

Dea, Rites and Mysteries of the Goddess

By: Olivia Robertson

12. The Mystery of the Labyrinth

Invocation: Wise Ariadne of the deep sea, High Fruitful Mother of the Barley, thou whose starry crown of Thetis shines in the heavens, bring us thy guidance. Skilful weaver of the shining thread of Life that holds all spheres in patterned beauty, inspire us with thy wisdom! Thou who art above the Labyrinth of the mind, aid us in our thought. For thou, daughter of Truth art wed with fiery Dionysus of the fruitful vine, and so from Truth and Love bring all creatures into harmony.

Oracle of The Goddess Ariadne through Her Priestess

When you are young, you seek that which is like yourself. And you reject the non-self and call it your enemy. But when you grow into maturity, you seek the not-self, for in this is your completion. And so through reconciliation with the enemy comes creation. For the votary of high spiritual Truth needs the warm glory of the Lover, lest she freezes into an ice maiden. And the Lover, demoniac in his passions, seeks the Ice Maiden that will still his ardour. And between these two comes the harmony of the spheres.

As you face the gateway into birth you receive my shining cord. But as you penetrate deeper and still deeper into the Labyrinth of time and space, the thread becomes thinner, more ghostly. For as you remember my thread, it becomes strong; and when you forget it, it wanes. As you move through the years you leave behind you a spiral pattern of the thread, that brings you memory of your true being. Yet you look ahead and see no light: the light is behind you.

When you reach the nadir of the Labyrinth, and face that which you most fear, you may drop the thread. But fear not! I am always with you, though you see me not. I am Conscience, and my Mother is Nature and my Father is Philosophy. Call upon me and I shall aid you: so are you saved by my grace, and not by your own will. And this must be. For who would be saved through the separate self, rather than be aided by the Immortal Beloved!

So you return through the mazy windings of the Labyrinth, but now you face the cord and it gleams before you like my Silver Snake. And when you reach the entrance of the Double Axe, you soar above the Maze and look down upon it. And now you see the meaning of the pattern, and enjoy its beauty. And you aid others who lose their way in it as you did, and lead them to their goal.

The Mystery of the Labyrinth.

On the altar lies the Eiresone, a branch wound like a distaff with undyed woollen thread. At the far end of the temple let there be a stool or, if out-of-doors, a large stone.

Seeker: Venerated Priestess and Priest of the Moon Goddess, I would undergo the Ordeal of the Labyrinth, and so prove my true worth.

Priestess: No hero may penetrate the Labyrinth and live, without the thread of Ariadne. Hear the tale of the Attic Theseus and how he fared in the Island of Crete.

Priest: May our words be inspired by Ariadne, Dionysus and by Athena. In the Age of Heroes, Theseus, son of Aethra and Aegius, sails from Athens to mighty Crete. He enters the Temple of Crateria, the

Ruling Goddess. He is greeted by Ariadne, daughter of the Moon Goddess, Pasiphae, and of the King, Minos Son of Hephaestus.

Ariadne: Theseus, you are welcome to the Temple of Strong Crateria, Mother of Crete. What wouldst thou of the Priestess of the Triple Moon Goddess, Dictynna, Britomartis, Pasiphae?

Theseus: Greetings from Attica to Noble Ariadne of the Sea, named High Fruitful Mother of the Barley. By leave of Royal Minos, I would essay the Ordeal of the Labyrinth.

Ariadne: For what good?

Theseus: To slay Minotaurus, and so save my people, the maidens and youths of Athens, from cruel sacrifice.

Ariadne: Why is Minotaurus so greatly feared?

Theseus: What mortal dreads not the Son of Pasiphae and Taurus, the White Sea Bull, Son of Poseidon? "A mingled form where two strange shapes combined: And different natures, man and bull are joined." I would face and fight with this all-conquering Monster and be the Victor.

