



The Tale of Inanna - Goddess of Heaven and Earth

The story of Inanna was found in what is now Iraq, and is about 5000 years old. It was unearthed 110 to 120 years ago and deciphered. It is the oldest story known to people.

The story of Inanna is split up into 3 parts, but the one we have been focusing on for our wisdom teachings, is when she receives her call "To the Great Below" and begins her journey into the underworld.

In the story, Inanna receives a call from her sister Eriskegal, the Goddess of the Underworld, and, as she puts her ear to the ground to hear the call, her insides turn to mush, for she KNOWS that this is not just any calling. This is an initiation; this is a journey that will change her life, and Eriskegal is her shadow sister!

She is the parts of herself that she does not like to look at, but she also knows that the longer she avoids them, the darker they get and the less likely she will be able to visit them, and understand them... she knows that this visit, this initiation, is LONG overdue!

Her subconscious knows that she has to do something she has not done before, to see something she has not seen, to go to the dark places of her soul.

But, Inanna's life was full and rich and satisfying! So, she probably resisted this call as long as long as she could, and argued with herself about it. Why should she go to the underworld when she was already so busy with her life?

Still, finally this call became so great that she couldn't resist it anymore.

The first thing she had to do, in order to go to this place of the heart, was to leave the things that tied her mind and body to the earth. She had to leave her seven temples, and close each one.

These temples are sort of like the temples in your mind, that we all have; they are like our ideas. So, for you, you might not have these big temples outside that reach up to the heavens where you do rituals, but you do have temples of your mind, where you have different rituals that you perform everyday.

Perhaps one of your temples is: "I need my morning coffee to function." Another might be: "I never leave the house without my face on"... etc...

In fact, take out a piece of paper right now, and jot down your temples - the things you value, the things you do, the ideas you have of yourself.

There may be lots of temples in your mind, but you know that, in order to take this journey, you will need to close many of them, and this can be a hard task.

There can be the temple of approval, the temple of not having enough time, the temple of security, the temple of "it's not my turn", or the temple of "I am not strong enough"....

Hmmm... it may even seem that these temples are the stories we hold about ourselves.....

And so, Inanna abandoned her temples to descend into the underworld.

The great Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth, closes her seven temples, says goodbye to her two grown sons and her honey-man of a husband, and goes off in search...

BUT, before she left for the great descent, she had to gather her sacred items, or *medha*, which is a Sanskrit word that means "mother wisdom."

In the day of Inanna - and this is still happening now - when you put on your *medha*, you are putting on seven things that make "order out of chaos". These are things that define your role or function in any given event or ceremony.

Right now you are wearing clothing that represents "learning" *medha*. If you look closely at it, you may realize that you probably wouldn't wear it to a wedding or ceremony.

You see, before we take on a role, in order to define ourselves in society, we put on our *medha*, and it helps to define who we are.

In the story of Inanna, she puts on seven things, for the number seven is the sacred number of initiation.

The first thing Inanna puts on is a crown, and this is an important thing, for it has seven horns of a great bull that was hunted to extinction, because it was so huge and powerful. This crown helps her identify with her own power animal and connects her to heaven to earth.

Then she puts her lapis blue necklace around her neck

Then she put on another double strand of lapis beads, for these represent great wealth and prestige.

She now adds the breast plate that shows she is a warrior. She hand-tooled this breast-plate herself, as most warriors did back then, and had covered it with her own sacred symbols of power and courage.

She now puts on a cape, woven from soft wool, probably in lapis blue with gold thread. This she has spun herself, and she would have worn it her whole life to ceremony, and eventually been buried in it.



She puts on her gold bracelet, pounded from the deepest gold, and inscribed with all of the names of her mother's line, with her name included.

She now picks up her lapis measuring rod, a sign of the sacred masculine and feminine, and a phallic symbol.

Then she calls on Ninshubar. Ninshubar is her best friend, the woman whom she trusted most, for they attended each other's births, nursed each other's children, and fought side-by-side in battle.

Ninshubar asked Inanna, "Where you going?"

"I have to go, I have to answer this call to the underworld."

"Inanna, oh my God, don't do it, you don't have to. You've got Demuzi, two nice boys, your temples (ideas) - you have so much. Nobody returns from the underworld unscathed. Please don't go Inanna!"

