Women’s Stories of their Transpersonal Experiences with the Divine Feminine

by

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BSc, Ambassador University, 1996
MA, Trinity Western University, 2005

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

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Spirituality is becoming an increasingly important dimension of Counselling Psychology. As multicultural communities become more inclusive and global, it is valuable for counsellors to become more familiar with the different types of spiritual experiences that individuals are having. By attending to such experiences, counsellors may address how current forms of spirituality encourage healing, growth, and development, thereby increasing our understanding of human potential. Furthermore, many cultures are emerging from a religious history that portrays a male god as supreme, and the predominant images of the Divine as masculine. This imbalance of the masculine and feminine in relation to spirituality has been associated with a profound disconnection from our bodies, the earth-body, and the split between spirit and matter. For this reason, relating to the Divine Feminine may hold an essential piece for many in to reconnect with earth, body, and soul.

In this narrative inquiry, ten women are interviewed about their transpersonal experiences with the Divine Feminine. Their stories illuminate what the Divine Feminine is, the meaning attributed to Her, and the changes in their lives associated with their experiences. This study increases our understanding of the role that the Divine Feminine has in the lives of women, and represents some forms of spirituality emerging in the new global context. In turn, it widens our perspective on the therapeutic implications these and related phenomena could have on Counselling Psychology.

The key findings of this research show that contemporary women are experiencing the Divine Feminine through: (a) Goddesses, (b) Shakti and Kundalini Shakti, (c) one’s Self (body, sexuality, women’s blood mysteries), (d) Nature and sacred plant medicine, (e) Mother, and (f)
Spirit guides, visions, and past life experiences. This inquiry raises the awareness of the powerful healing, deep insight, and growth enhancing shifts that are attributed the Divine Feminine. The intention is that these stories will inspire counsellors to inquire into their clients’ transpersonal experiences with the Divine Feminine, as these experiences contain potent life-affirming and growth-enhancing resources.
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Dedication

I dedicate this work to the Divine Feminine, and to all the beings that are sounding Her name, embodying Her, and illuminating Her presence in this world. Jai Ma.
Chapter I: Introduction

Goddess, Aphrodite, Inanna, Kali, Durga, Triple Goddess, Mother Earth, Persephone, Lilith, Mary Magdalene, Shakti…are a few names used to describe the Divine Feminine. What is the Divine Feminine? What meaning does She hold in contemporary culture? How are people’s lives being changed through relating to and experiencing Her? What does an experience with the Divine Feminine look like, feel like? There are many stories about the Divine Feminine in literature, mythology, Jungian psychology, religion, and anthropology; but what are contemporary women’s stories of how She is presently being experienced? How is She presently a catalyst for transformation? How is She presently bringing balance, chaos, wholeness, crisis, and/or new ways of being in the world? What relevance does She hold for women, men, culture, society, and the environment in the 21st century?

Research Question

The primary research question addressed is what are contemporary women’s stories of their transpersonal experiences with the Divine Feminine? Within this primary question, secondary questions are explored: What is the Divine Feminine? What meaning do these experiences hold for these women? What change/transformation accompanies these experiences? And how do these experiences relate to evolution, wholeness, and expanded consciousness – individually, culturally, and cosmically?

Definitions

I am researching transpersonal experiences as seen through the lens of transpersonal psychology. Below I offer a brief definition of transpersonal psychology and the transpersonal, and give a few examples of transpersonal experiences. I then provide some definitions of the Divine Feminine, although a more in-depth exploration of Her will be revealed in Chapter II.
Transpersonal psychology and the transpersonal. Transpersonal psychology integrates the world’s spiritual traditions with modern psychology, and aims to validate spirituality and non-ordinary states of consciousness as legitimate paths to wholeness (Cortright, 1997). In the field of transpersonal psychology, the healing potential of transpersonal experiences is affirmed, spirituality is seen as vital to psychological health, and spiritual issues are explored from a psychological perspective (Vaughan, 1993). There is attention to distinguishing pathology from spiritual experiences, and discerning when spiritual practices are used to enhance growth towards wholeness versus masking pathology. The former is conceptualized as a manifestation of unifying interconnectedness, purpose and meaning, inner resources, and transcendence (Daniels & Fitzpatrick, 2013).

Transpersonal psychology, like psychology, is the study of consciousness; however, the understanding of consciousness from a transpersonal perspective is that the origin of consciousness is spiritual. Transpersonal psychology explores what helps or hinders the growth, healing, unfolding, and expansion of consciousness. “From a transpersonal perspective, consciousness heals” (Cortright, 1997, p. 56). Furthermore, transpersonal psychology works within a wellness model of moving towards human potential, rather than a model of moving towards the absence of disease, although the latter is often a side-effect of the former.

Transpersonal psychology includes the themes of beyond-ego psychology, integrative/holistic psychology, and psychology of transformation (Hartelius, Caplan, & Rardin, 2007). These themes of transpersonal psychology coincide with the three Latin meanings of trans: beyond, pervading, and changing (Hartelius et al., 2007). My research fits into the realm of transpersonal psychology because I am exploring the sacred (the Divine Feminine) and I am exploring transpersonal experiences.

What is considered a transpersonal experience? Examples of transpersonal experiences include dreams, intuitive knowing, visions, past life experiences, non-ordinary intensity in positive feelings, body/somatic experiences, and energetic sensations. Transpersonal experiences are also called spiritual experiences, mystical experiences, and Altered States of Consciousness (ASC’s). Transpersonal experiences can be transcendent and/or immanent. The transcendent qualities and experiences of the transpersonal are described by many terms: otherworldly transcendence, beyond-ego, the Divine Masculine, Father Sky, Spirit, Heaven, Shiva, and Absolute Consciousness. Terms to describe the immanent qualities and experiences
of the transpersonal are pervasive, embodied, Mother Earth, Soul, and Shakti. In my experience, focussing solely on the transcedent qualities of the transpersonal accentuates the mind/body split. Often the transpersonal is erroneously considered only within this transcendent other-worldly rarely-accessible-realm, rather than considered within both the transcendent and immanent (this-worldly everyday-accessible-realm). It is the immanent qualities and experiences of the transpersonal that are deeply entwined and associated with the nature of the Divine Feminine.

The Divine Feminine.

For I am the first and the last  
I am the honoured one and the scorned one.  
I am the whore and the holy one.  
I am the wife and the virgin.  
I am the mother and the daughter.  
I am the barren one and many are her sons.  
I am she whose wedding is great,  
And I have not taken a husband.  
I am the midwife and she who does not bear.  
I am the solace of my labor pains.  
I am the bride and the bridegroom,  
And it is my husband who begot me.  
I am the mother of my father and the  
Sister of my husband, and he is my offspring....  
Give heed to me.  
I am the one who is disgraced and the great one.  
( Believed to be the voice of Sophia – divine feminine wisdom – in a section found in the Gnostic Christian text found in Nag Hamadi, Egypt in 1945, Dead Sea Scrolls; Robinson, 1990 )

Attempts to describe the Divine Feminine will always fall short, as She encompasses much more than any of us could ever imagine; this is the nature of the Sacred. Yet, it is still useful to use symbolic representation – be it with words, images, gestures, dance – in attempt to create a bridge to understanding and perhaps some brief glimpses and felt senses of Her fullness. Some common terms used to describe the Divine Feminine throughout the literature include Feminine Divine, Goddess, Goddess Archetype, feminine energy, feminine principle, Shakti, Mother Earth, and Sophia (Wisdom). She is also known by a multitude of Goddess names such as Kali, Aphrodite, Kuan Yin, Persephone, Mary, Durga, Lilith, Triple Goddess, and Demeter to name a few of hundreds. For this research, the Divine Feminine is the preferred term I have chosen to describe a variety of sacred (transpersonal/spiritual) experiences involving (a) an
image of the Divine Feminine in any of her cultural and religious forms, (b) Shakti – the energetic feminine life-force, (c) nature/Mother Earth/the earth-body, and/or (d) women and women’s’ bodies. Other terms to describe the Divine Feminine will be used to stay true to how others represent Her. I am also choosing to capitalize any reference to the Divine Feminine to accentuate the *sacredness* – the spiritual dimension – that is underlying this research.

The Divine Feminine participates in the mysteries of nature; in the cycles of birth, death, and renewal. For some, the Divine Feminine is the feminine energy that pervades all of life (also known as Shakti). For others, She is embodied in Mother Earth, or experienced as emanations of a particular Goddess. Others experience Her in their own bodies when their bodies are seen, felt, and experienced as Sacred. Perot (2008) explains, “She is the embodiment of the feminine principle, a mythological character, a psychological archetype necessary for growth, and a religious figure” (p. 11). Women have described the Divine Feminine in various ways: that-which-cannot-be-told; the world: moon, sun, earth, star, stone seed, flowing river, wind, wave, leaf and branch, bud and blossom, fang and claw, woman and man; internal presence; an open and flexible inner knowing of the divine presence that arises through the body, experience, relationship, community and reflection; the mountain stream, the leaves, flowers, and fruit of a tree, the lightening perception that energizes all the forces of light from the fire within the Earth to the Sun in heaven above, She dwells everywhere in nature; the life-force in matter; the feminine life force; the energy in us that transforms matter into consciousness, and; the void, love, wisdom; the source of all things (Christ, 2007, 2003; Frawley, 2004; Goldenberg, 1979; Starhawk, 1979; Virtue, 2005; Woodman & Dickson, 1996). As exemplified, the definitions, descriptions, and experiences of the Divine Feminine are quite varied… and this is only the beginning!

Yet for some, the Divine Feminine has little or no meaning, sounds vague, or may even bring up feelings of resistance (Ruether, 2005). I have experienced such reactions when I inquire about the Divine Feminine with my colleagues, friends, and family. Some respond with aversion: “Why do people need to refer to God as feminine?” Some respond with confusion, yet curiosity: “I don’t understand what you mean by the Divine Feminine, can you give me some examples?” Sometimes, the Divine Feminine is simply a term that is unfamiliar, but once a dialogue is started about the meaning behind the “label”, there is recognition. There are others that *know*, deeply and intimately, the Divine Feminine – and these are the women I will ask to
share their stories. These are women who have experienced Her through their whole being: mind, body, and soul. As others hear these stories, perhaps they will be stirred to remember their own experiences of Her, or awaken to the possibility of experiencing Her.

**Rationale**

>You can’t long for what you don’t know. You can only feel the longing, and wait. (Leanard, 2003, p. 12)

Why research women’s stories of their transpersonal experiences with the Divine Feminine? There are many reasons that range from the individual to the global. Below, I explain some of the reasons why this research is important.

**Women’s voices.** First of all, why women’s stories? Women’s voices are slowly becoming more prominent in the field of psychology, yet they are still under-represented. Individuals such as Carol Gilligan, Jean Baker Miller, Irene Pierce Stiver, Clarissa Pinkola Estes, and Joan Borysenka have helped us understand human development, relationships, psychological and spiritual health from the perspectives of women (Borysenka & Dveirin, 2007; Estes, 1995; Gilligan, 1993, 2003; Miller & Stiver, 1997). Until the 1970’s, most psychological theories and models were created and interpreted by men, and we have understood psychology largely through a male lens.

Furthermore, an analysis of the Journal of Transpersonal Psychology suggests that women writers, authoring 25% of the articles, are still underrepresented (Hartelius, Caplan, & Rardin, 2008). Hartelius et al. (2008) state that “there is no way one can have a fully informed understanding of the feminine that is within and around human culture without the strong participation of women” (p. 9). It is particularly relevant that research on the Divine Feminine be centered in women’s voices.

This research will increase the scholarly literature of women’s voices in the field of psychology, and in particular, in the field of transpersonal psychology. This research will also add perspectives on the Divine Feminine, the transpersonal, psycho-spiritual development, and meaning-making that may be unique to women.
Transpersonal psychology and spiritual competence. Transpersonal psychology is also an under-represented field within psychology, yet it is becoming increasingly important for counsellors and psychotherapists to expand their spiritual competence in order to stay in integrity with multi-cultural competence, one of Counselling Psychology’s aspirations. Spirituality evolves with the values of society, and spirituality and culture are mutually informative (Daniels & Fitzpatrick, 2013). “The cross-pollination of the world faiths has given rise to a more universal understanding of spirituality, with mysticism, intuitive knowledge, and transpersonal psychology becoming popular in meeting clients’ spiritual needs” (Lines, 2002, p. 102). Lines (2002) affirms that there is a need for spiritual competence in counselling, especially for clients who are exploring their personal spirituality and life-meaning through “different and thicker narratives” (p. 102). Furthermore, higher levels of spirituality have been linked to greater well being (Daniels & Fitzpatrick, 2013).

A recent survey of 342 Registered Clinical Counsellors in British Columbia revealed that spirituality was important in the participants’ lives and their work with clients (Plumb, 2011). The participants also supported the concept of a positive relationship of spirituality to mental health, physical health, and community health. Furthermore, Walsh and Vaughan (1993) state that transpersonal experiences often produce dramatic, enduring, and beneficial psychological changes and that “they can provide a sense of meaning and purpose, resolve existential quandaries, and inspire compassionate concern for humankind and earth” (p.8). Hickson and Phelps (1998) add that clients in emotional crisis often give attention to spiritual domains as they attempt to navigate through this time. In addition, Hickson and Phelps (1998) assert that women’s spirituality has distinct qualities and that practitioners need to understand spiritual beliefs from the perspective of diversity.

Women’s spirituality and the awakening of the Divine Feminine have been adding to developments in religious thought (Funderburk & Fukuyama, 2002). For example, Funderburk and Fukuyama (2002) summarize: 

Spirituality, feminism, and multiculturalism encourage the examination of socially, culturally, and cognitively constructed worldviews and beliefs. They collectively advocate a process of conscious awareness of these internal beliefs as well as external structures, which institutionalize or compartmentalize these constructs. All three processes are interested in liberating and individual and transforming oppression and
suffering in society and accomplish this, in part, by deconstructing “social realities.”

This focus and process can be seen as distinct from the rules of knowing and being in Western culture, which are shaped by patriarchy, hierarchy and oppression. (p. 8)

In particular, “Women’s spirituality emphasizes personal experience, empowerment, and liberation in the context of patriarchal values” (Funderburk & Fukuyama, 2002, p. 6).

Warwick (2002) suggests that the relationship to the Divine is a unique relationship which may impact the development of a women’s identity, and that learning to explore clients’ spiritual conceptualizations and relationships provides a way to strengthen women’s sense of self in relation to the Divine, themselves, and other people. Warwick has found that the relationship her clients have with close others parallels the type of relationship they have with the Divine. This research will add to the under-represented field of transpersonal psychology, as well as enrich counsellors’ and psychotherapists’ multi-cultural competence in the realm of spirituality and the transpersonal through the voices of women.

The Divine as feminine.

Women must discover the divine female essence within themselves.... When a woman reclaims her divine identity, she does not need to seek outer sources of approval, for a firm, unshakable basis for self-esteem emanates from the depths of her own being. (Shaw, 1994, p. 41)

Similar to the study of psychology being rooted in men’s way of knowing, we are emerging from a culture (North American) that has been steeped in a predominantly male image of the Divine. In the North American culture, there has been a pervasive religious history that portrays a male god as supreme, and the predominant images of the Divine as masculine. Many women feel that to reclaim their wholeness, it is paramount to be able to re-image the Divine as feminine (Ruether, 2005). Goldenberg (1979) asserts that “A culture that maintains a masculine image for its highest divinity cannot allow its women to experience themselves as the equals of its men” (p. 22). Goetz (2010) acknowledges that religious images and rituals can carry transformative power and promote healing, but when contemporary women cannot find such resources in mainstream traditions, they will seek out other spiritual communities. Reilly (1995) adds that growing up female in a male defined religion excludes women and girls from recognition, roles with power, or identification with a masculine God image. This invisibility contributes to the spiritual wounding of girls and women (Funderburk & Fukuyama, 2002).
Goetz (2010) boldly states that “contemporary women have deep spiritual needs that are not being met by mainstream religious traditions” (p. 148). Authors who contributed to the book “Woman Soul: The Inner life of Women’s Spirituality”, write of a profound personal need to see the feminine reflected in the godhead. Williamson (1993) contends that “A powerful tool for the reclamation of our glorious feminine identity is the worship of female gods” (p. 19). Shambhavi Lorain Chopra, Clarissa Pinkola Estés, Naomi Goldenberg, Carol Christ, and Starhawk are examples of some women who have already contributed to the process of helping us re-image and relate to the Divine through female symbols, form, and experience, and they attest to the movement towards greater wholeness and balance that result (Chopra, 2006; Christ, 2004; Estes, 1995; Goldenberg, 1979; Starhawk, 1979). This research will continue the work of relating to the Divine as Feminine through form, image, and experience which many see as vital to women’s growth towards wholeness. It is my belief that this is vital to men’s growth towards wholeness as well – that ultimately the balancing of the Divine Masculine and Divine Feminine is enhancing for all human and sentient beings, and our manifest world. Perot (2008) affirms that the re-emergence of the Divine Feminine is “significant for the spiritual, psychological, and evolutionary growth of males and females” (p. 10).