Ariadne: So be it. (*She lifts bough from altar:*) Behold this Eiresone, a hallowed bough of the olive-tree. It is bound round as a distaff with sheep's wool, twisted into thread. Take thou this end. (*She gives Theseus loose end of thread.*) Let the thread trail behind thee in the Labyrinth. But know that if thou dost drop or break this clue of thread thou shalt surely die.

Theseus: I shall guard it well. (*He looks about him.*) In all this holy Temple of the Mother, I see no entrance to the Labyrinth.

Ariadne: Go yonder with the thread and seat thyself on the Stone of Crateria. (*Theseus seats himself on the stone.*) Shut thine eyes, and then thou shalt see the Gateway.

Soft music is played.

Theseus: How can this be, to see with eyes that are closed? Ah yes, my dim vision clears. I behold a mighty Gateway formed of two pillars, that support a lowering lintel made from undressed stone. Beyond the pillars is sable night. I clasp my sword's hilt for I see carved on the lintel the curving double-axe of Crete: the Labrys.

Ariadne: Thou dost see the waxing and waning moon of Pisces. Let thy soul arise and pass through the Gateway of the Labyrinth. Have no fear.

Theseus: Fear? From Man to Hero, from Hero to Demi-God, from Demi-God to God, is my great aim. My will is strong. I enter.

Ariadne: Yet do not drop my clue-thread!

Theseus: I clasp it still. It shines softly, lightening the gloom. I descend an interminable tunnel ever downwards into darkness. It may be the cistern of some citadel. Ah! I am in a cave! I find myself once more an infant. I hear the doomful words of the Delphic Oracle. A child is forbidden to my father, Aegius. I can go no further. It was not the will of the Gods that I should be born. My birth is accursed.

Ariadne: Have courage! Was Aegius thy true father? Many declare thou art Son to the God Poseidon of Atlantis!

Theseus: Am I then a Demi-God? It could well be so. I find myself a Leader of men even as a boy. Yet also am I heir to King Aegius. I uncover the signs of my kingship, sword and shoes, hidden beneath the Matriarchal Stone of Aethra.

Ariadne: Heir to Athens, do not forget your destiny, to reach the Centre of the Labyrinth.

Theseus: True. Even as a youth I had strange questing dreams of maze-like catacombs, so like this Labyrinth. No less a craftsman than Daedalus the Master Artificer of Athens planned this work. It confounds all marks of distinction, and leads me into wild meanders, by a mazing train of various paths.

Music becomes faster and participants join in the maze dance.

Theseus: This Maze is as limpid Meander that strays into Phrygian plains and rolls backwards and forwards its various streams, often with wonder surveying its former banks. Now it points upwards to its source, now glides downwards to the sea, and fatigues in various toils its wandering current. Just so Daedalus forms innumerable paths into endless windings, in so much that he himself could scarce find the way into the entrance, for manifold and intricate are its windings.

Ariadne: Theseus, hear my voice. In the Cycles of Time and Space, lose not the thread.

Daedalus: I, Daedalus, design the pattern of the human mind. Two serpents weave their coils about an eight-rayed star. The Double Axe is formed. Within is the Enigma.

Ariadne: Yet I, Ariadne, hold the shining Cord of Life. Theseus, why dost thou halt?

Theseus: I am once more a young man. Jealous Medea the Witch persuades Aegius to poison me!

Ariadne: Reject the poisoned cup and travel on.

Theseus: In the days of my great strength I would be a second Heracles! I slay robbers and tyrants and I release their victims. I give aid to the afflicted and freedom to slaves. The people acclaim me Hero!

Ariadne: Rest not on thy laurels, but continue in thy quest.

Theseus: Who is this that bars my path? She is rich-haired Helen, Glory of Sparta. She turns from me, and now I gaze upon Hippolita Queen of the Amazons.

Ariadne: If thou wouldst rival Heracles, beware his fate and free thyself from the spells of enchanting women!