But, Inanna says, "I have to go, I must do this journey."

"Have you lost your mind? Are you mad?"

"No, I have to go."

"No, please don't go!!"

So, there was obviously this struggle. But Inanna, in her wisdom, said, "You know, I hear what you are saying. I hear that you love me so much and you are afraid that, if I go, you will lose your friend. But, if I don't go... this is hard for you to understand, but if I don't go, I'm afraid I will lose my life. I have to go. I have to find out what is calling me. I will make you a bargain, I'll make you a contract. Will you do something for me? If I do not return in three days, will you put on your sackcloth of grief, will you wail your song of grief, will you beat the drum around the town, and will you go to the three fathers and ask them to come help me?"

We know that she was a grand warrior, and as a warrior, she was strategic. A warrior has plan, she thinks ahead, she is not impulsive, not reckless. She was demonstrating her wisdom in this way, asking her friend if she would she be part of it, inviting Ninshubar to be part of the solution.

So, Ninshubar was no longer pulling Inanna from her journey, but said, "Go then, and I will watch for you; I will watch the store, I will watch your back while you make your descent." She felt she was given something to do, which helped her to allow Inanna to go. When this was taken care of, Inanna was free to go, without worrying about unfinished business; she was free to go deeper and deeper into her descent.

And so it goes like this...

Inanna begins her descent. As she does this, she comes to the first gate, and oddly enough, in the time of Sumer, the only things that were covered like doors, were tombs. So, for her to knock on a gate, was almost like going to the place of death. So, when

she gets to the first gate, she knocks, and from behind the gate, she hears a great voice. And this great voice is Neti. In Sanskrit, Neti means "Not This, Not This."

And Neti says, "Who are YOU, and why have you come to a place from where no one returns?"

And Inanna says, indignantly, "I am Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth!"

In essence, that is the same as if you were to say, "I'm Inanna, you know me, let me in! I have a degree in psychology and two kids and a house and car and am a high functioning woman in society!"

And Neti says, "HUH! Not this, not this! That is not who you are. That is what you have done. That is what you have identified with. That is not who you are!"

Neti has been through this before, and he's not phased by her arrogance. He says, "One moment please", and then he leaves and he runs as fast as he can through the labyrinth to Erishkegal, and says, "Queen Erishkegal, you'll never guess who's here!" Erishkegal is Inanna's sister, who agreed to go to the underworld - this is an agreement we all make with ourselves. We all agree to send part of our lives, part ourselves, into the darkness, while we do the fun work in the light, so to speak. We all make all kinds of agreements. There is no banishing, no punishing. There is only a conscious agreement - understand that Erishkegal willingly went, as part of this agreement. But, she is also a part of your life you haven't looked at, that you are ashamed of, that you hide, you ignore. So, obviously she has been buried and forgotten, out of sight, out of mind, so to speak.

So Neti says, "Queen Erishkegal, guess who's at the front gate? You won't believe who's at the front gate!"

"Who goes to the front gate?" she says.

"It's Inanna!"

And Erishkegal bites her lip, and slaps her thigh, and says, "Well I'll be damned! Where the hell has she been? I haven't seen her in a long time! Shall I let her down? Hmm, yes, perhaps I will, but do this: bolt the seven gates, and let her down... but at each gate, take something of value from her so that she comes to me naked and bowed low."

And Neti says "Yes my Queen." And up he runs, back up to the first gate.

He opens the gate, and as Inanna enters, he snatches her crown. And Inanna blows out her mouth and says, "What is this?" You can't take my crown! I am the Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth!"

And Neti says, "Not down here you're not. You're not the queen down here. The ways of the underworld may not be questioned. Pass on now."

So Inanna says, "Fine, whatever, I can always get more horns where those are from, the bull is not extinct yet." Her response is similar to the kind of bargaining we do during grief. No doubt Inanna did this kind of bargaining. She goes down to the underworld,

and she's tripping through the labyrinth, and she doesn't know how many gates there are. She doesn't know the story or how it will turn out, or IF it will turn out.

She went into this trusting her heart, but now she is being challenged, and realizing that this is harder than she thought it would be!