**Individual to global implications.** As individuals become more aware of what the Divine Feminine is through current descriptions of how She is embodied, they can start to cultivate and integrate those lost or forgotten aspects within themselves. As these lost aspects are reclaimed, a richer and more wholesome relationship with oneself is grown into. As individuals become more whole, their relationships to themselves, others, and the environment shifts. On a societal and global level, experiencing and embodying aspects of the Divine Feminine (such as deep connection and living with nature as opposed to conquering and controlling nature, circle collaborative relationships as opposed to hierarchical competitive relationships) can lead to a transformed world based on power with rather than power over processes. Coleman (2005) asserts, “For some, the Goddess promises to solve Western culture’s problems by creating a new, more female-valuing symbolic structure” (p. 126).

Concerning our connection with matter, body, and earth, connecting with and affirming the Divine Feminine includes creating a new relationship not only with our own bodies, but with the Earth Body. As Christ (2007) states, reclaiming the Divine Feminine is seen as personal and political, it is a restoring of not only the body but the world-body. Stromsted (2001), who has
researched and explored the development of embodied feminine consciousness through Authentic Movement, agrees that like the planet, our ravaged bodies and feminine psyches need to be understood in an entirely new way. Goldenberg (1979) asserts that psychology and different strands of feminist religion can work together to help advance the healing of the split between mind and body. As we heal this mind/body split, we also start to heal our profound disconnection from Mother Earth (Starhawk, 1979). Bolen (2004) feels that for the body to be considered sacred once again, the Goddess must return, because it is through a Goddess consciousness that matter can be perceived as having a sacred dimension.

Researching and bringing into consciousness the Divine Feminine has not only individual, but cultural, political, and global implications. Could it be that disconnection from the Divine Feminine is connected to our disconnection from our bodies and the Earth Body? How could re-connecting with the Divine Feminine help with environmental crisis? How about the political structures which are based on a hierarchy, power over processes, and immersed in patriarchy? Could the imbalance of (namely absence of) the Divine Feminine in relation to the Divine Masculine over the past several thousand years have had a piece to play in this?
Sharing stories as a doorway to expansion and evolution. As we share stories of the Divine Feminine, we open up possibilities for others to re-image and relate to the Divine through female symbols, form, and experience. Christ (2006) has found that women who have rediscovered the power of the Goddess feel She is a symbol of the affirmation of the legitimacy and beauty of female power. Through exploring women’s stories and experiences of the Divine Feminine, we expand our consciousness and provide the possibility for dormant innate energies to be activated resulting in living a fuller life. Bolen (2004) states that “we see ourselves reflected in another women’s experience, and we become conscious of some aspect of ourselves we were not aware of before” (p. 3). As a Jungian analyst, Bolen has witnessed the powerful effects of recognizing different aspects of the Goddesses within one’s self with many clients. Simply reading about Goddesses is new territory for consciousness raising for and about women (Bolen, 2004). “Story is the way we give shape to our experiences, both when we reflect on them ourselves and when we relate them to others” (Goldenberg, 1979, p. 118). Woodman and Mellick (1998) remind us that as women, we teach and pass on our wisdom through story. Kidd (1996) adds that in order to heal, “we need to tell our stories and have them witnessed” (p. 172). Furthermore, as we are constantly evolving, these contemporary experiences will shed light on where we are at now in the evolutionary process. And through sharing these transformational stories, consciousness is raised, new possibilities can be imagined, and these imaginations can become reality; this is creation, evolution, and expansion of consciousness in-process. Gadon (2006) shares her experience:

I experienced the power of shakti--cosmic energy as a female force. And I could never go back to my old ways of seeing and being in the world. I did not understand what had happened to me then. It was only years later when I was studying Indian culture in Chicago that I became aware of the cultural and political implications of my growing awareness of the sacred female. God was in me. My body and sexuality were sacred….I discovered the power of the integration of body, mind, and spirit. (p. 6)

Summary

As a transpersonal psychotherapist who has personally and professionally witnessed the life-enhancing and transformative effects that experiencing and embodying the Divine Feminine creates, it is my hope that this research project will increase knowledge and awareness of how women’s stories of their transpersonal experiences with the Divine Feminine can manifest, and
subsequently enhance and transform lives. I believe this will support individual evolution towards greater psychological, emotional, physical, and spiritual wholeness – which in turn influences and transforms our relationship with *all that is*. Exploring, remembering, and reclaiming the Divine Feminine will change our relationship with nature, animals, and people – and has profound implications for the evolution of society of which we are all deeply a part of.

Likewise, I feel this research will increase psychotherapists’, counsellors’, and educators’ awareness of transpersonal experiences, the variety of ways in which these experiences manifest, and revelations of how these experiences produce enduring beneficial change; the purpose is to maintain personal and professional competence in the realm of spirituality. Furthermore, in North America, society in general has been raised in a culture that privileges male voices, and that has predominantly related to the Divine as Masculine. Raising women’s voices through the representation of the Divine as Feminine can open access to vital aspects of one’s Self. Many feel that remembering and embodying the Divine Feminine are keys to healing the mind/body split which affects how we relate to our own bodies as well as to the Earth Body.

And finally, I would like to add that as we all become more aware of and integrate the Divine Feminine, there is the possibility of Heiros Gamos (sacred marriage). Herios Gamos is possible when the Divine Masculine and the Divine Feminine are held in balance. “Although the masculine and feminine qualities of the Divine are ultimately One, the sacred marriage can only occur after there has been a differentiation of the masculine and the feminine principles” (Qualls-Corbett, 1988, p. 82). Exploring, understanding, and experiencing the Divine Feminine is a piece of this process.
Chapter II: Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to explore the Divine Feminine, including the history of the Divine Feminine, several predominant archetypes of Her, representations of Her through Vedic culture, women’s experiences of Her, and women’s ways of understanding and coming to know Her. This exploration will provide background and context for contemporary women’s stories of their experiences of the Divine Feminine.

As a middle-class, able-bodied, Caucasian, female transpersonal psychotherapist continuing to practice and study Counselling Psychology in Canada, I see profound potential for healing and growth towards wholeness in women and men as we come to understand, experience, and embody the Divine Feminine. Throughout this literature review I have purposefully selected almost exclusively women’s voices for two reasons: Women’s voices are still under-represented in the field of Counselling Psychology (and in society in general), and women are the embodiment of the Divine Feminine; therefore, I believe we can come to know Her nature more directly through women’s voices. For example, though I believe that the qualities of the Divine Feminine (and Divine Masculine) are within every one of us and are not gender dependent, most individuals who identify as women live a life influenced by processes unique to women, such as menstruation, child-birth, and menopause. I invite you to read with a curious and open heart about these ideas and experiences of the Divine Feminine as seen and experienced through women. Welcome to this brief journey of exploration of ideas of what the Divine Feminine is, experiences of Her, and what relevance She holds.

Historical Backdrop

In this review, I’ve included some historical and cosmological worldviews that can enrich understanding, spark curiosity, and expand the discovery process of the Divine Feminine. Following, I present a cosmological worldview which predicts and affirms the re-emergence of the Divine Feminine that is presently being experienced. At this very present time in history, humanity is experiencing the re-emergence of the Divine Feminine (Northrup, 2011). I then summarize a brief history of pre-patriarchal times, sometimes referred to as matriarchy or the time of the Great Mother.
**Cosmological worldview.** According to some astrological, spiritual, and indigenous knowledge systems, we are in an auspicious time as we have recently transitioned from the Piscean Age into the Aquarian Age (George, 1992; Melchizadeck, 2008). The transition into the Aquarian Age relates to the Precession of the Equinox (POE), which is a wobble in the Earth’s axis that completes a full revolution approximately every 26,000 years. Every 2,160 years, the POE enters a new constellation (moving through the 12 constellations over the 26,000 years). We have just completed the dark moon phase (the ending) of the Piscean Age, as well as at the end of an entire 26,000 year polar precessional cycle (George, 1992). As we moved into the beginning of the Aquarian Age (the specific date was December 12, 2012) there was a corresponding shift towards the energy of the Divine Feminine (Melchizadeck, 2008). “Not only is this a shift of spiritual power from the male to the female, but it is also a spiritual power shift from Tibet and India to Chile and Peru” (Melchizadeck, 2008, p. Xiii). The latter phenomenon is due to the shift of the Earth’s base energy: every 13,000 years (half-way through one full POE wobble), the Earth’s base energy coming from its centre moves to a new location on its surface (Melchizadeck, 2008). Individuals who are intuitively and sensitively connected with the earth have witnessed effects of and felt this energetic shift.

George (1992) adds an interesting perspective and cosmological worldview. She proposes that the disappearance of the Goddess throughout the last 5,000 years (to be explored in the following section) can be viewed within the context of the Goddess’ own lunation cycle (in this case, Her dark phase). From this context, George theorizes a 40,000 year lunation cycle – which would place the emergence of the Goddess at the beginning of the Upper Paleolithic in 38,000 Before Common Era (BCE). The Neolithic Revolution beginning around 8,000 BCE would correspond to the last-quarter phase of this lunation cycle. The third millennium BCE was the critical transitional period between matriarchal and patriarchal cultures. It marked not only the dark moon phase of the Goddess’ 40,000 year lunation cycle, but it also coincided with another major shift within the 26,000 year precessional cycle: the Age of Taurus, which gave way to the Age of Aries (George, 1992).

The Sumerians, Tibetans and Hindus have also recorded the movements of the POE, and the Tibetans and Hindus placed great importance on the twelve divisions and refer to them as *Yugas*, meaning periods of time. Although these ideas may seem a little far-fetched for some, it is important to be aware of knowledge and theories that come from and through other ways of
knowing – ways of knowing that are quite foreign to patriarchal and Western paradigms. *This is crucial for understanding the Divine Feminine and for evolution of consciousness.*

**Pre-patriarchy to patriarchy.** Evidence of humanity worshipping a female deity who became personified in the symbolism of the Goddess goes back far as the beginning of the Upper Paleolithic, 40,000 years ago (George, 1992; Perot, 2008; Ruether, 2005). During this time, humanity perceived the Great Goddess as an organizing principle of the universe who embodied all the forces of life, death, and rebirth. The primary mythology centered around nature as a Great Mother who gave life and took it away – She was creator and destroyer (Bolen, 2004; Ruether, 2005; Woodman & Dickson, 1996).

With the emergence of ego consciousness, humans began to separate from the Great Mother, and matriarchy evolved into a more conscious form of Goddess worship (Woodman & Dickson, 1996). This was the Neolithic Age, around 10,000 B.C. to 5,500 B.C., when the cult of the Goddess grew and became more organized into a religion, which permeated all of society (Perot, 2008). The Neolithic Age is differentiated from the Paleolithic Age by the development of agriculture and the domestication of animals. The Goddess appeared in many different cultures throughout the ancient world, known by many names. For example, She was worshiped as Inanna in the Far East, as Isis and Maat in Egypt, as Demeter and Aphrodite in Greece, as Shakti and Durga in India, as Tara in Tibet, and Kwan Yin in China and Japan. The feminine Goddess later evolved into the Virgin Mary, Sophia, and Shekinah of Christian and Judaic cultures. In societies where She was worshipped, women held esteemed roles as priestesses, leaders, healers, midwives, and diviners.

The period around 3,500 BCE to 3,000 BCE, also called the Bronze Age, was a critical time. Goddess cultures that flourished around the world for over 35,000 years began to decline (George, 1992; Perot, 2008; Qualls-Corbett, 1988; Woodman & Dickson, 1996). This period marks the beginning of patriarchy: Predominant mythology shifted away from the earth towards the sky, and power became centralized in the sun God; God as male became the dominant symbol of divinity. Research in the fields of theology, archaeology, art history, and mythology have uncovered evidence that points to a transition in the predominant religious and political structures that governed humanity around 3,000 BCE where matriarchal societies, which worshipped Goddesses of the earth and moon, gave way to patriarchal societies (George, 1992). The “disenthronement” of the goddesses, begun by the Indo-European invaders from around
3,000 BCE, was finally accomplished by the Hebrew, Christian, and Moslem religions that later arose (Bolen, 2004). Perot (2008) concurs that for the last 2,000 to 4,000 years God has been depicted as masculine in gender due in part to the influence of three major religions of today: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. The Goddesses were not completely suppressed, but incorporated into the religions of the invaders. Qualls-Corbett (1988) summarizes this history succinctly:

Through the ages the pendulum has swung from a matriarchal to a patriarchal social structure; from goddess worship or pantheism to the worship of one supreme god; from a morality based on the supremacy of body and matter to a morality based on the supremacy of spirituality. Rationality came to predominate over feeling and the nonlinear, creative force of nature. (p. 51)

In recent history (the past half century), I propose that we have been witnessing a rebirth of the Goddess. “Since the beginnings of the Women’s Liberation Movement and the rebirth of women’s spirituality in the early 1970’s, individuals are reawakening to the beauty, wisdom, and strength of the feminine” (George, 1992, p. 62). Perot (2008) adds, “It has only been in the last few decades that the idea of a Divine Feminine is once again becoming popular and can be discussed openly without fear of reprisal, at least in most of the Western world” (p. 9). This awakening of women’s spirituality and consciousness of the Divine Feminine can be the awakening of a new feminine center of consciousness in the human psyche due to natural evolutionary and cosmological cycles. Many men and women who are working toward the new paradigm find an image through the Goddess, who comes out of the unconscious to guide them (Woodman & Dickson, 1996). I now turn to exploring contemporary ideas, experiences, and ways of understanding the Divine Feminine.

**Explorations of the Divine Feminine at the Dawn of the Aquarian Age**

_Vulnerable and alone, infinitely at the mercy of whatever was to happen, I knew it was not my will, not my love, but Her will, Her love, that there was some meaning to my life infinitely beyond anything I had ever imagined, and that my delicate body – in all its ugliness and all its beauty – was the temple through which I had come to know Her on this earth._

*(Woodman, 1985, p. 181)*

I have chosen to explore the Divine Feminine in several of Her predominant aspects that best capture what is prevalent in recent (past 40 years) literature. I will touch briefly upon the Divine Feminine as Mother, Virgin/Maiden, and Crone, and then more in-depth on the Divine
Feminine as the Dark Goddess. I will also devote a section to exploring Vedic perspectives of the Divine Feminine. This piece is included because cross-cultural views enhance and broaden our understanding, because Hindu and Indian goddesses are increasingly becoming known due to the popularity of yoga, and because my personal experience with the Divine Feminine is framed within a Vedic worldview. Finally, I will discuss how nature-based spiritualities and indigenous cultures tend to implicitly nurture close connection and deep relationship with the Divine Feminine – largely through recognition of body, Earth, animals, and all of matter as Sacred.

**The Triple Goddess: Mother, Virgin, and Crone.** The triple Goddess is a common description used to describe three aspects of the Divine Feminine: Mother, Virgin, and Crone. Here I explore the mother/virgin/crone archetypes primarily through the view of Marion Woodman, a Jungian analyst. Insights into archetypes are helpful in relation to women’s (and men’s) psycho-spiritual development, which are often of direct interest and relevance to counselling and psychotherapy. In fact, I have found that Jungian understanding of the Divine Feminine (and Divine Masculine) archetypes are solid starting points for counsellors and psychotherapists who want to integrate this type of understanding into their work. A brief description of the Mother, Virgin, and Crone archetypes of the Divine Feminine along with examples follows.

**The Divine Feminine as Mother.** The Mother aspect or archetype of the Divine Feminine, when operating in balance, represents the nurturing, life-giving, creating, caring, warm, and receiving energy of the Divine Feminine. When out of balance, there is either lack or excess of the qualities of the Mother archetype. For example, an excess of the Mother aspect can be seen as the devouring mother. If we get stuck in this excess, we can lose our creativity and other life-giving aspects of the Divine Mother.

In a developmental context, Woodman and Dickson (1996) assert that when the ego is strong enough to relate to the mother without losing its own identity, the Mother becomes the source of all creativity. In therapy, often the therapist must hold the role of the loving mother until the great and loving Goddess has become a reality in the client’s psyche, and then “out of this reality comes a love affair with life and sheer delight in creativity” (Woodman & Dickson, 1996, p. 27). Woodman and Dickson (1996) also hypothesize that relationships in our culture are in crises around mothering, there is **too much** mothering, coupled with too little of the Virgin and Crone aspects of the Divine Feminine. As a result, many people are developmentally
(emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually) boys and girls in adult male and female bodies. Later relationships then tend to be heavily influenced by individual projections; for example, men and women marry their ‘mother’ or ‘father’ in an attempt to complete developmental processes that were not completed as children and teen-agers. As well, some studies indicate that women who have primarily identified themselves with mothering their children or partners experience the greatest difficulty in adjusting to the physiological and psychological demands that the rite of menopause brings into the third stage of a woman’s life (George, 1992). When one overly identifies with being a mother or being mothered, other aspects are repressed and show up in shadow material.

