

The Feminine Face of God: The (1991) Unfolding of the Sacred in Women

Sherry Ruth Anderson & Patricia Hopkins

This book is an invitation for women to define for themselves what is Sacred.

The feminine face of God is an aspect of divinity and an approach to the sacred — it's not exclusively of women, but women will naturally lead the way. ♡

↓ (1)
It begins with our stories — with women telling the truth about their lives — which differs from patriarchal theology.

What constitutes spiritual maturity? ↓ ↓ ↓

I already know I am I child of God. The question is how can I be an ADULT of God? research

Each woman interviewed decided to stop looking to authority figures outside herself for the truth, and to trust that what she experienced as sacred was indeed sacred.

Everyone found the necessity for SOLITUDE

and came to trust an inner source ♡ of wisdom ♡

Research question raised: (2)

Is there a relationship between women saying "I don't know how to pray," and "I don't know what it means to be a woman."

Shekhinah — saying it out loud creates a fog somewhere deep inside.

spoiler alert: Yup. ♡

"Shekhinah": The Feminine Face of God (found in the Kabbalah)

her story, a dream: the Torah is placed inside her body and she receives it, "feeling my body as a sacred vessel."

"What is this all about?" she asks

"We are celebrating because you, a woman, have consented to accept full spiritual responsibility for your life. This is your initiation as one who will serve the planet" (3)

"And you are not alone. Many, many women are coming forward now to lead the way"

you will be teachers for each other



you will come together in circles and speak your spiritual truth to each other

The time has come for women to accept their

spiritual responsibility for our planet

The voice of the deep feminine is beginning to speak clearly and firmly to many women.

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

And it is by sharing our inner truths, our sacred truths with each other that a "new way", and untraditional perspective about what it means to live an embodied spirituality in the world today, is beginning to take form in her dream.

our spiritual brothers say:

"We are no longer know the way. Our ways do not work anymore."

they say: "We give you our wholehearted blessings"

YOU WOMEN MUST FIND A NEW WAY

The feminine face of God is
an attempt to articulate and
give shape to this new way.

the challenge:

To give birth and
be the midwives
at the same
time.

⑤

Women's experiences have
remained unspoken. — we
know almost nothing about
how women develop spiritually.

But we do know this:
We cannot learn how women
develop spiritually from men*.

How
How
Yes!

The responsibility
for describing & the
this process call
is ours,
as women.

*We must look BEYOND the
models of the past for inspiration.

What we need are stories from
spiritually mature women in our
time and culture who are
demonstrating the sacred
♥ — in today's world — ♥

If women are to pioneer
a new way of embodying
spirit in the world today,
one thing seems certain: ⑥

We must listen to the
DEEP source of wisdom
within ourselves and tell
the truth about our lives
and what we're learning ♥

We need not only the COURAGE
to follow whenever the questions
lead us, but the willingness to
let go of the certainty of
thousands of years of traditional
teachings to enter the unknown territory.

Q: What is the face of God that can be revealed through women?

✓ How intimately connected our own cycles are to those of the earth — and how fundamental this bond, this sense of relationship is to ~~the~~ our sense of the sacred.

✓ Truth — speaking it, sharing it, hearing it.

⑦ ✓ Storytelling = powerful ^{and we have ability}

✓ Communitarian wisdom that emerges in circles — more powerful than any one of us alone; we need each other.

✓ AND it begins in solitude and requires Silence to "plumb the depths" of our own relationship w/ the divine.

"Spiritually mature women" = those women who have plumbed the depths of their own lives and were trying to bring together and live out their own spiritual relationships with the divine.

Their research sample: included
- Relatively unknown + well as women who have received public recognition for their spiritual contributions.

- A broad spectrum of paths: 8
Mediane women and rabbis and ministers, mothers, artists, teachers, community workers.

Women who have found their own DIRECT relationship with the divine.

concept of "hearing each other into speech"

for until we speak our truth and know that we've been heard, we don't wholly know it ourselves

(9)

♡ this re: my own work @ shelham

A circle of women can provide

a container for emergence in a way that a woman alone or even a one-to-one relationship cannot. Intimate relationships and even friendships can break or be strained by life changes—but from the

combined wisdom and energy of a small group of women

who are committed to "hearing each other into speech", continuity and trust can develop, than can be relied upon over the long term

A GARDEN as a metaphor for how a woman's spirituality unfolds.

✓ All the women we interviewed first connected with the divine through nature. — circles of stones, cairns, tide pools, trees, animals

✓ The attitude of "not knowing", of allowing, of opening to the new, can be like rain falling on the hard packed soil of our lives. If we are willing, it can soften us, so we can feel gratitude + compassion and our own human vulnerability.

✓ Gates or ^{openings to the sacred...} doorways to garden: so many!

Bath-giving, fear + darkness, long periods of silence, plunging into the heart of the matter (truth),

✓ refers to a profound sense of interconnectedness with all life.

✓ There is a rhythm to our development: a time to be alone, a time to be in community — find your center + connect

Marion Woodman "one of the problems women have today is that they're not willing to find the river in their own life and surrender to it's current."

Q: Why do we as women find it so difficult to trust the truth of our own experience?

"It's very hard to put into words... but something uniquely feminine in me is asking to be expressed and I don't know how to let it come out"

... maybe we remember the THOUSANDS of women who were tortured and burned alive for daring to say and practice what they knew.

