

## **THE DESCENT OF INANNA**

From the Great Above, Inanna, The Great Goddess, opened her ear to the Great Below. She turned her attention to the underworld, and decided to descend.

She abandoned heaven and earth to descend into the underworld. She abandoned her office of holy priestess and abandoned her temples in seven cities, from Uruk to Akkad.

She gathered together seven attributes of civilization which she transformed into such feminine allure as her crown, jewelry, and royal robe to serve as her protection.

She instructed her faithful servant, Ninshubur, what to do in case she did not return -- to seek out her fathers, urging them not to let their daughter die.

Arriving at the outer gates of the underworld, she announced herself. Neti, the chief gatekeeper of the underworld, did not recognize her and asked who she was.

She replied: "I am Inanna, Queen of Heaven, On my way to the East."

Neti was skeptical. "If you are truly Inanna, Queen of Heaven, On your way to the East, Why has your heart led you on the road from which no traveler returns?"

Inanna answered: "Because of my older sister, Ereshkigal. Her husband, Gugalanna, the Bull of Heaven has died. I have come to witness the funeral rites."

Neti, still uncertain, tells Inanna to wait, while he delivers her message to his queen.

Neti goes to his queen, Ereshkigal, and tells her of the glorious Inanna at the palace gates.

Neti also tells Ereshkigal that Inanna has seven of The Me in her possession, that she has prepared herself, and then describes each of the seven attributes, from her crown to her royal robe or breechcloth.

Ereshkigal is not pleased. She slaps her thigh and bites her lip. After dwelling on the news, she tells Neti to bolt the seven gates of the underworld, and then, one by one, open each gate a crack, let Inanna enter, and as she does, remove her royal garments one by one. Ereshkigal also tells Neti to "Let the holy priestess of heaven enter bowed low."

Neti does as he is told, bolting the seven gates of the underworld and asking Inanna in.

At each gate, Neti removes one of Inanna's garments, beginning with her crown and working his way down to her royal robe -- progressing from the top chakra to the lowest. Each time, Inanna asks, "What is this?" and each time Neti answers: "Quiet, Inanna, the ways of the underworld are perfect. They may not be questioned."

Then, naked and bowed low, Inanna enters the throne room.

Ereshkigal rises from her throne, as Inanna starts toward the throne. The Annuna, the judges of the underworld, surround Inanna and pass judgment against her.

Then Ereshkigal fastens on Inanna the eyes of death, speaks against her the word of wrath, and utters against her the cry of guilt. Then she strikes her.

Inanna is turned into a corpse, a piece of rotting meat, and hung from a hook on the wall.

After for three days and nights, when Inanna had not returned, Ninshubur went into action. She set up a lament for Inanna, beating the drum for her in the assembly places. She circled the houses of the gods, tearing at her eyes, her mouth and thighs. She dressed herself in sackcloth, a single garment like a beggar.

Alone, she set out for Nippur and the temple of Enlil. There she pleaded with Nippur not to let his grand-daughter be put to death in the underworld.

Enlil was not impressed. His daughter's actions made him angry, and he would not help.

Ninshubur then went to Ur and the temple of Nanna, begging for Inanna's father's help.

Nanna was about as helpful as Enlil. He refused to help.

Then Ninshubur went to Eridu and the temple of Enki, Inanna's mother's father. She pleaded with Enki in the same manner as she had done with Enlil and Nanna.

Enki, on the other hand, was troubled and grieved for his daughter, Inanna.

From under his fingernails, Enki, brought forth dirt and fashioned the dirt into creatures neither male or female, the kurgarra and the galatur. He gave the food of life to the kurgarra, and to the galatur, the water of life.

Enki then instructed them to enter the underworld like flies. There they would find Ereshkigal, the Queen of the Underworld, moaning with the cries of a woman about to give birth.

Enki told the kurgarra and the galatur, that when she cried of her inside or her outside, they were to echo her cries. That this would please her, and she would offer them a gift. They were to ask her only for the corpse hanging on the wall. And when each sprinkled the food and water of life, that Inanna would rise.

The kurgarra and the galatur heeded Enki's words and set out for the underworld. As flies, they slipped through the cracks of the gates, and entered Ereshkigal's throne room.

Ereshkigal was moaning as if she were about to give birth. No linen was spread over her body and her breasts were uncovered. Her hair swirled around her head like leeks. When she cried of her inside, her outside, her belly, her back, her heart, her liver -- the kurgarra and the galatur would echo her pain, empathetic to each of her pains.