Comas-Diaz (2008) recounts a powerful story in which a client experiences the Divine Feminine as Mother. The client sees La Morenita Guadalupe (our Little Brown Lady of Guadalupe) in a vision – first rocking her as a child, and then later merging with her own mother, who died when she was a small child. Through several vision experiences with this image of the Divine Feminine as La Morenita Guadalupe, the client felt a profound love for herself, as a mother would love a child. Once she experienced this, she was able to feel whole enough (Virgin archetype) to enter into a relationship with another man. She had effectively integrated the mother within her, which made room for becoming one-onto-herself (Virgin) which in turn allowed her to enter into a mature relationship with a partner.

Doreen Virtue, a clairvoyant and doctor of psychology, had numerous experiences with Mother Mary of the Christian tradition when she visited Lourdes, France (Virtue, 2005). She was visiting the Grotto of Massabielle, the same grotto where Bernadette, a 14 year old girl had started seeing visions of Mother Mary in 1858. Bernadette received instructions from Mother Mary to dig a hole in the dirt. Water filled the hole and it became a natural-spring well where many miraculous healings occurred. When Doreen was visiting this grotto, she began crying as she was flooded with “such sweet, pure, loving, and ecstatically nurturing energy” (Virtue, 2005, p. 137). As she sat down in the grotto, she had an intimate conversation with Mary where she was told of the power of prayer and of the importance of showing love and being way-showers for children by being a role model of compassion, courage, and respect for self, life, and others. The next day Doreen returns to the grotto and receives further instruction from Mother Mary: “True equality comes from compassion, which is touching and feeling the Divine within yourself and every person…be a strong, purified, and loving leader. No longer forsake the feminine”
This experience exemplifies the balanced aspect of the Mother aspect of the Divine Feminine – loving, compassionate, and caring towards all of life.

**The Divine Feminine as Virgin.** The Virgin archetype is expressed through a woman who is whole within herself; she is *one- unto- herself* (Estés, 1995). This description of the Virgin aspect of the Divine Feminine is distinctly different from the common understanding of virgin as one who has not had sexual intercourse. The Divine Feminine as Virgin is connected to and led by her most profound needs and by ideals and attitudes that come from *within*. She is not contaminated by external circumstances or overly affected by criticism (Qualls-Corbett, 1988). She can fully emerge once the Mother has been integrated within one’s self. The Virgin lives spontaneously from the emotions and values that are grounded in her own musculature; she is full of her own life force and full of potential. “She is born from the womb of the conscious mother within us.... The Virgin carries the new consciousness – the consciousness that may radically shift the consciousness of the planet” (Woodman & Dickson, 1996, p. 10). Women who are recognizing and coming into their own power are connecting with the Virgin archetype of the Divine Feminine (Woodman & Sharp, 1993). The Virgin is also sometimes referred to as the Maiden.

A myth of Aphrodite and Psyche exemplifies the process of coming into the Virgin energy. Aphrodite gives Psyche three tasks that appear to be humanly impossible, but Psyche completes them all and comes into her Self, her own power, throughout this process. From her adventures in Hades, Psyche learns that she dare not separate her body from her spirit, that she does not have enough energy to help everyone she meets, and that she cannot rescue other people from their destiny and that trying to do so can undermine their strength (Woodman & Dickson, 1996). In recent North American culture, the Virgin’s full expression is often not accepted. For example, if a woman is sweet and nice, she is accepted, but if she is assertive and sexual, she often receives derogatory comments such as “bitch” and “whore” (Quails-Corbett, 1988). This will be discussed further in the section on the Sacred Prostitute, an aspect of the Dark Goddess.
The Divine Feminine as Crone. The Crone is the third aspect of the Triple Goddess. She evolves out of the conscious Mother and the conscious Virgin. The Crone has learned to accept the surrender of her ego desires and, having accepted her own destiny, she is free and fearless. She has learned to love without any personal agenda and so makes an excellent guide. “The beauty and the horror of the whole of life are held together in paradox and in love. She can hold the container in which we can experience our own shadow rage without destroying ourselves or others” (Woodman & Dickson, 1996, p. 11). It is not so much age that defines the Crone as experience. The Crone can afford to be honest. She’s not playing games anymore. She brings you into that place where outer conflicts dissolve and you can experience your essence (Woodman & Mellick, 1998). The Crone is also closely related to Sophia – the Divine Feminine as the embodiment of Wisdom.

An experience Marion Woodman had with Sophia, the aspect of the Divine Feminine associated with Wisdom and the Crone, follows. In a dream, she clearly heard a voice ask, “How does it feel on the eve of becoming everything you’ve fought against all your life?” (Stromsted, 2001, p. 52). In that moment, Marion realized she had fought the feminine all her life. An overwhelming sense of love healed her: “I’d never known this kind of love before – pure, transcendent – feminine transcendence from below” (Stromsted, 2001, p. 52). When asked how she identified this love as feminine, Marion replied that it was soft and warm and she could relax into it. She elaborated that it was sinuous and flexible, there was complete surrender, and she was completely immersed. Speaking of the same experience, Marion continues:

That nonrational knowing, which is being known, is what brings the heights and depths together. In that wholeness, healing lies. Every cell remembers its health. Without ego interference, psyche perceives light in matter. That was the dawn of becoming what I had fought against all my life. The sweetness of my body surrendered to Her love. In being known, I knew myself as part of the one. (Woodman & Dickson, 1996, p. 191)

In conclusion, it is relevant to comment on how the moon is a strong symbol for the Triple Goddess. The waxing moon is seen as the Virgin, the full moon as the Mother, and the waning moon as the Crone. Linking the Goddess to the cycles of the moon fosters an acceptance of psychological change (Goldenberg, 1979). Women weave in and out of these aspects of the Divine Feminine throughout life; for example, one may expect the Virgin archetype to emerge before the Mother archetype, but for many women, the full expression of the Virgin archetype
often does not emerge until after they have identified with, related to, and integrated the Mother archetype. Now I move on to explore the Dark Goddess, which also includes the Virgin (the woman who is fully one- unto-herself) and to the Crone (the wise woman, truth-teller, healer, and transformer). The Virgin and the Crone are aspects of the Divine Feminine that have been repressed and seen as threats in patriarchal times (George, 1992; Perera, 1981); thus, they are associated with the Dark Goddess.

**The Divine Feminine as the Dark Goddess.**

*She is often afraid. She is alive*  
*here in the darkness. She is afraid*  
*someone will find her life and call it death...*  
*Leonard, 2003, p. 32*

The Dark Goddess is the *most* common aspect of the Divine Feminine written about in recent literature. The Dark Goddess is associated with aspects of the Divine Feminine that have been repressed, such as sexuality and death; both are potent forms of transformation, and each are exemplified in the Virgin and Crone respectively. The Dark Goddess is also associated with the shadow aspects of the Divine Feminine, which emerge due to repressed or unbalanced energies. For example, She may be the devouring Mother, the profane Virgin/Prostitute, and the Crone who uses her psychic powers for evil. The Crone as a *phase* also represents the Dark Goddess, as does the waning cycle of the moon. In this case, the Dark Goddess is not representing what is repressed or the shadow side. She is representing a normal phase (death or moving towards death) in the on-going cyclical process of life, death, and rebirth. The following is an exploration of the Dark Goddess as expressed through the Black Madonna, through the Sacred Prostitute, and through women’s blood mysteries.
**The Dark Goddess as the Black Madonna.** The Black Madonna is the iconic remains of the ancient goddess worship blended into Christianity (Comas-Diaz, 2008). The Black Madonna (a) stands for female sexuality in the journey to wholeness; (b) is known as the bearer of pleasure and love; (c) is the embodiment of fecundity, healing, intuition, and ancient wisdom; (d) brings forth, nourishes, protects, heals, receives at death, and; (e) facilitates the unfolding of internal guidance (Comas-Diaz, 2008). In addition, “contemporary feminists have reinterpreted the Black Madonna as a source of justice, empowerment, reconciliation, and liberation” (Comas-Diaz, 2008, p. 6). The Black Madonna manifests in sexuality, in childbirth, in nature – the earthiest sides of our womanhood (Woodman & Mellick, 1996). She accepts Her body as chalice for spirit, presides over the sacredness of matter, and represents the meeting of sex and spirit. Many of these characteristics of the Black Madonna are also shared with Mary Magdalene (Ruether, 2005).

Comas-Diaz (2008) worked with a client who had an inner experience of seeing a dark woman calling to her from the bottom of a lake. This image was La Morenita, Guadalupe, the Black Madonna of the Americas. According to Comas-Diaz, working with and integrating this image of the Black Madonna promoted “recovery, healing, and transformation” and helped her client “reconcile the mother-daughter split, reclaim her sexuality, and reconnect with her spirituality” (2008, p. 17). This awakening of the inner Black Madonna also facilitated the unfolding of internal guidance. For Comas-Diaz (2008), integration of the Black Madonna into our consciousness promotes resilience in the struggle against sexism, oppression, racism, and materialism.
The Dark Goddess as the Sacred Prostitute and sexuality. Qualls-Corbett (1982) gives a compelling history of the Sacred Prostitute, and her place now in our consciousness. The Sacred Prostitute relates to aspects of the Divine Feminine that are instinctive, erotic, and dynamic. In pre-patriarchal times, there were sacred prostitutes and temple priestesses whose purpose was to guarantee the continuation of life and love. “She touched basic regenerative powers, and thereby, as the goddess incarnate, assured the continuity of life and love. The sacred prostitute was the holy vessel wherein chthonic and spiritual forces united” (Qualls-Corbett, 1982, p. 40). Some feel that with the loss of the Sacred Prostitute came the loss of the feminine form as sacred, and the relationship of the sacred to matter. The Divine Feminine as the Sacred Prostitute is the woman who is completely full in her sexuality and “has consciously come to know the spiritual side of her eroticism and lives this out according to her individual circumstances” (Qualls-Corbett, 1982, p. 74). In this we can see how the Sacred Prostitute is related to the Virgin archetype: one who is completely “one unto herself”.

Northrup (2005), who promotes the healing of the mind-body and sexuality-spirituality splits, affirms that sexuality is the connection with our life force, and that it is an opening to the Divine. Speaking specifically of the female genital organs, Northrup (2011) states that the places humans are taught to be most afraid of are the places that hold the most power and pleasure. She goes on to emphatically remind us that our bodies are conceived in orgasm; this is our life force. Although it is generally recognized that the mind/body and spirituality/sexuality split has been deeply culturally and religiously ingrained, new stories that celebrate women’s sexuality and erotic potential are still needed. As Pellauer (2004) states: “Celebrating women’s sexuality is key to good sexual ethics…. We need many more voices raised to describe, to speculate, to linger over the meaning of our delights” (p. 182). “What we can not name, we have no power to transform” (Bonheim, 1997, p. 261). Esther Harding, as cited in Qualls-Corbett (1982), speaks eloquently about Sexuality and the Sacred Prostitute:

Through the acceptance of the power of instinct within her, while at the same time renouncing all claim to possessiveness in regard to it, a woman gains a new relation to herself. The power of instinct within her is recognized as belonging not to herself but to the nonhuman realm, to the goddess, whom we must serve, for whom her body must be a worthy vessel. From this experience is born the power to love another. Before she has undergone such an initiation, her love is no more than desire….But when she has passed
through an inner experience analogous to the ancient prostitution in the temple, the elements of desirousness and possessiveness have been given up, transmuted through the appreciation that her sexuality, her instinct, are expressions of a divine life force whose experience is of inestimable value, quite apart from their fulfillment on the human plane. (p. 87)

Leonard (2003) shares an experience with the Goddess when she was six or seven: “The Goddess came in the night in a way that I could discover a sweet experience of sex and spirit, an experience that told me as clear as clear that I exist, that I am connected, that I honour myself and am honoured, even that I am part of the divine” (Leonard, 2003, p. 16). However, later on and through much of her life, Leonard remained aware of a deep underworld where other realities operated – a kind of reality where arousal could be fulfilled only by an encounter with force, hatred, and destruction. This underworld was a major key to her spiritual development. She writes, “the remembrance of evil was necessary for my wholeness” (p. 17). And then a healing occurred for her:

An archetypal lover entered my psyche, and my fantasies came clear of violence and hatred leaving me overwhelmed with goddlessly healing love. Earth and air glowed. Underworld opened to sky. Sex was fire. Rushing water filled all my underground channels. Love was queen of heaven and earth. (Leonard, 2003, p. 17)

At first, Leonard didn’t think in terms of Goddess, and didn’t even know She existed, but as she became involved with earth-based spirituality, she began to feel a form emerging. She now sees the process of healing as re-seeing and reactivating the Goddess within that has lain dormant for so long. I add this example because it exemplifies the Dark Goddess in Her repressed or shadow forms (when arousal is paired with force, hatred, and destruction). There was first the pure innocent sexual experience as a child, and then somewhere along, sexuality pairs with force, hatred, and destruction – yet this was a necessary step for the transformation into wholeness. Northrup (2011) also shares that when women start to open up to and access their life force/sexual energy, they are often first swept with shame, which she connects with women’s history over the past 5,000 years wherein one in three women have been raped.

The Sacred Prostitute and sexuality are placed in the Dark Goddess category because these are aspects of the Divine Feminine that have largely been lost and harshly repressed in contemporary North American society. Many feel there is a connection between the shadow side
of sexuality (such as abuse, rape, and incest) and the repression of the Sacred Prostitute (Estes, 1995; Woodman & Sharp, 1993; Qualls-Corbett, 1988). It is interesting to note an earlier version of the myth of Psyche. Originally, she chose, of her own volition, to descend into the underworld. It was only through time that this myth evolved to where she was abducted, raped, and dragged to the underworld.

**The Dark Goddess in women’s blood mysteries and women’s bodies.**

*Most of us have lost the power to choose with our consciousness, but originally, we could internally choose yes or no. We could end life in the womb. I think women can still kill with a thought. We carry a life-and-death energy that is very powerful and very different from the power of the male.*

*(Donna, 1997, p. 354, in Aphrodite’s Daughters)*

Women’s blood mysteries include menstruation, birthing, and menopause, and are the core of female shamanism (George, 1992). With the industrialisation of Western culture and its alienation from nature, the spirituality of women’s body processes (blood mysteries) has been largely forgotten. Pre-patriarchal times and some indigenous and Eastern spiritual traditions provide examples of cultural practices that honour women for the cosmological power of their bodies (George, 1992; Moloney, 2009; Qualls-Corbett, 1988). Women’s psychic powers are most powerful during menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth, and come into fullness as she enters menopause (the Crone). As well, during women’s menstrual time (connected with the waning moon phase) the power of her erotic sexuality can be used for transformation, renewal, divination, healing, and magic rather than procreation (George, 1992). Bonheim (1997) was told by a priest in India that menstruating women “were not allowed to enter his temple, because they had too much fire and might literally set the building ablaze” (p. 156). George (1993) reveals:

The early Goddess-worshipping peoples understood that the dark of the moon was the Goddess’s menstrual peak, and that women, at this time, were the most magical, mysterious, and powerful….A woman’s capacity for prophecy and vision is most enhanced when she is menstruating….The sexuality that takes place during the menstrual time was ritually used for ecstasy, healing, regeneration, and spiritual illumination. (p. 209-210)

Many women in contemporary North American culture experience shame, disgust, embarrassment, and a general lack of connection with their natural bodily processes. Women feel shame when menstruation begins at puberty, and they feel shame when menstruation ceases.
at menopause (Daniluk & Browne, 2008). Moloney’s (2009) qualitative study involving ten in-depth interviews with women and seven women’s circles, explored women’s experiences of menstruation and childbirth. Women felt their bodies to be vehicles of the life force, universal energy, or the Goddess transmitting the underlying wholeness of the universe – a power mysterious and indeterminate, yet utterly trustworthy and beneficent (Moloney, 2009). Moloney found that menstrual shame was a key factor that predisposed women to approach birth feeling fearful, disempowered and vulnerable to intervention. “Redesignating menstruation as a spiritual phenomenon enabled women to heal their menstrual shame, connect with their female spirituality and give birth fearlessly and powerfully” (Moloney, 2009, p. viii). Women experienced menstruation as a sacred connection with the Divine, and birth was a transformative opening to Spirit.