Now, Inanna comes to another gate. And she says "Hmm, well, with everything else I have mastered, this should be no problem." So she tries to go through it, but it's locked. She has no keys in the underworld, so she has to knock. From behind the gate, Neti says, "Who are You? Who are YOU?"

And Inanna says, "I am Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth! I have a lapis necklace, I have two boys, I write poetry, I've been in wars, I've read many books, I have a degree!"

And Neti says, "Still don't get it, do ya? Come on in." He opens the gate, and he snatches her lapis necklace.

"What is this? Only royalty wear the lapis necklace! You can't take my necklace. You can't tell me what to say!" OH, and she's indignant about the whole thing.

And what does he say? "Inanna, the ways of Underworld are perfect, and they may not be questioned!"

"But, but, but.."

"Pass on."

So she does. She starts moving again, down the labyrinth, making pretty good progress, and she thinks, "This isn't so hard. I can always get more lapis where that came from."

Uh?! There's another gate. What! She can't open it, again. So she has to knock.

Neti says to Inanna, "Who ARE you??"

And she stares at him, and she starts losing a little steam, and she says: "I'm Inanna, I used to be the Queen. I read some books, I wrote some poetry. Can we get on with this already? Can we cut to the chase?"

Neti says, "Well, you're getting closer, Inanna, but you're not quite there." So he opens the door and he snatches her breast plate, and when he does so, what is exposed?

Her heart.

Can you let yourself feel, when those things that you use, the emotions and games you play to guard your heart, are taken from you? When your heart is exposed and shown, and it's wide open, and this powerful work and initiation is doing that to you, this is why you are here, so FEEL!

Back in the story, Inanna says "What is this? I made that. I've had it all my life. You can't take that from me."

"I just did."

"You can't."

"I just did. What are you going to do about it?" And there's this very clear line, which is a lot like life.

So, finally, Inanna says, "Fine!" and she remembers what she came for, and that what she really wants is to answer this call.

So she begins to trip down, and now the stairs start to get narrower and uneven, and the walls get start to cave in, and it's getting dark, and there's less and less light from the upper world filtering in. She has to feel her way through. She begins to see with her third eye, her intuitive eye, feeling her way through the labyrinth, tripping and walking. There are things dripping from the ceiling and little furry things crossing her path, and she has to sort of make a decision about which things to take notice of, and which things to let stop her. You know?

And she keeps going and she bumps into yet another gate. And now she's pissed.

And she is thinking that she's had quite enough of the furry things. Of the moldy things. Of things she's had taken from her. "It's not right. It's not fair, after all the things I have done and learned. I deserve more. I ate my tofu. I worked hard. I don't deserve this."

And so she thinks "I'll just wait here", and she sits down and pouts. What she does not realize is that Neti could care less. He's on the other side, ignoring her, reading his stone tablet, *News from the Underworld*. And while he is doing this, Inanna sits, and she decides how much more she can give up, and while this is happening, maybe she is building a psychic power inside of herself before this threshold.

She's thinking, "Can I do this, and is it fair? What am I down here for anyway?" She's really thinking, "Who am I? Do I have what it takes? Can I ask for help? Will anybody help me? Do I need help? Or, how can I get back? Can I save face?"

Who, other than herself, knows exactly what she is thinking? But she is probably wondering about how to get through this. "Is there an acupuncturist down here? Can I get a stone massage maybe? I'm tired!" There's a lot of that going on, right?

Finally, through the gate, when the timing is just right, the inner voice says, "Who are you and why have you come this far? What did you come for? Have you forgotten?"

And Inanna sits up and she says, "Yeah, who *am* I? If I am not the Queen of Heaven and Earth now, and I am surely not writing poems, and I'm nobody's lover down here, who am I? And where am I going?"

So now the quest begins and she says, "Open the gate Neti, open the gate! Take what you will, I want what I've come for. I want it more than I want life itself." And the gate opens, and he takes her beautiful wool robe and bears her entire body.

And she maybe wishes that that didn't happen, but whatever, and she trips down, and

realizes it's actually a bit easier to go down this narrow passageway without that wonderful thick wool robe, and she goes down, down, down, winding through the labyrinth and it's really tight now, and she's scraping her elbows and her hair is getting all messed up, she's lost an earring, the mascara is smudged on her face from her crying, and she's hungry and thirsty and exhausted beyond belief. And then she gets to another gate.

