

Inanna's Descent



Inanna2

“He gave me truth

He gave me descent into the underworld

He gave me ascent from the underworld

He gave me the kurgarra”

-Inanna and the God of Wisdom (6).

The above passage translates Sumerian cuneiform text that articulates four of the ninety-four keys of wisdom the Queen Inanna was given. After receiving these keys she was crowned Goddess Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth, the highest and most noble Goddess in Sumerian culture. The above motif foreshadows a journey that she has yet to know. It is a flight into the underworld. A voyage into herself. Inanna and

her descent are symbolic of the travels that many women go through. It is the exploration to those places we deny are a part of ourselves. The expedition to the underworld is the derivation into the Other. The excursion to the Shadow that we deny. The crossing to the abject that we reject and makes us so uncomfortable. It is a pilgrimage that we must take, as did Inanna, if we are ever to ascend. It is the odyssey that we must be willing to partake if we are ever to truly know the truth of ourselves.

As women we may not have a consensus on what falls under the realm of the divine feminine. We may not even know what is truly feminine because our lives and our conditioning have been so abstracted. Our Judeo-Christian religious institutions are built on a subversive ideology that exalts and celebrates male images. It is a male god that is celebrated, venerated, and feared. The images we comprehend on deep, intuitive levels focus on God as Father. This God as Father image creates and legitimizes the authority of men and reinforces the subjugation of women. They create a feeling that beckons deep into your bones, right down to your DNA, that to be a woman is to be lacking. To be a woman is to hold power that is only receptive, solely passive, and aching quiet. Female power is ultimately seen in its most limiting terms. (1)

Women are led to believe that they must behave in the limiting examples of patriarchal power they do see if they are ever to feel a sense of wholeness. As daughters of our fathers we wear masks of what we think is appropriate behavior. To the outside world we are pleasant and rational. Conceptual and abstract. We achieve and succeed in the rat race, yet on the inside may find ourselves filled with self hatred and loathing because we can never match the masculine, honored ideal that is so deeply ingrained within us. This path of "acting male" can lead to an even greater emptiness. Conversely, we may become overly

identified with male energy. This can lead to what has been identified by Freud as “penis envy” or over identification with Jung’s concept of the “inner-animus”. All in our search for power and validation. (7).

A significant aspect of our own personal journey of descent involves a confrontation with our inner patriarch. This inner patriarch can be classified as Freud’s Super Ego. It is the voice of “God the Father” that we have incorporated as part of our psyche. When we first confront the inner patriarch things begin to fall apart. Women become so conditioned to live along safe, set out patterns and acceptable ways of behaving. We take on patriarchal ideals as our own. Then the shattering comes. The reckoning. The beginning of the descent. We are challenging and questioning the Super-Ego. We are confronting the truth we have previously blindly accepted and known. (7).

Like Inanna, we are called on to begin removing our veils, one at a time. Each one representing something within us that has held onto the paradigm we are born into. Inner symbols of our status, intellectual and career achievements, sensuality, sexuality, financial security, even physical dominance, and lineage appear to be stripped from us (6). Each layer of adornment representing a deeper step into the unconscious, a deeper level into the core of the hidden self, a more cavernous move toward the Other. We are left bare and frightened. The loss of our previously accepted indoctrination into the hegemony leaves us scared, chaotic, and messy. It is within this state that the other aspect of our previously rejected inner divine feminine can be birthed. It is only by unveiling to the very core of our beings that we can find the great Goddess within us. (7).

The feminine is by nature empty, receptive, and responsive. As such, there exists the instinctual calling that seeks to fill this emptiness. In her search for a love she can feel in her body and bones, a love she can feel to the deepest depths of her being, a woman will choose to smother the

men closest to her even if these men are abusive or inappropriate. She is in search of something, anything, to worship. Failing romantic companionship, a woman may use sex, food, shopping, and other sensual pleasures that will allow her to avoid the emptiness. It is an emptiness that can leave a painful vacancy. She continues to search outside of herself to fill this desert. As long as she looks outside she remains empty. It is an emptiness that only the divine can fill. (2)

Cognizance of this space can come suddenly, forcefully, and dramatically. This awareness can leave a woman running from herself. In her craving to fill this void, and in the absence of the Goddess within as divine inspiration, a woman may surrender her power and her identity to any man who brings her sexual contentment or rapturous physical joining. Her dependency becomes abject. At once the thing she most craves and also the thing she most rejects as an aspect of her psyche (7).

