ForeWord Reviews

BODY, MIND & SPIRIT

The Woman Awake
Regina Sara Ryan
Hohm Press
978-0-934252-79-9
(May 1998)

"The only woman awake is the woman who has heard the flute!" These telling words from the long stilled tongue of a 13th century poet provide the framework for Regina Sara Ryan's ambitious quest to define and concurrently celebrate the "feminine face of divinity."

A former Catholic nun, Ryan flexes her vast knowledge of religious tradition effortlessly, writing with the gentle authority of more than three decades of related study.

Because the work itself was born of a personal response to an ongoing call for spiritual growth, it retains a freshness, the kind which may only be attributed to the unbridled joy of revelation. Ryan's style is free flowing and inviting, but not without challenge to the readers' intellect and spiritual convictions. She writes that her work might be misinterpreted as being rooted in staunch feminism, but stresses that she wants to define feminine spirituality with no intention of alienating men. Nor does she consider this a shortcut to spiritual growth. Ryan offers her efforts as simply a foothold on a difficult path. As a reference in times of need, the book is divided simply, each chapter a whole in itself. Each showcases a separate facet of the divine feminine - her compassion, darkness, power as warrior, mother, devotion, and sexuality among others.

With these separate "paths" to the realization of every woman's innate mysticism, Ryan has associated the profiles of 24 great women in addition to her own insights. The diversity of these "leaders by example" lends a sense of balance to the work. Ranging from fervent tales of Hindu, Tibetan and Sumerian goddesses to contemporary anthropologist Joan Halifax, Mother Tessa Bielecki and Auschwitz victim Etty Hillseum, a common thread of timeless spirituality is discerned.

This work offers vital insights for women of all ages, of all backgrounds. As the face of the divine feminine is revealed in the mosaic of these 24 great women, eyes open to meet our own mirrored gaze. Photography and images were unavailable.

Karen Wyckoff