

The Perfect Tan

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I've devoted my whole summer so far to getting the perfect tan. Not some subtle brownish tint that nobody notices, mind you. I want to be as dark as my heroes and heroines, those Miami Beach retirees who only leave the sand to head to the pool or to drive to the local restaurant to partake of that luxury known as the early bird special. And, if I keep up my current pace, by Labor Day no condo board in Florida would dare refuse me admittance.

Until a few summers ago, I had a troubled and unrequited relationship with the sun. I couldn't seem to coax my fair Irish skin to bronze no matter what I did. No combination of tanning ointments succeeded in turning me into a full-fledged sun worshipper, and God knows I tried. An old acquaintance used to describe my skin after a full summer of weekend beach going as adobe-colored. She was trying to be nice, but I didn't take it that way. You see, I grew up with a woman who could get a base tan in the time it took her to take the garbage out. Never once has my mother's skin burned, never once has she had to swim with a tee shirt on, never once has she looked pasty after Memorial Day. To make matters worse, I married a man who also tans senza problema (it's the Italian DNA), and even though my daughter has fair skin, she's been the spitting image of the Coppertone baby every summer since she's been born. Talk about feeling second rate.

Don't scold me. I know it's currently not in vogue to devote time and energy to getting a tan. Conventional wisdom and the medical establishment have succeeded in making sun worship analogous to suicide. We are supposed to fear the sun, that flaming ball of life energy that every planet in our solar system revolves around, because we've destroyed the ozone layer thanks to decades of aerosol use and pollution. We're urged to avoid the sun at all costs to protect ourselves from skin cancer and premature aging in the form of extreme dryness and wrinkles. I'm not making light of cancer or premature aging, but I don't think that conventional wisdom and the medical establishment know a damn thing about how to experience life, with or without the ozone layer.

The medical hucksters and cultural and political pundits have turned menopause into a shameful illness, have created conditions such as Attention Deficit Disorder in order to medicate our rebellious and anti-conformist youth, and have encouraged working people to invest their retirement money in that Vegas style roulette wheel known as the stock market while those higher up on the food chain manipulate the system and then feel completely free to pillage and plunder. I should listen to what they say about the sun? Conventional wisdom in all its disguises is a fear-based pseudo-reality that we've created to prevent us from experiencing life. And why are we so afraid to experience life? Because we're afraid to die. Well, since we're all going to die, I choose to be burned up by the sun rather than slowly tortured to death by the constraints of consensus reality. Wrinkled skin be damned. I'm a woman who's supposed to live and age, not a lifeless department store mannequin with a perfect form and no soul.

I feel better now. But there's an even deeper level to my desire for the perfect tan. Miraculously, my skin started tanning a few summers after I gave birth to my daughter Sophia. It may have something to do with hormones, but it's also something much more incredible. Before Sophia was born, I began an inner journey to meet the divine within. To my surprise, the face of this divinity was female, and her name is Sophia or Wisdom. Religion wasn't a big part of my upbringing, but it's tough to steer clear of patriarchal concepts when it seems that's all there is. Meeting Sophia, in myself and in my child, has been the most rewarding and trying experience of my life. And, as I've discovered, I never know when or how she'll make her presence known.

As I sat on the couch the other day, I found myself marveling at my tan and confused about my obsession with it at the same time. Out of the blue, the following quote from *Revelations* (12:1-2) that describes the feminine aspect of divinity and presages the war in heaven, popped into my head:

And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; she was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery.

Everyone and their sister have tried to interpret Revelations and I'm no biblical scholar. But this quote directly applies to me. I am now brown-skinned because my beliefs about the sun and my skin and the nature of reality have changed. I don't use sun block any more; I simply cover up or go inside when I've received enough of the sun's life-giving rays. I've stopped begging life to give me what I want. Life gladly provides me with everything I need so what's the point of being greedy and getting burned? The sun is sacred and so am I. We're on the same wavelength after all these years.

So much for being clothed with the sun, but what about the moon under my feet, the crown of twelve stars and the image of a woman in labor? Well, I got this awesome color at the beach, didn't I? When I feel the sun's power and warmth penetrate my body while the ocean waves (that are ruled by the mighty luna) caress my feet, I feel connected to all that is, pregnant with possibility, with love. I am adorned with a crown of twelve stars. It's my birthday present from the Universe. I am a Pisces, the twelfth sign of the Zodiac, the sign that represents both the Omega and a new Alpha, that connects the sun with the moon, the conscious with the subconscious, the fire with the water, the sign of rebirth. I am in the process of giving birth, to myself, to the divine mother within, and sometimes it hurts like hell. Everything that's not love has to go and that means war because conventional wisdom still has deep roots in me. But I'm protected. Because I am the woman clothed with the sun. I am life itself. And so are we all.

Through thousands of pale-faced lifetimes and one gloriously bronzing summer, Sophia has taught me the only thing I need to know. There's only Life and through it all things are possible. Even the perfect tan.