanted to see more partnership ideals perpetuated within the community a la Rianne Eisler's work, so I founded a 501c3 non-profit, The Isis Ancient Cultures & Religion Society. I continued with sacred tours. I was publishing articles in pagan oriented publications.

TWPT: Once you started to explore the local community associated with the Goddess what were some of your initial impressions of the community itself and the potential for becoming more a part of it as time went by?

KT: Well, to be honest, my experiences weren't always the best. I was discouraged a lot and almost quit the path, but it always seemed Goddess dangled a carrot that kept me to the path. I didn't find a lot of partnership. I found competition, back biting, jealousy and patriarchy in a skirt. I was sad there wasn't more support of each other, community, and perpetuation of values and ideals I believed were Goddess ideals. Eventually I began to attract toward myself people that were more in sync with my values, but it was a tough road. Honestly, I learned as much or more about what I didn't want in a community as I did about Goddess, paganism and what I did value in community.

TWPT: You are also involved with the International Fellowship of Isis. Could you give me some background on this organization and how your involvement with it came about.

KT: The FOI came along in the 1960's, founded by Lady Olivia Robertson, her brother and his wife. It's an international organization that's been expanding over the decades with a very loose and inclusive set of ideals. One can join by signing the manifesto and you can become as involved as you want, but a lot of the work is independent. Over the last years it's become more structured so the FOI can be sustained in the future. Men and women can, if they choose to be more involved and committed within the FOI, found an isium or lyceum and perform their services to the community under the auspices of their isium or lyceum while under the larger international banner of the FOI. In my isium, or hearth of the Goddess, as they're called, I published articles, led sacred/organized sacred pilgrimages, and organized rituals, salons and workshops.

Lady Olivia has continued to be a great support and inspiration to me.

I believe it was she who first recognized a spark within me and she set me upon my path. She has continued to be supportive during times of sickness and most recently has come out publicly supporting my book, Sacred Places of Goddess: 108 Destinations, and as she said herself, she usually doesn't do that, but the book is such that it warrants her support.

TWPT: During all of this initial exploration when was it that writing became an important aspect of sharing what you were finding with the community at large?

KT: Well, I started writing because I wanted to share with the like minded what going to these sacred locales was like. I realized many would never go to these far away places and I had been blessed by a set of circumstances that allowed me to travel across continents seeking out

Goddess in all her manifestations. Most of my writing in the beginning was about sacred places, experiential episodes while there, and I even took on a title, Priestess of Sacred Geography for awhile. Later my writing branched out into non-sacred site related work.

TWPT: Being a travel agent gave you some ideas as to how you wanted to explore this new spirituality that was opening up to you. When was it that you decided to start visiting some of the sacred places that you had heretofore only ready about?

KT: As a kid, I always wanted to see exotic places. When I was pre-school age I was drawn to books on Egypt and Pompeii as an example. That wanderlust never died. It seemed the perfect match to combine my passion for travel with my passion for Goddess. The two merged and morphed, shaping the last two decades of my life. So, I'd say, it was from the very beginning that I incorporated the two. My first tour was for 26 days, destination Greece, seeking out sacred locales of Isis in particular.

TWPT: What is it about standing or walking in these places that bring the ancient stories to life even more than just reading about them?

KT: While I believe you can experience Goddess anywhere, I also believe you can sense a more authentic and deeper sense of her in her ancient homes.

Time and distance dims. Being a priestess in contemporary society is often difficult, but being in these places helps one feel a part of that continuum of sister clergy from times past. And it's just exciting to walk in the footsteps of those who have gone before who made history!

TWPT: Has the idea of Goddess spirituality made additional inroads into the modern consciousness since you began your studies?

KT: I believe it has actually. An example is the most recent excitement surrounding Dan Brown's The DaVinci Code. Dan Brown got people talking.

