

## **COURSE DATES AND TIMES FOR 'SEEKING INANNA'**

**Thursday 5th September 2019, from 7 - 9 pm**

**Week 1: Lady of the Largest Heart: Holding an open mind and large heart**

Celebrating Inanna's People (of diverse sexuality, role, gender and sexual desires). Anne discusses common desire differences of sexual interests and mis-matched libidos, which can be both baseline libido, and fluctuation which can occur over longer-term life and stressors. In this introductory first lesson, she sets the framework: of nurturing curiosity, open-mindedness and generosity towards yourself and your lover. Alongside this, understanding the common ingredients which impact on sexual desire, drawn from major sex surveys and research by sexologists. (Including stress, health issues, relationship resentment, sleep deprivation, mental distractions, medical conditions & medications, childbirth, menopause, miscarriage, hormones and ageing, erectile dysfunction, cultural and religious shame around sexuality, past historic trauma, body shame.)

Throughout the course, she will be encouraging practising empathy and largest heart, understanding through open and honest communication, listening without judgment, human embrace. The course is taught from a philosophy of sex being part of life and part of humanity, and in the face of mortality; from the Harpist's Song "Rejoice, Kiss Again", to the wise woman Siduri's words: "Make your partner happy in your embrace"; to give and enjoy sexual pleasure as part of embracing our humanity.

For those who have felt that their or their partner's libido is low, or has dwindled in the face of stress or children or with age (or other reason), the research offers reassurance of just how common it is. And the course is designed to help understand what drives libido and desire, what can be done to nurture sexuality and desire - from both science and ancient wisdom practised for millennia, and better understand what affects our own libido.

*Homework this week: Honest, empathetic, non-judgmental sharing on paper or in person with one's partner or self. (As for all classes, it is not compulsory to share with class the reflections gained by the exercise, but those who wish to share will be welcome to do so if they choose, with class's agreement to privacy and empathy for that which is shared within the classroom walls.) There may be factors coming up for individuals and within relationships which also suggest a need for additional personalized help by a qualified professional - such as medication affecting libido and the need to review this with a doctor, through to trauma from past abuse or miscarriage which would benefit from seeking out a psychologist or counsellor who is skilled in addressing trauma. There is also a lot of practical tools to address aspects from menopausal effects of lessened lubrication - to which quality lube can be of much assistance, through to tools for people who have gone through prostate*

*cancer surgery - such as penis pumps and a more expansive attitude to what constitutes "sex" and intimacy. So where possible, this is an opportunity to examine factors which may be resonating as affecting libido, and opportunities and avenues for beginning to address those with knowledge and expertise brought to the topic.*

**Thursday 12th September 2019, from 7 - 9 pm**

**Week 2: From Freudian drive and Eros's arrows to Responsive Desire: Echoes of Ancient Erotic Wisdom**

Anne discusses The old Freudian idea of "sex drive", and it's helpfulness and its flaws. We compare this to the modern day concept of Spontaneous versus Responsive Desire, beginning to workshop how to consider what you or your partner's own internal sexual brake and accelerator system looks like and knowing the right fuel to put in it (metaphorically speaking - wink) to turn on.

Knowledge of responsive desire closely matches ancient Goddess sex ritual practices. In Mesopotamia, the Levant and Cyprus, honouring the sex Goddess Inanna (later syncretised with other Goddesses) who was responsible for libido, sexual desire and abundance, took place with an annual sex ritual. Love songs and practices were transmitted cross-culturally in love songs (sex songs) honouring the star Goddess in Egypt and Aphrodite and Venus, artwork and rituals activating and celebrating libido, desire and beauty and the act of lovemaking / fucking / sex in whatever term you wish to describe it. (Qursu literally meant "fucking ritual".)

This echoes an ancient tradition in which Creation is brought about by a divine couple Tiamat and Apsu mixing their waters in the Babylonian Creation Story Enuma Elis ('When on High'), through to God's breath on the face of Tehom in Genesis, and Lady Wisdom personified in Biblical Proverbs as God's daily delight with erotic connotations. The Divine Lovers's coupling and Creation was honoured in the qursu ritual practised in the ancient world. Desire was celebrated by all people, and all sexualities held sacred to Inanna, without shame.

