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## An Internal Glance of Sacred Femininity

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In a spiritual sense, honoring the Sacred Feminine includes valuing the feminine and masculine principles as equal and fundamental aspects of the Divine. I am thrilled to share my encounter with the Divine Feminine when visiting the Black Madonna in Le Puy, France, and Mary Magdalene's grotto and chapel in Sainte Baume, France. I hope my journey allows you to recognize and treasure the infinite beauty in your surroundings - the Divine Feminine is everlasting and eternal.

### **Black Madonna**

I'm sharing an experience. This experience was when we visited the Black Madonna altar in Le Puy, France. This happened when I was on a pilgrimage to connect with the divine feminine over the summer. I'm sharing this to invite you to look inward and reflect on a situation in your life when you connected with the divine feminine. And then be in that memory and recollect all that was shown to you from your experience. Allow that memory to be the bridge to your inner world.

So, over our family's summer travels, we each had our pilgrimage of what we wanted to see, do, or experience. Along my pilgrimage, we visited Le Puy, France - located in southern France, between Lyon and Montpellier. We visited the Cathedral of Notre Dame du Puy to be in the presence of the Black Madonna shrine. I'll admit there are many Black Madonna shrines around the world. But based on my research, this is one of the oldest Black Madonna pilgrimage sites in Europe, and it holds a strong presence of her spirit.

### **Cathedral of Notre Dame de Puy**

I learned from our travels to this site that it's believed a pagan cult of Celtic origin developed on this mountaintop well before the spread of Christianity. And it dates back to ancient times, as far back as the Bronze Age. It remains a mystery when Christianity established it as a sanctuary. Some say that happened in the fifth or sixth centuries. I share this to give you a sense of how old this cathedral is and how it existed before Christianity.

That said, this church radiates femininity. To get inside, we had to climb up this steep staircase. And as you're traveling up, you can see a Virgin and Child statue on the left. And on the right, you see the Transfiguration of Christ, where he's manifesting his divinity. It was interesting as the energy that flows through your left arm symbolizes the feminine energy coming from your heart, whereas the energy flowing from your right arm represents the masculine energy. I



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found the positioning of the statues intriguing.

As you continue up the stairs and enter through this pathway, they call it entering in the maternal bosom or the bosom of the church. Some even say you enter the uterus of the divine feminine or the uterus of this church. And even others say you enter through the heart of the church. I found this super fascinating because, in our travels, I learned that traditional churches always have an east entrance. This was certainly not a traditional church, that was one thing I noticed.

And then, once you arrive up those stairs, there's an altar with a subtle cross. The cross was lit with white light and without Jesus hanging on it - as you see in a traditional church setting. Instead, this cross seemed to radiate passion over the resurrection of Christ - not the suffering and pain. I embraced the celebration of the victory of that experience and not the death of his life. Another thing I noticed about this altar with the cross is that by not having Christ hanging on it, it's like we know he's a part of the divine glory, even though we can't see it with our eyes. It was a beautiful, symbolic way of reminding us of that. That was the entranceway. Then there was a supporting altar slightly more predominant, where the Black Madonna shrine existed. I will come back to that and give you a brief tour.

What I noticed most was the level of femininity in this cathedral. Along the walls were paintings where the women were honored and celebrated for their divinity. It wasn't your traditional stations of the cross that carry a heaviness of the end of one's life. One of the paintings was the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, which celebrates the risen Mary and her glory in the heavens. Another one that I found striking was the Vow of the Consoles. And that painting showed the consoles, male officials, surrounding the Black Virgin praying for her support; this scene moved me. Then there was a statue of St. Anne with Mary Magdalene. I sat there staring at the figure and feeling the power of the maternal energy we carry as women and portrayed by this statue. Whether you have kids or not, there's maternal energy about the divine feminine that I experienced at that moment.

### **The Black Madonna Altar in the Marion Choir**

And then I found my way to what they called the Marion choir, where the Black Madonna altar was. So above the altar was this beautiful stained glass, which showed the story of the angel coming to Mary and the humble acceptance of her being the one who was to become the Mother of God.

In churches I've visited over my life, there wasn't a solid feminine presence on the walls or



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even in the church itself - from my personal experience. I was genuinely moved by this cathedral, especially the Black Virgin herself, who brought Mary joy in presenting her son Jesus. When I sat in the small wooden pew looking at this altar, I was instantly flooded with emotions. It was overwhelming the amount of love and acceptance I was feeling. I sat there and just cried. And I cried. I mean, I sobbed. I was trying to keep it in. I remember my family walking away and letting me be in that moment. And I can't even explain why I was crying.