It opened a lot of eyes to the connection between Paganism and Christianity and Goddess, as well as the Divine Feminine as it relates to Jesus, Mary and Mary Magdalene. Besides the millions of books sold, the dvds will be in living rooms of millions very soon. I think a lot of seeds have been planted that will hopefully sprout new growth in interest in Goddess. I believe Goddess is slowly not just a fringe idea. It's slowly infiltrating the mainstream.

TWPT: What are the challenges that Goddess spirituality faces in the years to come in regards to getting this message out to even more of those who want to hear?

KT: Two things I can think of that might be challenges are:

a) Without a definitive bible-like "book" its hard to point people to one particular source that's the alpha and omega of Goddess spirituality, and some people need such a book. But then again, I don't think we necessarily want "a book" because then we get into dogma that divides us. So that's a double edged sword.

b) By our very independent nature as pagans, we don't organize and support one another very easily. We tend to exist in factions, and small isolated groups. Many believe we don't even need Goddess Temples.

This will inhibit our ability to be recognized as a viable religion or spirituality. A case in point is the battle to get that deceased pagan soldier a headstone with a pentagram inscribed on it.

Fortunately I believe Goddess and the idea of the Sacred Feminine is entering the contemporary collective consciousness

through other means other than just relying on Pagans to mobilize and get the message into the mainstream. I think through means such as The DaVinci Code as an example, more people are learning about the Feminine Face of God that's been swept under the rug because of power and politics. My book for instance, is on mainstream travel and women's studies book shelves, not just in the occult or new age sections. A planet was just named after the Inuit Goddess, Sedna, sparking some dialogue. Travel and history shows on television are starting to bring more information about Goddess to the screen, but that needs to be fleshed out much more. But we need more voices out there reclaiming the Sacred Feminine over the airwaves.

We have to re-educate the public that Goddess is not just for feminists and lesbians, which is what I hear sometimes out there as I'm giving lectures. We have to teach what Goddess can mean to the future of our world.

TWPT: Tell me about some of the groups around the country and the world that are actively bringing this ancient Goddess wisdom back to the consciousness of modern society?

KT: Well, obviously the Hindu devotees have never forgotten Goddess.

Neither have the Shinto or the Native Americans. Kwan Yin and Tara are major in the East. But in our patriarchal world, this remembering isn't enough. Some scholars believe the Hindu Goddesses aren't the best role models for women either, and it's not like the Shinto and Native Americans are major players on the world stage of religion.

For awhile now many Unitarian Universalist Churches have had congregations with liturgy inclusive of both genders of deity. Classes are given on the Queen of Heaven. We have our pagan groups, disjointed as they are. Obviously it's not enough. But change happens slowly. I think in our current political and spiritual culture it's imperative that more voices speak out toward a paradigm shift, a tipping point, to perpetuate the need for change. We cannot continue to sustain the planet or even our own governments and cultures in the direction we're headed. We have to begin to embrace ideals of the Feminine and incorporate them into the way we live and think - and not just as a model or ideal, but as an actual way of "walking our talk." We need a real shake up and we will have to be prepared to make the sacrifices for that change.

TWPT: Do you see this reemergence of the divine/sacred feminine as a natural balancing that is occurring due to there being such an emphasis on the God aspect of spirituality in the world's recent history?

KT: Yes, absolutely.

Ancient people were not stupid heathens as some might believe. The ancient Egyptians and people who lived in close relationship with the land understood the need for balance. Our Judeo-Christian beliefs teach we are the masters of Nature and industrialization has caused us to be more detached from the web of life in which we are all a part. That cannot continue without consequences.

TWPT: You are also the founder of an organization called The Isis Ancient Cultures Society. What kind of goals do you have for this organization? How does it accomplish these goals and how does it use education and art to communicate these goals to society?

KT: Said a bit about this before, but to elaborate, I founded the organization to hopefully try to create a group that would

function using partnership ideals. We were not perfect, but we did really well.

