

utter one word in Hebrew but I saw the other women — and their faces glowed with tears. It was a moment of participation and belonging to them, a moment of acceptance of oneself — a moment of privilege.

Orthodox Jewish men perform this ritual three times every day, Conservative and Reform men less frequently. It is only in the Reform synagogues that women are allowed to participate in rituals. In the other synagogues women are barred behind a wall or a curtain or put on a viewing balcony. The men practise their spiritual supremacy at the expense of their women. Yet some women cannot conceive of spiritual life as separated from the god whom they have learned to fear and love from early

childhood. Some women had positive experiences in domestic rituals and some women cherish their labour, which enables men to rise to the heights of godlike experience and affirmation. Can we say to these women that they must discard their experiences, their pattern of beliefs with which they feel comfortable and secure? I cannot. I can only hope that the women who choose to remain within the traditional structures will have the courage to change these so as to accomplish the affirmation of women as fully alive human beings.

In the coven, although the one I attended is hierarchically structured, we were part of one circle; we sang, we chanted, we laughed and joked, we collected our energy (gynergy), moved it around the

circle, let it flow and increase, and we also grounded it. I hesitated to participate at first since the experience was overwhelmingly strange; I was also upset at the time because of an unrelated incident. By the end of the ritual I was part of that flowing energy. I have reaffirmed my existence, my belonging to the human race, my self-worth, my ability to ground my awareness in my body. I was grateful because the energy healed.

According to Starhawk, the basic function of a ritual is to teach our bodies what our minds already know; it is an integrating experience in which the rift between body and mind can be healed. The balance that is achieved by this process gives a sense of completeness, wholeness, and well-being.

PATRIARCHY & GODDESS WORSHIP

Heather M. Ferguson and F. Tsipporah Nemani

Les auteures discutent du déclin du statut de la Grande Déesse, à l'origine suprême et unifiée, déclin causé par le système patriarcal. A travers un processus de division, chacun de ses pouvoirs et de ses aspects fut assigné à une déesse différente. La Déesse, à l'origine, était la nature dans tous ses éléments, et était donc à la fois permanente, immanente et changeante.

La Déesse Sumérienne Inanna représente une autre forme de déclin. Le fait qu'elle ait tellement d'attributs différents, souvent contradictoires et incohérents, montre qu'elle était à l'origine la Grande Déesse. En comprenant les déesses telles qu'Inanna, nous pouvons commencer à redécouvrir la Grande Déesse dans toutes ses manifestations.

The Great Goddess, the Queen of Heaven and Earth, was, for thousands of years, the primary deity of a large part of the world. Even after the gradual "patriarchal

takeover," when a supreme female deity was slowly demoted and replaced by a supreme male deity, Goddesses were worshipped, sometimes with state approval as in Ancient Rome's Magna Mater (Great Mother) cult, sometimes in fear and secrecy as in the Wicca (witch) religion of the Middle Ages. Indeed we suspect that there have always been Goddess worshippers. What, after all, is the cult of the Virgin Mary? Today many feminists are reviving Goddess worship, either through joining one of the Wiccan circles which can be found now in most major cities or, helped by the research of feminist scholars, developing their own version of Her rituals.

The task of recovering lost or hidden information about the Goddess and Her worship has been, and still is, an enormous one. Such sources as there are, are, to say the least, imperfect. Many of them have been destroyed by the male-

dominated religious establishments of the patriarchy; others have been so tampered with and altered that it is difficult for feminist scholars to reconstruct them. Still, much work has produced some results, so that we can now say that we are again beginning to know Her.

Originally the Goddess was one and eternal. She was creativity itself. She was nature in all its elements and processes, so that, far from being abstract and separate from the natural world, She was in and of it. Her essence was that She was both immanent and changing — as nature is both. And because She was nature, it was possible for humans to see Her as different aspects of nature — as moon, as sea, as earth, as tree. This possibility led gradually to the division of the one Goddess into many different Goddesses, all still retaining some indication of their original unity. The division of the One into the many inevitably diminished Her power, and this division was one of the ways that patriarchy found to demote and weaken Her. Her femaleness, Her biological cycle, which originally was a sign of both Her immanence and Her ability to transform, also was, by its very nature, divisible. Her aspect as young girl or daughter was separated from Her aspect as mature and

This balance is also a source of enormous strength and courage. But this balance is also precarious and fragile until we learn to reach the depth inside ourselves and renew it.

