

# Discovering The Art Of Being A Woman Through The Eyes Of A Distant Human Ancestor

[BY KATIE HART](#)

Her name is Dinkinesh.

She was found in the Awash River Valley in Africa, her fossilized bones over 3 million years old. The Ethiopians named her Dinkinesh, which translates as “You are marvelous” in Amharic. American anthropologists who discovered her nicknamed her “Lucy,” because it was the 1970s and the Beatles’ song “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds” was playing on the stereo all summer long at the dig site.

But I prefer Dinkinesh.

Her bones tell us that she stood just under 4 feet tall. Her arms were long, and they needed to be. Sometimes she still swung from tree branches to evade predators and fill her belly with plucked fruits and leaves. Sometimes she left the protection of the forest to roam the open grasslands of the savannas. A keen-eyed adventuress, she could thrive in both worlds.

Anthropologists classed her as “Australopithecus afarensis,” a distant ancestor of homo sapiens. Yet no matter how distant, every priestess knows that the shape of evolution is a spiral, not a gradually ascending straight line. So when I look at the magazine photo of her skeleton on display in the Ethiopian museum, I wonder about who she was. Could we be so different?

I feel a kinship with her butterfly-shaped pelvis and the way they’ve positioned her mid-stride, her head upright and reaching for the clouds. I wonder what thoughts and visions

flew through the sky of her mind. She had a smaller brain size than us sapiens, and I wonder if her wisdom was informed less by intellect and more by body, heart, and divinely-inspired guidance.

I certainly don't assume she was "dumber" than us, or inferior to us, or incapable of deep thoughts or feelings.

To me, the bones of Dinkinesh tell a creation story. It is the story, perhaps, of where womankind began.

I see her walking straight into a cool evening breeze lifting off the Awash River. Three million years ago (eons), the river valley was lush and silky, covered in green swaying leaves. Those leaves whisper to her to follow the wind, and here she is sneaking away from her tribe.

She stops to look up at the face in the sky looming above her. It is full tonight, and she feels its familiar pull.

***Something deep inside her always expands and softens when she marvels at the moon. Every several nights it brightens and every several nights it dies in a miraculous and comforting routine.***

A sound wants to rise from a place deep inside Dinkinesh, a sound that is carried on a mysterious wave of emotion. What is this sound swelling that is unlike the other sounds she knows for anger, laughter, pleasure, and pain?

She takes a breath. "Ahhhhh," she sings softly, feeling the note lift higher as her voice gains confidence. Her voice, her hands, her eyes all lift to the moon.

Then one hand goes to her lower belly. It is her bleeding time

and this part of her is round and full as well. Warm drops have begun to moisten her inner thighs. She touches her fingertips there and dabs them in her body's red pulp – the world's first paint. The temple's first anointing oil. She rubs her thumb across her bloody fingertips, sees how they gleam and reflect the moon's glow.

*I am just like the moon,* she thinks.

"Ahh-Ahhhhh," she sings again. Longer. Louder. It is more like a chant.

Dinkinesh touches the damp mouth of her body's cave for more blood. She spreads her smeared fingers and palms in front of her face. The moon glides higher, directly overhead, directly over the gushing Awash River which seems to spill out of the moon, or out of the moon's reflection on the water. The river is now a shimmering white snake that bends and bleeds its life-giving waters across the thick grassy land.

She begins streaking her forehead and cheeks with her wet blood. There is a river of blood inside her. It is her blood. It is moon blood. It is both, for a woman surely gave birth to the moon, and the moon surely birth to more mothers. When Dinkinesh returns to her people in the oasis of the forest den, where her mother and elder sister have begun to worry about how long she's been gone, moon-fire flickers in her eyes.

She has discovered her kinship with the moon.

***She has discovered the art of being a woman.***

I imagine that Dinkinesh ripened into womanhood, loved someone, and taught their children how to honor all other life forms that walked the Earth. She is a Great Grandmother of the

human tribe. In the tradition of ancestor worship, where treasured cremated remains are kept sealed in jars or buried in pits at the foot of special trees or standing stones, the bones of Dinkinesh are sacred.

I lift my eyes from the photograph of her bones on display in a museum. Sure, it's educational, but isn't this the way so many marvelous oddities go? We define them, classify them, put a spotlight on them and gawk at them as if they are something totally "other" and different from ourselves. Meanwhile, we get no closer to an essential understanding of their true nature, or of our shared connective nature.

A sound wants to rise from a place deep inside me. "Din-ki-nesh," I say aloud, testing the different textures on my tongue. I repeat it again and again. I like making the sounds, stressing different syllables in different ways.

And then I add, "You are marvelous."

Now that's a name. There is such pleasure in saying it, such basking in admiration. Such openness to letting what is truly magnificent just be what it is, so we can celebrate the mystery of its possibilities.

I think of the Americans pinning a household name from a popular song onto Dinkinesh. And I close my eyes in prayer.

*Goddess, teach my collective tribe about reverence. Teach us to be more like the Ethiopians who named Dinkinesh from a place in their hearts. They expressed their wonder and awe with words of sweet praise. Goddess, teach us to listen better for your song in our hearts, and to sing it loudly when it fills us, so that we can name – or see – your creations around us as the marvelous wonders that they are.*

So let us say to someone special in our hearts today, "You are marvelous."

Let us say to someone with a bright glow of kindness in their eyes today, "You are marvelous."

Let us smile to ourselves and say with the affection of someone who's been with us through it all as long as we've ever lived, "You are marvelous."

And I say to you, dear reader – "Dinkinesh."

Photo by [Wikimedia Commons](#)

For more self-study, [The Urban Howl](#) recommends [Sacred Woman: A Guide to Healing the Feminine Body, Mind, and Spirit](#).

*Sip a little more:*

*Hymn To The Wild Man Of The Woods*

*Kissing Goddess Earth With Our Feet & Listening  
For Her Heartbeat's Song*

What if we all were to meet each other in the pureness of our need to commune with the soul of the earth, through and with each other? In a way that supports the life of another. Not out of martyrdom, but out of genuine open-hearted desire, because in that meeting you are also being fed by meeting the preciousness of this life.

Kate Joyner

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