I was so moved, and it wasn't a sadness whatsoever. Instead, it was like something within me softened. It was like I let go of something and opened up to what I could best describe as my holy center. And the tears seemed to wash away and clear any personal, ancestral, even cosmic mother lines of guilt for wanting or desiring to be sensual or attractive. It was like I was in the universal womb of a cosmic mother. She was so expansive, and it was so unconditional. It was like she was there with me, and I just sat there in tremendous acceptance of all my beauty and femininity. I thought of my daughters and how they're also fully accepted for their beauty and femininity - along with all feminine beings.

It was a feeling of returning home and returning to Source or even the truth of knowing the power I hold. I don't know how long I was sitting. But I could have been there for hours. Instead, I was pulled between two places. I wanted to stay there in the Black Madonna's presence and continue receiving what she provided me. Yet I knew my husband's pilgrimage that day was to experience the Tour de France, which meant we needed to be in the car and on the road really soon. I knew my time was limited with her, yet I somehow knew there was no sense of time. And because of that, I could remain in her energy and be in the car with my family.

This brings me back to the present time here with you, with me in your ear - and yet still in her loving and accepting presence. I have to say, I've jokingly said I'm a recovering Catholic. I grew up with Catholicism, and I would even say today that I'm not a religious person - I'm a spiritual person. But now, along this pilgrimage - I'd say that I found my religion. I found infinite love and acceptance when connecting with the energy of the divine feminine.

## **Mary Magdalene**

I'm continuing to guide you along my summer pilgrimage to connect with the divine feminine. In the previous section, we visited the Black Madonna Alter in Le Puy, France. In this section, we're visiting the Mary Magdalene grotto and chapel in Sainte Baume in Southern France.

Along my pilgrimage to reconnect with the divine feminine, we made a trek to southern France to visit Mary Magdalene's cave and tiny chapel on the top of the mountain. The night before,



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we made our plan. We planned to wake up and arrive before dawn to beat the heat. We had our hike plotted and driving directions to Sainte Baume. I woke up, and Dave, my husband, was not feeling well. He decided to stay back. I was disheartened he wasn't joining since he's our steady rock in life – especially when traveling to places where we don't know our way around and don't speak the language. Yet there was something a bit magical about embarking on this journey alone - just my daughters and me.

## The Journey

We arrive, and no one is around. It's gorgeous. Peaceful. Bliss. Chilly. We felt the feminine draw as the dawn skies awake. We start on the trail and pass a Dominican friar or monk walking by quietly. We continued, backpacks full of water and snacks. We follow the path. We're a good 45 minutes into the hike, and it's a bit arduous. We're walking along a thick tree-covered trail - almost like a pathway to the underworld or the lower world in the Shamanic topography. The three of us are quietly climbing the steps. We take occasional breaks to catch our breath. We continue.

As we walked, I likened this to the prolonged delivery of an expecting mother. The climbs along the chalky white trail hugging the cliffs got steep. We were huffing and puffing. We kept going. We eventually acknowledged how hard this is. We kept climbing -still determining what to expect besides seeing the cave and chapel. The groans of complaints started in. About the same time as the sun started to rise. We welcomed the warmth. We took more breaks. We looked out on the horizon and peeked through the canopy of trees to see our progress.

When we arrived at the top of the mountain, it was breathtaking and expansive. There was a calming and confident feeling of vastness. It reminded me of Mother Nature and her presence when we stepped into her space. It was humbling to blend the mountains, the coastline, the rugged terrain, and the lush green trees. Seeing the beauty and interconnectedness within, above, below, and around the imbalances surrounding us, like devastation, pain, and hurt, is a force to be reckoned with.

The masculinity of the warm sun seemed to embellish and accent her almighty presence. As I took this in, I became emotional about Mother Nature's beauty. It brought tears to my eyes. The wind blew away the work it took to arrive here. The vastness of the elements of the Grandmothers, Mothers, and Daughters of the four directions was sensational and exhilarating. I felt so big yet so small at that moment. And while this moment felt like a sense of accomplishment in its own celebratory way - we needed to move on.



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We continue along our trail on top of mountain cliffs for quite some ways. I'm grateful that my husband plotted out the hike since the trail markings were faint and spread far apart. And since we hadn't seen a single person up to this point, I felt relief in having technology that provided me direction.

### **Chapel on Top of the Mountain**

We see the tiny square-shaped chapel on the horizon where Mary Magdalene is connected with the angles. We climb our way up there, and the wind is howling. It's physically strong and moves us toward the chapel. Call me crazy, but all three of us commented how we felt this nudge forward as we found our way to the chapel.