And just with her bumping into it, Neti calls, "Who are you?" WHO ARE YOU?!"

She can barely answer, but she says, "Inanna."

And he says, "Why have you come to this place from which no one returns?"

And she can barely figure out the answer, and that's the right answer, so the gate opens. He snatches from her the gold bracelet. And in Sumer, women passed down their jewelry from generation to generation, so this represented all of her family stories, her family values, her birth stories, all the ways she does things, all snatched from her. Sound familiar?

And so now, she has to find out how other people do it. Gold represents so many things, especially to a Sumerian woman. They knew what gold meant. It was the most valuable of all metals. Gold can be beat thinner and thinner and thinner and it won't break. And Inanna said, "I won't break. You can beat me, but you cannot break me!"

So she kept walking and walking, and then she was tired, so tired that she couldn't even walk. She was crawling. She was crawling on her knees, breathless and tired, and she crawled and she crawled into a narrow passageway, until her head virtually bounced into this last gate.

And Neti opened it and said "Who are you?" And she said nothing.

"What have you come for?" And she said nothing.

And that was the right answer!

Inanna finally knew that she had gone to a place where she knew not how to find what she did not know. Where nothing could stop her. And so he took away her lapis measuring rod, that could have represented many things, and there was nothing left to measure or judge. There was no beginning, no end, no ambition, no past, no future... just the "nowness". Nothing from her past with her, no name even, and she walked through and she looked into the eye of Ereshkegal and Ereshkegal looked at her and gave her the eye of death.

Oh, sure, some judgments may have been passed on her, but those happened so quickly, nearly forgotten, and Inanna FELL!!

It was over.

But, know this! She had died a death, one death, but she must be, and she will be, re-born. No one is the same after looking at their shadow self, no one returns from the Underworld the same, NO ONE! When you look into the eyes of a mirror, you are looking into Ereshkegal's eyes; there is a sudden and absolutely terminal death of the

maiden. You can never go back to the innocence, to the self, to the small, self-absorbed woman you were. You can never go back, so that person dies. In one glimpse. One glimpse.

Well, Ereshkegal is this great compassionate part inside of you, who is you, although she is unseen; she is this great wisdom that has always been brewing inside of you, and now she has come to the surface for you. She picks up this corpse of Inanna, the Maiden, and hangs her on the hook where she rots and turns green for three days and three nights.

But, you see, while Inanna is on the hook, some amazing things are happening in this cocoon. She's hanging on the hook but her hollowness is filled with divine ecstasy. She is realizing everything, inside that cocoon of death. Inside that cocoon she is spinning and laughing and dancing her way into a new her, but you can't see that from the outside. From the outside, her hair is dripping and straggly, her eyeballs are popping out, the blood on her smells bad, like sulfur... yuck! She's dripping - quite nasty really. But on the inside, there is a transfiguration.

If you are a mother, you will remember that this time is a little bit like the postpartum period. Postpartum time is like you are on a hook. You haven't had a shower for days. The breast milk is souring on your body. Your blood, the lochia, can get a little strong in between the sparse baths, and your hair isn't fixed quite right, and you can look a bit like that for a few weeks... hmm hmm. Not to worry, it's all part of the ritual. Stinking, that is.

So Inanna is doing, up there on the hook, what she needs to do, you see?

Meantime, Ninshubur is up there on the surface. Well, she's been watching the clock. She knows three days and three nights have gone by. So Ninshabur gets her sackcloth of grief and starts wailing, and she starts to lament, and she beats the hell out of her drum, because beating a drum entrains a culture. Do you know that when people beat a drum, it entrains us, because the sound of a drum is like a heartbeat, and there's a certain rhythm that gets everyone to think and feel the same.

We don't drum so much anymore, but until recent times, people drummed to entrain each other. That's what Ninshubar is doing, she's entraining the culture to notice that something has happened. And people notice, they wonder what's up.

