



When you look at the stone goddess figures from our prehistoric ancestors, it's difficult to relate to their dimensions. Let's be honest, in our current view of the female body, many of us are turned off by their generous curves, by their round bellies and thighs. When we talk about finding our inner goddess, we probably don't think of them.

History gives us the barest information about the original mother goddess, but it's believed that before written history swayed to the patriarchal god, our world was filled with the magic of the female body.

We bled. We produced children. It's debated if they understood the biology of what was happening, but we know that they revered the pregnant form.

We also created some of the earliest art. It's now believed that our human relatives, the neanderthals organized their societies around matrilineal concerns.

But what does this have to do with you, aside from the general pride and girl power? We are so far removed from those prehistoric times that it's hard to care outside of theory.

### **Art, Ritual and the Male Gaze**

For thousands of years art has revolved around the male gaze, and so when these statues were found it was assumed that they were exaggerated forms associated with fertility rituals. Looking at them straight on, the way a man would gaze on a woman's body, the curves are exaggerated.

For example, the Venus of Willendorf, a tiny statue from roughly 28,000 years ago features exaggerated breasts and buttocks with legs that disappear close to the feet and no detail in the head area. Another statue from close to 35,000 years ago is even more exaggerated and headless. There is only a hole where the head should be, possibly meant to make it wearable.

According an article in the New York Times, statues like these were fertility figures, talismans men wore as necklaces for some kind of spiritual purpose.

That seems a little better doesn't it? Men wearing the form of a woman for shamanistic purposes or ritual of some kind. And it doesn't seem too far off the mark when you consider the way the goddess has figured into ancient spirituality.

Many early creation myths required both a "female" and a "male" energy. Artifacts found in the Indus Valley, thought to be the seat of humanity's civilization, seem to suggest that humans have seen the concept of mother as the divine source, or at least part of it, since humanity as we know it now began. These Indus dwellers hint that our earliest spiritual experiences were with this mother, this goddess, and with the creative forces around us.

In the ancient Hindu Vedas, the proto-female is the creative word, the first spoken energies of the universe. She is also the "light of the early morning," something that illuminates all creation. "All things exist, but become manifest in her...."

### **Embodying the Goddess: Find Your Spark**

So, that's great. Forever ago, men might have worshipped god in female form, but now, with our work and taxes and shopping lists and unrealistic beauty standards, it seems impossible to imagine ourselves as the divine creative force of the universe. Just put that on the ever expanding list, right?

Those early statues that so fascinate anthropologists seem little more than caricatures, wildly exaggerated sexual pieces with no faces or heads. Thanks a lot.

But can I shift your gaze? Just pause for a minute.

Think about this; what if those statues were made by women? And further, women gazing down upon themselves? In a paper that deviated sharply from the male-focused world of archaeology, LeRoy McDermott, an anthropologist writing in *Current Anthropology*, suggested that the statues were made in just that manner.

Instead of these statues being made looking directly at the subject, their exaggerations were the result of women looking *at themselves*.

When you change the perspective, the dimensions transform to something more realistic. More relatable. There's a reason that the lower legs are so small, the feet missing altogether. In this radical turn, some archaeologists now believe that the statues are tributes to the woman's own body, made before mirrors and cameras allowed us to look at ourselves from afar.

## **The Personal is the Spiritual**

A few months ago, I made my own little statue. I looked down at my own body and formed a crude representation, and it was interesting. I was repulsed at first, a product of years of dieting advice, slick magazines, hearing my own mother speak of her body in disparaging terms. I had no idea how much value I placed on my body as a tool of conventional beauty.

Beauty is power - in the patriarchal paradigm, the only power I have.

Some things unraveled the tiniest bit.

I'm not saying that carving a little statue of your own body will melt away years of learned self hatred, but I think it's important to shift your perspective. What does it take for you to see your body as your own before interpreting it through someone else's gaze?

It takes a little magic. A little spark.

I challenge you to see yourself through your own gaze, rather than what others see. While it's important and incredibly satisfying to have others acknowledge the good in you, you must ground yourself first in the knowledge of who you are on your own terms.

This is the difficulty. Understanding self love at the core requires that shift in gaze, the shift away from what another sees in you. It requires you to go back to time before written history when our bodies and hearts were revered as the life givers and creators.

*Find your spark.*

This is who you are. You are a life giver, whether you have given birth to children, you save clearance rack plants, or you care for your circle of friends when they need you. You are a creator whether you paint, write, format the most excellent Excel spreadsheet, or just make the best coffee in all the land.

This is your legacy.

## **The Practice**

Unraveling your own wounds requires work. It requires you to look, really look, keep looking until you understand the heart and the center of who you are and what the thorn in your side really is. There lies the real magic.

1. Make your own statue

Whoever you are, female, male, another expression altogether, it is possible to gaze upon your own body in order to heal. For this exercise, take something you can mold, clay or play dough or bread dough, whatever it might be. As you look down on your own body, smooth the edges of the clay until it resembles your own body. Work from your chest down. When you are finished, place it on your altar or bury it.

## 2. Draw your face

In this exercise, find a dry erase marker. As you stand in the mirror, trace the lines of your face onto the mirror. Start slow. Take care to see the curves and the shapes. When you are finished, erase the image.

Your body is temporary to this world, just like your tracing. Your real self lies in the spirit. Honor the place your spirit chose for this life.

## 3. Who Are You?

In a final exercise, you will reflect on who you truly are. This is done best with a partner, but can also be done in a mirror.

Light a candle and sit across from your partner. Your partner will ask "Who are you?" and you respond with your first gut response. Repeat the question to your partner. Continue questioning and answering until you feel lines shift, until you blur the distinction between your physical self and your spiritual self. There are no wrong answers.

Later, reflect on a few answers that resonate strongly with you. These are clues to your inner world.

If you feel open to it, post a picture of your statue or your mirror drawing, or list a few of your "Who are you?" answers in the comments. Our community is one of healing.

Wilford, John Noble. "Full-Figured Statuette, 35,000 Years Old, Provides New Clues to How Art Evolved" New York Times 13 May 2009. Web <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/14/science/14venus.html>

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