The not for profit educational organization held monthly rituals we called Moon Circles, giving different groups in the community a platform to showcase their work and beliefs. This was to perpetuate the idea there is not just ONE WAY. I was so tired of certain groups that put out notions they were the only real priestesses, doing the only real work. It was the antithesis of Goddess ideals and they didn't even see that. So sad and damaging to the Goddess movement.

We also offered personal development salons by inviting experts in to speak on topics to help us as human beings be better and stronger and healthier emotionally and physically. We sponsored workshops on magical, academic and spiritual topics. We recreated ancient rituals in a modern context to symbolize the lost knowledge of the Ancients, and a returning to some of these ideas we've become disconnected from. I wanted IACRS to become a bridge builder to reach out to other communities and spiritualities and faiths. I wanted others not familiar with Goddess Spirituality to see who we were and what we're about instead of the sensational hype that spins out there. We used various forms of ritual, art and educational means to accomplish that goal.

TWPT: In another interview that I read the title referred to you as a Goddess Advocate. In what ways do you see yourself as fulfilling this title?

KT: Workshops, travel tours with groups etc.

Well, when I began my work publicly outside the Goddess Community, I wanted to develop a title that I felt more comfortable with. I usually referred to myself as a Priestess but that didn't seem a title that most mainstream people could easily relate to. So I considered what would be more contemporary, mainstream, and would leave no question about my belief. In presentations I advocated that people take either their first look, or perhaps a second look at what the "New Divine Feminine Movement" had to offer for the future. I was tired of hearing this was just for witches, lesbians, and feminists. The message of our activist foremothers and forefathers had been lost and was drowned out in the spin of those who did not want change and supported the status quo.

But I believed there were people out there who didn't even realize they were Goddess Advocates. When I give UU sermons, I point out what many Goddess Advocates believe (see attached article) and by casting the net wide as I have, we realize by our beliefs in what we want for our world, we have many like-minded sisters and brothers out there beyond the Pagan community - only sometimes they don't realize it yet. I suggest to these people that with our mutual ideas, they are embracing Goddess, and why not name their belief what it is - belief in Divine Feminine ideals - and consequently many now see that including the Sacred Feminine in their spiritual paradigm is a natural thing. I looked at this as sort of mainstreaming Goddess.

TWPT: When was it during your travels that the thought first occurred to you to share what you were finding at these sacred Goddess sites around the world with others through some tangible form such as Sacred Places of Goddess: 108 Destinations?

KT: Actually I began doing organizing and leading tours very early along my path because it naturally morphed with my own travel passion and I saw how powerful it was to stand in her sacred locales. I actually never planned to write a travel book. I'd only been writing individual articles and submitting them for publication in pagan oriented magazines. This

book, Sacred Places of Goddess: 108 Destinations came about very serendipitously. I actually was pitching a different book. One that's finished and needs a publisher right now. Hint! Hint! It's more anecdotal and experiential about our many travels to sacred sites alone and with groups, and what it's been like as a contemporary woman walking an ancient path as a priestess. But my publisher got wind of my travel/priestess book and realized I was the person to write the next book in his travel series, so Sacred Places of Goddess: 108 Destinations came to be born.

TWPT: Out of all the sites in the world how did you decide which ones to include in your book and what were the reasons that you chose some and not others?

KT: This was one of the hardest parts of writing the book. Cutting out sites was like cutting off limbs. I even left out favorite sites sometimes. First of all, the first criteria was the publisher wanted sites from around the world and from every continent possible. I chose these sites then by various means. I wanted to show the many kinds of sites there were, i.e.

- A) landscape of the Goddess as in natural occurring contours of the land,
- B) sites built by human hands,
- C) sites where living traditions are still practices,
- D) sites where several traditions are practices under one roof,
- E) sites that encompass art and nature together
- F) newly redefined sacred sites, such as museums

I also chose sites that present theories and concepts such as those of people like Marija Gimbutas, James Melaart, Ian Hodder and other anthropologists, archaeologists, etc. Finally, I wanted to introduce as many Goddesses as possible to show readers the wide swath of Goddess worship our planet over time and place.

