

## At Home with Hestia

*a return to centre*

Our world changed in a heartbeat. Anxiety frequently accompanies sudden and unexpected change. And when the anxiety of change is elevated, the instinct to imagine often turns to an imagination of ruin or doom; hence, why telling mythic stories during this time can be of assistance. Myth turns our imaginative eye to the symbols and archetypes that sustain our humanness. They support us in the process of seeing through the literal world. So how might we see through, or find a way of thinking about, the viral symptoms that capture our day-to-day headlines.

Symptoms are signposts to the soul. Soul does not consign the Coronavirus exclusively to an exterior reality or an event, but also identifies its inner dimension. An unwelcome visitor has been brought to the doorstep of our global village. What do we do? What would Hestia do?

I find it extraordinary that around the world governmental guidelines are directing us to stay home, to seek the shelter of our home-place! We are all called home to Hestia's hearth to regain our focus, to relocate our centre, to realign our values, to reflect on and to recover what's been lost over time: home to spend time being contemplative and creative.

Worldwide we are advised to return to Hestia, the divine image of stillness and quiet. In Her presence we may get a glimpse of what this time means to us, whether that is personal reflection on family life, our rituals, our values or in a collective way, in terms of our humanness and humanity. The first stage in any profound transition is to go quiet. And in this stillness we can feel Hestia's embrace.

Hestia was the first-born child of Cronus and Rhea, the first Olympian, the first devoured by Cronus, and the last of his five children to be disgorged from his belly. Zeus escaped this fate, yet the god always acknowledged his sister Hestia as the first goddess, and the one to whom appropriate sacrifices must be made before family meals. Hestia is first- and last-born. She remains uncomplicated by the world outside, being centred and focused on the inner world. Hestia is not found on the outer rim of the Wheel, but is situated at its centre, characterizing qualities of stillness, discretion, centring, quietness and stability. While uncomplicated by the world, She is not indifferent, nor unmoved by its suffering. Her spirit pervades places of sanctuary, refuge and asylum. In the still atmosphere of the central hearth She creates the space for images to gather around. She is host to both guests and ghosts, providing the psychic room and nurturing space for inner images to breathe again.<sup>1</sup> Hestia is hospitable to all who arrive at her door.

Hestia welcomed the uninvited visitor as guest. The goddess knew that the voice of the divine spoke in many tongues, through many vessels, and in many ways; therefore, whoever arrived on the doorstep was welcomed. Even the diseased was offered hospice, as this was Her way of healing. I am reminded of Rumi's beautiful poem *The Guest House*,<sup>2</sup> always appropriate, but ever so in the climate of today.

Be grateful for whoever comes,  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.

As a goddess of hospitality, her presence is invoked in the guest chambers of the hospices and hospitals through rest, quiet and stillness. She is the balm carried on our prayers and healing images for those in hospices and hospitals.

Few myths, statues or temples remain of Hestia; she is rarely personified, yet before life became focused outside the home, she was the most honoured goddess, worshipped at the centre of every household. By Classical times Hestia was not included as one of the twelve Olympians, having been replaced by Dionysus. Hestia and her brother Hades are the only two siblings who remain separate from Olympian family dramas. Their places are internal, interior and introverted. Few images or alters survive to remind us of their worship or importance in cult. As gods of place, both Hestia and Hades have been re-placed and dis-placed, potent clues as to what we have culturally and psychologically done with these archetypes, these essential aspects of instinctual life. In a modern context Hestia's hearth has become dis-placed onto the hustle and hurry of life, lack of time and busyness of the outer world. As an image of centre, Hestia is not personified nor remembered by outer images and icons. In many ways she is missing, lost in the unconscious, yet ironically the governmental decree to shelter-at-home invites us to honour the goddess once again, to revive her presence and authority at the centre of our lives.

Central to psychic life, Hestia is the sacred centre – the goddess who honours sacred space and protects sacred images. Hestia is hospitable, welcoming guests and ghosts to gather around her hearth, as here, with focus and attention, we tell and hear the stories of life.

As the hearth, Hestia is the centre and focus of the home, the curator of family life offering a place where our circle of ancestors can gather. As custodian of the hearth, She personifies the fire burning at the heart of life, the fireplace of the home, and the flame lit in the city centre. She is the Olympic flame that will burn even though the games cannot be played. She sustains the inner world, but has been forgotten in the stampede of outer life. Formerly consigned to the unconscious, she reappears in the centre of this pandemic.

The myth reveals that the instinct for centring ourselves, personified by Hestia, is the first divine child consumed by Cronus, the Titan god of time. Saturn, Cronus's successor, characterizes authority, organization, management and control of the outer world and along with time, this corporation devours the presence of mind needed to be centred at the hearth of our inner world. Hestia personifies the last qualities to be released by the cartel of Cronus. We are called back to the hearth to contemplate the creative act of centring.

Has Cronus, as we've known Him, finally released enough control to reset our human priorities, values, ethics and integrity?

When we do not honour Hestia, we dishonour an archetypal pathway that connects us to our centre, our stillness, our inner life. We risk being drawn out before we have fully repaired our relationship to Hestia. She invites us back to the hearth to help reset and re-centre the world that forgot Her, a world brave enough to be still. A world still enough to heal.

*written April 8, 2020*

---

<sup>1</sup> Barbara Kirksey, "Hestia: A Background of Psychological Focusing", from *Facing the Gods*, edited by James Hillman, Spring Publications, Inc. University of Dallas, Irving, TX: 1980, p.110. She explores the etymological connections between hospitality, host, hospital, ghost and guest.

<sup>2</sup> See Rumi, The Guest House - <http://www.sagemindfulness.com/blog/rumi-s-poem-the-guest-house>