

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Birthing God: Women's Experiences of the Divine

Lana Dalberg

Part I: Divine Love and Love of Self

Esperanza

In which moments did Esperanza experience God's presence most intensely?

How does Esperanza characterize God's presence within her? How do you sense this Spirit within you?

How does Esperanza draw on "the God within" when fear presents itself? How can you deal with fear differently?

Lindsey

What spiritual moments did Lindsey describe, and how did she open herself to them?

How do you think Lindsey's experiences contribute to her ability to say, "You are loved for who you are"?

How do you experience divine love in your life, and how does it influence your view of yourself?

Lori

How did Lori make room for divine inspiration and divine love in her life?

What do you feel about Lori's experiences of being rocked? How did Lori's experiences contribute to her love of self and lead to a rebirth in her sense of vocation?

What are the ways in which you experience the Divine in your life? In which moments do you feel loved by God?

Hyun Kyung

How did Hyun Kyung's most difficult experiences affect her faith and the direction of her life? How were they transformative?

How did Hyun Kyung's deepest wound become transformed into her greatest strength?

Think of your deepest wounds. How might they become transformed into your greatest strengths?

Susan

What experiences of loss or of new understanding affected Susan? How did she conceive the Divine differently?

How has your spirituality changed, in relation to both your outer world and your inner experience?

How would you characterize your conception of God today vis-à-vis your previous conceptions?
How is this birthing a new understanding of the Divine in your life?

Sridevi

How did Sridevi's upbringing inform her spiritual experiences as an adult?

Sridevi is aware of the Divine all around her. When do you feel this way in your life?

How do positive feminine images contribute to your self-esteem?

What beautiful images do you see within yourself?

Arisika

How did Arisika's childhood and her choice of profession influence her spiritual experiences?

What do you think about interpreting the word *virgin* to mean a woman who belongs to herself?

How do you practice that concept in your own life?

Arisika suggests that telling our stories invites a rebirthing—an honoring and valuing of ourselves and our life experiences.

What is your most memorable experience of the Divine?

What do you know of your mother's or grandmother's experience of the Divine?

What thoughts, feelings, or images does the word *birthing* bring up for you?

Rachel

What experiences brought about changes in Rachel's spirituality?

How would you characterize Rachel's moment at Machu Picchu? How do you relate what she experienced to your own life?

How, for Rachel, is Christianity an embodied religion? How does her experience and point of view relate to your faith experience(s)?

Anna

How did Anna's ailments affect her spirituality? How were they labor pains for birthing a new understanding of the Divine?

How is Anna's sense of the Divine different from yours? How is it similar?

Where do you see labor pains of birthing new understandings—of yourself, God, community, or vocation—in your life?

Alice

Which experiences led to Alice's revelations?

What would you characterize as an epiphany of "I'm of worth" in your own life? In what ways is that epiphany a rebirthing of yourself?

What actions or reflections can you undertake on a daily basis to open up your mind and heart to the experience of divine love for yourself in both body and soul?

Sarah

How does Sarah describe the sense of God within her as she faced vocational decisions?

How did Sarah's experiences of God change with loss and motherhood? How has your experience of the Divine changed?

What is your go-to image for God? How has it changed over the course of your life?

Ann

What beliefs did Ann examine and why? When have you felt inclined to examine your faith? What changes occurred?

Ann states, "Who I am is authentic goodness." What is good within you? Name at least twenty things.

Rhina

How did Rhina's discovery about her sexual orientation open up her spiritual experience of God and help her to rebirth herself?

How did Rhina experience divine love in moments of pain and transformation? Who was the face of the Divine for her during these moments of transition?

Describe when *you* feel God's presence. When have you felt God ministering to you through other people? How have these moments aided self-discovery and self-acceptance?

Part II: Divine Connection**Jeanette**

What experiences in Jeanette's culture and childhood influenced her understanding of the Divine?

Describe the value of accompaniment for Jeanette and how it affects her spirituality.

How does your relationship to family and other people important to you impact your understanding of the Divine?

Irma

What is Irma's experience of faith? What do the worship vestments do for Irma and why?

How do the words Irma receives in prayer reinforce the words she shares as a mother to her children and vice versa?

What do you gain from Irma's experience of prayer? What do you experience in prayer?

Kimberly

When you are fearful, how does your relationship to God or understanding of God help you to address fear?

Think about Kimberly's words, "Mystery is essential for faith. The challenge is to see the mystery as something beautiful and not as something fearful." How would you apply her words to your own life?

What does your understanding of mystery say about your relationship with the Divine and with yourself?

Elena

What experiences in Elena's childhood stand out to you? How do you feel you would have responded in her situation?

What is your experience of the Divine in moments of profound stress?

In your view, how does a Divine Mother differ (if at all) from a Divine Father?

Belvie

What elements of Belvie's childhood shaped her sense of self and the Divine?

How does Belvie see humanity? How does she see the relationship of humanity to the earth?

How do you see your relationships, both with other humans and other species? How does your understanding of the Divine enhance your relationship with others (including other species) and the earth?

Malisa

Malisa talks about seeing the Divine in relationship, and often it's in relationship that we grow the most spiritually. Think of at least one instance of a relationship in your life where this is true.

Sadaya

For Sadaya, how do movement and chanting lend themselves to prayer and connecting with the Divine?

How do dreams impact Sadaya's life and decision making? How do dreams factor into your daily living?

In your experience, how is God both lover and beloved, as well as love, all at the same time?

Carolina

How did Carolina's experience of exile influence her faith?