TWPT: Is Sacred Places of the Goddess just a book about these sites to stimulate a readers intellect or did you have something else in mind that you wanted a reader to experience or do in regards to what you were sharing?

KT: I wrote the book to be an encyclopedia of Goddess. I wanted a pagan to be able to pick it up and reach beyond their tradition or ancestry. I wanted the mainstream to learn about Goddess and how she was swept from the world stage over centuries for political gain. I wanted people of other faiths to see how she was instrumental or influenced their faiths.

I wanted people who had never heard of her to know about her - and if you wanted to travel to these places, from your armchair, or by stamping your passport, I was making it possible. I wanted people to know this was not a feminist or occult fantasy.

TWPT: How important are spiritual pilgrimages in the lives of those within the pagan community or specifically to those who are seeking to integrate Goddess spirituality into their lives?

KT: Purposeful travel, the modern pilgrimage, can be very important.

Sometimes they are a catalyst for personal and spiritual growth and transformation. They help us learn more about deity from esoteric and exoteric perspectives. We can go to these sites to curry favor with a deity, connect with our ancestors or family heritage. Journeys like this dim the abyss between time and place. We learn about other cultures and suddenly the

rest of the world is not “other.” People just aren’t as willing to spend their precious time away from work sitting by a pool. They want to do something that’s going to nourish their soul.

TWPT: How would you suggest that readers of your book if they so desire begin to take some of these trips for themselves? For those who have never even thought about something like this before where do they even begin?

KT: Well, by accident one can take the book and easily drive a pilgrimage along the West Coast. That would be the easiest and probably least expensive. Next would be the sites in Mexico. It is less expensive to fly to Mexico than Europe or other places “across the ponds.” One can go to Mexico City and with day trips outside and around Mexico City, see quite a lot. However, I cannot stress enough the importance of not just going somewhere for the sake of the less expensive price tag or not to leave the country. My best recommendation is to go where the culture and deity call to you. For me, the strongest pull was to visit Egypt and the Mediterranean area. That being said, I was amazed how much I connect with in Ireland and Turkey, which was very unexpected. Another important thing is to take a Goddess-oriented tour, not a traditional tour, because if you do the latter, you more than likely will not hear the goddess-oriented perspectives of the place.

TWPT: With travel being a little more dangerous these days in certain parts of the world (in some cases just about anywhere) do you have any practical ideas for making your travel plans in regards to your destinations and what dangers you might face there and ways to reduce the risks you might face?

KT: I have to say always check with the State Department and their recommendations. I know people going most places today without much concern however. I wouldn’t go to Lebanon, Iran or Iraq obviously.

But I still would take my chances in Israel and Jordan. Certainly in Egypt. If you’re really afraid, limit your travels to Turkey and the Mediterranean, Europe and the British Isles, or even Polynesia or Central and South America.

TWPT: Are there still some sacred sites out there that you have not managed to visit over the last 20 years?

KT: Absolutely. I’d like to go to more places in India and the Far East.

And I’d like to go back to Greece and see more of the islands. And Turkey. Most of the time we would be on a two week tour and its very hard in that short time to really soak in and absorb it all.

TWPT: After all of these years do you consider travel to be as much a part of your spiritual path to the Goddess as your academic studies or your personal devotional practices are?

KT: Now I travel for myself more than before. I might be persuaded to lead a tour, or organize a tour, but it’s not my first priority these days.

I think I’m called now to teach, and share what I’ve learned, to be a voice for Goddess. I believe I’m one of many of the next wave trying to move her back onto the world center stage.

TWPT: Tell me about some of the feedback that you have received from your readers in regards to Sacred Places of

the Goddess since it was published. Overall have you been satisfied with the book as whole and how it reaches out to those you may never meet?

