

The Greek Goddess Artemis

Artemis: Goddess of Light and Protector of the Vulnerable

In Greek mythology Artemis was the daughter of Zeus, the mighty ruler of the Olympian gods. The goddess Artemis was literally born to serve as a nurturer and protector! The Greek goddess Artemis was frequently called upon to nurture the needy. All too often she felt compelled to come to the rescue even though Artemis received little in return. Artemis naturally became the patron saint of childbirth, the protector of children, and the goddess who especially heard the appeals of women.

The goddess Artemis was always responsive to the needs of the vulnerable and the suffering. She was quick to defend the powerless from unjust treatment at the hands of the Olympian patriarchy; it is not surprising that in current times Artemis is seen as the "feminist" goddess. Even as a small child the Greek goddess Artemis was decisive.

When Zeus asked Artemis what presents she wanted for her third birthday she responded without hesitation that she wanted six things:

- ~ To be allowed to live without having to be distracted by love and marriage,
- ~ A bow and arrow just like her brother's,
- ~ A hunting costume and freedom from having to dress up like a lady,
- ~ The job of bringing light into the world,
- ~All the mountains on the earth to live on.

Zeus was amused by her precociousness and happily granted the little goddess Artemis her wishes. Even at this tender age it was clear that Artemis was going to be the most independent of the goddesses, one who thrived on challenges!

Artemis' association with the natural world, the wilderness, symbolizes her own untamed spirit. The most independent of the goddesses, she roamed the forests in her role as huntress.

The Greek goddess Artemis was famous for her hunting skills, for the sharp focus of her attention and her unerring aim. She was known as a fearless and responsible hunter, willing and able to bring down the most terrifying beasts.

But Artemis was especially fierce in her protection of the gentle animals that were usually preyed upon. As the protector of animals and the young, the goddess Artemis was angered because a group of Greek sailors had slaughtered a hare and its young. She delayed them from sailing to join the Battle of Troy.

Artemis was not the least interested in cultivating the land or in harnessing the forces of nature to benefit mankind (she left those responsibilities to Demeter and Athena, respectfully). Artemis could

easily be described as an early environmentalist. The goddess Artemis valued her freedom and personal space and protected them with ferociousness.

Indeed, those who restricted her freedom, those who tried to thwart her commitment to reaching her goals, or simply invaded her privacy, paid dearly.

The Greek goddess Artemis was often associated with the moon, especially the crescent or "new" moon. Phoebe was one of the many names she was called. The name Phoebe means the "light one" or "bright one".

Artemis "Goddess of Light" had the divine duty of illuminating the darkness. Artemis was often depicted carrying a candle or torch, lighting the way for others, leading them through territories yet uncharted.

In Greek mythology Artemis, despite her "wildness" (her refusal to conform to conventional ways or tradition) and her fierce independence, was depicted as one of the compassionate, healing goddesses. Of all the Greek goddesses, she was the most self-sufficient, living life on her own terms, comfortable both in solitude and in holding the reins of leadership.

The Greek goddess Artemis gives us courage. Like her counterpart, the Roman goddess Diana, she illuminates those places that terrify us and lends us her strength to bring us safely through our fears.