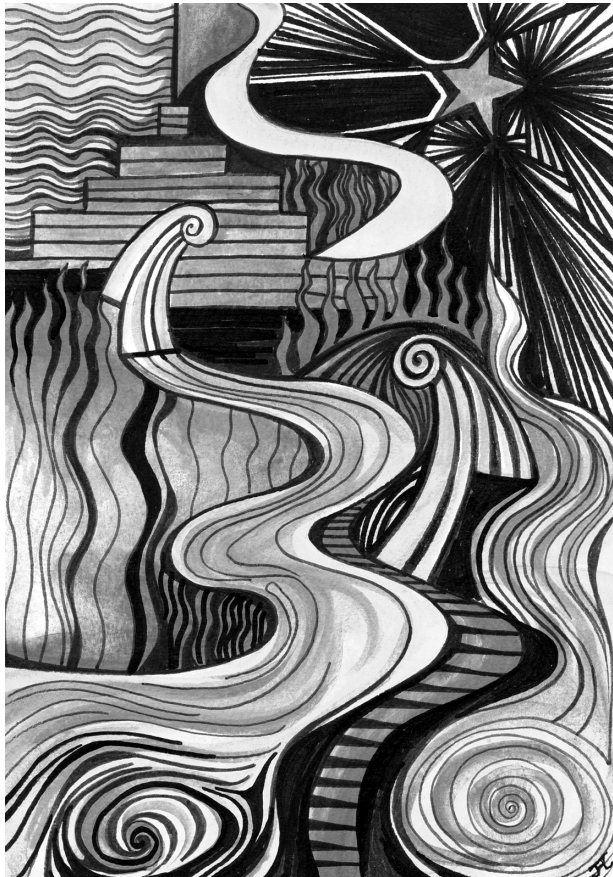


# INNANA AND THE ATTACK ON IRAQ

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I. the woman who circles the land – tell me where is my house,  
Tell me where is the city in which I may live . . .  
The bird has its nesting place, but I . . . my young are dispersed,  
The fish lie in calm waters, but I . . . my resting place exists not,  
The dog kneels at the threshold, but . . . I have no threshold . . .  
(Kramer, 1979)

This lament for the goddess Innana was written more than 4,000 years ago in the land of Sumer in what is now modern Iraq. It was a time when the ancient ways of the goddess, revering women and the rhythmic order of nature, were giving way to a new patriarchal, dominating, empire-building way of life. Something profoundly important for the psychological and social health of humanity was lost at that time. And for 5,000 years it stayed underground. Inanna represents what has gone. She 'epitomised the essence of contradiction' as De Shong Meador (2000) writes. Perera (1981) sees her as incarnating the alternating, feminine way. Inanna seems to embody the mysterious order within chaos, a rhythmic equalizing process that endlessly flows in nature. She is the process that operates in the depths of our psyches and in historical changes over time, in nature and in human societies. In her essence she is like the Tao of ancient China and the way of opposites or enantiodromia understood so well by Jung. They all provide a paradigm or model of thinking totally different from the mainstream competitive one in which everything is about winning or losing.

Today, perhaps we are seeing a final peaking of the dominant, hierarchical paradigm in the attack on Iraq and its aftermath. Saddam, another patriarchal tyrant, up against empire-building US right-wingers, profit-seeking corporations, and the most powerful war machine the world has ever seen. Ironically, in 2375 BC the first real empire on the planet was created in Sumer (modern day Iraq) forcibly uniting all the cities and towns together. Their religion gradually demoted the goddess Inanna and became more patriarchal. Still, Enduanna, the daughter of Sargon, a slightly later Arkkadian empire builder, reclaimed Inanna for the warring peoples of her time. Her poems stress the paradoxical nature of

the goddess perhaps 'in order to reestablish the balance between the reality of the forces of nature and the hubris of aggressive conquest' (De Shong Meador, 2000). She is needed more than ever today.

### **INANNA AS A METAPHOR**

On a psychological level we can use the idea of Inanna to help us trust in the balancing rhythms of our own unconscious psyches rather than always trying to control and dominate ourselves with the ego or our reason. Perera (1981), who is a Jungian analyst, describes beautifully how her story can inspire our personal journeys to discover the underworlds of our own hidden sides. Like her, we can 'die' to our egos and reintegrate our 'shadows'. On a social level we can use her wisdom of endless alternation to develop a genuine participatory democracy that has no place for rigid hierarchies of domination. We need to have more faith in our own intuition as well as politically more faith in the 'people' to make decisions. Inanna is a form or symbol representing those balancing rhythms. We do not need literally to worship her or believe she exists in some supernatural heavenly way. But as humans most of us seem to need images and symbols to make sense of a natural world that is still full of mystery.

### **INANNA AND ACTIVISM**

So when the attack on Iraq was couched in terms of good and evil, the need for an alternative way of thinking became more obvious throughout the world. Before, during and after the war, various actions to call for the return of what Inanna represents were held by various people connected to the Serpent Institute. (The Serpent Institute was set up by John Rowan and Jocelyn

Chaplin in 1989 to train psychotherapists and counsellors within a framework of natural, goddess-orientated spirituality; now it runs seminars and therapy groups exploring the interrelations between therapy, spirituality and radical politics.) It was felt that a return of Inanna to the land she once protected was a vital metaphor for a transformation that could still happen in the world despite the apparent success of the dominant paradigm. It was adding another dimension to our protest on the streets.

On the September 2002 anti-war march, a large circle of black-clad pagans from a variety of groups gathered on the south bank of the River Thames. Among other actions we invoked the spirit of the river, Isis (some similarities with Inanna), to dissolve the hard hearts and rigid thinking of the parliament buildings opposite. We still know so little scientifically about the interaction of energy and thought. It is not impossible to imagine that such 'prayers' have subtle accumulative effects. But it also helps us personally to feel we are tuning in and expressing ourselves, at a time when so many feel powerless and angry. There seem to be more and more groups bringing a spiritual dimension into their activism. I have been involved in several of these, for example during the May Day protests against global capitalism. They often involve reclaiming public spaces, such as Piccadilly Circus, and conducting sacred processions and rituals such as the honouring of natural Eros as a counterbalance to his commercial and brutal distortion. A clear intention is always vital.

After the big February 2003 march we carried out further rituals specifically for Inanna. Some of us read out Enheduanna's

4,000-year-old poetry in honour of her. We shared her stories such as the descent and return from the underworld. These related to our personal experiences but also to the disappearance of her wisdom or paradigm from mainstream society for 5,000 years. Visualizations of her in our imaginations and in statues replicating those used in ancient Sumer were used with incense like Frankincense to experience 'her energy'. We even chanted her name ending with a deep and long sound of 'Aaaaaaaa'. This is a very primal, healing sound, which helped us feel better whatever other effect it may or may not have had.

## INANNA AND CREATIVITY

Another day during the war some of us went to the British Museum to honour images of her there and to mourn with her the tragedy of her land, and of the feminine in general. In the goddess therapy group I run, we all found aspects of her that we needed in our personal lives, such as her famous compassion or her power. At other times we held seminars to discuss the philosophical meaning of Inanna and her links with Taoism and so forth.

I personally painted many pictures using her original cuneiform shape as a kind of 'prayer' for her 'to return'. Some of these were shown at a concert of Iraqi music held during the war. It seemed for months as though the name of Inanna came up at every gathering I went to. Others were making the connections in their different ways. None of us were wanting to create some kind of goddess-worshipping new religion but rather we wanted to add imaginal and sacred dimensions to our politics and our personal lives.

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