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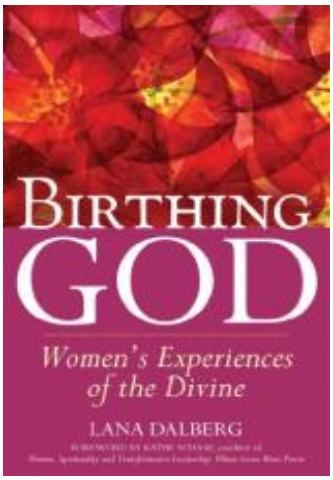
Birthing God: Women's Experiences of the Divine

by Lana Dalberg



About the Book

In BIRTHING GOD, forty women relate Spirit-filled moments: a grieving pastor walks a labyrinth and rediscovers the Rock of her existence; a human rights advocate re-encounters Allah in an intensely visceral moment in the sun; an educator, moved by an ancestral vision, launches a global tree-planting project to heal the wounds of slavery; a revolutionary awakens from a coma and realizes that all of life is infused with Spirit; a peasant woman under fire discovers within herself the God who gives her courage; and a disabled doctor, embraced by Shekhinah, turns her heart to rabbinical studies.

Grounded in raw experience and ideal for spiritual seekers and leaders of all faiths, these engaging and powerful stories invite you to consider the origins of your own spirituality and to deepen your relationship with God.

Discussion Guide

Part I: Divine Love and Love of Self

Esperanza

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

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

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

Try This:

Plan on sitting quietly for at least ten minutes, twenty minutes or longer being ideal. Close your eyes. Relax your body, allowing any tension or stress to dissipate. Inhale slowly and exhale thoroughly for at least ten cycles of in-and-out breaths. Focus your mind on the word ?in? as you fill your lungs and ?out? or ?empty? as you empty your lungs of the last remnant of air. Breathe another ten or twenty cycles in this fashion, thinking ?in? as you inhale and ?empty? as you exhale, letting all thoughts drift away. Afterward, write what you felt inside, especially when you were ?empty.?

Or try this: If a moment of tension or fear arises for you, close your eyes and breathe through at least five cycles of slow, calm inhalations and exhalations, focusing your mind on the filling and emptying movements of your lungs. How does your awareness of breath and/or your awareness of the Inner Divine affect your fear?

Lindsey

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

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

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

Try This:

After a few moments of quiet, relaxed breathing, picture in your mind someone who is dear to you who has passed on. For as long as you like, hold onto that image. Treasure that person and what he or she shared with you. What would that person say to you about your worth or the ability to love yourself? Take a moment to write down your reflections.

Lori

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

2. 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?

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

Try This:

Get comfortable. Read ?Meditation on Divine Love? in the section ?Meditations and Visualizations? (page 270). If you can, record it for yourself or have a friend read it out loud to you as you breathe deeply and relax into its message. When prerecording, be sure to read slowly and pause for at least five seconds on the ellipsis (?) and at least ten seconds between paragraphs. These pauses allow you to go deeper into the meditation experience.

Hyun Kyung

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

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

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

Try This:

Pick one household chore and do it mindfully, that is, in the presence of Spirit. Your chore could be folding clothes, chopping vegetables, or washing dishes. Whatever your task, focus all your attention on it. Complete it with devotion. Empty your thoughts to more fully experience God?s presence?and your own?in the now.

Susan

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

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

3. 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?

Try This:

Find a place and position where you can become very still. If helpful, read one of the selections in the section ?Meditations and Visualizations.? Get comfortable and breathe deeply for several minutes, until your breathing lengthens into a natural, calm rhythm. As you breathe, listen to your body. If you become aware of a particular area in your body, give thanks for it. Breathe in your awareness of your body?s many gifts. Breathe out your gratitude, again and again and again.

Sridevi

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

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

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

4. What beautiful images do you see within yourself?

Try This:

Put on some music that you like. Relax however feels right for you, whether that is lying on the floor or sitting. After a few minutes of breathing deeply in that relaxed position, allow a hand or a foot or another body part to move to the music, however it wants to move. Allow it to expand its movement. Allow your whole body to respond to the music. After the music ends, take a few minutes to write down what you experienced.