Hickson and Phelps (1998) also confirm that menstruation, childbirth and menopause can be viewed as both developmentally and spiritually significant events. They contend that for women to understand their spiritual nature they must first understand their own grounding in nature and natural energies (Hickson & Phelps, 1998). When women reclaim menstruation and birth as our sacred territory, we recover our connection to nature, to the Earth and to our own life-giving power and authority. Repressed for the last two thousand years (most sources say five thousand years), these vital energies are now beginning to rise toward consciousness in the Western psyche (Stromsted, 2001). Stromsted (2001) relates how women’s blood mysteries and our relationship to our bodies in general need to be integrated:

Menstrual cycles, the intimate experience of giving birth, nursing, and other daily life events bring women that much closer to the cycles of nature as they are experienced within their own bodies. The body is the shadow of Christianity, often viewed as a manifestation of the Feminine principle…. Our present challenge is how to reintegrate mind, body, and spirit, healing the split that many women and men suffer from. (p. 53) Maloney (2009) then makes an explicit connection from personal to political (when she speaks of “this sacred aspect of the female”, she is specifically referring to the blood mysteries as previously discussed):

At this critical time in the history of our planet when climate change increasingly threatens our survival, the resurgence of this sacred aspect of the female dimension of
being can play a pivotal role in countering the destructive aspects of patriarchal modernity and restore humanity’s life-sustaining connection to the Earth. (p. ix)

Concerning women’s bodies in general, Bonheim (1997) speaks about how women need to see their bodies as sacred: “Too many women worship the goddess yet hate their own bodies, and do not walk their talk. So many women appear confident and self-assured, yet secretly hate their bodies, their breasts, their genitals” (p. 334). Esbjorn-Hargens (2004), who studied the experience of the body for contemporary female mystics, explains her own experience as feeling “a burning in the heart, an urgent desire to connect and bridge the larger world of matter and that of spirit, to inquire into that dimension where flesh and spirit are not two, but one” (p. 401). She also believes that this impulse to understand the relationship between body and spirit is both personal and collective. Connecting to the body is often accompanied by energetic awakening, reclaiming sexuality, and consciously bringing spirit into matter” (Esbjorn-Hargens, 2004).

Women connecting with their bodies are an essential part of transformation. As is now understood, unresolved physical and emotional trauma is often held in the body until it can be brought to consciousness (Stromsted, 2001). Rape of the earth-body and rape of women’s bodies go hand-in-hand, and through honouring the sacred presence within, women can refuse to participate in any kind of abuse; “To become protectors of the earth, women must become protectors of their own bodies” (Bonheim, 1997, p. 319).

I have described women’s blood mysteries as an aspect of the Dark Goddess because the heightened spirituality, psychic powers, and eroticism that is experienced during these times have largely been repressed, unacknowledged, or forgotten, and replaced by shame and discomfort. Menstruation is also associated with the waning (dark) phase of the moon. Women’s bodies in general are also associated with the Dark Goddess because our bodies (as well as men’s bodies, and matter in general) have often been split off from mind, soul, and spirit. This is also reflected in the profound disconnection with the Earth-Body.

This concludes a brief exploration of the Dark Goddess as seen in the Black Madonna, in the Sacred Prostitute and sexuality, and in women’s blood mysteries and bodies. She is associated with death, chaos, matter, sexuality, and all that has been repressed – yet to face and to embrace these aspects of Her is to enter into a fuller life. She is the waning moon, the death of the moon, and She is the transformer and change-agent. She is the Goddess of Initiation. She represents the descent into hell and the fall into madness. She is known as Inanna, the Goddess
who descends into the underworld and dies, and comes back renewed/reborn (Perera, 1981). She is the one who will shake us to our core to wake us up.

To contemplate the Black Goddess as the flux of life, death, rebirth, is to see things as they really are.... We have to enter chaos, terrifying though it might seem, if we are to find our own creativity.... To let go of the familiar landscape of our own restrictions is to risk madness. Letting go is embracing the Black Goddess, she who will open our eyes to our illusions, she who will make us see that our treasure lies in the repressed feminine energies that we once labelled weak, irrational, disorganized, supersensitive, and all the other thoughtless labels – naive, stupid, slow, melodramatic. (Woodman & Dickson, 1996, p. 181)

Recognizing the Dark Goddess in the Divine Feminine can help women reclaim their full sexuality, their psychic powers, and the acceptance of death and the cyclical process of life. A brief exploration of some women’s experiences with the Divine Feminine through nature-based spirituality follows.

**Nature-based spirituality and the connection to the Divine Feminine.**

To come face to face with your own interior landscape and recognise it as the sacred territory of the Goddess confirms an inner spiritual presence that most Western women have been out of touch with for millennia.... There is nothing supernatural about the process of discovery, merely reactivating the powers of the psyche that have lain dormant for so long. (Gadon, 1989, p. 335)

Nature-based spiritualities seem to draw individuals who are seeking stronger connection with the Divine Feminine. Earth (nature)-based spirituality is rooted in concepts such as immanence, interconnection, and community (Funderburk & Fukuyama, 2002). Nature-based spiritualities also have a deep understanding of the cycle of life. Death is not an end, it is a stage in the cycle of life that leads to rebirth, and rebirth is seen as the great gift of the Goddess, who manifests in the physical world (Starhawk, 1979). Indigenous practices inherently honour the earth, and it is not surprising that we are returning to these ancient wisdoms as we search for ways to heal ourselves and the world. “Like our planet, our ravaged bodies and feminine psyches need to be understood in an entirely new way… we can learn from ancient indigenous healing practices as well” (Stromsted, 2001, p. 53). I have included this piece on nature-based spirituality because there are many women who come to experience the Divine Feminine through this path. I will now elaborate on a few of these experiences.
Alison Leonard has written a personal narrative about a series of earth-based, feminine-orientated experiences and spiritual encounters that led her to an openness of the Divine Feminine (Leonard, 2003). The first 50 years of her life were spent discovering that the religious “myth” she grew up in was not for her. “A space lay inside me like an organ of my spiritual body, empty and waiting to be filled” (Leonard, 2003, p. 11). She feels that the culture, one which dismissed the Earth Mother and Her sister Goddesses and chose instead to revere the monotheistic male Sky God, has divided humanity from a huge part of its own nature. Jamie Funderburk, a psychotherapist who has written on feminism, multiculturalism, and psychotherapy, was reawakened to an interest in spirituality when she was exposed to “more universal, new age, non-hierarchical, and feminist informed or earth-based spiritual beliefs” (Funderburk & Fukuyama, 2002, p. 3).

Goldenberg (1979) states that “the prominence of a female divinity in all forms of witchcraft fosters psychological strength in all female witches” (p. 91). In witchcraft (another term for earth or nature-based spirituality), each woman is considered a Goddess and all of her creations are seen as holy. As well, “modern witchcraft represents a profound shift in the human tendency to imagine gods, goddesses and divine beings as forces outside human selves and to conceive of these beings as interior experiences” (Goldenberg, 1979, p. 109). There is not only an affirmation of the Goddess through outward images and symbols, but also a pulling of the projection inwards – to the realization of the Divine within.

Manning (2010) conducted a study in which she explored the meaning of life and aging for women identifying as Pagan (nature-centered spirituality), who all incorporate the Goddess/Divine Feminine into some aspect of their belief system. The focal discussion that shaped the study was how the experience of growing older for women is shaped by Paganism. Themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews demonstrate the interconnectedness between acceptance of self through aging, empowerment through spirituality, and nature as a source of the sacred. Manning (2010) states that the literature associated with spirituality, religion, and aging reflects the major and traditional patriarchal models of spirituality and religion, and she proposed that her findings high-light “a potentially unique and relatively unexplored point on the continuum of study within spirituality, religion, feminism, and aging” (p. 195). Mainly, the focus is on spiritualities embracing the Divine Feminine, which she describes as the female manifestation of spirit of the Goddess.
In further elaboration of Manning’s (2010) study, understanding the Divine-as-Self was key to these women’s abilities to celebrate themselves as women, especially as ageing women. One woman expressed how paganism freed her to accept herself as she was and that it was okay for her body to change because it is part of the cycle (Manning, 2010). There was a strong equation of the body with nature and an understanding and acceptance of the participants seeing themselves as part of life’s wheel rather than separate from it. For example, one participant wrote: “I can feel that it is okay for my body to change, it’s part of the cycle. It’s just more natural and accepting . . . this is what nature does and there is where I am now. I can be more accepting of myself and of the change that comes with age so, I celebrate it” (Manning, 2010, p. 208).

Manning (2010) concludes that the women in her study were able to embrace and celebrate their aging experience through paganism and an experience of aging that can be described as organic, natural, and holistic – uniting the body with the natural world. She postulates that the pagan women in her study offer a paradigm that is essential in understanding and capturing the richness and complexity of aging and greater human experience – a model that encourages authentic selves, empowerment, and celebration of the sacred in the mundane. One can see the connection here with the Crone in Her balanced aspect.

For Warwick (2002), who practices Wicca, the experience of connection with the Divine comes through an intuitive sense of a Presence beyond herself, and the experience of immanence in the world. A proponent of the self-in-relation theory (which sees women’s relationships as crucial to their growth and development as individuals), Warwick (2002) asserts that her relationship with the Divine empowers and helps her to continue to elaborate her identity. “Many women have found that nature-based spirituality and associated religions, which usually focus on the Deity as female as well as male, suit their development better than patriarchal, formally organized religions, especially as they move toward knowing and developing their own identities outside of social roles” (Warwick, 2002, p. 127).

**Hindu and Indian perspectives of the Divine Feminine.**

*O Goddess, by you everything is supported; by you is the world created;
By you is it all protected, and you always consume it at the end of time.*

*At the world’s emanation you have the form of creation; in its protection you have the form of steadiness;
Likewise at the end of the world you have the form of destruction, O you who consist of the World!*

*(Devi Mahatmya, 1:57)*
Hindu Goddesses have become popular in the west, primarily through the avenue of yoga. Here I present several views on and experiences of Hindu Goddesses. I include this piece because cross-cultural views enrich our understanding of the Divine Feminine as well as our multi-cultural competence. Funderburk and Fukuyama (2002) add that cross-cultural encounters can aid in one’s spiritual evolution by expanding one’s consciousness and worldview. I will briefly touch on images of the Divine through Hindu Goddesses, Shakti as the life-force that permeates and animates the manifest realm, and Kali as the Dark Goddess.

**Images of the Divine through Hindu Goddesses.** As noted in the introduction, the image of the Divine as Feminine has been lacking in North American cultural and religious history. In India, images of the Divine are both male and female; there are an abundance of both. When studying Hindu idol worship, Bailly (2000) found image as an avenue to experience God as transcendent and immanent. She further elaborates that ritual is a means to establish contact with the Divine and gain a sense of experience with the Divine. This often goes through a progression of first connecting with a material form (image), to connecting with a mental form, to connecting beyond form. This is an example of the use of image as part of the process of connecting with the Divine.

Icons of the Divine, according to Bailly (2000), are meant to represent essences of the Divine. For example, Kali embodies endings and is seen as the goddess of death and destruction. “Kali represents the dissolution of all that is decaying and illusory, giving way to the birth of wisdom….She is uncompromised reality, the core of wisdom without constriction of the false sense of niceties behind which the timid hide” (Bailly, 2000, p. 278). Kali represents the uncomfortable realms of death and rebirth, and She is called on to destroy demons, whether they be outside forces that will harm us or our own inner attachments that keep us from living from our truth. Another example, Lakshmi, the Goddess who is often paired with Vishnu, represents the preserving of creation. Bailly (2000) states that through worshipping particular forms of Gods and Goddesses, the participant contacts and participates in the transformative energy that is God.

Gross (1978) elaborates on six basic images of Hindu Goddesses, which she feels have been mostly absent in patriarchal cultures. The first image is the Goddess as an aspect of a deity that is androgynous and bisexual. For example, the Divine represented as couples, and as half woman half man. Within this, it is important to note “Goddess-imagery does not mean the loss of
the image of a male God, but rather completion of presently truncated anthropomorphic imagery” (Gross, 1978, p. 269). The second image is the Goddess as both strong and beautiful. This is exemplified in an image of Durga riding her lion or tiger and defeating the Buffalo demon. Gross (1978) contends that this second image is important for women who have internalized a false concept that femininity cannot be maintained along with strength. Durga is imaged as a beautiful woman who is simultaneously strong and victorious.

The third image is that of the Goddess that symbolizes the pairing of opposites, such as participating in the round of birth and death.

The process of cutting away all resting places, all finite attachments, though difficult and painful, is inevitably necessary for release in most Indian views... the deities most closely connected with death and destruction, Kali and Siva, are also intimately connected with revelation and release. (Gross, 1978, p. 282)

Gross (1978) emphasizes that this opposites symbolism as seen in the Hindu Goddesses, is valuable and has much to teach us. For example, in an image of Kali, it is the grotesque parts that are noticed and “neophytes usually overlook the peace-giving and gift-giving mudras of the other two hands, the beautiful hair and the halo” (Gross, 1978, p. 282-283). Such images of the Goddess represent the tension of the opposites. Fourthly, Gross (1978) asserts that the Goddess who is Mother speaks to the metaphor of divine motherhood without limiting women solely to the mother-role. It is not only what’s created by females that justifies the title mother, but “any kind of creativity or bestowing of life seems to evoke a symbolism of motherhood” (Gross, 1978, p. 284). Fifthly, the Goddess is patron of many life-pursuits: arts, learning, culture, and liberation. For example, “Lakshmi distributes wealth and good fortune, while Sarasvati promotes learning and cultured, artful living” (Gross, 1978, p. 286). And finally, Gross (1978) asserts that the Goddess images restore sexuality and aide us in becoming reconciled to and appreciating our embodied condition. Gross concludes, “By being there as female, She validates me as I am. Her limitlessness is exemplary for me. It is good to be in the image of the Goddess. That is the most important of Her many meanings” (Gross, 1978, p. 288).

The Goddess as Shakti.

Tantra defines god as formless, unmoving spirit, and goddess as spirit in motion. He is the essence within all things, while she is energy and matter. She is the form-giver, the creator, the birth mother of us all. All that moves manifests her energy, and whatever has form receives that
Shakti is the Sanskrit name used to describe the feminine life force energy, the primeval feminine energy. She is the energy that sits dormant at the base of our spine, also called Kundalini or Kundalini Shakti. According to Vedism, the manifest world is made possible because of Shakti. Shiva is the male counterpart, and without either, nothing would exist. Shiva is pure consciousness, and Shakti is what animates consciousness. Santiko (1997) explains that in Hinduism, the Gods are believed to possess a certain energy or power – which is Shakti – the feminine life force, depicted as various Goddesses: Shiva’s Shakti is called Durga, Kali, or Parvati, Vishnu’s Shakti is Lakshmi, and Brahma’s Shakti is Saraswati. The Shakti of Shiva is worshiped in various aspects. For example, Shiva’s calm materializes as Parvati, his anger as Durga, and his fierceness as Kali (Santiko, 1997).

Shakti is the life-force, the energy that animates all manifest form. The Goddesses are depictions of various aspects that this life-force materializes as. This distinction is important to remember because experiences of the Divine Feminine come in various forms. Sometimes She is experienced as Shakti – the life-force that animates all-that-is – pure energy, and sometimes She is experienced through an aspect, or archetype of the Divine Feminine, such as Mother, Virgin, Crone, Kali, and La Morenita Guadalupe.

The same thought is expressed in the notion that “the male pole of the male-female dichotomy represents passivity and potentiality, while the female pole represents activity and actuality. Called Maya-Shakti, this version of the Goddess is responsible for the manifest-manifold world or our experience, while her passive consort represents only the potential for existence” (Gross, 1978, p. 284-285). This notion is extremely widespread in Tantric Hinduism which asserts that “There is a world only because of Kali. Without her, everything would slip back into primordial potential voidness” (p. 285). In Shakta and Tantric traditions, Devi is the primordial Great Goddess; the transcendent reality that creates, sustains, and destroys the cosmos (Sinha, 2006).
**Kali and the Dark Goddess.** Kali is the most popular Goddess from Hindu culture that is heard about in North America. She represents the Dark Goddess. Psychological and religious perspectives of Her relevance follow.

