

## “JOURNEY OF THE MOTHERS”

Machu Picchu, Peru

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The first time I went to Peru was in 1989. I went with my friend from Ecuador, Maria, and a small group of people led by an American psychologist and a medicine man from the Amazon. My friend and I had spent years struggling to understand aspects of our lives that had not been satisfied by the prevailing model of reality. Maria and I had met at Pasadena City College; she was my student and I was pregnant with my only child, my son Pisti. She had three children and was now a Marriage and Family therapist; thus our relationship began as mothers and women committed to helping our children and ourselves live as creatively as possible in a world that was revealing on a daily basis that it was dangerously out of balance. By 1989 our children were almost adults and we decided that this would be the year of intensifying our explorations outside our families and professions. So when we read about a small group of people who were going to visit some of the sacred places in Peru where they would meditate and focus on the healing of themselves and the planet, we knew that nothing could prevent us from going.

In March of that year we met the group in Lima. The morning after our arrival, we left for the beautiful countryside of Peru where we would spend the following weeks. It became clear very quickly that we had not made a mistake: the people in the group had similar interests and we worked very well together. The leaders were skilled in helping us to weave a single fabric of experience which honored each person's unique contribution to the unified effort to step beyond our rational construction of reality. Except for the shaman from the Amazon, we had all grown up under the influence of Western rationalism. I had just finished my Ph.D. in Comparative Literature at the University of California at Irvine; I was feeling an urgency to break through that intellectual view of the world and to participate in a visionary, spiritual reality—if, in fact, such a reality existed. All my life I had been open to such a possibility. I had studied world religions, indigenous spiritual traditions, and psychology. I had taught symbolic/mythic language for years and during graduate study had spent several more years studying various theories of how the symbol functions in the human mind. I had worked most of my adult life with my own dream symbolism. I was definitely open to the possibility of actual experience in dimensions of consciousness not constructed by the rational brain. I was open to the experience, but, other than dreams, I had had no such experience myself.

The first days seemed like weeks as the vastness of the Andes gently, almost imperceptibly, peeled away the layers of focused perception. I began to take in the environment through my body, and my senses became more active. As my brain began to relax its attention to detail and analysis, I began to feel a more direct biological response to the landscape. This felt like a new form of perception, but it surely must have been familiar to me during childhood. It connected me with the landscape in ways that resist articulation. Time slowed down and no longer seemed to dominate our days and nights; time was structuring our activities just as it had from the beginning of the trip, but it had sunk into the background of the field of

perception. I realized that its position in perception dramatically changed its effects on my life.

By the time we arrived at Machu Picchu, however, these effects were translated into a pervasive sadness. I tried to reflect on this powerful feeling. I needed to articulate it, to understand it. I knew that it concerned my desire to go beyond my rational understanding of the world, and I knew that my rational self was beginning to suggest that this trip was a failure. My rational self devalued the effects of the shifts in perception, shifts that had actually given me pleasure. It concluded that nothing extraordinary had happened. I recognized the saboteur, but recognition did not reduce its power over me. I felt trapped between what might have been a biological reweaving of the tapestry of perception and the surgical reductionism of my own rational mind.

Before we entered Machu Picchu, we participated in a death ritual, a death to all that inhibited our ability to be fully present on this ancient sacred mountain. It was a beautiful ritual, but I could only experience the outer edges of its form. The next morning we entered Machu Picchu. The vastness of these mountains, the sky, the river below, the greenness of the earth began to spread out my vision and once again awaken a sensuous response. That highly focused camera of the mind extended its lenses and both mind and body became porous. We approached the Intihuatana, called the Hitching Post of the Sun, where we were going to have our first ritual. We made a circle around this ancient structure, and the shaman began to chant in Quechua. This is a haunting language, and when it is chanted, it sinks into the bones. The shaman himself was deeply moved. Each of us in turn stepped up to the sacred structure and placed our foreheads on the stone. This was, in a symbolic way, to awaken in us the memory of our own wholeness and our connection to all life. When it was my turn, I moved forward, kneeled, and felt the hard coldness. Something in me collapsed and an ocean broke loose. I experienced the profound lack of wholeness and the painful disconnection to life itself. I cried, but it was more than that; I was being cried. I cried for myself, for the terrible rape of my own creative source. I was both the victim and the perpetrator. And I was not alone. I cried for us all. I cried for the history of the world, and history cried through me.