*Homework this week: Giving consideration to your (and your partner's) own accelerator and brake system and sensitivities (with honesty, open mind and large heart). Do you experience more spontaneous desire, or responsive desire, or a combination of the two? Consider: "I turn myself on when...."*

*Relevant reading: Emily Nagoski 'Come as You Are: The Surprising New Science That Will Transform Your Sex Life'*

**Thursday 19th September 2019, from 7 - 9 pm**

**Week 3: Radiance rituals: Bathing and beautification**

The sex Goddess looks at and praises her vulva and breasts, in ancient songs celebrating sexual desire. The first part of the qursu ritual involved this looking at sexuality as beauty in body and erotic attributes. Anne discusses the ritual components, of self-praise, and of bathing as part of the ritual with images from her archaeological field trips of the actual bath buried in the Sanctuary of Aphrodite. What is underlying this bathing ritual? Washing off the day and transforming states, in-bodilyness and tactile sensation, cleansing and making oneself clean and desirable, and holy; ready for the lover and ready to love.

The readying ritual extended itself to anointing with holy perfumed oil in ancient times, not so dissimilar to our modern-day application of perfume or cologne. The hair was arranged, fine garments were put on, and beautification was a sacred ritual act in preparation for the arrival of the lover. Cosmetics were part of Goddess rituals, part of the beautification process and powerful erotic allure; the kohl of the eye make-up called "let a man come, let a man come". Jewellery made of gold, and semi-precious stones were also a part of the ritual, and also had associations to Inanna as Queenly opulent 'Queen of Heaven', and Inanna as sacred whore who could (al)lure a man. The heroic man, looking like a God in ancient literature, is also described as freshly bathed and dressed and looking alluring, from the King-God Dumuzi as consort-lover to Inanna, through to Greek Epic of Odysseus and other heroes.

Under patriarchal systems and monotheism, the "painted woman" was cast out, like Jezebel thrown from the window. And yet, beautification rituals are so fundamental to human culture that they have been around from the earliest record and echoed in marriage rituals around the world. Beautification as an ancient ritual practise linked to Goddess tradition was also revived in Venus bathing: the sign for female ♀ is derived from Venus's bronze mirror, with its long history across millennia.

*Homework this week: Consider your sexual self-praise (and encourage your partner's), with an invitation to look at yourself in the mirror with kindness and see your body and erotic attributes and take healthy pride in your body, with positive self-talk. Consider that making time for bathing, fixing your hair, and putting on fresh garments that you feel attractive in, feeling attractive and beautiful and radiant - is part of sexuality and self to be nurtured. What aspects can you work on to honour this in yourself (and to honour this in your partner)?*

**Thursday 26th September 2019, from 7 - 9 pm**

#### **Week 4: Setting the Sensual Scene and Mood**

Transforming the scene to the erotic, wining and dining, the throne, music and mood, (aroma, flowers, fabrics, light/fire) kindling erotic desire and the setting up of a sacred bed.

Amongst male sex workers Anne has known, the thing that all have shared with her is their amazement in catering to female clients, how what they've paid for and wanted was to be wined and dined. To be listened to, looked at, seen, heard. And desired. Their surprise has been that rather than paying them for sex, "the way a man commonly would" (sweeping gender generalizations we know, but reported as heard from them nonetheless), their female clients wanted something quite different than what those male escorts had expected going into their job. It changed their perspective of women and women's sexuality forever, they said. The setting for many of these dates was a bar or restaurant, ahead of a hotel room or bedroom often opulently set up.

In ancient imagery from Goddess rituals, there is a woman enthroned with a drink (in ancient times drunk with a long straw to get under the floating top layer of the beer or wine), scenes of banqueting, musicians and a mood of happy revelry. In the ancient sex songs, a special bed is set up with special linens within a fragrant chamber.

Responsive desire tends to respond favourably to "romantic setting". Hotels understand this well; offering options of champagne with two flutes, sprinkling rose petals across a bed in a love heart, options of a jacuzzi bath for two. Restaurants set tables up with a rose stem or other flowers, good lighting level, great service to attend to what a couple would like to order. The focus is on pleasing the individual's desires, enjoyment and having a good time.

Of course it doesn't necessarily require a restaurant meal or a hotel room, although these can be desirable, it's understanding the ingredients that are at play. Anne examines the root foundations (excuse the pun) in ancient practices, to help provide good inspiration and ideas for applying knowledge of responsive desire in setting the sensual scene and mood.