Curran (2005), an English professor and Jungian analyst, posits that “the archetypal image of Kali, the terrible, devouring goddess in Hindu mythology, fills a gap in Christian monotheism insofar as it includes negative qualities that theistic dualism dissociates and attributes to Satan” (p. 172). Sinha (2006) describes Kali:

A dark, fierce, and wrathful four-armed goddess. She wears a garland of human heads, a girdle of decapitated arms and hands, and her arms hold the head of the demon Mahishasur, trishul, scimitar, and conch. With her tongue lolling out, the goddess stands over the supine body of Shiva. (p. 92)

Curran (2005) offers us religious and psychological perspectives of Kali. She feels that Christian orthodoxy and its tendency to dichotomize has the effect of putting the unconscious off limits; however, Hinduism provides us with Kali to personify what we cannot image in a Western religious perspective. She puts us in touch with a violent and aggressive and even ecstatic relish in killing and devouring – homicidal predispositions that symbolize psychic attitudes and possibilities that are the preconditions for transformation and change. (Curran, 2005, p. 174)

Furthermore, Curran (2005) proposes that Kali is the goddess of the borderline state in which chaos, the unconscious, and the psyche are undifferentiated. Kali is an image of the struggle between the ego and the unconscious in the individuation process. In Tantrism, Kali holds the tension of the opposites. She is both awful and wonderful; she is symbolic of the process of transformation, and the risk involved in individuation. Another image of Kali is Her standing in a boat that floats on an ocean of blood. The blood is the life-blood of the world of children that she is bringing forth, sustaining, and eating back. “The Tantric hero must face her in her negative aspect. If confronted courageously, she confers great power and salvation, and she can be an agent in his transformation” (Curran, 2005, p. 175). Curran likens Kali’s struggle with an eventual defeat of the demons to our own individuation process that happens over and over. We regress back to the psychically rich filthy mess, a journey to dissolution, in order to rebirth. Relating to Kali promotes the processes of inclusion, integration, and transformation (Curran,

However, I find it important to note what McDermott (2000) states: “Much of the New Age writing on Hindu goddesses (1) is based on erroneous knowledge of India and Hinduism, (2) is self-referential (quoting as “authorities” other New Age writers, few of whom have their information correct), (3) creates a static, essentialized icon of goddess worship, and (4), says more about the fertile and wounded imaginations of its western authors than it does about diety veneration in India” (726). She then asserts that “Hindu goddesses, particularly the fierce ones, represent the dark, sexual, repressed, angry sides of women that have been repressed in the West but which – if one follows the Hindu lead – can be released for creative and spiritual transformation” (McDermott, 2000, p. 723).

Summary

All my life I’ve heard ‘God is love’ without understanding that was meant. Recently I’ve come to feel that in a very real way G-d-ess is the love that flows in and between and among us.... The web is also the love that flows through creation, from G-d/ess, from us, from everywhere. The web is an affirmation and comfort, support and clear-naming. (Rose Ketterer)

I have explored some history of the Divine Feminine, as well as how She is experienced and understood through women’s dreams, blood mysteries, bodies, and sexuality, through myth, through symbol, through earth-based spirituality, and through relating to female images of the Divine. Whether it is Sophia, Kali, Shakti (life-force energy), the Virgin, the Moon, or any other of the multitude of personifications, myths, images, and energies associated with the Goddess. Ultimately, it could be stated that the intention is to reconnect with that which is innately within one’s own Self. “The Goddess doesn’t enter from outside; she emerges from deep within” (Williamson, 1993, p. 18). The outer form and symbol simply mirror and help us recognize and embody what is within. Kidd (1996) speaks of her own healing:

Healing came for me as I integrated images of a strong, powerful, compassionate Feminine Being, one who was creating the universe, creating Herself, birthing new life, and holding everything in being. For me this was the most significant factor in creating a restoration of the feminine value, dignity, and power inside – seeing female as imago dei, the image of the Divine, revealed now through women just as it had been revealed all these centuries through men. (p. 181)
With this background of information on the Divine Feminine, let us now turn to the Method for this study.
Chapter III: Method

All people worldwide become perfectly themselves in their own time and place... only in our diversity, might we survive. (Anderson & Braud, 2011, p. 304)

I chose narrative inquiry to explore the research question: “What are contemporary women’s stories of their transpersonal experiences with the Divine Feminine?” In this chapter, I describe characteristics of qualitative research in general and narrative inquiry in particular, as well as the underlying paradigms I am working from and why this type of methodology is a good fit for my research. I then explain the research process, which includes the selection of co-researchers, the interview preparation and procedures, and the interpretation and analysis. Finally, I discuss the advantages and limitations, ethical concerns, and standards of trustworthiness and rigor.

Methodology

Understanding basic characteristics of qualitative methodology is helpful in understanding narrative inquiry. In this section I introduce some of the characteristics of qualitative research, the underlying paradigm(s) for this particular research, an introduction to narrative inquiry, and how narrative inquiry in particular (and qualitative research in general) is a good fit for this research. The terms “research” and “inquiry” are used interchangeably throughout, as this reflects what is found in the literature.

Qualitative research. Qualitative research is a form of empirical science which largely comes from the human sciences (Fisher, 2006; Ponterotto, 2005; Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007). Qualitative research is *emic*, meaning that the categories emerge from the insider perspective, and *idiographic*, meaning that it produces knowledge claims about one or a very few individuals or groups (Morrow, 2007; Morrow & Smith, 2000). This type of research usually begins with research questions rather than hypotheses. Creswell (1998) adds that qualitative research is appropriate for answering questions of *how* or *what* as opposed to *why*.

Morrow (2007) asserts that qualitative research is also the most useful in understanding the meaning people make of their experience. Polkinghorne (2005) adds that in dealing with human lived experience, qualitative inquiry’s primary purpose is to describe and clarify experience as it is lived and constituted in awareness. Furthermore, qualitative methods, with their use of language, “are particularly helpful for counselling psychology research which inquires about the experiential life of the people it serves” (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 138).
As is the case in quantitative research, it is the research question in qualitative research that leads to the choice of data-gathering procedures (Morrow, 2007). The “analytic strategy begins inductively as the researcher works to understand the meanings of participants”. As themes emerge, they are tested deductively by comparing and contrasting with existing and new data (Morrow, 2007, p. 215). With this process, it is important to be sensitive to emerging findings, which may require a revision of the research design, interview questions, and other data gathering and analytic strategies.

As well, understanding the social location in relation to the research project is essential; readers are able to make decisions about how transferable the information may be to another context (Morrow, 2007). Furthermore, Morrow (2007) states that:

Identifying the researcher’s social positioning in relation to the participants in the study provides the reader with an understanding of the relative privilege and power held by the investigator and participants, as well as shedding light on the worldview of the researcher or the lens through which she or he views the participants and the phenomenon of interest. (p. 215)

These two issues of the social location of the research and the social positioning of the researcher are particularly relevant to qualitative research.

**A constructivist paradigm within qualitative research.**

*A paradigm may be viewed as a set of basic beliefs (or metaphysics) that deals with ultimates or first principles. It represents a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the ‘world,’ the individual’s place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts, as, for example, cosmologies and theologies do. The beliefs are basic in the sense that they must be accepted simply on faith (however well argued); there is no way to establish their ultimate truthfulness. (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 107)*

It is important to understand the paradigm underpinning one’s research because the paradigm determines the standards by which the research will be evaluated (Morrow, 2007). A paradigm is a “basic set of beliefs that guide action” (Guba, 1990, p 17). It includes ontological (nature of reality), epistemological (how reality is known, including the relationship between the knower and the known), and axiological (the place of values in one’s research) assumptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The methodological assumptions emerge from these three aforementioned assumptions. Guba and Lincoln (1994) see qualitative research as fitting into a post-positivistic or constructivist paradigm. Morrow (2007) finds it useful to categorize
qualitative research into three paradigms: postpositivism, interpretivism-constructivism, and ideological-critical theories.

For this research, I believe that the underlying paradigm that is most congruent with my personal standpoint, the research question and objectives, and the chosen qualitative methodology of narrative inquiry, is interpretivism-constructivism (sometimes simply termed constructivism). However, there are also elements of the ideological-critical paradigm that can be seen within this research, which I discuss later. First I will expand on the underlying assumptions of constructivism. I will also start to comment on how narrative inquiry fits into a constructivist paradigm, although the detailed exploration of narrative inquiry comes later.

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), the ontology of constructivism is relativist, meaning there are multiple realities based on mental constructions and experience, and they are local and specific in nature. Narrative inquiry ascribes to multiple realities based on mental constructions and experience. The epistemology of constructivism is transactional and subjectivist, meaning the investigator and the investigated are assumed to be interactively linked and the values of each influence the inquiry; the findings “are literally created as the investigations proceed” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). Constructivism sees knowledge as value mediated and value dependent and assumes that knowledge is created in interaction among investigator and investigated. The aim or purpose of constructivism is “understanding and reconstruction of the constructions that people (including the inquirer) initially hold, aiming toward consensus but still open to new interpretations as information and sophistication improve” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 113). Narrative inquiry is very intentional to co-construct the meaning. From both a constructivist and ideological paradigm, there is attention to subjectivity, but there is more focus on intersubjectivity or what is called participatory consciousness (Morrow, 2007). Advocacy and activism are key concepts as well, and the inquirer takes the role of participant and facilitator in this regard. For example, the researcher facilitates the representational space of marginalized voices. The nature of knowledge in constructivism holds multiple knowledges “depending on social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender factors that differentiate the interpreters” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 113). Knowledge in constructivism accumulates through the formation of more informed and sophisticated constructions. Transfer of knowledge happens through vicarious experiences. The
researchers, co-researchers, and readers of the research are all changed through a variety of levels of participation.

In addition to constructivism, I feel that the critical-ideological paradigm can be considered an undercurrent in this research. Like the interpretivism-constructivism perspective, this paradigm assumes that multiple realities exist, but it also “agrees on a ‘real’ reality related to power and oppression” (Morrow, 2007, p. 213). Critical-ideological paradigms are committed to social justice and ending oppression; therefore, their axiology can be quite value laden. Often Counselling Psychology research in multicultural, feminist, and social justice areas are influenced by this paradigm (Morrow, 2007). My particular research could be seen as assisting the ending of oppression for women, and advancing multicultural views and social justice issues.

This summarizes two paradigms that are often congruent with qualitative methodologies in general and narrative inquiry in particular. Following is an exploration of narrative inquiry including the debates regarding what is considered narrative inquiry.

**Narrative inquiry**

Narrative inquiry is an old practice that may feel new for a variety of reasons. It is a commonplace to note that human beings both live and tell stories about their living. These lived and told stories and talk about those stories are ways we create meaning in our lives as well as ways we enlist each other’s help in building our lives and communities. What does feel new is the emergence of narrative methodologies in social science research. With this emergence has come intensified talk about our stories, their function in our lives, and their place in composing our collective affairs. (Clandinin, 2006, p. 44)

Narrative as inquiry has brought up some debate about what is actually considered narrative. Following I present the variety of forms narrative inquiry can take, the distinction between narrative as method and narrative as methodology, and how narrative inquiry can be viewed as intrinsic to all research. I also present some details of what narrative inquiry usually includes.

Hendry (2010) suggests that all research is narrative, that narrative is the first and oldest form of inquiry. Narrative is not a method, but “a process of meaning making that encompasses three major spheres of inquiry: the scientific (physical), the symbolic (human experience) and the sacred (metaphysical)” (p. 72). At the most basic, “‘narrative’ means ‘to account’ and is derived from the term gno, meaning ‘to know’” (Hendry, 2010, p. 72). If inquiry (research) is understood as meaning making, then all inquiry is narrative. Understood this way, narrative is an overarching epistemology that cannot be reduced to a method; it is the primary process of
inquiry. Following I will summarize Hendry’s (2010) three spheres (sacred, symbolic, and scientific) of narrative inquiry as I believe her overarching view is a valid and important starting point, and it gives a slightly different focus than the constructivist and critical-ideological paradigms I introduced earlier.

According to Hendry (2010), the nature of knowledge in the sacred sphere is the unknowable, in the symbolic sphere is the human experience, and in the science sphere is the physical world. The aim of inquiry in the sacred sphere is to be, in the symbolic sphere is to interpret, and in the science sphere is to explain. Finally, the quality of criteria in the sacred sphere is compassion and love, in the symbolic sphere is verisimilitude, and in the science sphere is falsification. I will now present more details of the nature of knowledge, particularly of the sacred and symbolic spheres as they are most closely related to my research.

Of the sacred sphere, Hendry (2010) elaborates: “Narratives of the sacred are outside the limitations of language and reason, and include the imaginal, poetic, spiritual, paradoxical, and the mythic” (p. 73). She explains that often this type of inquiry does not provide answers, but rather seeks to open spaces and creative interpretation. The sacred sphere addresses questions that are beyond reason, and require an ontology of faith; furthermore, “sacred narratives do not require analysis or interpretation or verification” (p. 75). Speaking of the symbolic sphere of narrative inquiry, Hendry (2010) elaborates that these narratives “seek to respond to questions of human experience” and that their focus is on “understanding human experience” (p. 76). She suggests that symbolic narratives are intended to illuminate the process of becoming, and emphasizes that a balance of reason, creation, and love are at the heart of interpretation. The science narratives of narrative inquiry are based on hypothesis and falsification. What all three spheres (sacred, symbolic, and science) of narrative inquiry have in common is the search for meaning (Hendry, 2010).

Narrative, as a scholarly concept, originated in the field of literary criticism, and then migrated into the discipline of history (Bell, 2002; Bresler, 2006). Applying the concepts from literary criticism (with roots in fiction) to the scientific discipline of history led to examining the methods of all disciplines in the humanities and social sciences (Bresler, 2006). By the mid-1980s, narrative became popular within cultural psychology, largely because of the epistemological limitations of positivism (Bresler, 2006).
Narrative inquiry is based in the assumption that we make meaning in our lives through story, and that our lives are made up of multiple stories that are co-constructed (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Therefore, the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world. Narrative inquiry “is concerned with the production, interpretation and representation of storied accounts of lived experience” (Shacklock & Thorp, 2008, p. 156). Bell (2002) states that there are three assumptions behind narrative inquiry: (a) people make sense of their lives according to the narratives available to them, (b) stories are constantly changing as new events unfold, and (c) stories do not exist in a vacuum but rather are shaped by lifelong personal and community narratives. She elaborates:

Narrative inquiry rests on the epistemological assumption that we as human beings make sense of random experience by the imposition of story structures….we select those elements of experience to which we will attend, and we pattern those chosen elements in ways that reflect the stories available to us. (Bell, 2002, p. 207)

Bresler (2006) affirms the expansiveness of the term narrative. She identifies that narrative can be described as: (a) discourse, (b) articulated personal meaning, (c) meanings and interpretations that are intransigently multiple, (d) a mode of thinking, (e) a structure of organizing knowledge, (f) a vehicle in the process of education, and (g) story. Concerning the distinction of narrative as method and narrative as methodology, Bresler (2006) explains that narrative as method simply exists within language, and that “language shapes our perceptions, conceptualization, and sensitivities, our very vision of reality, and what we attend to” (p. 24) and that narrative as methodology is experienced as activity and production, not simply text. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) make another distinction: “We say that people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience” (p. 2). They add that the main interest in experience is growth and transformation in the life story that researchers and co-researchers author (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

As a story, narrative functions aesthetically, and in this sense “all forms of artistic expression – music, drama, dance, poetry, visual art, media – are ultimately forms of storytelling; they are articulations in which one describes overtly or implicitly ‘what is important,’ presenting a view of the world and of oneself” (Bresler, 2006, p. 22). However, Bell (2002) feels that narrative inquiry, in its fullest sense, requires going beyond simply telling stories; narrative
inquiry requires analytic examination of the underlying insights and assumptions the story illustrates. In addition, Bresler (2006) argues that this exposure to other ways of doing things (through narrative) is insufficient if it is not combined with empathy and respect. She also contends that emotion is key in facilitating a personal connection, which enables perception, conceptualization, and meaning making. She eloquently states:

> The aspect of personal connection in narrative, in particular, and the generative power of that connection is at the core of my conceptualization of narrative as an act of coming to understand the world empathetically, exploring, and negotiating polysemic meanings. (Bresler, 2006, p. 22)

Clandinin (2006) speaks of three dimensions of narrative inquiry: (a) the personal and social interaction, (b) the past, present, and future continuity, and (c) the place or situation. She explains that working within these three dimensions highlights the relational dimension of narrative inquiry. Narrative inquirers make themselves as aware as possible of the many layered narratives at work in their inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Data for narrative inquiry can be in the form of field notes of the shared experience, journal records, interviews, others’ observations, storytelling, letter writing, autobiographical and biographical writing, and documents which can include pictures (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). However, the interview is the most commonly used means of data gathering (Osborne, 1994; Polkinghorne, 2005). One of the starting points for narrative inquiry is the researcher’s own narrative of experience – the researcher’s autobiography (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In fact, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) assert that the researcher’s composition of her/his own narrative is central to narrative inquiry. This view shows there is a place for the researcher’s personal narrative, or what could be considered autobiography, in narrative inquiry. Wall (2008) comments that personal experience methods “justify themselves by observing that individuals do not exist apart from their social context, and for this reason personal experience can be the foundation for further sociological understanding” (p. 49). Although usually narrative inquiry is not purely a personal experience method as autoethnography is more likely to be, it can include the researcher’s personal story.
How narrative inquiry and qualitative research are a good fit. Qualitative research in general, and narrative inquiry in particular, were chosen for this research for several reasons. First of all, my intention is not to prove a hypothesis, but rather to gather rich and detailed descriptions of experiences and to discover the meaning and significance of these experiences. Second of all, narrative inquiry fits into an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm which acknowledges multiple realities and multiple truths, and a critical-ideological paradigm which acknowledges a reality of oppression. I am not only interested in revealing a variety of experiences and interpretations of the Divine Feminine; I am interested in representing stories that are often left out of mainstream counselling, psychology, and education – women’s stories, and transpersonal experiences, for example. Some purposes inherent in the act of telling (i.e. storying) are to inform, embrace, retell, remember, and engage (Riessman & Speedy, 2006). Thirdly, qualitative research in general has been considered particularly appropriate where the field of interest is characterised by complexity, ambiguity, and lack of prior theory and research (Richardson, 1996). As I have reviewed the literature, I have found that little research has been done on contemporary women’s experiences with the Divine Feminine. In fact, trying to even pin a definition on what the Divine Feminine is has been very difficult. I am researching an area characterised by complexity and ambiguity, and there is a lack of explicit connection on how this relates to the field of counselling psychology. I also believe that sharing and hearing stories is transformative in itself, and narrative inquiry affirms this view.