In what ways did meeting and engaging with people of different faiths influence Carolina's own faith?

What are some universal values that you identify in the faith traditions you have encountered?

Which value resonates most for you?

Debbie

Debbie describes feeling the Divine in a sea of people moving together with a common purpose. Have you ever felt the presence of God in this way?

How did Debbie see her spiritual choices in relation to young women around her? How do you see your faith-related decisions in the context of your friendships, family, and other relationships?

How does Debbie express Tai Chi's effect on her faith?

Teresa

What does Teresa describe as important factors in her spiritual life? What, in your life, is most nourishing and stimulating to your faith?

In what ways are you, like Teresa, diving into life and diving into faith? How do you find your spiritual aspirations and desires strengthened in working with others? How do these activities build your happiness and your faith?

In what ways are you a vessel for the Divine Spirit?

Susan

What factors in Susan's given family informed her spirituality?

Why was it important to Susan to create new ways of being family?

What are Susan's values? What are your values, and how do they influence your relationships? How does your relationship with the Divine influence how you relate to others in the world?

Marci

What factors in Marci's religious upbringing contributed to her skepticism?

What qualities did she find in the community of her church that allowed her to address her doubts? How did relationships with others in her church community impact her well-being?

How would you characterize your own doubts? How do they impact your actions and your relationships? How do they impact your view of yourself?

Emily

What experience helped Emily to "suspend her disbelief"? What experiences in your life do you attribute to divine influence?

How are you present to other women in your life? How do you exemplify the Divine to them or allow yourself to see the Divine in them?

Alison

What does chanting do for Alison? How do you regard chanting as a spiritual practice?

What happens for you when you sing with others?

What examples of interconnectedness can you draw from your own life?

Judith

What interconnections do you see around you? How do your body and spirit respond when you encounter them?

How are you influenced by sensory experiences, and how do you express your response?

Are there new ways in which you can conceive of the Divine, particularly in the areas of movement and sensory perception?

Part III: Divine Change

SaraLeya

What changes in SaraLeya's life led to her spiritual growth?

In what ways does she experience the Divine?

In what ways and areas of your life can you practice what she calls "small mind and large mind"?

Lucy

Where do you see rebirth and growth in Lucy's experiences of loss?

Looking back over your own life, where do you recognize instances of "found art"? How have you grown from the experience of adapting to things you thought couldn't possibly go together or work out?

What do you think of Lucy's encouragement to trust your imagination? Where might your imagination lead you?

Ayesha

Describe the impact of life-threatening illness on Ayesha's spirituality. How have illness and bodily changes affected your experience of faith?

In what ways did 9/11 affect Ayesha's life and that of her community? How does your faith change in relation to events that unfold around you?

Allison

What losses in Allison's life enabled her to "go further" in exploration of the Divine? What is her view of death? of change?

How does Allison's sense of humanity as community ("the human matrix") resonate for you personally? When do you feel connected to other humans and members of other species?

What do you think of Allison's opinion that spirituality is *felt* and that once it's codified, it loses its vitality?

What is your experience of spirituality as something that is *felt*? How has loss or other difficult experiences influenced it?

Viviana

What childhood and young adult experiences led Viviana to her understanding of Spirit?

What is her attitude toward change? Why would she say that "prayer is gratitude for everything we are given, as well as for everything we are not given"?

What was your gut response to Viviana's advice to love yourself *more* than you love your neighbor? How do you apply this wisdom to your own life?

Zoharah

How did racism and other social and economic injustices influence Zoharah's evolving spirituality? In your own spiritual development, how do social and economic circumstances play in?

What do you think of Zoharah's suggestion that you must become the change internally that you are seeking to affect externally?

Zoharah speaks about spiritual teachers. Can you think of a mentor or teacher who aided your spiritual growth? In what ways were you most impacted?

Kristin

What are some of the childhood circumstances that influenced Kristin's spirituality?

How would you describe your feelings when you are resting or reflecting in a quiet place in nature? What do you learn in those moments?

How did Kristin react to the changes in her life?

How does Kristin distinguish between her near-death experience and her stroke? For you, what's the interplay between your ability to control and your trust in the Spirit?

Dionne

What impact did Dionne's childhood and background have on her spirituality?

How do loss and other changes inform her spirituality? How do they inform yours?

Reflect on the ways in which your spirituality has changed due to loss(es) in your life.

Stacy

How did Stacy address challenges in her vocation and in her life?

Which of the images or metaphors that Stacy mentioned speak to you?

What does Stacy mean when she suggests that the power of women and the Divine Feminine need to be seen not just as feminine metaphors but in real-life examples, "women like yourself"?

How are you an example of the Divine at work and at play in the world?

Virginia

Which of Virginia's experiences resonate most strongly for you?

Where does Virginia's inspiration for creativity come from? How does she nurture it?

What does Virginia say about trust and how it relates to the changes in her life? How would you characterize your own faith in terms of trust?

Jann

What changes did Jann experience in her life? How did she look to the Spirit in embracing those changes? What has changed as a result for other women?

Where does Jann draw her inspiration for writing songs from? What moments in your life can you characterize as engagement with what she calls the Creative Spirit?

Jann talks about the importance of spiritual symbols. Which spiritual symbols are affirming and empowering for you?

Katie

What changes was Katie going through during the time of her mystical experiences?

Katie is now painting in addition to composing. What strikes you about the changes in her life and the way she has grown with them?

How can you adapt so that opportunities and challenges that come into your life can facilitate growth?

What are your stories of the Spirit at work in your life?