

The Gods Whose Sacrifices We Neglect

The old gods have a lot to teach us.

Sure, we all know that the Greek pantheon – Zeus, Hera, Aphrodite, Hades, Ares, Athena, Artemis, Demeter, Dionysus, and the rest – don't *really* exist.

But there is a reason people chose these characters to personify their understanding of the world. As psychologist Jordan Peterson points out, each god (in all of his or her power and pettiness) represents some of the fundamental human drives or attributes – sex, intelligence, wrath, independence.

The old Greek pantheon is a sophisticated way for understanding the complex human mind, which is home to many powerful needs and drives that sometimes act like personalities.

Like the gods of legend, these “gods” of our personality don't like people who spurn them. And it doesn't take a long look into Greek mythology to know that the gods do awful things to people they don't like. Afflictions of madness, afflictions of lust, transformation into animals – it's not pretty.

Aren't fighting for your rights, your ideas, or your self-respect? You are neglecting Ares (the god of war) and he will exact his sacrifice someday. Usually this will look like a gradual building resentment, with an explosion of anger toward someone who doesn't deserve it at a time it's not called for.

Aren't honoring or expressing your own sexuality? You may be offending Aphrodite (who brought about the downfall of Heracles – so not someone to be messed with). She'll have her due, in uncontrolled, warped, or frustrated desire.

Aren't preserving your independence and purity? Giving in to the crowd? Surrendering what makes you unique? In a sense you are offending the virgin goddess Artemis, who is perhaps the scariest of them all (she'll turn you into a stag and have your own hounds kill you).

It's all imagination, I know. But I still find it interesting to think of my own drives or needs as personalities. With personalities, at least we can bargain. We can make the sacrifices that all good Greeks knew to make. And we can remember that neglecting any of the gods has terrible consequences.

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