Furthermore, qualitative research provides the opportunity for Counselling Psychology students to conduct research that is often congruent with paradigms and methods that are more closely related to the actual practice of counselling (Morrow, 2007). McLeod (2001) adds that the “activity of doing qualitative research (identifying and clarifying meaning; learning how the meaning of aspects of the social world is constructed) is highly concordant with the activity of doing therapy (making new meaning, gaining insight and understanding, learning how personal meanings have been constructed)” (p. 16). Qualitative research also “presents possibilities for scientific inquiry into one’s own practice as a counselling psychologist” (Morrow, 2007, p. 228). “A central area of narrative study is human interaction in relationships – the daily stuff of social work, counseling, and psychotherapy” (Riessman & Speedy, 2006, p. 427). The process of remembering and retelling are key elements in counselling and psychotherapy. Narrative frameworks honour counsellors’ and psychotherapists’ professional values and ethics by valuing
time with and diversity among people (Riessman & Speedy, 2006).

I also believe that as I open to new ways of learning and seeing things, both myself and my clients are enriched. Narrative inquiry allows me to be deeply involved in this research, it allows me to interact with co-researchers on a very personal level, and it allows for the co-construction of meaning – which is transformative and knowledge-enhancing for both co-researcher and researcher. It is more accessible; there is not such a disconnect from the heart and mind, the body and soul, and the spiritual and physical.

The Research Design

In this section I explain the process of selecting co-researchers, preparing for the interview, and interpretation and analysis. I will also address trustworthiness and validity, advantages and limitations, and ethical concerns. Before delving into the aforementioned, I will self-position myself and speak about subjectivity and reflexivity, as this is essential to qualitative research and narrative inquiry.

Self-positioning. I am a fourth year PhD student in Counselling Psychology within the Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies at the University of Victoria. I work as a psychotherapist and yoga teacher. As a psychotherapist, I work primarily with adults and my theoretical orientation is humanistic, existential, and transpersonal. My research interest in the Divine Feminine emerged as a result of a combination of personal experiences, work with clients, and a spiritual practice and study based in yoga. As I ventured further into the exploration of the Divine Feminine through additional sources such as conversations, books, journal articles, and a trip to India, I learned that experiences with the Divine Feminine were changing individuals’ lives in a variety of ways. Some of the changes that individuals attributed to their experiences with the Divine Feminine included: a) a greater connection and respect for their physical bodies, b) a greater connection and respect for the earth body, c) a deeper, fuller, and more positive connection with their sexuality, d) positive birth experiences, e) a greater ability to accept death, and f) integration of shadow material and previously cut-off aspects of one’s Self (Adler, 1995; Bonheim, 1997; Chopra, 2006; Estes, 1995; Maloney, 2009; Perera, 1981; Qualls-Corbett, 1988; Ruether, 2005; Woodman & Dickson, 1996). As I read and heard stories of experiences with the Divine Feminine, my own awareness and experience of Her deepened. I became more curious about how hearing stories of experiences with the Divine Feminine may be helpful in the field of counselling psychology, for both therapists and clients.
In my mid-thirties, I had a Kundalini awakening. A Kundalini awakening is a term used to describe a variety of transpersonal experiences that occur when the energy that lies dormant at the base of our spine awakens and moves up the spine, passing through and enlivening the seven chakras (centers of spiritual energy). Kundalini is the feminine creative energy of our natural physical beingness, the energy/life-force of each cell of the physical body, and the latent potential of the feminine principle of creation. This was my introduction to the Divine Feminine. Veils were dropped, sexuality was awakened, and perceptions and beliefs were turned upside down. I experienced a profound feeling of Oneness, and non-personal Love streamed through this body vessel. There was a breaking down and breaking apart – destruction – and in that a revealing of parts of mySelf that I had previously been asleep to. This was the very beginning of what emerged into an intense on-going exploration of the Divine Feminine, and the catalyst of my decision to research women’s experiences of the Divine Feminine. I am now experiencing first hand how She is changing my life, and as I explore more, I see how She is changing the lives of many women – and men – in a variety of ways.

I feel that our individual struggles and our yearnings towards wholeness are deeply interconnected with not only the state of our mind, body, and spirit, but also with the state of society, culture, and the world. In this way, I feel connected to a critical-ideological paradigm, with an interest in encouraging and empowering women to grow fully into their authentic selves and to confidently take their place in the world – a world where historically they have been oppressed. I also know the power of story to transform, and that story, because of the holistic sense it encourages, is an effective way to remember our wholeness and inspire positive transformation.

**Subjectivity and reflexivity.**

*Whether inquirers begin with telling stories or living stories, we enter into the midst of stories. Participants’ stories, inquirers’ stories, social, cultural and institutional stories, are all ongoing as narrative inquiries begin. Being in the field, that is, engaging with participants, is walking into the midst of stories. (Clandinin, 2006, p.47)*

A characteristic of qualitative research is greater attention to ways of managing and integrating subjectivity. For example, “Qualitative researchers often use self-reflective journals, peer researchers, and follow-up ‘participant checks’ to assure that researcher subjectivity does not dominate and that participants’ perspectives are fairly represented” (Morrow, 2007, p. 216). Guba and Lincoln (1994) add that the constructivist approach places the inquirer as the
“passionate participant actively engaged in facilitating the ‘multivoice’ reconstruction of his or her own construction as well as those of all other participants” (p. 115). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) state that narrative inquirers do not bracket themselves out of the inquiry. In this research, I used self-reflective journals and follow-up checks with my co-researchers to ensure that the co-researchers’ voices were fairly represented.

In narrative inquiry, it is important that the researcher reflects on the way the self and other interact, and how this influences the research. Recognizing one’s own story, and reflecting on it and how it impacts the ways we hear what others are saying is also called reflexivity or self-reflection. I maintained reflexivity throughout the research process through journaling, self-reflection, and interaction with colleagues and co-researchers. This self-reflection (reflexivity) is also a way to stay aware of and manage subjectivity.

In narrative inquiry, the researcher’s and co-researchers’ experiences, perceptions, and feelings are equally important. The quality of the story is enhanced by getting right inside it and living it, internalizing it, and being transformed by it. As the story is being told, it is being co-constructed; with each telling, new meaning and new understanding emerges.

**Selection of co-researchers.** The primary source of data for this research was open-ended interviews in which the co-researchers were invited to tell their story of their transpersonal experience with the Divine Feminine. Wertz (2005) identifies that “one of the researcher’s first choices involves the identification and selection of human beings whose lives involve a revelatory relationship with the subject matter under investigation” (p. 171). The basis of the decision for selecting co-researchers is the researcher’s judgement of whose experience most fully and authentically manifests or makes accessible what the researcher is interested in (Wertz, 2005). This type of sampling, called purposive sampling, and using small numbers of participants selected for their ability to illuminate specific research questions or areas, is characteristic of qualitative research (Osborne, 1994). Furthermore, the nature and number of participants cannot be determined beforehand, rather, “deliberation and critical reflection considering the research problem, the life-world position of the participant(s), the quality of the data, and the value of emergent findings with regard to research goals are required in a continuing assessment of adequacy” (Wertz, 2005, p. 171). I kept these recommendations in mind throughout the process of selecting co-researchers.
The main criterion I used for selection of the co-researchers was that they be contemporary women who have had transpersonal experiences with the Divine Feminine. *Contemporary* was defined as any woman presently living and *woman* was defined as any individual who self-defined herself as a woman (I had considered removing gender as a criterion for inclusion, in part because I did not want to imply that experiences with the Divine Feminine are relevant only to woman, and in part because I came across men who have had very rich experiences with the Divine Feminine, but decided to leave this for future research). The co-researchers were easily found through word-of-mouth. As I spoke openly about my research interests to colleagues, friends, and acquaintances, and gave talks on the Divine Feminine, many people approached me wanting to share their story. I collected names, and when it came time to recruit, I emailed them the Participant Consent Form (see Appendix A). The age range of the ten co-researchers selected was thirty-three to sixty-eight.

There are several approaches that can be considered when selecting co-researchers: maximum variation sampling, selecting participants from a particular subgroup, selecting participants based on a typical experience of the experience being studied, criterion sampling, and confirmatory and disconfirmatory participants (Polkinghorne, 2005). I focussed on maximum variation sampling (sampling from participants who have experiences that greatly vary from one another), and selecting from a particular subgroup (women only).

Because of my selection approach of *maximum variation sampling*, the criteria of redundancy and saturation (sometimes used in qualitative research) to determine sufficiency of data is not applicable. “Qualitative methodologists often use the criteria of *redundancy of data* and *theoretical saturation* to determine sufficiency of data” (Morrow, 2007, p. 217). Saturation and redundancy occurs, for example, when data from interviews is not generating anything new; whereas, maximum variation sampling specifically searches for new information. I also stopped interviewing after ten participants due to time-constraints.

The selection process could remain open throughout the beginning of the research process. This way, additional participants could be selected who were thought to be able to fill in, expand, or challenge the initial descriptions (Polkinghorne, 2005). This is part of the *iterative* research process – moving back and forth from data collection and analysis until the description is comprehensive. Polkinghorne (2005) speaks of the importance of avoiding static sampling because this eliminates the researcher’s ability “to reach out to other participants who might
correct or expand aspects of their developing description” (p. 140). As I moved deeper into the research, more and more potential co-researchers presented themselves. Unfortunately, as previously mentioned, I had to cap the interviews at ten to facilitate completing my dissertation in a timely manner.

The selection of co-researchers is important because “the validity and trustworthiness of qualitative research is related to the selection of viable sources that promote a deepening of the understanding of the experience inquired about” (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 141). The richness and depth of qualitative research depends to a large extent on the quality of the sources from which the interpretation and analysis is drawn. Throughout the selection process, I kept the primary question of this narrative inquiry in central focus: What are women’s stories of their transpersonal experiences with the Divine Feminine. Other objectives included increasing the representation of women’s stories in the field of counselling psychology, and through this, increasing the understanding of what the Divine Feminine is, what meaning She holds for women, and what changes are attributed to Her. An underlying assumption is that women’s experiences with the Divine Feminine promote growth towards wholeness and is deeply connected to women’s spirituality, women’s acceptance of their bodies, and women’s discovering and reclaiming cut-off aspects of themselves. Other underlying assumptions are that experiences with the Divine Feminine can help individuals re-connect with the earth-body and re-balance the masculine/feminine imbalance that many cultures and societies have been immersed in for the past 5,000 years.

**Interview preparation and procedure.**

*Narrative inquiry is a process of collaboration involving mutual storytelling and restorying as the research proceeds. In the process of beginning to live the shared story of narrative inquiry, the researcher needs to be aware of constructing a relationship in which both voices are heard.* (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4)

Once the co-researcher had read and filled out the *Participant Consent Form*, I sent a short *Participant Information and Story Preparation Form* (See Appendix B), and we set an interview date. When we met for the interview, we discussed and clarified the focus of the research, that nature of the interview, and briefly reviewed the Informed Consent Form. This ensured that there was sufficient understanding of the research process and other concerns such as confidentiality, on-going informed consent, and potential risks and benefits from involvement.
in the research. Most importantly however, was the relationship building that occurred between the researcher and co-researcher.

After attending to comfort level, the informed consent, and questions, I invited the co-researcher to share her story of her transpersonal experience(s) with the Divine Feminine. From there the interview flowed organically with follow-up questions asked as necessary. For example, “What is the meaning of your experience with the Divine Feminine?” “How has your experience with the Divine Feminine changed your life?”, and “What is your relationship like with the Divine Feminine?” The interviews were a give-and-take dialogue where I followed the conversational threads opened by the co-researcher, and helped guide the conversation toward producing a full account of the experience.

Throughout the process of interviewing it is important to work towards the blurring of the insider/outsider dichotomy. Concerning this, Bresler (2006) states that “empathic understanding involves resonance, an embodied state of mind that is cognitive and at the same time, affective and corporeal” (p. 25). Part of the characteristic of narrative is that it generates response and transformation, and ultimately dissolves the insider/outsider dichotomy. There is a sense of invitation into the story, followed by absorption; the researcher is being absorbed into the story and the story is being absorbed into the researcher so that the boundaries of what is perceived as inside and outside become blurred. Interactive and cyclical aspects rather than hierarchical and linear aspects are essential to narrative inquiry, and “these aspects infuse the various stages of this kind of research, including the processes of interviewing, analysis, and writing” (Bresler, 2006, p. 27).

**Analysis and interpretation.** Data analysis and interpretation happens simultaneously and is an on-going process that is alive throughout most, if not all stages of research. Within this process of data analysis and interpretation is an alternating cycle of induction and deduction, also called iterative or recursive (Morrow, 2005; Polkinghorne, 2005).

The interpretive process largely depends on the purpose of the research. “Who should control the interpretive process in any particular case depends in large part on the aim or purpose of the research and thus what kind of material needs to be collected and what kind of interpretation best suits that material” (Chase, 1996, p. 51). For example, a narrative researcher may have a research goal of giving voice to their participants, or of decoding the texts of their interviews at some other level of understanding (Josselson, 2004).
I was more interested in giving voice to the participants rather than decoding the texts of the interviews; I undertook the role of collaborator and conduit more than that of interpreter. I saw the co-researcher as the primary authority of the meaning of their narrative, though I understood that we both brought our perspectives that inherently influenced the interpretation and representation of the meaning, and that we were working together to come to a shared understanding (co-constructed meaning). The Results Chapter is as pure of a representation/re-storying of the co-researchers’ stories as possible, within the understood co-constructed context.

The analysis and interpretation of the interviews results in a written narrative of the co-researchers’ personal stories. “Narrative research explores the extended account rather than fragmenting it into discursive meaning-laden moments or thematic categories, as is customary in other qualitative approaches” (Riessman & Speedy, p. 430). Although there are narrative methods that combine thematic analyses, for this research the primary focus and therefore the results is the co-constructed re-storying of the co-researchers’ stories.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) emphasize that when reading the story, there should be a sense of invitation. Narrative inquiry is driven by a sense of the whole, and therefore, the writing needs to provide a sense of the whole. Detail is necessary, but one does not want to get lost in it; there needs to be a balance between the general and the particular. Structuring the narrative, through scene and plot and place and time, for example, is very important because it enhances the experiential quality of narrative. Time is essential to plot because the past can convey the significance, the present can convey the value, and the future can convey the intention; therefore, narrative explanation “consists of significance, value, and intention” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 9). However, not all narratives are organized temporally and linearly (i.e. this happened, then this…) but rather can be organized thematically or episodically (Riessman & Speedy, 2006).

Throughout the process of analysis, it’s important to consider the context (environment, how I was situated, how the co-researcher was situated) and how this influences the interpretations, descriptions, and analysis. The analysis is deeply interwoven with the descriptions used, and the descriptions chosen are deeply interwoven with how one interprets reality, or, one’s life-world. Working from a constructivist paradigm, I was cautious that my experiences, expectations, beliefs, and feelings did not dominate the analysis, and that the analysis truly reflected a co-constructive process where I am influenced by the co-researchers,
the co-researchers are influenced by me, and together we co-create the “interpretation/analysis”. At the same time, I acknowledge my position of privilege (as a white middle class individual born and raised in North America) and power (as the primary researcher in this project).

The narrative analysis and interpretive procedure I used was Arvay’s (2004) collaborative narrative reading method, which involved four separate readings of the transcribed interviews. To achieve complete and accurate transcriptions, I listened to each story at least five times as I was transcribing. Although time-consuming, these five listenings allowed me to fully absorb and become deeply familiar with the stories as well as the emotional tone of the co-researchers in relation to their stories. From each transcription, I created four separate documents, one for each of the four readings. I cut and pasted into each document parts of the story that were relevant for that particular reading. This kept the process of the analysis more distinct and clear. Following is a description of the four different readings:

1. Reading One: Reading for the content of the story. I read through each transcribed narrative focussing on the *storyline*. I put the sequence of events in order, and checked to see if the story was clear and if further clarification was needed.

