

Eris: The Goddess of Chaos and Discord



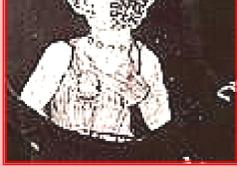
Eris Goddess of Discord © [Emmanuella Kozas](#)

Image used with permission from the artist

Eris is the Greek Goddess of Chaos and Discord, and, in the confusion that surrounds Her origins, She certainly live up to the name. She is referred to either a minor spirit, or eldest daughter of Nyx (Night) and Zeus, or daughter of Zeus and Hera and twin to Ares. She is depicted as a beautiful young woman, a skeletal crone or winged daemon.

Hesiod describes two Goddesses who go by the name Eris, the Erites. The first is a benign Goddess who promotes healthy competition, and can be a catalyst for bettering oneself. This "Good Eris" provides the incentive for individuals to create the change they want to see in themselves. It is Eris who gives us the proverbial "kick in the butt" we all require, at times, when we become lethargic, complacent or prone to procrastination.

The second Eris is the one we are most familiar with. As the daughter of Hera and Zeus, and companion to Ares, She fosters evil, war and cruelty. Her epithets include Infernal Monster, Lady of Sorrows and Nurse of War. The poet Virgil writes that Eris lives in a cavern, surrounded by mountains, at the entrance to Hades. Eris begins as a small and insignificant Spirit who thrives on Chaos, striding through battlefields growing stronger and larger as She feeds on the slaughter. She spreads rumours and plants jealousies, creating quarrels, feuds, disagreements. But it is likely this much reviled Eris is a later version, created in order to vilify a powerful Dark Goddess who did not fit the mold of what a Goddess should be. Eris was simply too wild and chaotic to fit into patriarchy's well-ordered universe.



Eris at the Judgment of Paris - Public Domain

[Badisches Landesmuseum](#)

In some stories, She is the eldest Daughter of Dark Night (Nyx). She embodies the Chaos that arose from the Primal Void, and from which all of life is created. Eris is usually depicted as a beautiful young woman but as one moves in closer, She is transformed into a grotesque old crone with pale skin and corpse-like features. She wears a tattered white gown, and conceals a doubled-edged dagger between Her breasts. Her eyes are like flames, Her hair is covered in thorns and She wears a poisonous snake as a garland. Her most important symbol is the Golden Apple of Discord.

Eris, in Her role as Defender of the People, may have roots in a pre-patriarchal society which valued the chaotic nature of this Goddess. Eris may have originally been an aspect of a Triple Goddess of Fate along with Her Sisters, Philotes (Affection) and Nemesis (Vengeance). She is associated with the Tree of Hesperides (the source of Her golden apples). The serpent coiled in Her hair is a symbol that links Her to a much older Deity. Eris is sometimes depicted as a black-winged Goddess with claws replacing her feet, conjuring up images of Lilith or Inanna, and other maligned and feared Dark Goddesses.



Winged Eris - Public Domain

[Antikensammlung Berlin Museum](#)

She is the mother of the spirits known as the Kakodaimones. These Children of Chaos inhabited Pandora's box and were unwittingly unleashed into the world. Eris is a fiercely protective Mother. She sought revenge on the Gods of Olympus on behalf of Her Children, when She and Her brood were the only Gods forbidden to attend the wedding of Thetis and Peleus. What Mother today would not feel outrage to find her children were the only ones not invited to a party? In these circumstances, Eris becomes the champion of social justice, standing up for those who cannot defend themselves.

When She arrived at the wedding uninvited and tossed Her Apple of Discord into the room, She set in motion the events that would eventually lead to the Trojan War. Upon the Apple was the word Kallisti, which means "to the fairest". Hera, Athena and Aphrodite all vied for the Apple, believing themselves to be the prettiest. The mortal, Paris, was selected to award the Apple to the fairest, he chose Aphrodite. She had bribed him, offering him the beautiful Helen. Paris and Helen returned to Troy, pursued by Helen's husband Menelaus, a Greek king. And thus the Trojan War began.

Many would paint Eris as a spiteful Goddess seeking revenge, and this is how She is often portrayed. But Eris did not start the Trojan War, She was merely a catalyst. If She and Her Children had been invited and accepted by the Gods, nothing more would have happened. If the Goddesses had realized we are all equally beautiful, events would not have unfolded as they did. And if the Gods, including mighty Zeus, had not been meddling in the affairs of humans in the first place, all would be well. Eris was merely acting out Her role as a Goddess of Fate, doling out natural consequences as punishment for arrogant behaviour.

Through one simple act, Eris was able to stand up for Her Children as well as expose the insignificant vanities of the Gods. Eris is most definitely a force to be reckoned with, for She will take down as many as She can when She is disrespected, and She will always expose the hypocrisy of others, mortal and God alike. In the 5th century BC, the poet Aeschylus wrote: "Eris is the last of the Gods to close an argument".