Of course, I had known for a long time that the very nature of Western consciousness lay in its separation from all that was being awakened on this trip. I had been trained very early to devalue my experience, my feelings, my sensuous relation to the environment so that my ability to reason would not be compromised; trained to sever the outcropping of reason from its roots in the senses, the symbol, the vision, and that nonspatial, nontemporal world of being. I was taught to distrust every aspect of the mind and body that did not originate in reason. Theoretically, I had rejected this distrust, and I had even made a profession of teaching about cultures and people who also rejected it. Yet I could not overcome my own personal history. Western consciousness, including my own, had been constructed on a primary act of mental racism: only the rational mind could be trusted; all other modes of the mind were inferior. With the shifts in perception which had taken place, I was now able to experience in my body the consequences of this continuing historical act.

As I lay in bed that evening still shaken from the experiences of the day, I thought of my son Pisti and my husband Pista and how much I missed them. Maria and I whispered into the night about all that had happened and about our climb that afternoon to the moon temple at the top of the great mountain, Huayna Picchu, “Old Woman Mountain.” Legend tells of the power and magic of this mountain, and the people of the Andes still honor it as a symbol of the sacredness of all life. I knew that I was not yet able to fully experience the sacredness of life, but I also knew that my love for my friends and my love for Pisti and Pista were at the heart of it.

After we stopped speaking, I lay awake thinking of how Lavinia in Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* is a symbol of our intuitive, feeling, visionary self, of all those modes of the mind that we reject as insignificant or deceptive. As daughter and woman she is potential mother, the very source of life. Yet her tragic fate is a chilling reflection of the consequences of our culture’s mental racism. She was gang-raped by the sons of a man her father had captured in war. So that she could not tell her story, they cut out her tongue. So that she could not write her story, they cut off her arms. But she was not defeated. She took a stick by her teeth and tried to scratch her story in the earth. Yet even those scratchings have been ridiculed, ignored, or denied. Could it be, I wondered, that Lavinia might eventually forget she had a story to tell?

Since the historical denial of her story shapes the foundation of our model of reality, to remember Lavinia’s story as symbolic of excluded reality is to break through centuries of addictive, abusive behavior. If we do not ridicule, ignore, or deny her altogether, we may seek her out only to do her further harm by demanding her to be what she uniquely is not. In our addiction to the rational mind, we say she must prove herself with the same “rigor” we demand of reason. We do not recognize that reason’s way must demand rigor of itself, but it must allow Lavinia to present herself to us in her own way. To demand of her how she should do this is to rape her, to dominate her, to insist she be her opposite rather than herself. We fail to realize that we have so devalued and mutilated her that she cannot reveal herself to us in her full power—and this we take as proof that she has nothing to reveal. Our finest university cackle is reserved for anyone who would throw her a sop. In our attempt to uphold reason, we betray the very open, exploratory nature of reason itself.

My own complicity in this addictive behavior made me shudder. Just like an addict who has gone beyond denial, I wanted to be healed, but just like the addict, I could not resist the compulsive reaction to devalue and betray Lavinia. I regretted that I could not accomplish more on this trip, but only days remained. Soon I would return to Los Angeles carrying not only in my mind but also in my body the sorrow of our mutilated selves.