Arisika

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

2. 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?

3. Arisika suggests that telling our stories invites a rebirthing?an honoring and valuing of ourselves and our life experiences. How might you rebirth yourself through the sharing of your story? How might your communion with Spirit be revitalized through the telling and valuing of your faith journey?

Try This:

Set aside at least twenty minutes. Prepare for meditating by using the ?Greeting Silence Meditation? in the section ?Meditations and Guided Visualizations? (page 269), either prerecording it for yourself or having a friend read it out loud for you as you relax. Sit or lie comfortably, with a notebook and pen at the ready. Close your eyes and begin the guided visualization. Afterward, continue the deep breathing exercises on your own for several minutes.

When you feel ready, open your eyes and answer the first question below. It?s best if you respond immediately and write whatever pops into your head before reading the second question. Likewise, as soon as you?ve read the second question, answer it without hesitation.

Just jump in; no censorship allowed. Continue in this way, writing with great compassion for yourself, until you have answered all three questions. For any of the questions, substitute the name of the Divine that works best for you.

What is your most memorable experience of the Divine? Write your response now.
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

1. What experiences brought about changes in Rachel?s spirituality?

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

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

Try This:

Find an open place that has a bit of human history to it. If you can, try to discover the indigenous history, as well as Western civilization?s history, of the place. Lie down or sit in a secluded spot on that site. Breathe deeply, possibly using one of the meditations at the end of this book to help you do that. Write down your thoughts when you are done.

Anna

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

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

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

Try This:

Google ?labyrinth? and find one near you. Before walking it, find a place nearby to sit quietly and focus on your breathing. After a few minutes of calm, centered breathing, approach the labyrinth and stand at its entrance. Notice what sounds in your heart. Walk the labyrinth slowly and meditatively. Once you arrive at its center, stop for a minute to observe your emotions and your state of being. Turn to retrace your path. Continue walking slowly with your heart focused

on your inner prayers as you return to the labyrinth?s entrance. In your notebook, jot down what it felt like to walk the labyrinth. You can also ?walk? the labyrinth at your computer. Just go to www.gratefulness.org/labyrinth/chartres.htm to begin.

Alice

1. Which experiences led to Alice?s revelations?

2. 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?

3. 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?

Try This:

Take a few minutes to close your eyes and breathe deeply, using one of the meditations in the section ?Meditations and Visualizations.? Breathe quietly until your breaths take on a natural rhythm of their own, and then, with your eyes still closed, focus on your inner eyelids for a few minutes. Watch the darkness. Notice the muted changes in the texture of the darkness. If anything else changes, track it with your inner eye. When you are done, write down what you experienced.

Sarah

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

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

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

Try This:

The next time you are working outdoors (gardening, trimming back hedges, or similar tasks), turn your thoughts to the Divine. Converse. Experience the grace of the elements that surround you and your connection.

Ann

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

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

Try This:

Ann practices Zen meditation. One form for beginners is to count up from ?one.? On each inhalation and exhalation, silently count, ?One ? two ? ? and so on, with the goal of counting to ten. It?s important to be seated comfortably, with your spine straight so that you can breathe deeply from your abdomen. Meditate for fifteen minutes. Whenever you notice yourself in a thought, simply release the thought and start with ?one? again. Eventually you will be able to just concentrate on the breath and abandon the counting. After meditating, ask yourself later during the day (or week if you continue to meditate daily) if meditation has any impact on the way you see yourself and live your day.

Rhina

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

2. 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?

3. 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?

Try This:

Reflect on your religious community (or whatever grouping of people where you feel most supported). Where is God for you in that community? When are you ?divine? for others?

Part II: **Divine Connection**

Jeanette

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

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

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

Try This:

Close your eyes and take a few minutes to breathe quietly. Think of your mother (or a person who is like a mother to you). Remember a time when this person did something loving for you. Imagine yourself taking in this gesture or gift from your loving mother or friend. Imagine yourself expressing your gratitude. Stay in that moment as long as you want. When you are ready, write a few words about it.