The Golden Apple is also known as the Apple of Discord or the Apple of Immortality. The Golden Apples grew in the Garden of Hesperides, located in Northern Africa. The Garden was tended by the Hesperides, Daughters of Nyx (and Sisters to Eris), and the Tree itself was protected by the Serpent, Ladon.

The Apple is inscribed with the word Kallisti which means "To the fairest" or "To the prettiest". But the Apple can just as easily mean to the richest, the most powerful, the chosen. People's true colors come out when they attempt to take the Apple for themselves. People will see what they want to see within the Apple, and will do anything to keep it for themselves, including having power over others and trampling peoples rights.



Golden Apple by Ajna DreamsAwake

The Fable of Eris and Herakles

Herakles was walking through a narrow pass when he spotted a small apple lying on the ground. Without thinking, he tried to smash it with his club, but the apple grew larger. Herakles smashed the apple again, even harder than before. Herakles continued smashing away at the apple with his club, but it continued to grow with each blow until it grew so large it blocked his path. Herakles dropped his club in confusion and stood staring at the massive apple. Athena came along and said, 'O Herakles, don't be so surprised! This thing that has brought about your confusion is Eris. If you just leave it alone, it stays small; but if you decide to fight it, then it swells from its small size and grows large.' The moral is "Strife feeds on conflict." When we come across a small and insignificant issue, we must deal with it immediately and appropriately. If we fight against it, or deny it, it will only escalate, growing larger until it prevents us from moving any further. Aesop, 6th B.C.

The Discordian Movement which was founded in the late 1950's, brought Eris into the modern world. Discordians view Eris as a catalyst for change, She teaches people to take responsibility for themselves and the messes they create. One of the key beliefs in Discordianism is "think for yourself."

All too often, people blame external circumstances or other people for their problems. When this happens, Eris has a tendency to step in and escalate the situation, causing even more trouble. Once a person realizes she is accountable for her actions, or that she has been taking herself too seriously, Eris will shrink back to a manageable size.

The Sacred Chao, a Discordian symbol, illustrates the desired balance between order and disorder. The pentagon represents order at its most limiting extreme. Examples include red tape and bureaucracy, organized religion, domination and control over others. The apple represents disorder or chaos, with such examples as subversive humour, anti-establishment groups or any action that shakes up the status quo. When our lives become overly structured, or we take ourselves too seriously, Eris is sure to show up with Her golden apple, wreaking havoc until we bring ourselves back into balance.



Sacred Chao by Ajna DreamsAwake

The modern Eris has become an important symbol for feminists and militant activists. She is the Goddess of the 99%, a Warrior Queen who does not shrink from conflict. She stands against injustice, hypocrisy and disrespect. The Ancient Greeks, fearing Her, attempted to diminish Her power, by relegating Her to a minor role in the Pantheon and attributing to Her all the negative aspects of warfare. We witness similar examples in our own lives, when we are slandered for rejecting a suitor, when we are attacked simply for being born women, or when we have accusations flung at us as we speak our truth, or when we demonstrate assertiveness. Women can call on Eris whenever they must stand up for themselves against patriarchy. This may occur in the form of a militant uprising, or, more subversively, through random acts of kindness. A single act, performed with loving intent, is capable of elevating the consciousness of the entire world. Eris challenges fear, war and violence through acts of beauty and love.

Ritual to Find Serenity amidst Chaos

This is a ritual I created for those times when I feel overwhelmed or confused by the events around me.

Supplies:

- Gold candle to represent Eris
- White candle to represent yourself
- Golden delicious or any yellow apple
- Cedar or violet incense to instill peace and clarity
- Red or black altar cloth

Cast your circle as you normally do.

Light the gold candle and invite Eris into the circle. Say the following prayer.

Light the white candle and sit quietly for a few minutes. Close your eyes and visualize the chaos swirling about you outside the circle. Say the following prayer:

"Blessed Eris. Take me to your place of stillness within the chaos that surrounds me, so that I may see the path before me. I do not fear. This situation passes over me, and around me, and through me. I am free; I live in peace. Blessed be." (Eris prayer adapted from [Book of the Goddess](#) by Anna Livia Plurabelle © 2002)

If there is a particular issue that is troubling you, visualize it as a giant golden apple blocking your path. As you sit in stillness, you notice the apple begin to shrink, the calmer you become, the smaller the apple becomes. If you find yourself getting worked up, repeat the Eris prayer, as often as you need to. You may also try to find something humorous about the situation. When you surrender to the absurd, you will discover the apple grows ever smaller, until it becomes something manageable or insignificant.

Give thanks to the Goddess and open the circle.



5-fingered Hand of Eris - Public Domain

Sources:

- <http://www.sacred-texts.com/wmn/bog/bog30.htm>
- <http://www.theoi.com/Daimon/Eris.html>
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_apple
- <http://webspaces.webring.com/people/ug/goldenmonkey/Eris.html>
- <http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~tilt/principia/body.html>
- <http://emanuellakozas.deviantart.com/>