

## Inanna Focus Questions

These questions are to help focus your reading of *Inanna's Descent* and bring up different potential interpretations. Your own engagement with the text should be the source of your answers, i.e. though the questions are about interpretation, don't feel you have to be wholly intellectual about it.

1. One of the big questions about Inanna's descent is why exactly did she go? Are believable practical reasons, or humanly reasonable reasons, given, or is there some less obvious or more mythically or ritually obscure reason? Or is it just meant to be a mystery?

2. Inanna and Ereshkigal are mirror images of one another, and are sometimes called sisters, although Ereshkigal's fate is to be exiled from the rest of the gods in the realm of death, while Inanna is the quintessential high-living, pleasure-taking deity. What sense of their relationship emerges from their attitudes or words or actions to one another? In what ways does their "mirror image" relationship manifest?

3. What is the significance of Inanna's disrobing at each of the gates? There are clearly symbolic elements, and possible cultic elements, so what range of meanings or combination of meanings could this passage into the underworld, as well as her own experience of death, mean?

4. Inanna has taken measures for her own rescue if she happens to get stuck in the underworld, but at first these do not seem to be working out very well. What are the reasons her fellow deities give for not helping her, or alternately, the elements that result in her salvation? What does this say about her role among the gods?

5. There are various daemonic figures in the rescue of Inanna from the underworld as well as in the persecution of her husband, Dumuzi, in the Sumerian version of the story. What are these demons like, and what role might they play in Middle Eastern mythology?

6. Why does Inanna make the decision she does about who will take her place in the underworld? It is a particularly interesting one because Inanna and Dumuzi are a prime example of sacred marriage in other texts (and possibly rituals). What does this rupture between the two of them say about symbolic divine marriage, or ordinary human marriage, if anything?