Irma

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

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

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

Try This:

Close your eyes and breathe deeply to release the labors of the day. Allow your body to relax, releasing whatever tensions remain. Imagine a Divine Being holding you, and exhale deeply into this moment of embrace. Continue to breathe in this manner, exhaling all fears and inhaling the depths of Divine Love. Stay here as long as you like. Afterward, take note of images or words that come your way.

Kimberly

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

2. 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?

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

Try This:

If you have a book of poems handy, read one of your favorites. Or read the poems in this book. The poetry of Mary Oliver or Denise Levertov also works well for reflection. Read your selected poem slowly, closing your eyes periodically to savor the images and rhythms. Try reading it out loud to a friend or family member. Reflect on the poem with others or write a poem or two yourself.

Mother God

God to me
Is my dark-haired mother,
Stroking my forehead
As she lullabies me to sleep.
My Mother is the earth
And all her creatures,
The web that brings us into relationship
With one another.
God to me
Is the Mother
Who spills Her essence into the world,
Creating and calling us to create
From the wombs of our being.
God to me
Is the Mother
Whose voice was drowned out
For most of history,
And yet,
I find Her in my deepest wisdom.
Alone, I feel Her touch
Upon my brow,
Mothering me still,
Mothering us all.
--*Lana Dalberg*

Elena

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

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

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

Try This:

Set aside fifteen or twenty minutes for people watching. Choose an area with lots of foot traffic, and allow yourself to observe others without judgment. Sit or walk slowly, breathing a few cycles of relaxed and easy inhalations and exhalations. As you breathe, experiment with the following Buddhist loving-kindness meditation, holding each person that you observe with compassion. On each in-breath, surround that person with loving compassion. On the next out-breath, repeat in your mind a series of simple phrases for that person. Examples: ?May you be happy. May you be healthy. May you be safe.? On the next inhalation, hold a different person with compassion,

and exhale with the same three phrases. You can also do the loving-kindness meditation at home or in transit. If you are

meditating with your eyes closed, bring a close friend to mind for each inhalation and bless him/her on the exhalation, moving onto another person with each breath cycle. This form of meditation derives from the Buddhist loving-kindness (*metta bhavana*) meditation and is practiced worldwide.

Belvie

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

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

3. 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?

Try This:

Sit or lie down for this meditation. Either prerecord it or have a friend read it to you. Get comfortable and breathe deeply for several minutes, until your breathing lengthens into a natural, calm rhythm. Imagine stepping into and sitting down in a comfortable train that takes you to another place. The train has no windows, but the doors will open soon. You count down: 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, **1.** The doors open, and you step into a garden. Take in the sights and sounds of the garden around you. If there is sunshine, feel it on your face. Feel the solidity of the ground beneath your feet. Reach down to run your hand over its textures. Breathe deeply. What do you smell? If you turn your head, what else do you see? Observe everything around you. Remain in this place as long as you want. When you are done, slowly open your eyes and write down what you experienced.

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.

Try This:

Meditate for at least twenty minutes. If helpful, use the meditation exercises at the back of the book. After the meditation, be more mindful of your next conversation or interaction. Write about it later, possibly incorporating questions like the following: What am I learning about myself and the Divine through my interactions with others, especially those close to me?

Sadaya

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

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

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

Try This:

Put on a selection of sacred music?whatever combination of sound and words that you find holy and healing?and move to it, putting your whole heart into your movements as you paint with your body what you hear and feel with your entire being.

Carolina

1. How did Carolina?s experience of exile influence her faith?

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

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

4. Which value resonates most for you?

Try This:

Next time you are in a relatively secluded or quiet outdoor setting (a park, beach, lakeshore, or neighborhood park at a time of low usage), sit comfortably. Focus on your breath, inhaling and exhaling calmly while sensing your body and its surroundings. If your eyes have been closed, open them and gaze intently at a natural object in your surroundings (e.g., a canopy of tree leaves, a nearby rose) and notice the quality of light on or around it. While remaining seated,

admire this object?s colors, textures, scent?whatever you can take in with your senses. With your heart, express gratitude for this gift of nature and for its presence in your day. Expand your gratitude and allow your eyes to take in other creatures or aspects of nature, thoroughly admiring their qualities and gifts to the world. Allow their beauty to speak to you, to impress upon you some aspect of the divinity you worship in your life. Be sure to whisper or gesture your gratitude before moving on with your day.

