

SESSION 3:

Womanpower



SESSION OBJECTIVES

For the participants:

1. to become aware of the fact that myths reflect and support social structures
2. to meet the world's earliest recorded woman poet
3. to reflect upon our power as women today

PREPARATION FOR THE FACILITATORS

- Read the New Foreground and be prepared to summarize it for the group.
- Read the recommended readings in *Cakes Resources* and make copies available to participants.
- Preview the video program “The City of Mesopotamia” and familiarize yourself with the scenes. Ask yourself questions you will be asking the group.
- Listen to the song “She Calls to Us from the Past” by C. Eagleheart.
- Arrange your altar in the center of the room (see details below).

MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT

- Large candle in holder and money for the altar, something that represents your power as a woman
- CD and equipment to show it
- Newsprint and felt marker
- Paper and markers for participants to use for the Here and Now Wheel
- Copies of opening and closing readings and the six theories for Session Four

REFERENCES

- Jean Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, Second Edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), particularly chapter 10.
- Rosalind Wiseman Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), particularly chapters 1 and 2.
- Dorothy May Emerson, “Women and Money” and “Economic Self-Empowerment for Women Worldwide,” in *Cakes Resources*

THE NEW FOREGROUND

One of the most important tasks facing women today is the development of a new understanding and use of power. For the last few thousand years in many cultures, men have attempted to define and circumscribe women's power. Today we have new opportunities to speak for ourselves and to demand the right to exercise our natural power and competence. Jean Baker Miller, in *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, makes an important distinction between power for ourselves and power over others.¹⁶ Our male-dominated society has tended to define power as power over others, the ability to control. Someone else's power, then, is seen as dangerous because he or she will want to control you. Miller points out that in terms of human development this is not a valid or healthy definition of power. Real confidence in oneself and real power for oneself have the opposite effect: they reduce the need to have power over others or to control them. It is important for women to hold fast to this healthy definition of power and to understand that we do not need to diminish other women, or men, in order to assert our own strength.

To develop our sense of power we need to understand the ways in which our society and its beliefs and myths tend to reinforce an unequal power relationship between women and men. A common anthropological theory is that the myths of a culture reflect its social power arrangements. If the overarching myth is that of a father-god whose representatives on Earth are males, as in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, this mythology reflects a male-dominated society. Once such a myth is revered in the society, it reinforces the social arrangements as part of the divine plan.

It is important for women to understand two things about this theory:

1. Ancient myths and artifacts emphasized significant female powers and gave force for thousands of years, thus reflecting significant female power in social structures.
2. When women see themselves as regaining significant powers, myths will be used to reflect that shift.

One important aspect of power in our culture is money. Money, like wine, seems to have originated in the temple of the ancient world. Money was first derived from the Roman Goddess Juno who in one of her forms was called Moneta meaning She Who Gives Warning. Her temple in Rome was a financial center of the city and so her name Moneta became the word for money. Mint is also derived from the same word since this temple was also the place where coins were minted. According to Barbara G. Walker, silver and gold coins manufactured there were valuable not only by reason of their precious metals but also by the blessing of the Goddess herself which was believed to bring good fortune and healing magic.¹⁸

Money was indeed a magical invention. It can be exchanged for every conceivable kind of tangible wealth. Indeed, over time, money became the primary measure of real wealth in Western society. But the fact is that in general, men have money and women don't. According to the United Nations Labor Organization, women put in 65% of the world's work and get back only 10% of all income paid. Most of the work done by women is unpaid

in money. When money becomes not only the measure of wealth but also the measure of a person's worth, those who earn little money are devalued and oppressed, no matter how much work they do. According to World Development Indicators, women work two-thirds of the world's working hours, produce half of the world's food, but earn only 10% of the world's income and own less than 1% of the world's property.¹⁹

Women need to remember that many Goddess temples were prominent with the centers of financial power were presided over by priestesses. Today, most of the financial institutions of our society are still presided over by men. As women let us claim our rightful fair share of the world's money and stop the pursuit that money can give us. But let us strive to create a society in which that power will be used in ways that will enhance the quality of life for ourselves and our children and our planet.

One of the most promising trends in recent years is the creation of micro-credit programs formed in developing countries so that poor people, mostly women, can borrow small amounts of money to start their own small businesses in order to support their families.

This session highlights an ancient priestess/poet, Enheduanna, as a way to focus on women's feelings about power and money today.

*... we do not need to
diminish other women,
or men, in order to assert
our own strength.*

SESSION PLAN**OPENING RITUAL**

Light the candle and say: The Goddess is a symbol of female strength and power. The Goddess is a symbol of all that is beautiful in the female experience. The Goddess is a symbol of women's fierce new love of the divine in ourselves.