In this receptive, responsive state we do not experience borders between ourselves and the rest of the world. As the Shadow has broken through into the psyche, so does our identity break into the outer world. There is no longer a clear, distinct Self. The Self that was known is gone. Those barriers within that allowed the Other to exist are gone. We are immersed in the Other. The Other becomes the Self. The Self is in reception to the Other. A deep empathy and symbiosis prevails. We are able to share in an emotional exchange unknown to us. This takes place within and without. We are raw in our interactions and in our relationships. For the self-centered, self-initiating individual who has taken on the values of our forefathers, this break of boundaries is frightening, revolutionary, new. We have reached the seat of the rejected Goddess within. We are face to face in encounter with the suppressed feminine consciousness. (7)

When women are alone and in the depths of our depression, we may think only of our irrational descent and not equate it with potency at all. There is a form of female power that is best articulated by the descent of Inanna. At first this potentiality and its energy are misunderstood. Suddenly we have aspects of our unconscious manifesting into our conscious and creating havoc. They manifest in ways that cause us to feel compulsive, rebellious, and confrontational. We are animalistic, primal, infantile, instinctive, devouring, and destroying. We are ashamed of the ways of our misbehaving. In the midst of this chaos we may not recognize that what is happening is divine. It is a call to power. A power that comes from being willing to discover those places within us that feel deeply and truly. Those aspects of our being that hold our fears and most fundamental hurts. This is the late-night call from the Goddess. This is the plunge into the Shadow. This is the encounter with the abject. (7)

The abject is that which we at once implore and yet reject. Importune yet refuse. Appeal and also squash. Exhort and additionally decline. Request and equally macerate. Petition and at the same time nauseate. It is what we want and elicit, and yet reject and repel. The abject is that part of our psyche that we want nothing to do with. Yet we court the abject like a dangerous lover we know is bad for us. So thrilling, scary, desirous, repulsive, lascivious, and disgusting is the underside of our consciousness. That which the Other within holds is begging, through is scandalous invite, for courtship. There is nothing like those aspects within us that we reject that let us know exactly who we are and what it is that we want. (5)

There is nothing there that seems even remotely familiar. Nothing there that we think we would want to know. These dreams, these visions, these knowings. These masochistic urges, these pleas for fulfillment, this pain. We cannot help but know it if we are ever to know ourselves. To get to

this place of entanglement, this place of seducing those parts within ourselves that we reject, requires us to release all attachments. Sometimes this process is violent, chaotic, and purging. Like the shedding of all of Inanna's upper world symbols, we may find ourselves physically ill. But we are compelled to release them (5). We may, as Inanna, ask why this is necessary. But the answers do not come. The ways of the underworld cannot be questioned (6). We sense this within us. We are filled with fear for we do not know what this journey holds for us. We hate everyone and everything as we are driven deeper within. We appear dazed and irrational. We forge even deeper. We get honest with ourselves about the complexities of our relationships. Our fathers. We throw up. Our mothers. We bleed. Our selves. We are maniacal. The fear is unbearable. In the middle of this orgy of disorder, we encounter the object (5). In the midst of it all, towards the very depths of it all, we become just like Inanna. We die in the encounter with our inner horror. We die to ourselves.

We must be willing to sacrifice all we think we are for the unknown of what we may be. This is not a process undertaken easily, for with it comes great pain. The guilt associated with allowing ourselves to feel this pain is immense. We are selfish, childish, and incoherent to those around us who live and trust the superego/ animus/ patriarchal ideal. We may not even be aware that a change is needed. Eventually we get to the point where we recognize that sacrifices must be made if we are ever to heal and receive our truth. Inanna knew that her worldly adornments must be sacrificed. There are parts of us that must be sacrificed if we are ever to move beyond this intense discomfort. The comforts of our old identity are substantial, but the pain is just too enormous for things to stay the same. And the pain will be great. If there isn't great pain, there will not be great motivation. The type of motivation needed for a great rebirth. (7)

We live for so long with notions of right and wrong, concepts of goodness and unsoundness, abstractions of virtue and fallaciousness, theories of morality and faults, beliefs of ethics and honesty, and convictions of suitability and nefariousness. But we are now at a point beyond these notions. The God of our fathers has failed us. We are purging. We are having our own personal encounter with evil. This is a wickedness that is arising within us that we do not understand. It is an experience marked with sinfulness and transgression. We reach the far side of self-murder. Then comes our salvation. Beyond annihilation lies our self-respect. We have reached unison with Elysium. (4)