*Homework this week: Consider yourself and your partner and whether either of you is responsive to this domain of setting sensual scene and mood. What makes them feel comfortable and relaxed and/or excited and stimulated, enjoying themselves and having pleasure with you? Are you or them sensitive or enjoy particular smells, temperature, lighting, fabrics, food and drink? Add this information as appropriate to your accelerator / brake for sexual desire charts.*

**Thursday 3rd October 2019, from 7 - 9 pm**

**Week 5: Gifts of Appreciation and Consideration and Time**

Anne explains how the ancient BAL-BAL-E sex songs / love songs were structured by a movement of forward-and-back; of exchanges of dialogue back-and-forth between the lovers, and structurally kindling desire.

The ingredients upon arrival of the consort is that the male brings gifts to the Goddess. In the earliest era these were milk products, with the ritual linked also to the sheepfold and shepherd-God, but also possibly with associations to bodily sexual fluids of semen and/or vaginal fluid. (Indeed into the modern era, we call semen oozing out of an orifice as a "cream pie" in pornography.) In later era and other examples it is semi-precious stones or jewellery referenced in the texts, also linked to gifts given to sex workers. Devotional offering or a gift of high value? Indeed perhaps our cultural divide is arbitrary, for it has long been tradition across cultures of jewellery and gift-giving in courting, in dowry-exchange, in payment of sex workers, in marking special occasions such as anniversaries or Valentines Day.

In relation to the sexual desire, what is appreciated is at its base - feeling considered, appreciated and valued. Feeling seen, acknowledged, and not taken for granted.

In ancient sex ritual songs, very typically there are lines of verse of the lovers complimenting each other. From Sumerian songs, to Egyptian songs, to Song of Songs. The lover compliments the other; their beauty, parts of their body, their traits which are admired and seen as attractive. There is touch given for pleasure, and for desire expression. Anne discusses this in relation to Betty Martin's Wheel of Consent and awareness of touch.

Anne discusses the explicit texts, the passages that translators who were translating them into English altered to reportedly "save our blushes", often with the female expressing active desire to-be-fucked after all this ritual-as-foreplay. (Yes we go there.) She also discusses an ingredient so often lost in modern day sexuality: time. The sex ritual lasted 7 nights in many of the ancient texts, and the wider ritual 10 nights. Time for leisure and pleasure in indulging sex.

With statistical sex gender differences in sexual arousal response and time-to-orgasm, Anne wonders to what extent this may be responsible also for modern-day reported sexual desire discrepancies between cis-men and cis-women in the data sets of heterosexual relations. Lesbians statistically fare better in length of time for sex, orgasm data, and sexual relationship satisfaction. We're lacking transgender data sets but hopefully as the research increases we will have more information also.

With pressures and commitments of work, of family and children for those with kids, and modern-day distractions of television and mobile phones, internet and social

media, invested time for sex is often lacking. A strategy often recommended is to mutually prioritise and schedule time.

*Homework: An appraisal of how busy, distracted and bombarded one is by work, by family responsibilities, by TV, internet, social media and other distractions, and whether this is impacting on desire and libido. As well as possibly adding any additional insight to accelerator / brake charts, is there a way to make leisurely time for sexual desire as a priority, and with those qualities of appreciation and consideration if its a factor in desire within your relationship for you or your partner. Looking at Betty Martin's Wheel of Consent, what kind of touching has been default, and what kind of touching is mutually desired? We will discuss next week Anne's notion of finding cross-over and wider willingness, with mutual generosity and exchange being typically a positive force for sexuality and desire.*

**Thursday 10th October 2019, from 7 - 9 pm**

### **Week 6: Pulling Up and Planting in the Soil of Taboo**

Part of Inanna's wider religion was embracing different sexualities, identities and sexual desires. In today's era, we use terms such as "kinks", "fetishes" and "fantasies" to describe non-normative desires or desires which expand beyond acts of normative sex or sexual intercourse.

Anne talks about how to understand kinks, about fetish formation and its statistical representation in primarily people born as cis-males, across any and every data set from sex surveys to paraphilia studies to anecdotal and modern-era porn search data. For the person with the fetish, it is a magical special thing with powerful effect upon their sexuality, and understanding this promotes understanding them and their sexuality.