KT: I was blessed with a research assistant that helped me write this book using resources from multiple faiths, disciplines and academic perspectives. That was important because I wanted to write a book that would stand in both the mainstream, pagan and academic communities and I know I've accomplished that. Goddess spirituality would be indisputable. I continue to get feedback that professors are using this as a reference book to teach their classes. I know there is nothing else out there like it because it didn't exist when I was planning tours, and it still doesn't exist years later, until now. Travelers can visit these places from their armchair or stamping their passports.

My book has had many very, very good reviews. I have people email me and come up to me, thanking me for writing this book. Only one critic dug to China, metaphorically of course, to find something negative to say. I think the book serves many purposes. Besides the 108 official sites, I've sprinkled mention of hundreds of other sites readers can use as springboards for their own research. The book has Gaia Alerts in each chapter telling about impending disaster, genocide or ecological turmoil on that continent. Goddess Focus side panels dispel myths and give more information about Goddess Spirituality. It's both a travel book and a Goddess "bible" of sorts. My only problem has been with a small publisher, I have very little help promoting the book and news of the book is not reaching enough people. I pray that I find new avenues to publicize the book, and not for the money, but for the sake of rebirthing Goddess in our world.

TWPT: What is on the horizon for you and will you be working on other travel books or other books dealing with Goddess spirituality in the future?

KT: Right now I'm working on getting a documentary made based on Sacred Places of Goddess: 108 Destinations. I would like to see my first book, about my travel experiences and role as a priestess, find a publisher.

I want to continue to lecture. I have presentations available on Goddess Spirituality, Goddess artifacts from the Louvre and British museums, and sacred sites across the globe. I manage to keep some of our cornerstone events going every year, namely the Isidis Navigium and the Isis Birthday Salon and Tea. I've begun to give monthly Sacred Sunday Services. I still write for magazines on occasion when asked. I hope to put a tour together to Turkey with my research assistant in the not too distant future. And I try to be a good friend, wife, and mother to our two feline daughters, Isis and Xena. It's quite a full plate when one works full time!

TWPT: . Beyond everything that you have been studying/exploring so far are there still areas academically/spiritually that you would still like to explore?

KT: Yes, I would like to delve more into ancient Mysticism, the Templars, Masons, Illuminati, and Kaballah. I like to keep on top of new archaeological discoveries and theories. I want to continue to try to manifest ways to create a bridge to Goddess from other more traditional faiths, and raise awareness of Goddess and her ideals around the world.

And I am always conscious of trying to deepen my connection with deity and to find ways to be of service.

TWPT: To close out this interview do you have any thoughts or ideas that you'd like to share with the readers of TWPT either about sacred travels or the future of the Sacred Feminine or Goddess Spirituality?

KT: I think more of us have to look at the big picture and beyond our own circles and covens. We have to suspend unbridled ego for the common good. Goddess spirituality is needed in the world and we have to be sane, credible, knowledgeable, accessible voices for helping introduce Goddess ideals back onto the world stage. We need to walk our talk. We need men and women in equality and partnership, working side by side in this. We need to dialogue sensibly with those who are fearful, and try to reach a place of understanding and like-mind. We have to reach outside ourselves, be selfless, for the sake of tomorrow. We must teach our sons and daughters the ways of Goddess rather than capitalism and patriarchy. We are a tribe. We are our brothers' keeper. We are stewards of the Earth. We are not about hierarchy, power, control and domination. We want to create win-win situations so that all of humanity thrives. We are for personal responsibility and integrity in all things, not survival of the fittest. We should nourish, encourage and support each other. And most of all, if we believe in the three-fold law, karma, or the gold rule, we should act like it. What we put out everyday, not just in our magickal circles of intention, has repercussions. So pay forward only that which you want reverberating out there in the world 'cause it just might come back to bite ya!

TWPT: Karen, I'd like to thank you for this enlightening interview and for sharing with us your thoughts about not only your book but also about the spiritual path you have chosen in life. Best of luck with this book and with whatever other projects you set your mind to.

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