

meet your inner goddess.

Tanalee Smith discovers that attending a goddess workshop opens both the heart and the tear ducts.

The woman chooses a pouch from the basket. "I want to remove my anger from this pouch," she says, her fingers miming the removal of items, "and replace it with happiness." The basket is then passed around the circle of 20 women, who are nearing the end of their first day of Goddess Within, a two-day workshop of empowerment, spirituality, songs, meditation, conversation, hugs – and tears.

Tears flow easily here. Minutes after entering the room, lushly decorated with gauzy purple saris, I reach for a tissue as host Diane McCann talks of our value as women. "How many of you have been sad or confused?" McCann asks. "You are wonderful, beautiful! And you deserve to be treated like the goddess you are."

Feminine glory

McCann founded Goddess Within 24 years ago, out of a belief that women need to love themselves in order to make the world a better place. "Women can get the husband, kids, job, house and car – but still know something's missing," she says. "Nothing but self-love and self-acceptance will fill that hole."

Spurred by the same desire to nurture female empowerment, Rukshika de Silva, of Inner Goddess workshops, pledges that participants "will connect to the core of your feminine essence and awaken the beauty of your true nature." Then there is Goddess Playshop, which runs workshops starting from just three hours that co-founder Louanne Simmons calls, "a subtle introduction to goddess energy" – the 'play' part includes essential oils, mini-readings, and angel whispers of affirmation. "We want them to take time out," explains Simmons. "There are tears, but they're gentle. Then, if they come back, they can go a little deeper."

Heal the heart

Goddess Within facilitator McCann, a dynamic 65 year-old with an open smile and deep gaze, starts her two-day seminar with lectures on fulfilment, genetics, quantum physics, health – "You need to take care of what you put in your mouth and on your body" – and environmental

responsibility. The group then stands in a circle, holding hands, and each person shares what brought them here. They also share feelings by writing memos to one another. "You shine like a star," read one I received; "Joy + Love. That's you!" said another. The day ends with each woman approaching another and, placing her hand on her heart, telling her something she wishes for her or sees in her. More snuffles and hugs punctuate the bonds these women have made in just hours.

This connection with other women is a critical part of the workshops, but the meditation exercises and activities like the purse-in-the-basket focus on each participant's personal progression and healing. McCann has asked that nothing be written about day two, a metaphysical and sacred day of emotional, mental and spiritual healing. "Participants are blown away because they heal so much, so quickly. A miracle," she says. Each Goddess is invited to follow-up monthly meetings to continue the emotional and personal connections. "You can't run your life in a two-day workshop," says McCann. "You have to keep acting on those principles for the rest of your life."

A woman looking for an emotional outlet in a safe environment couldn't do wrong by engaging with her own inner goddess. Who knows what you can achieve? As the ancient Chinese proverb says, "When sleeping women wake, mountains move."

FEEL THE LOVE

Participants say being with other women creates a safe space for you to explore insecurities and find solutions. "In the goddess circle, you are surrounded by unconditional love," says Lisa Rowe, who has just done her second Goddess Within workshop. "These women care about you. The workshops have taught me to step into my integrity, to speak my truth. My husband says that when I come out of these meetings I am never the same, that I am more confident and vocal about my needs. It's certainly been interesting!"

FROM ADDICTION TO EMPOWERMENT

Rebecca started smoking marijuana and drinking alcohol at age 12, and dropped out of school at 15. "I was in a bad place when I first did Goddess at 21. I was a single mum, in debt, living in a run-down house with no car. That first workshop helped me to start cleaning up my life. It wasn't easy; sometimes I just wanted to be numb and yield to my addictions. But there would be a push at my back that said, 'No, that's not your path'. Goddess

meant these women would stand by me, no matter what."

Rebecca went on to become an assistant at the workshops, and recently completed a double diploma in community welfare work, specialising in mental health and counselling. "Goddess gave me the tools and support to change my life," she says. Her family and friends have been thrilled by her transformation. "They think I'm amazing, and so do I now. I have come so far."

help yourself inner self.



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The Goddess Within:
www.goddesswithin.com.au

Goddess Playshops:
www.goddessplayshops.com

Star of Ishtar Inner Goddess:
www.starofishtar.com