It is one of the wonderful and horrifying aspects of life that it brings to us enormous surprises at times and places when and where we would least expect them. I was back in California lying on the bed listening to music. I began to laugh uncontrollably. Some long forgotten memory began to flow through my body. Before it reached rational consciousness, I already knew it, knew it in my body, and the cells were laughing with memory. I saw a rather

unclear figure move swiftly toward me with definite purpose. I knew she was Paccha Mama, the Old Woman of the Mountain, the source of all being. In less than a second she was no longer to be seen, but I felt her presence and I was back at Machu Picchu. I was up above the mountain looking down at what I knew was my dead body wrapped in canvass and tied with rope. It was on a hospital gurney that was being pushed quietly and quickly by four spirit-like beings. I had no remorse about my death—I knew the body was a symbol of my mutilated self. Suddenly I saw that I was being pushed toward Huayna Picchu. I was elated. I was to be allowed to enter the holy of holies—the ancient ones would speak to me, mysteries would be revealed to me. But just as suddenly the beings stopped at the entry into the sacred mountain. In a flash everything changed. What my body had known from the beginning had finally reached the rational mind. While my body laughed, the images had moved in linear fashion to communicate with the brain. Now all of me remembered. What a joke I had played on myself! I was the mountain, the ancient ones, the Old Woman, the mystery, the Source. I laughed uproariously. Never had I laughed like this before. It was a molecular laugh, a laugh that vibrated in the cells and shot straight through the toe nails, skin, and hair. This was gnosis, that knowing for which no proof is asked because the experience is the knowing—to question it would bring forth more uncontrollable laughter. There was no egotism in the experience, simply memory of who I am, who we all are. Then I saw myself sitting in a forest, and I was surrounded by deer. I heard myself say, “But I can’t create a world!” And a voice answered, “You just did create a world in which you cannot create! We can do nothing but create.” I knew this, remembered this fully and completely. And with this memory, I flew past Huayna Picchu and spoke my creation: “Then I will create better games, games where all our children will be healed, where all our children will live in a world of ecstasy, joy, love, and peace.” As I spoke, I myself was in a state of ecstasy. I was in love with the universe. I knew our world did not have to be as it is. I knew it is what we have created. In the moment this did not make me sad. I was experiencing what we can do, not what we have done. There would be time for sadness later.

This experience changed me dramatically, but not thoroughly. Other experiences came, and events in the outer world began to coalesce with the inner ones. Outer reality was now co-creating with the inner symbolic world. Maria’s world was also changing since Peru, and together we stood amazed at the strange and unexplainable games our inner and outer realities were playing. Our rational minds ran after these games in our attempts to understand them. We loved reason with the same deep passion we always had, but now we were allowing it to walk around Lavinia’s scratching in the earth, to observe it, to honor it. We restrained the rational mind’s trained reaction to surgically extract and discard phenomena that it could not explain. This restraint created an enormous stress.

When reason is uprooted from its creative source, it constructs for itself a fiction of its own superiority, and it becomes dominant and abusive to anything outside itself that does not support this fiction. Now we were asking it to allow information which did not support this fiction to coexist with the very fiction whose trained response was to destroy it. The tension was often almost unbearable.

In his usual witty manner my son Pista was able to help me with this tension. Pista was a reasonable young man, yet he had allowed the Lavinia of his soul, if not to flourish, at least to communicate with him in extraordinary ways from time to time. Since he had always been painfully independent in his thinking, I was delighted that we shared many of the same interests. But I also wanted to share these experiences with my husband. I obviously did not realize what I was asking of him. I wanted him to hold within his consciousness experiences which he himself had not had, to honor them, and to respond to me with great enthusiasm. One morning while I was talking, I realized that he was looking at me with strained patience—not interest. I asked, “Pista, aren’t you interested in this?” He answered, “I know what you are telling me is exactly what you have experienced, but I have never experienced anything even similar to what you are talking about, and I just can’t relate to it.” His newspaper was waiting politely between us. I was disappointed, but the bond between us was deep enough to allow this difference. I knew that it had been his strength, optimism, and independence that had nurtured me for years, and I knew that without the relationship with him I would never have been able to experience what he now could not assimilate.