We have descended to the very depths of our being as we undressed and surrender every earthly veil. And now we rise. The promised land is assured through the varied paths we choose towards our own decreed ascent (4). As Inanna hung rotting and hanging on a hook, we lay decayed from having acknowledged the evil within. There were three factors that contributed to Inanna's restoration and ascent from the underworld. The first two are the food of life and the water of life. These had to be sprinkled on Inanna's body to insure her rebirth. Inanna required messengers from above be sent to carry the nourishment that would assure her renewal. The God of Wisdom sends a kurgarra and a galatur. These are creatures who are instinct-based and non-sexual. As masterful mourners they are endowed with the gifts of empathy and imagination. They possess the ability to mirror the sense of sadness that pervades the underworld (6). Analogously, there are three factors that contribute to our restitution and our personal ascension: narrative assimilation, functional action, and forgiveness. (4)

Narrative assimilation occurs at the level of the mind, the food of life. This is using the rational abilities to discern between each piece of abhorrent beauty, disgusting glamour, repulsive appeal, and wicked allure within us. We are dissecting and making intellectual sense of

what we have found and continue to find. We may speak to someone to help us with our integration. We may devour books that speak to our process. We are attaining wisdom that comes from using the mental capabilities for acumen. As gut retching and body centered our experiences may be, the shift towards the strengths and rationality within the mind can provide balance and comfort. We transfer the visceral experience of our inner evil to the realm of analysis. (4)

In our intellectual pondering we do not abandon the very deep-rooted experiences we are having. We do not participate in intellectual stimulation and mental reasoning for authentication in and of themselves. We may do it because we want to challenge ourselves. We may partake in intellectual abstractions as a defensive mechanism in response to the pain we are feeling. At the root of our considerations exists a real yearning to know ourselves and the nature of our inner Other better. We take a stand against the rage within with our minds in the absolute faith that our current descent will lead to an ascent (4). Though we feel like Inanna on the hook, rotting away, there is a part of us that knows help is coming (6). That help involves cultivating the strength of our minds as an active force intent on assimilating and healing this abhorrence that has come forth in demand of our attention. Sometimes, in the midst of the madness, we may not even be aware that we can challenge. We may not even be aware that within us lies the aptness to question the validity of our sole experience. This intellectual exploration is not taken with the intention of impartiality. Our experiences during this time are entirely our own, and thus subjective and deeply personal. But this process is important because it gives us as women the ability to create a narrative that shall bear witness to our path of rebirth. As individuals, we find ourselves at the very beginning of formulating the great mythology of our own lives (4).

Purposeful action is the water of life. This is freeing your energy. Just as we cannot survive without the flow of water through our bodies, so our healing requires movement. Our experience with the abject within was not solely an intellectual process. Our descent into the Shadow-Other within the depths our psyche is not simply something that we thought through. It is something that reached to us and into us, to the very depths of our core. To the extent to which we were rocked and shocked, shaken and trembled, we will be required to revolutionize ourselves free. This is a process that takes place in the realm of body. To the level with which we surrendered our power is the same depths with which we will be required to be empowered. It is here that we acknowledge the deep-seated effects of our trauma. This is going beyond making sense of what our passage entailed. This is complete revolt. It is at this level that we kick, scream, dance, sing. We are moving beyond helplessness, guilt, victimization, and mental replays towards true reformation. This is catharsis (4).

This step moves us out of melancholia and into mourning. The differences may appear subtle but are distinct. In melancholia our focus is centered in on ourselves. We place ourselves under attack. We hold ourselves with little regard. We are blaming an inherent self-worthlessness as the cause for our discontent. The chaos of our encounter with the abject within has been so absorbing that we may have lost any interest in interacting with the world. In melancholia we were caught in a pattern of blaming ourselves for what is contained in our Shadow-Other. We think that there is something fundamentally wrong with us. The vicious cycle of helplessness, guilt, victimization, and mental replays only reinforce the assertion that perhaps there is something inherently unlovable about us. Melancholia manifests as self-hatred. (3)

Mourning allows us to acknowledge the loss we are experiencing. Whether that loss was an image we held of someone from our childhoods, the loss of our old identity as unquestioning daughters of the patriarchy, or some other illusion we lived under, our process is still a very painful one. We may not be interested in the outside world and are still confronting the Shadow-Other, but the self-hatred is diminished. We can grieve for who we were and may no longer ever be, for our awareness will no longer allow ignorance. Through our intellectual efforts to abstractualize our inner findings we began the process of welcoming cathartic energy. The introduction of cathartic energy brings with it the promise of healing. (3)