Debbie

1. 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?

2. 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?

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

Try This:

Google ?Tai Chi class? or ?Tai Chi teacher? to find a class offering near you and/or obtain a book on Tai Chi to learn more about it. Foundational to Tai Chi is the deep abdominal breathing practiced in meditation, as well as attunement to nature, including the nature within one?s self.

Teresa

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

2. 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?

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

Try This:

Get into a comfortable space and read ?Meditation on Being a Vessel? in the section ?Meditations and Visualizations? (page 274). Prerecord it to allow yourself to experience the guided visualization more fully as you breathe deeply, imagining your entire being filled with grace and goodness, a blessed container for the Divine.

Susan

1. What factors in Susan?s given family informed her spirituality?

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

3. 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?

Try This:

Breathe deeply. See your home in your mind?s eye. Imagine doing one small thing that connects it to the ecosystem of the place on earth that you inhabit. It could be planting ?bee bushes? or plants native to your area. It could be watering the neighbors? trees during a dry stretch or?thinking big?organizing a community garden. Write down your imaginings, however tentative or far-fetched they seem.

Marci

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

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

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

Try This:

Think for a moment until you find a doubt that keeps recurring in your life. Let it surface, and notice all the aspects of the doubt. As you sit with it, see if there are any ways in which it shifts. Imagine how this doubt could become fertile ground for new beliefs.

Emily

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

2. 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?

Try This:

After several minutes of deep abdominal breathing, pray a simple prayer for the first person who pops into your mind. If you like, you can do the ?Meditation on Divine Love? found on page 270. Or if you feel more comfortable with intercessory prayer, say whatever is in your heart for that person. Do not stay with that person too long, but allow another to come into your mind and pray a short blessing for that person, and continue on to the next person.

Alison

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

2. What happens for you when you sing with others?

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

Try This:

Sit still for a few moments. Hum. Or, if you don?t like to sing or hum, ring a chime or a bell or tap on a bowl. Repeat your sounding or humming with a sense of devotion for two minutes or more. See what comes up for you. Write down what you noticed about the experience. If you like, next time you are in a place of communal singing, join in and notice what it feels like to be singing with others.

Judith

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

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

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

Try This

Draw and color a mandala. Or dance! If you?ve never seen a mandala, search ?mandala? or ?mandala design? under the image category of your Internet search engine. If you choose to dance, you have permission to put on your favorite music and kick up your heels, even if you are by yourself!

Part III: **Divine Change**

SaraLeya

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

2. In what ways does she experience the Divine?

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

Try This:

Pick a routine task and do it mindfully. Keep one track of your mind open to the Divine as you undertake the components of your selected task.

Lucy

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

2. 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?

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

Try This

Gather images, paper in various colors and textures, and small glueable items (like leaves or other items you enjoy but wouldn?t necessarily imagine coexisting together). Before you bring these pieces together into a collage, breathe quietly for several minutes. When you open your eyes, begin to arrange the images, items, shapes, and colors in ways that are pleasing to you. Work with your materials until you feel satisfied with your arrangement. Use glue if you want a collage you can keep as a reminder of ?found art? in your life. Or, alternatively: Close your eyes in a place in which you have great familiarity (ideally your bedroom). From a seated position, reach forward and explore with just your fingertips the textures of things around you, for each item that you encounter through your sense of touch.

Ayesha

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

2. 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?

Try This:

Ayesha talks about the ebb and flow of faith throughout one?s life. She suggests that our relationship with the Divine can be experienced as a marriage, with moments of distance and reconnection. In this vein, I invite you to ponder the words of the Islamic mystical poet Mawlana Rumi:

Come, come, whoever you are.
Wanderer, idolater, worshipper of fire,
Come, even though you have broken your vows a
thousand times.
Come, and come yet again. Ours is not a caravan of
despair.2

Upon reading this passage, write down the first thing that comes to
your mind.

Allison

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

2. 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?

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

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

Try This:

Really act on your inclination to be generous with your spirit of goodwill. Find a dog or cat to pet. Hug that beautiful tree across the way! Or simply hug your closest human, yourself included.