This was to change. On October 29, 1991 we were both home in the late afternoon when we received a telephone call from Huntington Memorial Hospital in Pasadena. Our son Pista had been in an automobile accident on the 210 Freeway. I answered the phone. When Pista heard me asking about Pista’s condition, he came into the room. I told him what had happened. I was calm. Evidently I had not absorbed what I had just been told, but he had. I heard him say, “Oh, no! Oh, no!” with a voice I had never heard before. On the way to the hospital, he drove with one hand and held my hand with the other in a grip so hard that pain shot through my arm. We were silent, both trying in our own ways to prepare for what a dear friend later described so well: “You are enduring what every parent dreads—the unexpected call, the jarring end of what you considered ‘normal life’ and the plunge into eternity—whatever that may prove to be.”

That, of course, was written after Pista died. Nothing would ever be “normal” again—and we were plunged into an eternity far beyond anything we could ever have imagined. One week after Pista’s death Pista mentioned to me that since Pista’s accident the pain in his heart was so strong that he was having difficulty breathing. He had begun to wonder if such pain could cause a heart attack. In our despair and my fear of also losing Pista, we lay down together, held each other, and cried. I don’t know how much time had passed when Pista said, “Pista was here.” Both of us had experienced his presence. Pista’s pain was gone. I continued to ask for days if the pain had returned, but it never did.

Pista explained to me that he had felt as though he left his body and with Pista had gone to several of the sacred places of the earth, including Machu Picchu. Pista told him that with Pista’s energy as a bridge we would now be able to remember our lives in their larger context. We would begin to understand how his stepping into the other dimension was the beginning of a new kind of work together. They talked of the illness of the Earth and of the Earth’s longing to heal itself. Pista remembered that the Earth would drink to the dregs the possibilities of its own darkness, and that out of that horrible knowledge it would create a

world of exquisite light. Pista looked at me and said, "I had no idea what you were talking about earlier. I will never look at the Earth in the same way again." Before Pista's accident I would never have been able to believe that the man talking to me now was the same man who had gazed at me across the *Los Angeles Times*, but we both knew that world no longer existed.

That same afternoon I had heard what sounded like Native American chanting and I saw a large spiral of people coming into the Earth and covering the globe. They seemed like indigenous peoples, but I knew they had come from the entire universe out of their love for the Earth. They were a response of the universe to the agony of the Earth. In that moment I knew this was the most natural response a loving universe would make, and I mourned how we on the Earth with our belief in our own insignificance and the emptiness of the universe had robbed ourselves of this knowledge. Out of the spiral I heard them say, "Our brothers and sisters on the Earth are dreaming a terrible dream." Pista was with me as a kind of light body. Like Pista, I too had a glimpse of the great co-creativity taking place in the universe.

The sorrow remained, but there was also a joy that shocked us. We could now see our lives within a context of creativity. The rational mind's tendency to think of events as disconnected accidents holds it prisoner in a fragmented, meaningless world of victimization. In the experiences of that day each of us separately began to see how every event was related to all others and how our creating of these events began even before we had stepped into the time-space dimension. A vast tapestry of multidimensional co-creativity began to unfold within the consciousness of each of us. We recorded the events of that afternoon and of the days, weeks, and months that followed. They were so strange and wonderful that we feared our inability to hold their totality in our consciousness.

Pista continued to amaze me. Indeed he never did see the world in the same way again. I, on the other hand, lived between the shock and joy of my experience with Pista in nontemporal, nonspatial dimensions and the murderousness of my own rational mind.

There were times when I thought the pain and disbelief of Pista's death would destroy me. I wondered how I could fall back into this kind of despair after all we had experienced, but I came to understand that this is exactly what happens when rationality has been severed from its own roots. Once the experience is over, rationality begins to devalue it, to deny it ever happened, and ultimately to destroy it. Again it was Pista's strength, optimism, and independence from academic models of reality that helped me. He knew what he had experienced and, as always with him, he didn't care what anyone thought. So he became an anchor for me in this new reality. He was a business man who had not concerned himself with these matters and certainly had not read about them. So my rational mind was stunned now at the knowledge his visions gave him, knowledge that often could be verified in the outer world. It was also stunned that Jenny, the girl Pista loved so much, had similar visions, and that all our visionary experiences wove themselves into an overall pattern in which each of us was unique but delicately interconnected within a large web of being that appeared to all of us in surprising similarities. And it was not just the three of us. Maria and her daughter Jill stepped into eternity with us. We all were shocked, stunned, amazed, sad, and overjoyed.