It is only once we have reached catharsis can we truly mourn. Mourn for the person we thought we were. Cry for the ways we held ourselves back. Allow sorrow for the pains we suffered. Bemoan the ugliness we accepted. Deplore the evils we incorporated. It is through this cleansing that a new awareness can be achieved. The recognition that regardless of what previous paths were traveled, they do not have to determine future avenues. Despite the horrors lived, whether those horrors took place in our lives or solely within our psyches and spirits, now we can choose to forge a new trajectory (4). Our descent begins to teach us more of the glorious women we were created to be, not the previously subjugated young daughters of patriarchy that we had been conditioned to be (7). We are able to detach ourselves from the obsession of rethinking and reevaluating the pains and barbarity of where we were. We can move towards the freedom of freed energy. We remove ourselves from the endless cycles of requital, retribution, and vengeance. These endless circular roads drive us away from ourselves by reinforcing the already purged aspects of our psyche. The same object, when first encountered, immobilized us. Now we are awakened. Back in our bodies, we are compelled and spurred into action that triumphs over the adversity of the underworld (4).

Catharsis does not mean that we are suddenly forgetful of all that we have witnessed and all that we have experienced. The abject, loathsome, ugliness within has not magically vanished. That is not possible for we are forever changed through our interaction with the Shadow-Other. There is no turning back, nor would we want to. We are disinfected and decontaminated through this process. We have found the survivor within and would never give her up. This stage of mourning is not about going into victim mode. Far from it. We are now learning to live with the acknowledged abject within us. We are learning to identify and rename our trials and inner demons so that we can persevere. Who we are may not be clear as of yet, but we know that we are stronger than we knew ourselves to be. Though our correspondence with all that we once never thought was within us we shall bequeath a new life. From the remnants of our pain we shall leave a legacy. (4)

The repugnant things we have found within us are not something to be reasoned or rationalized away. It is not as simple as that nor would we want it to be (4). Inanna was called below out of a desire to acknowledge the passing of a relative (6). There was a part of us that was called to the great below. We were directed towards the lurid within us for it held allure. The abject was attractive to us. This has to be acknowledged. On an instinctual level we were fascinated. We moved towards the unconscious by the request of our spirit to heal at the most deepest levels. Our suffering may seem unfair, unjust. Many times it is. What came forth were the pains that were visited on us. Sometimes we are led to consider the pain we had visited on others. But now we are seeking reconciliation. Solutions may not be found. It is not even about exposition at this point. In catharsis we are learning to dialogue with the Shadow and reach collaboration within the depths of our psyche and body from which it arose. (4)

We have danced with ablution. Sang with abreaction. Cried with cleansing. Descanted through expurgation. Screamed in the midst of abolition. Kicked with purgation. Breathed with purification. After all this, after the food and water of life has been sprinkled on us and we are reawakened, Like Inanna, we are ready for the Kurgarra. We have consumed food for thought. Danced with the waters of catharsis. Now we embrace the Kurgarra and reach the point of forgiveness. Of all the steps we have taken towards consolidation, pardon may be the most difficult for it requires a new level of empathy towards ourselves. Forgiveness requires self-honesty and courage. (4)

We are being asked at this point to revisit our Shadow with fresh eyes. We are moved to encounter the object with a different perspective. We want to be free of its mindless and hold on us. So we enter the phenomenon of pardon. With all its complexities and imprisonments. With all its promises and failures. The promise of extenuation is a marvel only because we move beyond what we previously knew about analytical deciphering and seeking excesses. We move further than intellectual narration and justification. There appears to be a certain superficiality about forgiveness considering that the monstrosity we are addressing doesn't seem to require it. Forgiveness does not make sense unless and until we actually do it. Before we reach this state it is the last thing we want to do. The very last thing we think we would ever be able to do. There appears to be no point to it. The hurts and abuses of the past do not seem to deserve this grace on our part. (4)

This is where we meet the Kurgarra. The Kurgarra want nothing from us. The commodity of fleshly exchange through the request of sexual favors, that daughters of the patriarchy are always on guard of, is not relevant with the Kurgarra. There is no risk of being physically penetrated. The Kurgarra and the Galatur stand by us as we go through the process of mourning. They are mourning right along with us. On the

other side of our bereavement they impart with us a deep empathy. Empathy for the path that we have had to travel. The brave self-exploration we have shown in times of psychic turmoil. The painful transitions we have made. Now they return the gifts of all that work (7).

The Kurgarra represents that inner part of us that is beyond gender, beyond subjugation. Beyond the supposed irrationality of our encounter with the Other. Our experience is recognized with eyes of deep love and empathy. We are bathed in the fresh insights of affinity, appreciation, and communion with our new selves. We forgive our own contravention. We forgive the ways we have harmed ourselves. We stand ready to forgive the inner voice of impossible standards and unrelenting meanness (7).