As we walked up, I felt overwhelming love and softness. It was infinite. I was swallowed up by this love and found myself weeping. Inside this nondescript chapel was a small room. Gated. We were somewhat protected from the wind. In the chapel room were grey-black walls with roman-like pillars etched in white. A white marble stone was below the cross where a Mary Magdalene statue stood. Her head hung low, and the skull of her beloved at her feet. I sat on the little bench and embodied her softness. It was a reunion like no other. I felt supported and whole. Both of my daughters were standing next to me at one point, and I felt a level of completeness I'd never felt before. While I could've stayed there for hours, I remembered I could return to this place energetically whenever I liked.

Looking out from this chapel was the most gorgeous, dramatic view of the rugged terrain that overlooks the Provence valley of soft rolling green hills that meets a small town that kisses the shoreline of the Mediterranean Sea. It's breathtaking. Around this moment, there was a shimmering stillness, as if time had stopped to rest.

### **The Descend to the Grotto**

We continue our hike and crawl down this single-track trail along a steep drop off the side of the mountain. I pray to Mother Mary for our safety.

We keep trudging down the side of the mountain. At one point, we hear ruffling in the leaves. The girls are scared. Again, no one is around. We hadn't seen anyone this entire hike - except for the monk walking by as we left the parking lot. I lead us and find a deer nearby. We stop, and I talk to her. I thank her for the peace she radiates and provided us at that moment. My daughter resumes the lead at this point, and we continue. In my heart, I thank Mary Magdalene for the sign she's watching us. And FWIW, we've seen NO wildlife the 3+ hours into this



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hike. So, I was definitely taking that as a divine symbol.

We get to a more spacious trail, and the complaining kicks in. It's thick. The girls are tired. Frankly, I'm tired too. And then we arrive at the stairs leading to the discreet cave hidden on the side of the mountain. We whither our way up to be greeted by half a dozen monks that hold services at this sanctuary throughout the day. Some are playing chess. Some are reading from the bible. Some are praying.

We walk into the cave and see the basilica. It's stunning. We sit in a pew and take it all in. Another monk is sitting on a pew a couple of rows back. And I find myself somewhat annoyed that I'm trying to experience the divine feminine energy of Mary Magdalene with my daughters and male monks surrounding us. I remember how we have both masculine and feminine energies which coexist within us.

I move through this annoyance and settle in. We sit in this damp, moist, cool cave - feeling tired. It's like the long exhausting delivery, or hike, that ended by arriving in the womb of Mary Magdalene's energy. We're in her cave—the cave of the feminine Christ. We're in her energy. It's remarkable. I take in everything. The altar. The candles. The stained glass. The statues. The dripping water in the cave. The stillness. The quiet. I feel the deep sense of solitude that I imagine Mary Magdalene experienced while living here for 30 years. And while I absorb all this, there's more here for me. I can't explain it - besides feeling there's more for me to experience, I follow the impulse.

My daughters and I get up and walk around. I find stairs leading down the cave. It's darker and quieter here. We're closer to the water drops within the cave. I see a few benches facing an illuminated white cross. Before I could even sit down, I was weeping. I found her. I found Mary Magdalene's energy deep in the belly of this cave, below the altar. Below the candles. Below the symbolism of her divinity. Her essence came to me here as the deepest, quietest, purest form of inner connectedness. It's like knowing we all have access to this love deep within us. And there's a sense of reciprocity of this love. It flows in us and out of us. We receive love and give love. This love nurtures us while also expanding us. It's undeniable all-encompassing universal love as if from a Cosmic Mother.

As we leave, we hear the church bells echo from the cave. The sound of the bells vibrates through you. It's truly magical. We hike another 45 minutes and pass maybe 3-4 people walking with a monk - before we arrive at the parking lot.



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## Like a Flower

To come full circle, the one thing I hope you - whether you identify as a male or female - get from this story is an invitation to embark on your own pilgrimage to reconnect with your sacred feminine. And while on that pilgrimage, I hope you can let go of your old long-held beliefs and identifications with patriarchal structures that you may be clinging to for safety and bloom in a new way. When you unify your sacred masculine and feminine tendencies, you blossom into an exquisite, graceful, and hearty light being.

-Erica



Erica guides you on your spiritual journey to spark an awakening within your consciousness and align with your authentic self. Through Depth Hypnosis, Energy Medicine, Applied Shamanism processes, and Coming to Peace Conflict Resolution, Erica guides you to relax your mind and connect with your inner knowing. As you connect with this wisdom to access insights and clarity, you become your own shaman traveling along your own path.