Standing in the deepest sorrow, we were experiencing the magic of the universe.

Yet, while Lavinia's body was regenerating itself, my rational mind was chasing her down to hack off her limbs once more, to demand yet more proof and more rigor. I was exhausted. The energy fields of my mind had been stretched to their furthest poles of opposition. One morning when I felt I could no longer bear this tension, I went into Pisti's room. He had reorganized and repainted this room two weeks before his accident, and he had placed on the walls the beautiful shamanic paintings of Susan Boulet. It had become our place of silence and meditation. Since Pisti's death it seemed that I was no longer just Pisti's mother. He had opened my heart to all children. Every child I heard about or read about became my child. The heaviest pain to bear was the self-destruction of a child, whether expressed outward against society or inward against the self. Sometimes I had come into this room and begged to have that kind of knowledge lifted from me. It was simply too heavy for me to carry. So I realized that my own personal sorrow could never be as heavy as the sorrow of some mothers.

I lay across his bed and cried. I cried because I missed Pisti's physical presence, I cried for Jenny who was now without him for a lifetime, and I cried for the world we have created for all our children. I cried for the children who had been murdered or who had murdered, I cried for those who suffered addiction or abandonment or abuse, I cried for the children who were confused and could find no way to create happiness in their lives, and I cried for their mothers and fathers. Suddenly I felt a bolt of energy hit me. I jumped up and stumbled back on the bed with my body pressed hard against the wall. I knew I was not alone in the room.

My eyes were open, but I was not seeing with them. I saw with an inner vision that can bring multidimensional worlds together in a single unit of time and space. (I knew this in the moment to be true, and there was no time to challenge it.) The room was filled with mothers from the past, present, and future. In fact, they extended far out beyond the room. Those closer to me were highly conscious while those at the edges were hardly aware that they were present. Their pain had been so great that they had fallen into unconsciousness. Yet there was a deep soul-urgency in all of them. Their energy was so strong that I was still pressed against the wall. They must have become aware of my limitations because as I thought of it, they too seemed to think of it, and I felt a subsiding of the power of their presence. These women had drunk to the dregs the possibilities of the earth's darkness, and out of this horrible knowledge they longed for a different world. Everything was communicated at once without words.

Later I tried to think this experience through in linear fashion as I described it to Pista. I told him that I knew the mothers were symbolic of loving, nurturing, parenting energy, yet I also knew that mothers were there who had abused or even murdered their children. In their souls too there was a deep unconscious longing for a transformed world. These women were like a hieroglyph of all the longing that exists here on Earth for a truly creative world, for ourselves and all our children. Within the delineation of their symbolic form, they embraced all of the longing of every single one of us for a better world. And I realized that this longing had reached the critical mass necessary for radical transformation.

So much happened during the next months that I didn't focus on this experience very much. I did wonder from time to time what was really meant by their message that the energy necessary for transformation was now available. It reminded me of medieval alchemical symbolism in which the temperature of the heat in the alembic had to reach a certain level of intensity before the two contrary elements could change their forms into what the German poet and modern alchemist Goethe had described as, "a new, a third, a completely unanticipated other." I wondered what exactly was in this alembic.

Meanwhile, as these thoughts flowed in and out of my mind, Pista and I began to plan a trip to Machu Picchu. We talked with a friend of ours about getting together a very small group of people who wanted to work at some of the sacred sites in Peru. This friend was the same person Maria and I had gone with on our first trip to Peru. It looked as though Maria would go also, but as it turned out, neither Maria nor Pista went. Two weeks before the trip Pista began to feel that he was not to go, that I was to go without him. We were surprised at this because Pista wanted to go as much, if not more, than I, but we had come to a point in our lives that we would not go against our deepest intuitions.

