

STAGE NINE



Story of a Black Woman

“I NEEDED A DIVINE ENERGY THAT KNEW MY MOTHER
AND MY GRANDMOTHER ...”

I know it sounds crazy, but one of the hardest things I’ve ever had to do in my life is to believe in and love myself. As a little girl, I was shy. I wanted to blend in, but didn’t know how. There was an undertone that always seemed to be inside of me: “If you were light skinned, your life would be easier.”

The death of my grandmother, and my mother five years later, made me confront the reality of death. As I walked away from my mother’s gravesite, it occurred to me that death was not unfamiliar territory. I’d been facing death for as long as I could remember and its image had been nothing less than terrifying to me. It took my breath away ... made my heart beat irregularly and forced me to work hard in order to construct a life style that was supposedly ‘risk-free.’ The fear of death made me run fast to be perfect. So, yes ... death has been chasing me for a long time. Not a physical death, but something that is even more debilitating ... a slow, torturous spiritual death.

During my younger years, I hid from the world in shame. I made myself unavailable. I hid from the challengers and thought I was safe. I imagined the world as evil. Time moved me along when I would have been happy standing still. I became a wife without being emotionally ready to choose a suitable husband. Miraculously, becoming a mother seemed natural and normal ... like ‘readiness was in place.’ My son became life. He was my new legitimate escape. Now, in my aloneness, I must face the world that I avoided, squarely in the face. I embraced the challenge. I decided to find ways to unleash the powers within me.

After many attempts to create my new life alone, I joined a support group for women of color in my church. I prayed with them in a way that I never prayed before. I prayed to the Black Madonna, Isis. Isis sent a message to her devotees; “I am black and beautiful.” The Great Goddess, Isis, was the feminine life force that I needed to reclaim parts of myself that were cloaked in shame. I needed a Divine energy that knew me before I existed because she was in the cotton fields ... because she had her children taken from her ... because she was summoned by the master she didn’t love and a life she didn’t choose. I needed a Devine energy that knew my mother and my grandmother ...

who always felt beautiful. I needed a Divine energy that cooked in my mother's kitchen and blessed my grandmother's food. The "one-in-herself-ness" of Isis that sought quiet tranquility in order to bring forth what was meaningful made me want to know all I could about her.

My hunger to know her sent me to the library for Goddess information. What I learned deepened my appreciation of womanhood. I learned about the collective consciousness that is part of every woman. They are the patterns we all share. I learned that in Old Europe, Europe's first civilization was a peaceful, sedentary, art-loving, earth and sea-bound culture that worshipped the Great Goddess. She was worshipped as the force deeply connected to nature and her fertility was responsible both for creating life and destroying it. The Great Goddess was immortal, changeless, and omnipotent. She took lovers for pleasure. Before fatherhood, before male gods, the Great Goddess was the feminine life force. When the conquerors that invaded Europe imposed their patriarchal principles on the people, and insisted upon the observance of their rules, the Great Goddess became subservient. The complete dethronement of the Great Goddess was finally accomplished by the Hebrew, Christian and Moslem religions centuries ago. As the female Goddess faded into the background, male deities took her place. I realize that I carry in myself my own glory and my own repression. To realize that once there was a God that looked like me, made me determined to find her ... live her ... be her.

Finally looking for myself as a woman, grand-daughter, daughter, mother, friend, and professional was like being the anthropologist of my own journey. There were so many questions I wanted to ask my mother and grandmother now that I was motivated by this hunger to know. I pulled out of storage the few letters and cards they had written to me. I was angry with myself for not asking questions and angry at them for not writing more. They had both taken with them into death a huge part of my personal history. I wept privately and sometimes sobbed about the closeness I missed with them. It relieved some of my tension, but I knew the tears would not wipe out my loss.

I wanted myth and reality to merge in me. I wanted to know who I came from ... what blood was running through my veins. I wanted to live consciously ... to get ride of the vagueness and confusion that was cluttering my mind. I wanted to be real. One night, during our discussion group, I was asked to recall my anger towards my mother. The thought of being angry with my mother was close to sacrilegious. How could I? "I'm not angry at her," I said firmly. It didn't work. The other women pursued my honesty like a vulture seeking its prey. I wanted to leave immediately, but knew how immature that would seem. So, I became silent. That defense silenced the group. We all sat silently. I became angry with all of them for being silent. How dare they use that defense against me!

After ten minutes of silence (which seemed like ten hours), I began to talk about my mother. I didn't know why this challenge was so important to them, but something inside of me said: "Trust them! Being rooted in life means being rooted in all of reality." Slowly, I began to articulate things that were hard for me to admit, even to myself. I had been disappointed in my mother. I didn't expect her to be a queen, but at least, a vibrant, creative woman! I wanted her to be less defeated ... someone who had willed herself to be more protective of her own personal life. I wanted her to be outraged by my father's abandonment. I wanted my mother's pride in being a black woman to be demonstrated wherever she went. I wanted her to struggle less. I wanted some man to make love to her into the night. I wanted him to help her and cherish her. I wanted my father to weep for her as she lay in her dying bed. I sobbed as I released pain that lay dormant most of my life. I cried for my mother's life more profoundly than her death. I cried for the child in me that always missed daddy.

The silence of the sisters that surrounded me became my invitation to be released from every pain that held me captive. I was released from myself. Others came to me with hugs that made me feel my mother's closeness.