Ninshubar tells them, "Oh, our great Queen has gone to the Underworld and hasn't returned." And so, really, the whole culture is beginning to be motivated around this crisis. Ninshabur goes to the first father, and says, "Father Nana, Father Nana, Inanna has gone to the underworld and she hasn't returned, what shall we do? It's a terrible thing."

And he says, "Inanna? Well, she wants to be Queen of Heaven and Earth, and she takes everything of value from heaven and earth, and now she wants the Underworld too? Well, that's like the girl who eats her tofu and does yoga and wants a deep experience too; it's not my problem this happened to her."

So she thinks, "Well, you're not going to help much, I'm going to get a second opinion. I'm not buying that!" So she picks up her drum, straightens her sack cloth, and proceeds to beat the hell out of that drum and carry on. And she wails and she demands



her attention. She's going to keep her agreement. And she goes to the next one, Enru, and she says "Enru, Enru, Inanna has gone to the underworld and she hasn't come back. Can you help me?"

And Enru "pfffs" and says, "What do you want me to do? Inanna has a degree, she's read many books, she chose poorly. It's not my problem. Let her have what's been dealt to her. I'm busy. Off with you."

Ninshubar straightens her sackcloth, beats her drum, and says, "I'll get a third opinion." And she beats that drum, wailing and carrying on, until she meets Enki. She goes to Father Enki and she says, "Father Enki, Inanna has gone to the underworld."

And he says, "Oh, dear, dear, dear. That daughter of mine." And he sits down, and says, "Tell me what happened." And he sits and he listens. While he listens, he's cleaning his nails, and as he does, she tells him the whole story. He listens very carefully, with his belly ear probably.

Ninshubar says, "How can you been cleaning your nails at a time like this? Have you no compassion or concern for my friend, your daughter, Inanna?"

"Oh, indeed," he says, "but things are not what they seem." And he took the dirt from his right hand and the dirt from his left hand and he made two little creatures named Galatur and Kubara. They were flightless, sexless, little unseen creatures, and allies to the warrior. Every warrior has an ally. No other archetype gets one, just the warrior, and so the birth warrior always has allies.

Enki said to them, "You need to go to the underworld. And do this. You need to go to the seven gates; it will be dark down there. You will find a woman there, in labor, writhing on the floor. You must not be afraid of her. You must give her compassion. When she cries out that her back is hurting, rub her back. If she cries out she needs something, give her whatever she needs. Be empathic. She is very powerful. She will offer you the fields of grain; do not take them. She will offer you the water from the Tigress; do not take it. Only take the corpse of Inanna. Go now." And they flew off to do exactly what they were told - a very important thing.

So they went through so very quietly, and they were so very small, they went past Neti, right past the seven gates, until they soon arrived at their destination, deep, deep, deep, in the heart of the Underworld. There they found Ereshkegal in labor, on the floor, doing just what they had been told she would. Soon she said, "Ooohhh, my back..."

And they said "Ooohhh, your back! Your aching back!"

She said, "Ooohhh my liver...my ruptured liver!"

And they said... "Ooohh your poor liver! Your poor aching liver!"

"Oooohhh, my heart is breaking, my heart is breaking, for no one has seen me."

"Ooohhhh, your breaking heart, your poor heart!"

And Ereshkegal was so amazed that someone had finally seen her, and not judged her,

and given her what she needed, that she said, "Who are you? Where did you come from?" And they could not explain this to her, so she said, "What do you want? I must reward you. Take from my rivers of gold..."

"We do not wish to."

"Would you take the water from the Tigris?" she then offers.

"No, we do not wish to."

In surprise Erishkegal asks, "What do you wish then?"

"We wish to take Inanna."

At this, Ereshkegal almost laughs. "That??!! You want that??!! That corpse??!! Have you gone mad?"

"No, we want the corpse of Inanna."

And she says "Fine, take it if you wish."

So they took down the corpse of Inanna, and they restored her with the water and the breath of life. They then helped her through another winding course, an ascent through the same labyrinth, the same seven gates. She had to ascend, no longer the same woman who came to the Underworld, but rather another, stronger, and more self-aware woman. A woman who knows her shadows and misgivings, for she has stared the worst of herself in the eye, has had the cast of death put upon her, and has embraced the deep transformation that has carried her through to the other side.