Sexual fantasies love going (and growing) in the field of the taboo; whether that's an unusual setting, imagining an extra person (or group sex, or celebrity), a scenario in which they are captured and restrained and played-with, or are pegged in which normative gender roles are transgressed, or revisit a power dynamic in fantasy as teacher/student or incest taboo, or abducted by a sexy alien - or all manner of imaginings. (Indeed Anne offers an entire course dedicated to Fantasies, for those interested.)

Some fantasies will be entirely held in the individual's mind, and not sought to be acted out in real life. For others, roleplay or integration of some fantasies into sexual play is desired, and can be potentially drawn upon to add "spice" to the erotic menu.

Anne discusses a framework of balancing selfishness and generosity, your lover's desires and your own, finding cross-over and wider willingness, and communicating without coercion, respecting a partner's hard limits. She discusses ethics and

systems from the BDSM world can become useful in this domain, in respect of use of safewords, acknowledging and mitigating risks, checking-in during play, understanding sub-drop (and Dom-drop) effects of the come-down following physically or psychologically activating play, and providing aftercare with a debrief (or continual debrief) for things which may have come up.

One model of thinking relevant to this topic is Dan Savage's 'GGG'; an acronym for 'Good, Giving and Game', widely taken up in gay communities. Anne contrasts the slight differentiation between this and her own philosophy of 'Lady of the Largest Heart', adding empathy and understanding of people's personalities, nuances and limitations, stretching in growth while respecting hard limits.

*Homework: Are there particular kinks or fantasies or fetishes that you or your partner have? Things that fire your imagination and loins, and often these can be within the domain of the taboo. To what degree are you willing to explore these to benefit the erotic spark of desire and lust? What might be your worries holding you back? Is there a way to manage these risks to allow for relatively safe exploration to some degree that you wish to take a step forward towards? Is there some junk from childhood, from imposed religious beliefs or shame that you wish to work on beginning to jettison?*

**Thursday 17th October 2019, from 7 - 9 pm**

### **Week 7: Recharging Radiance and Distance-to-desire**

For the last week of the course, Anne discusses the common condition of sexual desire being at a high in limerence at the beginning of a relationship, and dropping off over time after a so-called honeymoon period, and can be a common struggle to keep running high within a longer-term relationship.

It's as if desire - like a flame needs oxygen, needs some air and space. It benefits from some time apart from the lover, creating enough space to miss them and long for them. It benefits from not taking the person for granted, from not knowing them entirely with something of them being a surprise or a novelty. It benefits from some mystery and excitement: desire thrives on something new. Desire wants to travel towards a lover who is some distance away. (Not too much or they're too distant, that in-between distance, close enough to see and want, but not so close that you feel like you already have them.)

Modern-day cohabitation and domestic drudgery frequently collapses all the mystery.

To keep a curious and exploring mind, to be open to new things, to keep growing. To go out with one's friends away from one's lover, to pursue one's own blossoming interests.

The effect is two-fold. In pursuing one's own blossoming interests, your personality, seeing the friends you adore, and spending time doing what you love, you honour yourself and recharge your radiance. Secondly, in doing so, you are less known by your partner and out of their clutches and creating enough space for them to pull you closer when they see you, to know what you've been up to, to have a part of yourself be elusive and multi-faceted.

Anne reflects that the star of Venus was the star that glowed brightest in the night sky, and moved somewhat erratically, both a morning star and an evening star, with different qualities. These were linked to the Mesopotamian Goddess Inanna, to the Egyptian Goddess Hathor, to the Cypriot Goddess Aphrodite, and to the Roman Goddess Venus - from which the star has its name.

There is a lesson in there for us on desire: to nurture a little bit of unpredictability, to be changeable, to dart and then move slowly, to change direction, to shine brightly with one's own radiance.

Healthy space between lovers allows opportunity for longing-for, and for reconnection and delight in the other, to rejoice, and to kiss again.

***Standby Date: Wednesday 23rd October 2019, from 7 - 9 pm***

In the unlikely event that Anne falls sick or is unable to teach a class, a standby date is allocated as a contingency planning.

Recommended course texts:

Anne will be providing resources within the weeks of the course. However books she has found particularly useful supplementary to the course material she will provide are:

Esther Perel '*Mating in Captivity: Unlocking Erotic Intelligence*'

Emily Nagoski '*Come as You Are: The Surprising New Science That Will Transform Your Sex Life*'

Anne can also happily recommend books tailored to individual needs, and will cite all sources of research presented during the course from scientific articles and journals, etc.