Once we have moved towards a new love and antipathy of ourselves we can now allow it to be directed towards others. With guided patience and determination, we learn to pardon the wrongs done against us. The faces of people that represented the inner ugliness now searches for the full light of the healing Sun to be nourished and absolved. This is not simple, though the results may lead to poetry. This is honest self-care. This is taking steps to ensure that the possibility of a dramatic reencounter with the Other, the effects of which leave us spinning, can be softened. We hope through this process of pardon we may prevent future evils from being recreated in our lives, in our psyches, and in the lives of others. We are breaking a powerful, forceful, habitual, endless cycle. This is an active process in that it requires that we be willing to look ahead to the future as active participants while honoring the very real losses of the past. These losses, these realizations, and these remembrances. They strengthen us. (4)

The past is revisited, reworked, reinvented, re-imagined, rethought, reawakened, revived, and revised. We take these steps so that we are clear to ourselves what exactly we are choosing to forgive. Forgiveness

has a purpose that calculated thought and rationality cannot make sense of. Where we cannot forgive completely, we forgive to the extent that we can. We do this to the admeasurements that we are capable, while remaining gentle with ourselves (4). This is the greatest lesson of this time. To allow the inner Kurgarra to come forth. The Kurgarra, who are created from the dirt underneath the fingernail of Enki. The Kurgarra, who is the physical representation of a consciousness that is not only beyond gender, but also in the act of being genderless, can represent the full spectrum of gender. The Kurgarra, who are the very basis of emotional life and the most gorgeous representation of the loving material that can be found in the hidden, disregarded, deemed useless parts of us (7).

It is the Kurgarra who allow the inner aspect of ourselves that is filled with total love and compassion for each and every loss we have felt to dominate. We do this, acknowledge and revere our own Kurgarra, as an act of supreme self-love. We allow our Kurgarra to heal us through its actions of witnessing and mourning. We are at a crossroad, ready for the ultimate embrace. The truth that we were previously given has been shattered. We come to know a new truth. We are ready to take hold of a greater truth and a greater freedom based in self-respect, self-awareness, and self-healing. This is a truth we have earned. It is truth based in a key of wisdom that has come through a direct result our own experience. It is truth par excellence.

The mythology of Goddess Inanna is elaborate. Her stories do not only show her as a passive rider towards her own death. There is another aspect of her, as active divine feminine, that is celebrated (6). This is the other side of the feminine. Feminine energy as active, affecting, stimulating, and inspiring. An energy that is transformative and regenerative. It is Goddess as muse, as creative fuel, boundless imagination, heart-rending joy, ethereal passion, and exhilarating risk

(8). The feminine has its own yang. Exploration of the underworld and a willingness to explore one's most suppressed, rejected inner-Other leaves Inanna with gifts. The gifts come through embracing that which has been hidden. By identifying the part of her that must die, Inanna is reborn whole. Now metamorphosed, a woman finds that her receptive yin energy works in balance and harmony with her inner, assertive, and self-caring feminine yang. The source of her newfound faculty is entirely within. She finds a source of power and assertion that is outside the animus and free from the conditioning of patriarchy. (7).

The active sacred feminine can only be reached through its converse. Inanna must journey to the underworld. She must descend into the realm of the unknown other, for this is where she will find the source of her newfound strength and power. Inanna must confront all those things within her that she rejects. She must die to her old identity based in what she thought she was and what she thought she knew of herself. Inanna must start again, at ground zero, if she is ever to find herself. It is this life- death- rebirth passage that forms the route to claiming her assertive, divine feminine. Inanna dies to her birthright to become the beneficent Goddess (7).

This process is sacred. It is sacred to go the depths of our psyche in our most disillusioned moments. The inward journey is the yin path. It is the way to return to the earth. The path of magic. Towards a realm where we instinctively know that miracles are celebrated. Inanna went on her descent as many women today descent, into the ugliest, angriest, and most disordered aspect of ourselves. There we will find beauty, magnificence, eloquence, and splendor steeped within the filth. Truth and self-respect where there are lies, disillusion, and betrayals. It is a paradox. There may appear to be no purpose or meaning to it. Inanna herself turns to rotted meat, hanging on a hook. A dreaded, smelly, puss-filled corpse (7). There is no life worthy to live. Inanna has

submitted to the underworld. There she finds gorgeous transformation, ultimate truth, and breath-taking rebirth as results of her destruction.

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