2. Reading Two: Reading for the identity construction of the narrative. I read through the transcription with a focus on *who* was telling the story. I looked for what was revealed about the story-teller, how the story-teller positioned him/herself in the text, what the story-teller wanted the reader to know, and what metaphors were used to construct her/himself in the text.

3. Reading Three: Reading for the research questions. I read through the transcribed narrative focussing on the answer to the primary and secondary research questions, “What is this woman’s story of her transpersonal experiences with the Divine Feminine?”, “What is the personal meaning of this experience?” and “What change is attributed to this experience?”

4. Reading Four: Reading critically. I read through the transcription looking for where the story-teller was using her voice and with what result, and where the story-teller is silenced or silencing herself. I also looked for what is not said but implied, how culture spoke through the story, and what was at stake in the story. I noted my own thoughts, emotions and reactions as I read the stories.

Once the four readings were complete, I wrote the narrative accounts. As I wrote each narrative, I listened to the audio-recording of each narrator one more time to stay connected with the emotional flavour and other important nuances that can be perceived through voice. The
process of analyzing the stories with the four readings and writing the narratives also included discussing the narratives with my supervisor, and checking the correctness of my four readings with a committee member.

Once the narrative accounts were written, I sent them to each co-researcher, requesting that she review her story and make any desired changes (see Appendix C). This was to ensure that the analysis and interpretation is co-constructed, and that the final product accurately reflects the co-researchers’ experiences and our mutual understanding or co-construction of it. Hycner (1985) considers this a validity check and others, such as Morrow (2007) consider this a trustworthiness check. When this procedure was used in a study of mothers’ and teens’ perspectives on adolescent sexuality, only three words were changed in all of the fifteen narratives returned to the mothers (Arvay-Buchanan & Keats, 2003). Interestingly, three of the mothers dropped out at this point, not wanting their stories to be shared because they were either not comfortable with people reading their story, the story was too raw and therefore embarrassing, or the story was too exposing and they were not ready to share it (Arvay-Buchanan & Keats, 2003).

Six of the co-researchers accepted their story as it was. Three co-researchers accepted their story as it was with very minor changes such as one or two grammar changes or a word correction. One co-researcher changed approximately one tenth of her narrative, noting that she felt a little vulnerable. I accepted all her changes. Nine of the co-researchers wanted to use their actual name, and one chose a pseudonym. Following I have listed some of the participants comments after they read their narratives:

1. “It has been a really wonderful morning reading through this in reflection to all that was and is now. Thank you for all this process and holding the tenderness of my journey back home closely to your heart, and having the clear seeing to pursue this incredibly meaningful work. I fully accept this story as is. You may also use my full name. I’m keen to share with all that may benefit from my journey.” (Jessica, email communication, June 18th, 2013)

2. “It is so interesting to me to read it – to see who I was when I spoke it, and to also reflect on how and what I would say today. I think this is the remarkable aspect that growth brings year to year. I marvel at how our stories change – not in the facts of things, but in the perspective and flavour of things as they continue to process and deepen within us. Stories, I feel, can and are rewritten with each day with each new unfolding and learning. So, for when it was spoken, it is
the rawness of me, and I do not feel it is appropriate to reshape it for that reason. Today, if we were to sit together, I think I would weave the story in a different way, with different perspectives. And certainly tomorrow, I would have yet another story to tell. So, please use the story as it is. It is an accurate portrayal of me in that moment of time. Thank you for this precious opportunity.” (Nikki, email communication, April 10th, 2013)

3. “It was a very moving experience connecting to my story again and also amazing to see how much has changed in me over the last year.” (Ariel, email communication, April, 2013)

4. “Wow, what a gift. I was so filled with gratitude yesterday, reading my own story written out by you. Thank you so much for listening so deeply to my story and making sense of it. The golden thread of the Divine Feminine really makes a lot of sense of my life’s journey!” (Sybille, email communication, March 3rd, 2013)

5. “Wow, it’s interesting to read this and see where I was then in my journey and how much further I have come.” (Erica, email communication, March 6th, 2013)

6. “I have read over the narrative and am so impressed with how well it represented my thoughts and feelings at that time. You have done a beautiful job and I would not want to change anything.” (Kat, email communication March 5th, 2013)

**Standards of trustworthiness and rigor.** Standards of trustworthiness and rigor are the preferred terms for qualitative research; however, sometimes the terms reliability, validity, and generalizability are used. This could be seen as helping to bridge the gap between qualitative and quantitative research. I will move back and forth between the terms as this reflects what is in the literature.

Trustworthiness is a term used to express the validity, or quality of the research (Morrow, 2005; Polkinghorne, 2005). The trustworthiness of the data includes the social validity, subjectivity and reflexivity, adequacy of data, and adequacy of interpretation (Morrow, 2005). Polkinghorne (2005) states that the trustworthiness of the data “depends on the integrity and honesty of the research” (p. 145). For example, how well does the data present the perspectives of the co-researchers? And is the production process transparent? As well, by making my stance, motivations, assumptions, and biases clear throughout this research, the research “gains a level of honesty that contributes to the trustworthiness (rigor) or the study” (Morrow, 2005, p. 216).

One way I ensured the trustworthiness of my data was through having each co-researcher
read and verify their final narrative, and make any additions, omissions, or changes that they wanted. Another way I ensured trustworthiness was to be continually self-reflective throughout the research process. This was enhanced through discussing the narratives with my supervisor, checking my analysis procedure with my committee member, and documenting my thoughts, feelings, and reactions throughout the research process (which was also built into the fourth reading of Arvay’s collaborative reading method). I endeavoured to keep the entire research process as transparent as possible without violating confidentiality. And finally, as previously mentioned in the Selection of Co-researchers section, the quality of the co-researchers’ experiences with the Divine Feminine and their ability to articulate these experiences in a meaningful way also affects the trustworthiness of the study.

The following questions are helpful guiding considerations for solid qualitative research: does the research add to our social understanding, does it have aesthetic merit, does it adequately position the researcher and researched (is the reflexivity apparent), is it impactful (emotionally, intellectually), is there a sense of lived experience, does it generate new questions or move to action, and does it transform? Guba and Lincoln (1994) use the terms trustworthiness and authenticity and Van Maanen (1988) uses the terms apparency and verisimilitude in relation to these aforementioned questions.

**Strengths and advantages, limitations and criticisms.** There are several limitations and criticisms of narrative inquiry. For example, Bell (2002) asserts that all stories rest on and illustrate the story structures an individual holds and that individuals construct stories that support their interpretation of themselves, even when experiences contradict this. As well, narrative inquiry is sometimes considered more of a philosophy than a well defined method, and the legitimacy of story-as-scholarship is questioned (Wall, 2008). Another criticism is that narrative inquiry focuses on the individual over the social context, as well as including too much self and being overly narcissistic in general (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) also caution about the risk of deception and faking it, and to be aware of the stories that are not told and what they call the smoothing or Hollywood effect (i.e. a happy ending).

Concerning the strengths and advantages of narrative inquiry, Bell (2002) states that narratives allow researchers to present experience holistically, in all its complexity and richness. She adds that “narrative allows researchers to understand experience, narrative lets researchers
get at information that people do not consciously know themselves, and narrative illuminates the
temporal notion of experience, recognizing that one’s understanding of people and events
changes” (Bell, 2002, p. 210). Finally, Bell claims that narratives are powerful constructions
which can be valuable teaching tools, as well as offer opportunity for marginalized groups to
participate in knowledge. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) add that a strength of narrative is its
quality, and that the principal attraction is its capacity “to render life experiences, both personal
and social, in relevant and meaningful ways” (p. 10). There is also considerable creative latitude
in the form of output in narrative inquiry (Wall, 2008). For example, poems, art, dance, are all
accepted forms of data that can be included in narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry advocates
emotion and real-to-life portrayals, which add to the quality and wholesomeness of the research.

**Ethical considerations.** I address some of the ethical concerns in the Informed Consent
Form (see Appendix A) such as on-going informed consent, freedom to withdraw, risks and
benefits, and confidentiality. However, there are other considerations that are often more
particular to qualitative research because of the intimacy of the researcher and co-researchers’
relationship. Haverkamp (2005) notes that “the qualitative research enterprise is fundamentally
relational” and that the competence, expertise, and power embedded in the researcher’s role is
inescapable (p. 151). The relationship between participants and the researcher can often be very
intimate, and the information disclosed can be highly emotional and sensitive; therefore, it is the
researcher’s responsibility to treat participants with high regard and respect (Haverkamp, 2005).
Haverkamp (2005) suggests that ethical researchers help participants anticipate their own
reactions, and insure their ongoing consent during the research process during the research
process.

Josselson (2007) also affirms the strong relational component of narrative research:
“Narrative research consists of obtaining and then reflecting on people’s lived experience and,
unlike objectifying and aggregating forms of research, is inherently a relational endeavour” (p.
537). She maintains that the principles of assuring the free consent of participants to participate,
guarding confidentiality, and protecting participants from harm that may result from their
participation are important; in addition, in narrative research, the responsibility in human
relationships is integral. Josselson’s (2007) view is that the researcher is in a dual role: an
intimate relationship with the participant, and a professionally responsible role in the scholarly
community. She cautions that the interpersonal ethics of dignity, privacy, and well being of
those who are studied can conflict with the scholarly ethics of accuracy, authenticity, and interpretation.

Bell (2002) mentions two challenges and potential ethical issues in narrative inquiry: (a) disengagement can be difficult for the researcher at the end of the research project (which relates to the intimacy of the relationship developed), and (b) participants are never completely free of the researcher’s interpretation of their lives and these effects of this re-storying can be powerful (i.e. when researchers take people’s stories and place them into a larger narrative). Josselson (2007) also cautions that the written word in Western society holds a lot of power.

These ethical considerations were reflected on throughout the research process. Certain cautions were mitigated through my careful and respectful relationship with each co-researcher during all our interactions, as well as by being transparent about the research process and all it entails. I intend to continue to follow-up with the co-researchers, invite them to the defense, and make myself available should they want to process further. We now move on to the Chapter IV, the Results, following this powerful quote.

*Because I know I'm not alone with All This . . . and, because I know the best way to get to know a Goddess is to listen to a woman tell her story . . . and, because I know She can only roar through our voices when we stop being so goddamned careful, spiritually correct, and hidden . . . and, because I have risked everything, and will continue to risk everything—including your friendship and opinion of me—for Her.*

*So, I want you to feel my gaze, see my flushed cheeks, smell my breath, and watch my body movements. I want you to witness my nervousness and occasional awkwardness, my openings and my closings, my passion and my pain, which always accompany sharing what's real. We will laugh our asses off, we will roll our eyes, we will let tears come and go, we will pause for long moments, just 'cause. We will take breaks to stretch our bodies and shake our booties. And, throughout it all, we will hold the space for the Divine to dance between us, massaging extra-tight pieces of us loose, rubbing our bellies, tickling us when we start taking ourselves or our stories too seriously, and grounding us when we are not taking ourselves or our stories seriously enough. We will honor the Divine in this way, and we will allow the Divine to honor us.*

*For it takes a tremendous amount of courage to share our heart's truth. And there will be Moments, like right now . . . where I/She will reach toward you and press my/Her warm palm against your beautiful Red heart . . . and Together, We will Remember what words can never communicate.*

*(Beak, 2013, prelude)*
Chapter IV: Results

Following are ten narratives of women’s stories of their transpersonal experiences with the Divine Feminine. These stories were initially told in 2011 and 2012, and the analysis and writing of the stories took place in 2012 and 2013. The stories are ordered chronologically from the first to last interview. All stories but one, “Ariel’s Story”, are titled by the actual names of the participants.

I invite you take your time as you read through these stories. Each woman speaks about what is Sacred to her, sharing her perspectives of the Divine Feminine through her deeply personal and intimate experiences with Her. Breathe deeply and drop down into the center of your chest and read these stories with an open heart; the Divine Feminine is only truly understood from this place.

Jessica’s Story

I will begin my story with Ayahuasca who to me is the Divine Feminine. Experiences I have with Ayahuasca are messages from the Divine Feminine. Ayahuasca is a plant, and a sentient being having human-like characteristics yet at the same time being Divine and God like. My understanding of Ayahuasca is all of that. She’s a plant sitting in a pot, She’s a plant in the jungle, and She’s a plant that has a chemical reaction to us. She opens a channel to Goddess, She’s a plant that’s receiving messages from Goddess, She HerSelf is Goddess. I understand Her to be all of these qualities.

My first encounter with Ayahuasca was a very big spiritual awakening for me; I felt like a shell was cracked. Previously I had been asking for the shell to be cracked, and there had been chips all along the way, chips, you know, getting at the inner Self, an inner light. Ayahuasca went in and from the inside out opened me up.

My very first meeting with Her, in January of 2011, was a journey through my life: the significant people in my life and the interconnections of relevant people. Relevant meaning those from different lifetimes who have been purposely placed here and now for me to have experiences with. This awoke in me the concept of interconnectivity; this was the message. Up until then interconnectivity had only been a word, it had only been a theory that I had read about, yet hadn’t had the direct experience of connection. I had had experiences with friends, family, and partners of feeling close and connected and yet there was still a you and there was still a me and there was still a them and there was still an it.
For example, a man that I know in this life was birthed by me in a previous life and I had died during that birth. Re-acquainting with him in this life-time was such a joyful celebration. When I met him, there was a sense of familiarity but it was unidentified. So when Ayahuasca showed me that this was my son from a previous lifetime I was like, “Ohhhhh, that’s why I felt that.” And it turned out that one of my best friends was the father of this child, and we have a funny relationship where there is kind of this undercurrent of resentment. After I was re-united with this son that I had missed out on because I had died during birth, Ayahuasca showed me that my best friend, who was the father and the husband of that son, had this resentment because she (previously he) was left raising this child.

This experience was quite impactful too because this man was sitting in the same ceremony. The physical part of myself really wanted to go over to him and embrace this child. And yet what Ayahuasca was showing me was this was not a physical reality, it was a different reality; this was the interconnectivity of our essences, of our energies, and to not attach into it. So after the ceremony I didn’t feel at all weird, you know, like, “Were you my son? Do I need to mother you?” It was done. It was like that’s how we’re connected, “Ohhhh, I see.”

Another pivotal point was when this man also showed up in a different way in relationship with my father and my grandfather, who were two abusers of mine. Before Ayahuasca I didn’t really know who my abusers were. And this was all within the first hour of Ayahuasca introducing me to Her! I didn’t feel it was shown to me gently or compassionately either, I felt if was very Kaliesque. My association of Kali is this: If you want a destroyer, Kali is the one. I felt that essence of Kali coming through, “Ok, you want open, I’ll give you open and this is what you’re opening to.” There was the mother connection with the man, which was the familiarity, and the love and the joy, and yet at the same time there was this representation of these two abusers who previously I didn’t know who they were.

I had gone through counselling and had been told that I had been abused. I didn’t know, but I had all these profiles for a highly traumatized person. So Ayahuasca showed me some incidences that had happened, and the people. There were a lot of people, not just two, there were many. It was very conflicting. Later I learnt a bit more on deciphering the messages of Ayahuasca, the messages aren’t all literal. But it did crack. There was a crack.

In addition there were less significant interconnections shown to me, explaining why some people were in my life. There were two women, a mother and a daughter, who were very
close to me, particularly at that time, and they were shown to me in that first Ayahuasca ceremony as guides and protectors. They weren’t sharing any information; they were just an essence of guides. The daughter was shown to me as being me. We shared the same seed. We were the same; she was me and I was her. In this life I have had a really special connection with her, sometimes I really love her and other times I really don’t like her. With this experience of sharing of the same seed with this girl, I started feeling more into the inner child and getting a bit closer to my inner child. So the experience went from having birthed a child, being re-united with that child, then meeting my own self as a child and seeing the identification of the age as to when the abuse started happening to me, to witnessing her life as my own as an unabused child.

What was also so impactful for me in this first ceremony with Ayahuasca was the destruction. Roses weren’t coming up, you know, the soil was being tilled. I felt like a lawn mower was uprooting everything. In fact, in many ceremonies I often have a sense that there are plugs and roots in my body that are being pulled out. Physically I can feel it, pain. Emotionally I can feel things being un-plugged and plucked out. Vomiting I can feel it coming out. It’s like an uprooting, like seeds being uprooted.

When I relate it to the abuse and the trauma, it’s like those seeds were planted in me, and they’re foreign, they’re not of my essence. They’ve taken hold and they’ve grown within me so they are a part of me yet they’re not me. So when I think of up-rooting and un-plugging, it’s taking something foreign out, and reclaiming my own essence and my own authenticity. The uprooting is taking away what is not naturally inherently, genuinely, authentically me.