Read the following ancient hymn to the Goddess Ishtar.²⁰

*Queen of Heaven, Goddess of the Universe,
The One who walked in terrible chaos
And brought life by the law of love
And out of chaos brought us harmony
And from chaos She has led us by the hand*

*Woman of women, Goddess of power
no equal,
She who decrees the destiny of people
Highest Ruler of the World
Sovereign of the Earth*

*It is you who choose our destinies
Make what is to be of us
At your right side is justice,
At your left side is kindness.
It is you who give us life and well being.*

*With Ishtar there is counsel and wisdom.
In Her hand is everything She holds in Her hand.
Joy comes from Her very glance.
She is the power, the magnificence.
She is the deity who protects.
She is the spirit that guides.*

*O Shining One,
You stop the anger of all other deities.
You care for the oppressed and the mistreated,
Each day offering them your help.
You are the One who gleams brightest
In the midst of all other deities.
You are the holy One of women and of men.*

Then read the following quotation by Monique Wittig:

There once was a time when you were not a slave, remember that. You walked alone, full of laughter, you bathed bare bellied. You say you have no recollection of it, remember ... you say there are no words to describe it, you say it doesn't exist. But remember. Make an effort to remember. Or, for that matter, invent.²¹

REFLECTION

Participants comment on the two versions and the feelings. They may wish to talk about the symbols of the Goddess. Encourage them to describe their reactions and feelings if they are comfortable in doing so. Let the conversation proceed in whatever direction seems to be of value and interest to the group. Allow about ten minutes for the discussion, summarizing it briefly before beginning the next activity.

INFORMATION

Introduce the idea expressed in the New Foreground that the myths of a culture both reflect and shape social power structures. In society, for example, the myth of a father-god whose earthly representative and clergy are all male reflects and supports male domination in the society.

Share this quotation from Mary Daly: "If God in 'his' heaven is a father ruling 'his' people, then it is in the 'nature' of things and according to divine plan and the order of the universe that society be male-dominated."²²

VISUAL PROGRAM

Show the visual program "The City-States of Mesopotamia."

After the slide show ends, say: In Mesopotamia, where the Goddess was worshipped, albeit along with male Gods, Her temples were the centers of wisdom and culture and financial power, presided over by women. Remember that.

Write on newsprint: The Goddess affirms female power.

**VISUAL PROGRAM #3:
“THE CITY-STATES OF MESOPOTAMIA”**

- Title: “The City-States of Mesopotamia”
- In what has been known as “the Fertile Crescent”—the land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers—lies ancient Mesopotamia, with its famous city-states of Mari in the north, Ur in the south in the region known as Sumer, and Babylon to the north and west of Ur. Hierarchical social structures developed as the city-states emerged in Mesopotamia. This region includes present-day Iraq, where 21st century wars for oil have been fought.
- Each of the Mesopotamian city-states had a Goddess or God of a certain domain as its special deity. Allow me to introduce you to Enheduanna, a Sumerian high priestess and poet who lived around 2,360 BCE in the Sumerian City of Uruk. Enheduanna is the figure in the center of the relief. She was appointed to the office of high priestess to the Moon God, Nanna, who was the father of the Goddess Inanna.
- Enheduanna came over time to have deep reverence for Inanna. Here is Inanna in a relief as Lady of the Date Palms. In this relief, made during Enheduanna’s time around 2,400 BCE, She is holding a cluster of ripe dates.
- Here is the famous Warka Vase, from the Sumerian City of Uruk, decorated with processions of people offering gifts to Inanna, who is in the center at the top. Note the gateposts with streamers behind her, symbols of the entry to her sacred storehouse.
- Baby lambs emerge from this sheepfold with the reed gateposts and streamers of Inanna, in this limestone trough from 3,000 BCE. The sheepfold is a metaphor for both the temple and sacred vulva of Inanna.
- Here is Inanna’s temple in what is now Khafajah, Iraq. This temple dates from about 2,500 BCE. Its oval shape is atypical.
- Here is the Babylonian Goddess Ishtar, whose warlike symbols are later assigned to Inanna. Her animal is a lion, shown here as the base of Her throne.
- In an attempt to unite several city-states, Enheduanna wrote a series of hymns to Inanna and other major deities. Here are attributes of the Goddess Inanna as a sample of cuneiform, Sumerian writing.
- By Enheduanna’s time this society was in the process of a further transition to patriarchy, and the Goddess has been assigned warlike qualities as well as the attributes of abundance and compassion. The picture shows a tablet with Sumerian script similar to the one Enheduanna used to record her poetic work *The Exaltation of Inanna*. Listen now to her words.
- “Lady of all the attributes, resplendent light, Righteous Woman clothed in radiance, beloved of Heaven and Earth.
- “Oh my Lady, the great gods, fluttering like bats, fly off from you to the clefts, they who dare not walk in your terrible glance, who dare not proceed before your terrible countenance. Who can temper your raging heart? Your malevolent heart is beyond tempering.
- “Lady who soothes the rains, Lady who gladdens the heart, whose rage is not tempered, oh Lady supreme over the land, who has ever denied You homage?
- “That You are lofty as Heaven, be it known! That You are broad as the earth, be it known! That your glance is terrible, be it known! That You lift your terrible glance, be it known! That your glance is flashing, be it known!”
- Notice that the Goddess is described as strong, even fearsome, as well as kind and nurturing. Male gods were already