In the Goddess religion, rituals are basically a technique or a framework in which we learn to experience and use our energy for our own needs and for that of others; these techniques vary considerably from coven to coven. For a woman the Goddess is the affirmation of her own image and the confirmation of her belonging to a community of women, of people.

I believe that religion and all systems of belief should be based on celebrating life in all its aspects. Awareness of ourselves as human

beings, as an integral part of nature, should be reflected in our way of life, in our activities, and in our experiences. Thus the ultimate assessment of any theory of consciousness is measured by the social and political actions that such awareness motivates. We cannot venerate life without ensuring that life continues on this planet and without demanding human dignity in our everyday living. Ritual thus can be understood also as a catalyst, since it places within our reach the energy to do what we must do and be whoever we want to be.

Even though it is possible to separate human consciousness into several parts, this division is basically and concretely artificial, since the parts are not separated from

each other and constitute a whole. Productive, reproductive, and immanent consciousness are elements that I can identify and understand, but do they really constitute a whole consciousness? All I can say is that I do not see my own limits yet and, to do so, I need the help of others — I need a community of women with whom I can speak and discuss these issues. The sense of belonging to a community is a basic necessity in our lives — let us celebrate our need of each other.

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fertile woman. Her aspect as sexual creature was separated from Her aspect as mother. And Her aspect as aging and aged female (crone) was separated from all the others. Thus, the demotion and diminution of the Goddess was complete. Now She could be mother, or temptress, or crone; moon or sea or earth; good or bad crone or witch — no longer Herself, a totality of nature's aspects and processes.

The Sumerian Goddess Inanna is undoubtedly a product of the patriarchy. The Goddess of sexuality, battle, morning and evening stars, date palms, full storehouse, harlotry, and taverns, and more — in the variety of her "attributes, her fragmentation is manifested. For men she represented the two aspects of woman — virgin and whore.

The rosette, an ancient symbol associated with the primal Great Goddess, is particularly connected with Inanna, so that we can safely assume that the image of Inanna had its origins in pre-patriarchal times. Another of her symbols is the lion, as are also reed gateposts.

Sumerian literature attributes to Inanna various aspects; some of the variations may be the result of different understandings of the Goddess in different milieux. However, when one piece of literature

depicts contradictory and incoherent images of Inanna, we can explain this difficulty only by positing an "editing" process which consciously attempted to reorganize the then-prevalent system of beliefs and thus demote the Great Goddess.

Inanna is also the Spinner, an attribute that may go back to pre-patriarchal times (as part of the triad of the Fates). But Inanna not only spins; she also unspins. She changes the outcome of battles; she weaves, she fashions, she dyes thread with multiple colours. She emerges from doors, and she is the door or the gatepost. She changes and transforms. Thus, as the Rain Goddess, she enters the sky and causes the rain to fall. She ushers in the day and the night as morning and evening stars.

Her presence in battle changes its course; her presence in the earth causes seeds to sprout; her presence in the storehouse causes it to fill and to empty. She is the transforming principle in nature, and she guards and participates in the process of passage from one state of being to another.

Her relation to the process of reproduction has been obscured by the patriarchy, which found it essential to appropriate this function and diminish women's role in it.

Thus Inanna's role is confined to the moment of conception, and consequently her sexual attributes have become overly exaggerated. This also explains the paradoxical position of Inanna as eternal *maid*, never *mother*; she is the Lady of the harlots, of pleasurable sexuality, but she never gives birth.

By understanding Inanna as the transforming principle in nature, in the Great Goddess, it is possible for us to rediscover the Great Goddess and all her manifestations in a concrete way.

Sumerian (and Babylonian) systems of belief document the struggle of the Goddess against male attempts at supremacy. The understanding of freedom as a "Return to the Mother" (the literal translation of the Sumerian for "freedom") opens for us the way for meaningful change and transformation of present social arrangements. Understanding how *free women* once viewed the world around them can help us make decisions about the future from a position of power, not from the point of view of subjugation.

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