It was then that Ereshkigal stopped and looked at them. She asked who they were and why they were moaning, groaning and sighing with her. She offered her blessing. Then she offered a gift: the water-gift, the river in its fullness.

But the kurgarra and the galatur answered, saying they did not wish it.

When she offered the grain-gift, the fields in harvest, they declined it as well.

Then Ereshkigal asked them what did they wish. The kurgarra and the galatur answered that they wanted only the corpse hanging on the hook.

Ereshkigal said that the corpse belonged to Inanna. They replied: "Whether it belongs to our queen, whether it belongs to our king, that is our wish.

The corpse was given to them. The kurgarra sprinkled the food of the life on the corpse, and the galatur sprinkled the water of life on the corpse. And Inanna arose...

Inanna was about to ascend from the underworld when the Annuna, the judges, seized her.

“No one ascends from the underworld unmarked.” Inanna must provide someone in her place.

Thus, as Inanna ascended, the galla, the demons of the underworld, clung to her side. The galla were demons who know no food, who know no drink, who eat no offerings, who drink no libations, who accept no gifts!

When Ninshubur, dressed in soiled sackcloth, waiting outside the palace gates, saw Inanna surrounded by the galla, she threw herself in the dust at Inanna’s feet.

The galla said, “Walk on, Inanna, we will take Ninshubur in your place.”

But Inanna was well aware of Ninshubur’s support and her part in rescuing her.

Whereupon, the galla said: “Walk on, Inanna, we will accompany you further.”

When they came upon Shara, the son of Inanna, and later, Lulal, Inanna’s other son, both were dressed in soiled sackcloth, and threw themselves in the dust at her feet. The galla were willing to take either, but Inanna knew that each had mourned her death, had always honored her, and would continue to do so. She refused to give them up.

But when Inanna arrived in Uruk, and came upon her husband, Dumuzi, she found him sitting on his magnificent throne, dressing in his finest garments. Dumuzi did not move.

Inanna told the galla: “Take him! Take Dumuzi away!”

The galla seized him by his thighs, breaking the reed pipe which he had been playing. They beat him and gashed him with axes.

Whereupon Dumuzi let out a wail, raising his hands to heaven to Utu, the God of Justice, and beseeching him to change him into a snake so that he could escape his demons.

Merciful, Utu accepted Dumuzi’s tears and changed him into a snake. Dumuzi escaped.

The Dream of Dumuzi

Dumuzi tried to hide in the ditches of Arali.

When the galla came to his sister, Geshtianna, she refused their gifts and refused to tell them where Dumuzi was hiding. They tortured her, but still she refused.

Then the galla went to Dumuzi's friend and offered him the water-gift and the grain-gift. The friend accepted the gifts and betrayed Dumuzi, telling the galla where Dumuzi was.

When they found Dumuzi, he cried again to Utu, to change him into a gazelle.

Utu mercifully did, changing Dumuzi into a gazelle. Dumuzi escaped.

Dumuzi fled to Kubiresh, where the galla found him. Dumuzi escaped.

Dumuzi fled to Old Belili, where the galla found him. Dumuzi escaped.

Dumuzi fled to the sheepfold of his sister, Geshtianna.

When Geshtianna found Dumuzi in the sheepfold, she wept and grieved. The seven galla found Dumuzi destroying all he had, and took him away, naked and bound.

#### The Return

Inanna, Sirtur, the mother of Dumuzi and Geshtianna, his sister, all wept for Dumuzi.

They cried aloud at all they had lost, those things Dumuzi would never bring to them again.

As Geshtianna wandered about the city, weeping for her brother, she cried: "The day that dawns for you will also dawn for me, the day you see I will also see. I would find my brother! I would comfort him! I would share his fate!"

When Inanna saw Geshtianna's grief, she was moved and spoke to her gently. Inanna would take his sister to Dumuzi's place, but Inanna did not know where Dumuzi was.

A holy fly told Inanna where Dumuzi was, in exchange for Inanna's gift to the fly -- that the fly could frequent the beer-house, taverns, and hear the talk of the wise ones.

Inanna and Geshtianna went to Arali, where they found Dumuzi weeping.

Inanna took Dumuzi by the hand and said: “You will go to the underworld half the year. Your sister, since she has asked, will go the other half. On the day you are called, that day you will be taken. On the day Geshtianna is called, that day you will be set free.”

Inanna placed Dumuzi in the hands of the eternal.

Holy Ereshkigal! Great is your renown! Holy Ereshkigal! I sing your praises!