Viviana

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

2. 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??

3. 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?

Try This:

Lie down and take a few minutes to breathe deeply. Sensing with your inner faculties, locate your toes and how they feel. Without physically touching them, feel your toes and then your heels and calves, working your way up your body. In your mind?s eye, isolate each body part and feel whatever sensations it brings you, gently holding and then releasing each sensation before moving on to the next body part. From your lower legs, move up to your knees, thighs, groin, buttocks, womb/abdomen, chest, back, fingers, arms, shoulders, neck, face, and crown. When you are done, sense and hold your entire body in love. Also, if you have a massage or other body work done, take some time to focus on the natural rhythm of your breath and then on the physical contact your body is receiving. In your mind?s eye, hold those parts of your body that the body worker is touching. Think of Viviana?s words: ?We are all spirit inside the accumulation of energy that is our bodies.? Think ?energy? at each moment of touch.

Zoharah

1. 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?

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

3. 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?

Try This:

Set aside twenty minutes or more for meditation. Read ?Spirit Guide Meditation? in the section ?Meditations and Visualizations? (page 275). Ideally, prerecord it or have a friend read it to you as you breathe deeply and enter into the experience of encountering a spirit guide.

Kristin

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

2. 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?

3. How did Kristin react to the changes in her life?

4. 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?

Try This:

On a temperate day, lay down in a quiet stretch of lawn, meadow, or beach where human sounds are limited or distant so that you can focus on your body touching the ground and the sensations of breeze, bird calls, and insect hums. Breathe deeply and focus on these sounds, letting them go as soon as your senses lay hold of them. Be open to everything but hold onto nothing. Just let the sounds enter your personal field and fall away. When you?ve had a chance to meditate this way for twenty minutes or longer, take a few moments to write down what you experienced.

Dionne

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

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

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

Try This:

Attend a drumming circle. You can search for ?drumming circle? on the Internet to find one near you.

Stacy

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

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

3. 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??

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

Try This:

Set out several hues of colored paper for collage making. Whimsically choose the colors that draw you. Let your imagination lead the way as you cut the colors into shapes. Group the shapes to your fancy. Rearrange them. Play. Take pleasure in the collage you are creating. Or, take out your rosary. (If you don?t have one, you can order a goddess rosary from www.herchurch.org. Instructions and prayers come with it.) You can pray a woman-affirming rosary by saying the ?Our Mother? prayer (page 60) and the ?Hail Goddess? prayer (below), alternating prayers for the small and large beads of the rosary.

Hail Goddess, full of grace.
Blessed are you
and blessed are all the fruits
of your womb.
For you are the mother of us all.
Hear us now
and in all our needs.
O blessed be, O blessed be.

(adapted from Carol P. Christ)

Virginia

1. Which of Virginia?s experiences resonate most strongly for you?

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

3. 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?

Try This:

Find a box of finger paints and a sheet or more of paper. Close your eyes and breathe quietly for a few moments. Then let your fingers paint whatever your imagination calls forth. Have fun!

Jann

1. 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?

2. 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?

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

Try This:

Think of your favorite religious song or chant. Hum a few lines to yourself or play it. The next time you sing it (in community or alone), notice which words and melodies appeal most to you. How does the music deepen the experience? Are there any words or symbols that no longer resonate for you? If so, how can you change them so that they do? Alternatively, try this: Think of a short phrase that has spiritual meaning for you and sing it, making up the tune as you go along. Repeat it several times so that you can recall it later. Sing it whenever you need to be reminded of its spiritual truth.

Katie

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

2. 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?

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

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

Try This:

Not everyone has the type of spiritual experience that Katie encountered, but anyone can take a few minutes to connect with a deeper sense of Spirit. Do that now in meditation. After breathing deeply for several minutes, call upon your spirit guide, and observe what happens. Or notice what?s happening for you physically and emotionally. What do you sense in your body, and what does it tell you? What do you sense emotionally or intuitively? After a time that feels right to you, write down your observations.

Author Bio

Critical Praise

"An excellent study of women?s personal experiences across various faiths?. Will appeal to readers with an interest in women?s spirituality, feminist spirituality, ecofeminism?. A good choice for reading groups."