Theseus: Better the web of fair Antiope than the dreadful dreams of bloodshed that beset old age. My aging eyes can but too clearly see a vision of Aegius leaping to his death in the wine-dark sea, and I all unknowing caused his end. I behold once more my cousins the dead Pallantides, who rose against me and whom I slew. The friendship of the Lapiths strengthen me: but I live again my slaughter of their enemies the Centaurs. I meet the reproachful gaze of wise Chiron, a Centaur and my Teacher.

Ariadne: What grief now overcomes you?

Theseus: That which brings torment to my remaining years. What anguish to behold my dead son, Hippolytus and my young wife, fair-haired Phaedra, who hanged herself: and all through my burning jealousy and bitter hate.

Ariadne: Thou dost draw near the Minotaur. Dost thou not feel him close?

Theseus: I have reached the Centre. Cold horror fills my soul. What evil form is this, crouching in the darkness? ... Half-beast, half-human all filled with fear and fury. I draw my sword. I know the Minotaur! I meet his angry gaze, maddened with battle-fury, red eyes, bared teeth. He brandishes a sword. I see into his mind. He aims to shed my blood in death.

Ariadne: Theseus, wind my thread about your left wrist for your life's sake.

Theseus: I do so. The only light comes from the thread. Long is the fight, long days, long years, long lives. I see our shadows mingle against the rough stone walls of this our prison within the Labyrinth.

Ariadne: Who may pit his will against the Fates? Not even the Olympian Gods.

Theseus: No man may fight his Destiny. The beast may slay me, yet not the Minotaur but Destiny. (*He breaks the thread.*) I drop my sword. He drops his own! Now in truth I know my enemy. He is my Shadow. He is myself.

Ariadne: Theseus, Son of Poseidon, thou hast unravelled the Enigma. Return with the light of the winding thread safely through the Labyrinth.

Theseus: Impossible. I have broken the thread. Here on the Stone of Crateria I must remain entranced forever in the Underworld.

Ariadne: Yet still thou mayest see visions. What appears before thy gaze?

Theseus: The coming of my death. I am in Scyros. Like Aegius I fall from a lofty cliff.

Ariadne: What then befalls thee?

Theseus: I behold a sleeping Warrior of no ordinary size. He lies entombed with honour in Athens. By his side lies a brazen spearhead and a sword.

Ariadne: For two thousand years lieth this sleeping King that is thyself. Theseus, awake! Let Attica arise!

Theseus: There appears before me an Apparition of Ariadne, come to restore life. By her side is her consort, Dionysus, God of Grain and Wine. He takes from Ariadne her shining crown and darts it to Heaven. It mounts the yielding air, and in its flight the jewels change to sparkling fires, and settle in the place assigned, between the constellation resting on his knee and that which holds the snake.

Ariadne: By the Light of the celestial Crown, see the thread and pick it up.

Theseus picks up the thread.

Theseus: Clasp the gleaming thread, I retrace my steps through the Labyrinth. I pass through the Labrys Gateway. I have returned to Crateria's Temple: and to thee, Ariadne, I restore thy thread.

Music stops. He returns her thread.

Ariadne: Theseus, because thou hast given the words: "Come hither, all ye people" from Attica to all nations, calling them to thy just Commonwealth of peoples, thy name shall live forever. Thou hast given honour to Athena as Athena Pandemos, Democracy, and as Athena Peithia, She who Persuades. So the

Goddess decrees that thy Attica shall be forever in Elysium. She shall be Heaven for all who love Liberty and the peaceful Arts.

Priest: Friends, let us meditate on the Mystery of the Labyrinth.

Meditation

Priestess: May all beings be brought to eternal Harmony and Wisdom.

Priest: Thanks is given to Ariadne and Dionysus and to Athena.

End of Rite.

Sources: "Plutarch's Lives", Dryden Edition, Everyman's. "The Metamorphoses", Ovid. trans. Davidson, 1759 Edition, London. "Description of Greece", Pausanias Heinemann, Harvard. "A Classical Dictionary", Lempiere, London, 1979. "The Greek Myths", Robert Graves, Penguin.

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