So I traveled alone to Miami where I joined the group. We went directly to Cuzco to begin our work at the navel of the ancient Incan spiritual world. There we met two men who were trained in the Incan shamanic tradition, one an anthropologist and the other an archaeologist. Together from this center we traveled the energy lines from sacred site to sacred site and performed in detail the ancient Incan shamanic rituals, structured to awaken ourselves and the Earth to our creative possibilities.

I was especially waiting for our trip to Machu Picchu. I had made arrangements to be on this sacred mountain one night alone because I was bringing Pista's ashes to the Great Mother. A few weeks before his accident he had said to Jenny that if one were to die, the truly wonderful thing would be to have one's ashes scattered at some of the sacred places on the earth. When it became clear that Pista would not live, we vowed we would do exactly that. When I left Los Angeles, Pista said that when I arrived at Machu Picchu, I would know where to scatter the ashes. I had thought I would like to scatter them at the Paccha Mama stone, an area dedicated to the Great Mother. However, once we were at Machu Picchu, the leaders of the group felt I should not stay all night alone by the Paccha Mama stone but that I should work in a cave in the sacred mountain of Huayna Picchu. This immediately felt right. The group would hike down to the cave, which touched the edge of the jungle. There we would all participate in an ancient Incan ritual in the afternoon and I would stay the night. The leaders also did not feel comfortable with me being there completely alone, so one of them asked to remain outside the cave to do his own work while I remained deep in the belly of the Great Mountain.

After the group left and before I entered the cave, the two of us walked over to the edge of Huayna Picchu, sat down, and soaked in the view of the huge mountains around us. In such a place the arrogance of Western consciousness becomes embarrassing. Here the ancient Incan spiritual tradition was still alive, perpetuated by both the landscape and the powerful

shamanic tradition that had been discreetly transmitted from shaman to shaman for over five hundred years. I knew something about how the ancient Incans viewed this place and this holy cave, but I wanted to hear how a university-trained man would express it, so I asked my friend what the cave meant to native people here. He looked at me, somewhat amazed at the question, but he answered gently, "It is the womb of our Great Mother." This was the response of an intellectual who had not severed his rational mind from its roots in its own creative source. He could speak of the reality of the symbol because he had experienced its power. Of course, such a position remains "absurd" to the intellect without this gnosis. I felt saddened by my tradition which had established itself as the gatekeeper of knowledge on the planet and which had perpetuated its mental racism as cultural racism against peoples whose model of reality was different from our own.

I entered the cave that evening wondering if I would ever completely heal the wound within myself. In spite of the balancing effects of nature and the work done during this journey, the old illness was still present. That night I felt utterly alone, severed from myself, the ones I loved, and certainly from any dimension of reality other than the cold wetness of the cave. I prepared for the ritual. Deep in the cave there was a natural stone altar. I scattered on this altar the dried leaves from the many roses Pisti had given Jenny. Since she had not been able to come, she wanted these to be scattered with his ashes as a symbol of their love for each other. In the tradition of the people native to this land I asked that the great circle be formed, that the sacred power of the four corners be present. And I asked once again to be healed, to be able to feel again the sacredness of all life. There was a part of me sick to death of healing, yet I remembered Camus' symbolism of the virus of violence in *The Plague*. He understood so well how we all carry this virus that can flare up at any time if we do not tend to our own healing from moment to moment.

I scattered Pisti's ashes in the womb of the Great Mother. I held in my hands the transformed substance of the son, more like bone than ash. I wondered how reason could account for this—the living child and now the bony ash. Within the space of this inability must surely lie the Mystery. As I continued to spread the ashes, they became the ashes of all our children. I could no longer think, and I could no longer mourn. I sat on the cold, wet stone below the altar. I would not leave this stone until early morning, and I would not remember much about the events of that evening until long after I had returned to California.

Pista met me at the airport anxious to hear about the journey. We both had anticipated extraordinary experiences at Machu Picchu since so many of our visions had occurred there. Often we had joked about this place being like a huge transformer between dimensions, but we didn't know what it really was that drew us to it in our dreams, visions, and, in my case, actual physical journeys. I wished I had more to tell Pista, but I didn't. What I now think is that each experience at Machu Picchu was so contrary to the model of reality that had been programmed into my rational brain that my consciousness simply could not contain either one of them all at once. As we talked on the way home from the airport, Pista intuited this and suggested I be patient. "Just as before," he said, "you will remember and understand with time."

