

Synopsis of Inanna

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It should come as no surprise that one of the oldest stories of the journey toward individuation did not originally begin in our mythic consciousness with a hero, but rather with the shero: a Goddess coming into her sovereignty.

One of the governing metaphors of this story is the juxtaposition of light and darkness, represented as both the heavenly and underworld consciousness. These sisters exemplify each necessary side in the quest to achieve sovereignty. The duality of the goddess between her conscious and unconscious self, her beautiful and loathsome sides, her heavenly and underworld natures, mirror what women still experience trying to achieve psychological, spiritual, and sexual sovereignty. This process entails welcoming the dark sister out of the unconscious and into the light or in descending from the light into her darkness. This is the path to allowing her to heal our woundedness which can only be done in mystery.

But the dualistic vision of womanhood is a psychological trap. If one can rise above the vision that insists on either/or, one sees all the potential for a truly authentic life lived in the greater mystery of both/and, which is our birthright. When this occurs (as we shall see in this myth,) a triune aspect emerges: a Transcendent Third between the two opposites becomes the unifying force between them.

The story of Inanna, one of the oldest existing written texts, dates back to circa 2000 B.C.E. Although this is one of the most ancient, recorded stories of the goddess, it was recorded right at the time when She began to disappear and was replaced, rather violently, by the worship of solar patriarchal gods. The famous archeologist, Marija Gimbutas, suggested that archeological evidence of goddess worship predates the recording of this story by 36,000-40,000 years.

Goddess scholar, Demetra George, hypothesizes that ‘the fall’ of the Great Mother religion may not have been exclusively a patriarchal coup, but a willingness to retreat—the goddess consciously participating in her own lunar cycle, her dark moon phase. She may have naturally disappeared, where we could not ‘see’ her, but this does not mean she abandoned us. She has always been present, like the dark moon. And in this necessary darkness, she has been re-imagining her form. Whatever function her older form served—birthing agriculture (as humans moved from hunting and gathering to farming,) or inspiring the creation of art and culture—she fulfilled her purpose and was looking to the future in her regeneration. George approximates this great change as historically happening right before the writing of the Inanna myth, circa 3,000 B.C.E:

George also offers that now, 5,000 years later, we are in the middle of the 500-year period where the goddess is leaving the darkness and returning to begin her new moon phase. As we examine this story of her ancient image, let us also look for her ever-present need for

transformation. We may even begin to ask ourselves, “What will the next image of the goddess be and what higher purpose will her new face serve? Below I offer a synopsis of the Inanna myth, which is broken into four episodes. The last episode you are given just enough context to understand the elements of the ritual we are going to co-create together.

Inanna and the Huluppu Tree

Inanna is the daughter of gods, but she earned her place among the stars. Her story begins as that of a brave woman, who, though she feared the sky and air gods, (the coming of solar worship) is courageous in rescuing and nurturing an unmoored tree.

Grandfather Enki, God of Wisdom and of the Waters, sets sail for the Underworld and is rejected by Ereshkigal, Queen of the Great Below. She throws stones and hail at him nearly smashing his boat to pieces. In this terrible storm, a huluppu tree is uprooted and carried downstream on the Euphrates, where Inanna finds and rescues it. The huluppu is the product of Enki and Ereshkigal’s confrontation/union, representing both the conscious and unconscious forces.

Inanna brings this huluppu tree to her holy garden and cares for it herself: she plants the soil around it with her own foot and nurtures it in the hopes that one day it will make her a throne and a bed.

Years pass.

A span of a lifetime and long relationship with the tree is one day threatened when a “serpent who could not be charmed” makes a nest in the roots of her tree; an anzu-bird makes a home in the branches, and Lilith, The Dark Maiden, makes her home in the trunk. All of Inanna’s seemingly good intentions and dreams for her throne and bed are threatened by the plague of “wicked hosts.” There are several ways to approach this myth. The first is to see it from a depth psychological perspective because Inanna is on the part of her individuation journey where she is ascending into the role of Goddess of Heaven. The movement of this part of the myth is upward and feels like an untangling from the things that have held her back from her destiny. But as we read deeper into the layers of her story, we discover that all of these beings plaguing her tree are symbols once associated with our ancient celestial goddess and they are alerting her to her coming descent. They may all be considered metaphors for the goddess’s own nature. Though the myth suggests Inanna wept because of their presence—because they were keeping her from her ambition—George suggests Inanna may have known with a foretelling wisdom that in order to be Sovereign in the encroaching age of the Sun God, she must vanquish these old friends and search for a new form. We may, therefore, assume that the very thing that stands in the path of the goddess becoming is her own self—is the fact that she has not yet confronted her own inner demons. In this case, she is not able to let go of the symbols of her old self so that she may become more than the sum of what she dreams.

Through his willingness to chase the demons away with his mighty ax, and to carve a throne and bed for his “holy sister,” Gilgamesh goes on to become “the epic hero of Uruk.”

The Queen of Heaven Visits the God of Wisdom

Our lady is now ready to celebrate her womanhood, take a crown, a lover and husband. This episode marks the end of the Inanna's maidenhood and the beginning of her womanhood.

Inanna takes her throne and assumes her role. She puts the “shugurra,” the crown of steppe, on her head,” and leaning against an apple tree, discovering her “wondrous vulva,” the young goddess is pleased with herself and decides: “I, the Queen of Heaven, shall visit the God of Wisdom. I shall go to Abzu, the sacred place in Eridu. I shall honor Enki, the God of Wisdom, in Eridu. I shall utter a prayer to Enki and the deep sweet waters” (13).