? *Library Journal*

"Reflect[s] a shift in consciousness regarding the Divine, one that is shaped by a deep and personal relationship with the Sacred within us and all around us, a knowing that is beyond images and names, a unifying energy that weaves into one all life on our planet. Shows how this Spirit-driven force within feminist spirituality continues to add to the universe story a multifaith, multicultural dimension steeped in wisdom and compassion and oriented toward planetary justice and peace. May these sacred stories give rise to many more."

? Miriam Therese Winter, professor, Hartford Seminary; author, **P**ARADOXOLOGY: Spirituality in a Quantum Universe

"Amazing ... restores balance to our human understanding of the Divine [and] brings readers face to face with a Divinity who empowers and accompanies women of many religious traditions and blended faiths. A must read!"

? Joan Borysenko, PhD, author, A WOMAN?S JOURNEY TO GOD

"Heartful, multifaceted ... generous and inspiring. As a Buddhist practitioner, I generally don?t use theistic language to describe deepest connections of love or clarity, so I found many of the perspectives in BIRTHING GOD to be especially interesting and thought provoking."

? Sharon Salzberg, author, REAL HAPPINESS: The Power of Meditation: A 28-Day Program; co-founder, The Insight Meditation Society

"At last, a vibrant investigation into the lived spirituality of God-intoxicated women! Lana Dalberg?s BIRTHING GOD

is more than a series of snapshots into the lives and thoughts of deeply spiritual women; it is a glimpse into the living Divine as She makes Herself known to us through these amazing seekers. The result is a spirituality of radical openness that offers a much-needed alternative to the closed-hearted and narrow-minded spirituality that dominates so much of contemporary religion."

? Rabbi Rami Shapiro, translator/annotator, THE DIVINE FEMININE IN BIBLICAL WISDOM LITERATURE: Selections Annotated & Explained

"[A] valuable resource [and] a real eye-opener.... Many insights into how this translates into traditional worship services. It is also a journey of self-discovery with the help of questions for reflection and a marvelous collection of meditations and visualizations."

? Kay Lindahl, co-founder, Women of Spirit and Faith; co-editor, WOMEN, SPIRITUALITY AND TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP: Where Grace Meets Power

"Offers a kaleidoscope of opportunities to invite in the Divine Feminine in myriad forms ... it can?t help but expand our ways of thinking how we can experience the Divine. Helps all women realize we belong to God/dess."

? Carolyn Bohler, PhD, author, GOD THE WHAT? What Our Metaphors for God Reveal about Our Beliefs in God and GOD IS LIKE A MOTHER HEN AND MUCH MUCH MORE ?

"Challenge[s] us to understand divinity and spirituality beyond traditional ideas of gender and dogma. Offers reflection, inspiration and even practical guidance for anyone seeking to experience her faith more deeply."

? Lisa Catherine Harper, author**,** A DOUBLE LIFE: Discovering Motherhood

"As women?s stories are told, the depths of women?s souls begin to be known. Speaking of the presence of Goddess and God in their lives, women transform religions."

? Carol P. Christ, author, REBIRTH OF THE GODDESS and SHE WHO CHANGES

"Would you like to meet forty women who are confident that in union with the Divine Feminine, they are going to give birth to vibrant new justice in this tired old world? Then treat yourself to this book?it will leave your heart brimming with life and love."

? Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, PhD, author, SENSUOUS SPIRITUALITY: Out from Fundamentalism and other books

"How diverse is your Spirit, Holy One, as these women testify. How many and varied are your Paths. Readers, explore these stories to clarify your own Way."

? Mary E. Hunt, co-director, Women?s Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual (WATER); co-editor, NEW FEMINIST CHRISTIANITY: Many Voices, Many Views

"Crosses boundaries to unite human and Divine.... Both draws on and departs from religious traditions ranging from Islam to Lutheranism, Catholicism to Zen Buddhism, simultaneously diving deeper into and transcending the limitations of that which we think we already know about the Divine."

? Caryn D. Riswold, PhD, associate professor of religion and chair of gender and women?s studies, Illinois College

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by Lana Dalberg

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