And so it was. Over a period of nine months, from the Equinox to the Solstice, through visions and dreams, each piece of the fabric began to emerge into consciousness. As each fragment revealed itself, there was time to reflect and assimilate. The progressive order and clarity astounded me. Each segment of consciousness prepared me for what was to follow. The old experience of the mental tension between the opposing principles of my mind was gradually subsiding. No longer did I feel as though my symbolic, visionary self was in the alchemical alembic under constant siege by my rampaging thinking self. Gradually Lavinia was healing and my rational mind was no longer attempting to mutilate her. Reason's fear of deception and betrayal was waning. They now stood on equal ground, she, as always, giving her gifts of creative love and wisdom, and reason finally giving her respect and trust. Having arrived at this point in the healing process, reason could now embrace Lavinia. In that embrace the rational mind was surprised to discover its own uniqueness. Instead of being diminished, it was awakening to its own vastness. Never before had reason been so rational! Just as Goethe had said, "a new, a third, a completely unexpected other" form of consciousness was taking shape. It was as though a beautiful tapestry were emerging out of the mist of the alembic.

It had not occurred to me earlier that the visit of the mothers had anything to do with my journey to Peru or my vigil that night in the cave. I later realized, however, that the entire journey was part of my work with these women. One evening while I was meditating in Pisti's room, I saw an old woman standing before me. Her eyes were large, unblinking, and sharply focused on my eyes. I felt she was piercing me with energy, attempting to raise me to a level of consciousness that would allow her to communicate with me. I decided I needed to lie down, so I went to the couch on the other side of the room. She came with me, sat down by me, and let her mind flow into mine. I was back in the cave and I saw that it was filled with the mothers just as they had once filled this room. I saw an image of the Pietá float past me; then I saw that each of us was a living pietá. The women carried their dead children to the altar where I had scattered Pisti's ashes that night. Our suffering and our darkness were so great that I had fallen into unconsciousness.

Not only had the suffering and the longing of the mothers been too powerful to carry in consciousness, there was something in the darkness that I had not yet been able to face. I thought I knew I had raped and mutilated the Lavinia of my soul. I had identified with her as victim of myself as perpetrator, but perhaps I had identified with her as victim more than I had taken responsibility as the perpetrator. Now I had to drink the dregs of my own darkness, and this was also the work of the mothers.

I—we—the mothers—had forgotten who we are. Because we had forgotten, we had allowed the mutilation of life itself. Only the love of the child could awaken us, but not until child after child had been sacrificed on the altar of our own darkness. We, the very source of life, had forgotten who we are. And we are all mother energy. We are creators, and having forgotten that, we created worlds in which we could not create—nor could our children because we bequeathed to them our myth of death. We had allowed our children to be born into a world of dead matter. Could we be surprised if they had no reverence for it, if they did

violence to it—and to themselves and others? We modeled a myth of our own insignificance and gave it to our children as a sacred text.

I could still feel the presence of the old woman. I opened my arms and felt her enter my heart and say, “The sorrow of the past, the present, and the future can only be healed by creating new worlds.” She was the mother of the Earth, the mother of us all and in us all. She began to sing in me:

*Tell all my children they are the creators,  
Create your worlds to keep me well.  
You are the creators,  
Create your worlds to keep me well.*

She was the Old Woman of the Sacred Mountain. I am that woman, and so are we all. We were in the cave that night. We carried the murdered child, ourselves, our children, our Earth. And we prayed for a new birth, a new remembering. We are all the sacred women, every woman, man, child—and we are the sacred Earth. And we are pregnant and the Earth is pregnant with this memory.

“Journey of the Mothers,” *Earthwalking Sky Dancers: Women’s Pilgrimages to Sacred Places*. Edited by Leila Castle. Berkeley: Frog, Ltd. Copyright © 1996.