Enki, delighted to see his granddaughter, welcomes her, and lays out a feast and beer. The two drink and drink to their hearts’ content. Enki bestows gift after gift to Inanna called the Holy me. The me are an interesting analogy for our modern conception of ego. For each me seems to define a sense of self in terms of the gifts, charms, and talents that a goddess or a woman might acquire, develop, and wield in the art of love, in questing for consciousness, and achieving sovereignty.

Realizing that Enki could change his mind, and also realizing that it is her intention to keep these gifts, Inanna decides to leave suddenly and hurry to bring the *me* home. She has ambition and the will to be the Queen of Heaven. Inanna loads all of the *me* into the Boat of Heaven and quickly sails back to Uruk. Enki awakens from his drunkenness and has regrets that Eridu is empty of the me. He sends his servant, Isimud, after her, in hopes of getting the holy me back. Inanna is absolutely mortified that Enki sends Isimud to fetch back the *me*. She cries out, “Deceit!” She flees at the thought of a broken promises and pledges in the “name of all his power” from her beloved grandfather. She pleads to her dearest companion and servant, Ninshubar to rescue them, which she does three times. When the Boat of Heaven arrives in Uruk, a great celebration begins and Inanna bequeaths all of the holy *me* to her people. She calls for the waters of the deep to overflow in the city so that she may ride in the Boat of Heaven on the streets all the way to her holy temple. In a sense, she is invoking her grandfather as she comes into her city. Excited, Enki calls to Isimud and finds out that his granddaughter is home and rejoices that she has landed in her city safely. As the *me* are unloaded from the Boat of Heaven to the temple, more me appear than what had been originally gifted to her appear. This is a very touching gift from her grandfather for they are the *me* of womanhood.

With these me, Inanna completes another important journey. Enki proclaims his city Eridu and Inanna's Uruk as forever allies. Inanna has not only earned the me, she has earned the mantle of “Wise Woman.”

Inanna establishes an unprecedented generosity in relationship with her people. She does not keep the gifts for herself and claims no hold to power. She gains stature through the hearts of

her people—through their gratitude and appreciation. Her generosity—not greed—begets their devotion.

The Courtship of Dumuzi

The Courtship of Inanna and Dumuzi Utu, her brother declares her to be ripe and fertile. He compares her readiness to the ripeness of the growing grain. Therefore, he decides it is time to prepare a marriage sheet for her bridal bed and for her to take a husband. But Inanna does not want to marry the man he suggests, as Sumerian tradition would dictate. She is thrown into conflict by the patriarch which demands to be obeyed. Like Lilith, she refuses to be subjugated. She wants to marry the farmer who grows the flax for her clothes and the food for her feasting table. The Great Goddess gave birth to agriculture. She moved her people out of hunting and gathering into the seat of civilization by bestowing her knowledge on them. Utu insists she shall marry Dumuzi, the shepherd, for his rich cream.

Reluctantly, at first, Inanna dresses herself in all her radiance and opens the bed chamber to her lover. The passages that follow are powerfully erotic, full of fecundity, and brimming with harvest. Inanna has had a wild change of heart and is eager to complete the final step toward becoming a woman. She sings to her brother/husband: Let the bed that rejoices the heart be prepared. “Let the bed that sweetens the loins be prepared. Let the bed of kingship be prepared. Let the bed of queenship be prepared. Let the royal bed be prepared (42). The couple seduce each other and make love many times with poetry and praises upon their lips for one another. Here, in the text, Inanna has new titles added to “Queen of Heaven.” Now she is also called “Greater Than Her Mother, Who Was Presented the Me by Enki, Inanna, the First Daughter of the Moon” (44).

Inanna and the Great Below

The final and fourth episode is the story of the goddess' journey into the Underworld and her unprecedented return. The two translators of the poem, Diane Wolkstein and Samuel Noah Kramer, instruct us that the word for “ear” and “mind” were the same. So, Inanna hears or senses there is more beyond the stages of the hero's journey she has already taken. All has not yet been won, nor has all been lost. Curiosity nags, gently. She is waiting for something from afar at first, then closer, until it is so close her name must be spoken with it. Her attention has been captured and Inanna is listening intently with a new perception, the ear of the mind, the heart of her soul. The light of Inanna has lost touch with her darkness. So off she goes in search of the source of her hunger without knowing the abyss that awaits her.

Inanna sets off alone with only faithful Ninshubar by her side. She instructs her companion to wait for her. If she does not return in a few days, Ninshubar is to lament for her in public places—at the doors of the gods—to dress poorly and beg the grandfathers not to let the Lady of Heaven perish. Of all, her hope lies best in Enki.

The two friends part ways.

Inanna arrives at the gates of Kur where she knocks loudly and asks Neti, the gatekeeper, to open the doors. She identifies herself and says she has come to observe the funeral rites of her brother-in-law, Gugalanna, the Bull of Heaven and husband of Ereshkigal. One notices immediately that Inanna's husband, Dumuzi is also called the Bull of Heaven. Is there a relationship between the two husbands?

Neti announces to his queen that the Lady of Heaven has come to the gates asking to be admitted to her kingdom. Ereshkigal, who dines on mud as her ambrosia and drinks dirty water as her nectar, is beside herself for it is at her expense that Inanna has received all the glory and honor, all the love she has been denied. She instructs Neti to bolt all seven of the gates of the Underworld. At each gate that Inanna enters, a me is to be taken from her.

At the first gate when the crown of steppe, the shugarra is removed, Inanna asks Neti, "What is this?" Neti responds, "Quiet Inanna, the ways of the underworld are perfect. They may not be questioned" (58). Seven times this happens to the goddess. There are seven entrances and at each one she becomes a little more naked, a little more humble. Each entry requires divestiture of some aspect of self—her beauty, her crown, her instruments of seduction, her womanhood, her arts, justice and rulership...we will discover what happens to Inanna during our weekend together.