Tools:

- ✓ Desire
- ✓ Questioning
- ✓ Silence
- ✓ Listening
- ✓ Our Bodies
- ✓ Following where we're led
- ✓ Openness
- ✓ Curiosity
- ✓ Wonder

The challenge:

- ✓ Stripping away the layers of incultured patriarchal values + belief
- ✓ It's a profoundly disruptive process
- ✓ We remember... this isn't safe
- ✓ It's hard to see with clear eyes
- ✓ Feels like betrayal - requires trust
- ✓ Has us confront fears
- ✓ Experience long-hidden emotions

Once accepted

(12) this challenge led each woman to cultivate what already had roots in her own sacred garden.

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She began to listen to the deep sources of wisdom within herself and to share what she was learning with others.

practice what they knew.

♡ Quotes: from interviews

"I woke up one morning to find that I was no longer able to squeeze into my old identity."

"I was swinging back and forth between a very deep cosmic urging and my feeling of terrible limitation. And what it came down to was: Can I trust myself?" (13)

"There's a gnosis, a direct inner knowing, that's driving me. It's not somebody else's tradition now; it's mine, and I have to go follow it."

"However, the danger of not leaving home (metaphorically or literally) is that we can spend the rest of our lives hiding from ourselves."

"If there's one thing we know from history, it is that patriarchal models of the spiritual have not been kind to women."

"I felt like I had found myself in other ways, but I had yet to find myself as a woman."

"Mrs. Woodman^(manion), there's no way you can be confirmed. You're a heretic!"
MW: "I didn't want any priest between me and God." ♡

"What I most regretted were my silences. My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you... it's not differences which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken."
-Audre Lorde.

→ Bernadette Roberts
"Spirituality is like a moving sidewalk. Whether you go with it or spend your whole life running against it, you're still going to be taken along. Whether you commit yourself utterly or throw in the towel, eventually you'll be swept away."

Our bodies are overlooked as vessels for the divine because they have been so consistently denigrated by patriarchal traditions.

Q: There was this one question that kept slipping through the cracks of our construction

15 "If you are in despair, are you in the garden?" !!

the danger is that we can idealize what it means to be spiritual/in the garden.

"Spiritual bypassing"

"It's not the surface work that's needed now. It's the deep work."

When a woman makes a choice to embody spiritual experience in her everyday life, idealizations go out the

♡ QUOTES ♡
"I was not able to approach God with this kind of engagement until I began to open up my prayer life to the feminine aspect of God, and to celebrate my own femaleness in that aspect" - Rev. Allie Renee Rozath

"As long as what is considered sacred is always in the image of men, a whole aspect of what divinity is for women is not accessible to us." - Jean Bolen 16

"I never pray unless I know where my feet are. I put my feet down so the earth rises up in me and I wait until it rises up in me." Rosalyn Bruyere
"Coming to terms with + honoring need for solitude has been essential window to her unfolding process."

Tools for the Sacred Garden

Practice is the key to spiritual growth
Origor, hyper masculine
* see it as a moving sidewalk
See/allow MANY diff practices
not just one. It's not about perfection

It's not about HARD WORK or overpowering the natural - don't insist on making it hard.

Choose every day - let your spiritual practice be how you LIVE YOUR LIFE

Until a woman becomes interested in what is real and true in her own particular life, THAT'S when/how she can embody the sacred in her life + her maturing can proceed.

"cultivate", in it's root form means to inhabit, to dwell
Live the dailiness of our own lives - to open to sacred within

* More Tools

prayer - communing w/ the divine
It might be the most personal + intimate thing we do.
to pray is to be vulnerable

Bring my own new value for the female side of life into prayer
our bodies - there is clearly a connection between prayer and our bodies - there is the acceptance of the female body as an aspect of God.
this* intersects with our relationship w/ being a woman

our sexuality our spirituality
Body as a tuning fork - $\equiv \heartsuit \equiv$ far divine
inner guidance - A heart song

listening to the silence of one's own heart (is a means of prayer) will help direct your spiritual path

Listening is a spiritual art form that takes practice. It's a feeling thing.
How Mother Theresa defined it.

Silence - that's the container for our prayers as well as a form of prayer in itself. & SOLITUDE

everything emerges from this - a word, an image, a line from a poem, a probing question.

"love the questions themselves."
- Rilke

(19)

Prayer is communion with mystery

don't take other people's medicine
the more we come ALIVE and AWAKE, the more everything we do becomes a prayer.
there's no right way to do it.

FEEL your way into it - the feminine path where you just FEEL spontaneously - give yourself permission to follow that path. Do whatever your inner self is telling you - HONOR IT

Digging down ~~deep~~ into SELF

let go of teachers, stop looking for tools - it's only this practice that lets our seeds bear fruit.

Ritual - torn me on inside, help me to experience sanctity, indwelling, the Shekhinah awakens. There is a simple, deep sense of connectedness. Be playful - being rigid cuts you off, it smothers the subtle messages coming to you from inside yourself (20)

Breath work - let it come to you spontaneously when you're off center. just fall into it.

The Feminine Path = the SPONTANEOUS (follow what unfolds) WAY

We have to begin how to give ourselves permission.

Relationships - women value these. We blend and weave and combine and sustain.