Today I am in a much more loving place with myself. I feel more in love with myself. Even the seeds that were planted and that are still in me, I feel love towards. There is less rejection of a lot of stuff. I don’t feel like I have to get rid of everything now. I am willing to let in more and be more embracing. What am I willing to accept? What am I willing to love, wholly, fully, as I am? Can I love my fucked-up-ness? Can I just be that person, can I be who I am as I am, having had all these experiences, without needing to change it?

Since 2008, when I started counselling therapy, it’s been, “How can I change myself?” Continually, “How can I change, how can I change?” And then moving into experiences with Ayahuasca, it’s more, “How am I willing to accept myself as I am?” The change will occur, just as manifestation changes, nature changes, day into night… yet the emphasis isn’t to change myself. That’s been a really huge… truly, that’s been a huge transformation for myself to
witness. Not only as a little girl, but now this person growing up and loving, loving this person as I am. Just as I am.

Ayahuasca also confirmed to me that the abuse did happen. I’ve been on the fence with it. “Did it happen? Didn’t it? I don’t know, I think it must have, it really seems like something did, but who? When? What?” Sometimes I thought of it as a constipated remembering, like I really want to remember, but I just can’t. And I’m discovering how to decode the messages from Ayahuasca; I’m learning not to take the messages so literal. Even with identification of some of the abusers who have come in and out of my life, I’m not attaching it to the physical form of who they were. I’ll explain that. So with my father, it’s been an estranged relationship for years, and the abuse has been unidentified for many years. Then in ceremony it all made sense. Shortly after ceremony I felt this injustice that he didn’t know I knew. And that’s all. I just wanted him to know that I knew.

What’s also interesting is the connection with the daughter and I sharing the same seed, and her mother and I share the same story. Not the same story, but a story that we bond with, a story of rape. And she remembers a rape and has a lot of anger and desire to release it. So one day I was chatting with her after ceremony about this injustice of my dad not knowing I know, and she had suggested that I write a letter. I did, and that was a really bold thing for me to do, because up until then, I was just in my own little world, feeling my own little damage, and believed he was in his own little world going through his thing, but now our world’s would have to connect in order for me to tell him, “I know what happened to me, I know you did it.”

When I wrote the letter, what was revealed to me was the gentleness that I received from Ayahuasca, and the compassion. And because I now understood the interconnectivity that we have with each other, and though this is someone who has done something to me, I was writing the letter to myself and I displayed a lot of love and understanding, and I described my process of not knowing yet wanting to know, and the vulnerability.

In addition to that, there seemed to be this desire for him to be healed. And I identified that I’m not the one to provide him forgiveness, yet I hope he gets it in his life. I hope he feels forgiveness in his life. That was a real big thing, to create the separateness, yet that connection. Where here is someone who has planted a seed that has quite significantly affected me, and yet to come out of that and look at this person and say, “You are really traumatized and you are
really hurt, and this is a cycle that I’m choosing to not be a part of. And I hope you find your
healing and if you don’t I hope you feel good in your life, and if you don’t then Blessed Be.’’

Ayahuasca also gave me the opportunity to meet my own inner child and to *mother*
myself. Part of the communication I had from Ayahuasca was that She’s always there, *always*,
always behind the scenes. I can look through the air, I can look to a plant, I can be in nature, I
can talk to someone, I can look at an object, an event, all these things that are flowing and
moving in our lives, and I have a sense that She is there. I can be with Her through this
gentleness, and this mothering, as She mothers me. I see and feel Her mothering like I see in
those Russian eggs. There’s an overall mothering that She channels and then I bring it in and
then I have this child and this child has a child and it continues on.

When given an opportunity to find an aggressive side of myself, an angry side of myself
as opposed to the compassionate side of myself, I would be the mother writing the letter of a
very hurt child, not wanting this child to feel hurt and knowing that anger wasn’t going to make
the child feel better. I have a girlfriend who has a two year old and the two year old was having
a tantrum. Instead of trying to *stop* the tantrum, the mother comforted, “I understand, it’s hard to
feel frustrated,’’ and just rubbed her belly and soothed her, but didn’t alter her state. And that’s
what I feel what Ayahuasca has done. I’d like to say confidently that She’s always soothing, but
no….yet, there is a comforting.

It’s implicit to me that Ayahuasca is Divine Feminine, because I associate Her as *Mother*,
and I associate Divine Feminine as Mother. In the first ceremony, she told me not to come back
until I had my taxes done. That particular experience to me was very motherly, you know,
“Clean up your room before you go outside. Put on a jacket it’s cold out.” She was also like a
teacher standing at the front of the room saying, “Don’t you come back until your taxes are
done.” Ayahuasca also gives me a sense of *fear*, because She is so powerful, and beyond what I
know.

There were very specific things that Ayahuasca, in that first ceremony, said to me. “If
you want to go further, you have to do the work, and I’m telling you what the work is, and don’t
come back until you do the work. I’m not going to pick your socks up for you anymore.” That
sort of tough love was the message I got. There were some things that she told me to do that I
didn’t do – task oriented things – *mundane* things – but energetically were very important. I
thought, “Ahh, She won’t notice, She’s a plant.” How does a plant know if I’ve done my taxes,
right? There was also a bill I had to pay, that was one of the other tasks, and I didn’t really want to, I didn’t have the money. So I didn’t pay the bill and I went back into ceremony and right away, snap, there was this retribution because I didn’t pay that. Now I know I didn’t pay the bill, but there is some part of me that believes that She knew also.

In ceremony She prepares me or opens me up for what is happening in life, and She carries me through. What She offers me is the practice. I experience Her in my waking life more and more. Right now I feel Her very strongly. She comes in my dream life, and I feel her psychically, I feel her guiding.

For example, I had a conversation with someone that was a very clear message to me from Ayahuasca. A friend had just returned from the jungle where he had been with a Shaman and with Ayahuasca, and I had been in my own experience with Ayahuasca. We were both still heightened with the plant still in us, in our orb. He had a conversation with me where I felt he wasn’t consciously having that conversation, but that it was Ayahuasca coming through him speaking to me. There were two occurrences. One was when he was telling me about a dark entity that was around him and I felt like that was my own warning. That was a message to me, like take that as a blessing, you don’t need this energy around you. It was very clear. So to me that was a Divine message coming through someone.

The other message was when I was having my own personal crisis and what this friend was saying, again, wasn’t coming from him. Let me give you a little background first. To me Ayahuasaca is the jungle and I’m walking in the jungle, I have to navigate my way through. I’m not passive; I’m in there, and while I’m in there I have to cope and find coping mechanisms. In ceremony I have words I will say, or a song will come, something will come, and it’s very particular to the process that is occurring. During this personal crisis that I was having with my friend, he was saying to me the things that I say to myself when I’m in ceremony. I felt really connected, not so much with him, but with the plant, “Thank you Ayahuasca, thank you for showing up in that way.” Now that’s not anything I’ve shared with anybody.

Ayahuasca also helped me find my voice. Right now I’m working with a mantra that I feel some resistance to, “Om Shrim Gan Ganapatayei Namaha.” “Om Shrim” is attracting abundance in my life. The prescription is to chant the mantra for thirty-five days straight. If you miss a day, you start from the beginning again. I’m on the third try! I find it actually quite difficult. I’m challenged to let in abundance. All I have to do is say “Om Shrim Gan
Ganapatayei Namaha’’ one hundred and eight times, daily. The way my voice says it really changes based on my energy, and I say it at night, for some reason, no other time of day; it has to be before I go to sleep.

This all connects with Ayahuasca because I found my voice in the last ceremony with Her. A lot of the trauma that had come up had been going around my throat and my neck and so I went in that ceremony with the intention of finding out about my pain in my neck, which has been ever since I can remember. What came up were some memories of trauma, of abuse, and a lot of sound was coming up. Three songs came to me in the ceremony. One was with a man paddling down a river singing a song, the other two were delivered in different ways and the one main one was one that I was singing to myself. So when I was in a place where I thought I couldn’t take it anymore and I was on my own, it was totally ok because I had this song.

Since that ceremony I have been integrating and finding my voice. So I’m with this mantra, and up until before ceremony my throat really hurts when I say this mantra. It actually quite hurts, and I just barrel through it and find a way. Some time after ceremony, I’m envisioning this image of the sun on the horizon that my friend sent me and everything softens up and this voice comes through and I’m following it like how I followed a woman’s voice in the ceremony. The tone changes and the mantra sounds nothing like how it was taught to me or how I had been saying it for the past month and a half. And it’s continued this way ever since.

I feel like that was one of the biggest transformations, finding my voice. So much is about speaking up. I feel I have been in a situation in my life where I didn’t have a chance to say what was going on in my life, and to speak. So, to find my voice in a way that was so directly connected to Spirit – it’s a mantra, and it has an image – is so beautiful. As I’m saying it I see this dreamer and it’s so expansive. I feel all of this coming from Ayahuasca, from really pinnacle points in the ceremonies with Ayahuasca.

The last ceremony I was in was thee most intense that I’ve had. It was a re-birth. It was so hard, I wanted out of there. A few ceremonies before that I had a sensation that I was giving birth. There were more contractions and painful experiences, and I felt like I was birthing. This most recent ceremony, in the summer of 2011, was me being birthed. I had gone into that ceremony feeling like I was more of a student of Ayahuasca rather than a visitor. I felt drawn into a student-ship. I say that and I break little sweats right now, because when the heart opens, I
feel a little….ooohhhh….there’s a lot to take in. Am I ready? Am I willing? I came into that ceremony and I drank twice.

One of the female shamans co-leading the ceremony was freaking me out because she was no longer human. I was sitting in her lap. I very clearly re-call trying to bury myself into her lap, I couldn’t do anything else other than dig into her lap. She took on an entirely different presence and form, as a fox; she became an old wise grandmother fox. So here I had dug myself into a burrow, and this fox was sitting there, and she was very playful, and I was with some other younger foxes and she was giving us some lessons. The grandmother fox was talking to me as a fox, and the words she was saying weren’t in English, she wasn’t human.

As the rebirth was occurring, the shaman, the fox, was saying, “This is the only way to heal” and she was pulling this part of my head, and as she was doing that, I was moving through what felt like cosmos. I could feel this energy pulling, and I could hear her words to let it go, and let the healing happen, that this is the only way that the healing can happen, and I felt like I was moving through this canal and that she wasn’t she, she was Divine Feminine, and she was moving me into Divine, and then there was this whole need to be inside of her. The whole thing was so unbelievable. When I see her now I feel this bond. I feel like she birthed me, and yet at the same time, I truly feel that this was Divine Feminine moving through. She was a clear channel for Divine Feminine to move through. I felt this when I was trying to follow her voice. I felt this crystal quality to this voice, it wasn’t her, it was Divine Feminine.

I birthed into this vastness. I had broken through. I left the third dimension. I encountered beings where there is this quality or oscillation of vibration that happens only at this level. In my conscious third dimension reality, I can’t interact with those beings. I’m now starting to feel this in my waking life; I start to witness the Divine Feminine now in everyday waking occurrences. One is through the messages – the mantra would be one, and moments where things snap into place. In this waking time, things shift, understanding shifts, solid objects shift, they’re more lucid, more flexible, in everything.

The other part with Ayahuasca is the practice, which became strong when the student-ship came up. There was this identity of this vastness that I reached within myself, and the courage that it takes to journey within. To give me reference was how I externally was trying to get out of it, but I dropped back into it, and you know, everyone was probably in that and going
through that. *Be in that.* You know, stand, *stand up, sit up.* Just *be there.* *Don’t run away.* So that was the student-ship quality that I found, and the practice.

I feel that since that very impactful re-birthing experience, and since taking on a student-ship with Her, that Ayahuasca *is* around me *all* the time now as a teacher. I love the relationship. She’s handed me a lot. I’ve been absolutely broken to the point where I feel I can’t go on, *everything* is broken, *nothing* is what I think it is, nothing exists, and I’ve also come to a fulfilled place of *love* and *support,* of *flowing* and *glowing* and interconnectivity and to me that’s the Divine Feminine; it’s both. I see Her as both. I used to think that when we have a transformation, a connection with the Divine, everything is beautiful after, and it stays that way, and if it doesn’t then you must be off track. I have a sense, at this stage in my place, that there will be more hard times. And there will be more integration, and there will be more beauty. I suppose that’s the student-ship of it, constantly clearing the channel.

One of the questions I have asked, as a student, is should I sit up during ceremony? And I feel like I would ask the same, should I stand up if life gets hard? Should I show up? Should I leave my house? Should I leave my bed when I feel my life is hard? When do I stand up? When do I lie down? What has changed for me is how I take in the hard times and the good times. There’s more strength and courage. When I look for tangible transformations, I look at where I’m at in my physical life, in my physical body, and in my mind, in my attachments. The attachments I have to *I* and *Me* and *You* and *Them.*

I also look at the qualities in my relationships, and they are stronger and clearer. The people who come in and out of my life have changed since being with Ayahuasca. I’m less likely to push someone away and more likely to create protection and safety for *myself.* Just because I don’t feel good, I don’t push everything away. First I identify if I can protect myself, and even within this, protecting is *responding* instead of reacting; being *conscious.* If I can do that, be conscious, and have that question, “Do I feel *good?* Do I feel like I’m in a *safe place?*” Then I don’t need to push people away and change my environment.

Historically I’ve been someone who transitions very quickly. If it doesn’t work, it doesn’t work. I’m out of there. Out of any situation. So now when things are hard, I can *stick through it,* and be gentle and compassionate. Now there’s the toughness, the tough love, the fierceness, *and* the gentleness. That’s, to date, what I’m balancing.
I now want to share about my experience with Kali, another aspect of the Divine Feminine. Kali is very similar to Ayahuasca, She embodies Ayahuasca and Ayahuasca embodies Her. I see Kali and Ayahuasca as very similar in nature. They are both vicious and the most nurturing and loving, all in one.

Kali is a deity, the consort of Shiva, and Shiva is the ruler of the world. I see Kali as the parallel, the feminine of Shiva. Kali is this dark, dark goddess, dark lordess. She is often depicted as very fierce, with tongue hanging out, teeth, skulls draped around her, and holding a decapitated head. There’s quite a grotesqueness. She stands on top of Shiva having slayed Him, and illusions. Kali also embodies this ever-expanding nurturing mother, She’s what grows within us, She’s our heart. She is what gives birth, and She is what slays our demons and our illusions. When I read of Kali and am told of Kali and have met Kali, I really identify Her with the slaying of illusion.

I first encountered Kali in May of 2009. I met her in an embodiment of a woman named Kalidharma. This was on the land of Tree of Life in Patagonia. I was there with a man who I had been following for some time, Bhagavan Das, who is Ram Dass’s teacher. Bhagavan is a devotee of Shiva and a devotee of Kali. He loves women, and he finds Kali in all women. He is in his late-seventies, and his wife Kalidharma is younger than me, she’s maybe thirty.

Bhagavan was raised in Kundalini through mantra. We sing with him, and he releases this energy, and Kali, his wife, accompanies him as the second chant. I first met Kali, the deity coming through Kalidharma, when we started singing to Kali. Initially there was this protection that happened with her and Bhagavan. Kali, the deity, started to envelop Bhagavan, She was very watchful and protective. There was a small group of us, about seven, but big energies, and all of us were there for Bhagavan, and so Kali was very protective of him.

So, we were singing to Kali and I was very drawn to Bhagavan. Even though my eyes were closed, my energy was to Bhagavan, my heart was to Bhagavan. Then out of my energy vision I see Kali and she is watching me. I just see her, this woman, I see her watching me with my eyes closed, and my whole body starts to shift to her. Then I’m singing to what now I see as Kali, the deity. And I’m like, “Is this really happening?” And I open my eyes, and she’s staring right at me. It was this powerful unbroken gaze.

Through experiencing the embodiment of Kali through Kalidharma, I understand Kali as being protective by how she protected Bhagavan and how She worked with the seven of us. At
times I wanted to be and sit with Kali, I wanted to be really close to her, and just have her sing to me. She was so inviting and when she smiled it was like everything smiled. There were other moments where I just shrivelled, when the fierceness came out of her. Kalidharma has this black matted hair, and Kali the deity also has black matted hair. The physical embodiment of Kali had this form – she is six foot tall, she was a dancer, she’s stunningly gorgeous with this intense hair that just drapes around her like snakes.

I was quite enchanted with Kali by that point and had had this Kundalini awakening with the group and was like, “What is all this?” Grant it my heart was with Bhagavan, but Kali….I wanted to know more. I didn’t know about Kali at the time, only peripherally, from some yoga studies, but I hadn’t had a direct encounter. So once I left Arizona and came back to Calgary I started reading about Kali and I continued singing to her. I continued singing this song that Bhagavan and Kalidharma sing, multiple times a day, not purposely as a mantra, just as a very beautiful song. It’s called Maha Kali and it’s invoking Kali.

In Calgary I had work that I was ready to leave behind but I still had some attachment to it, I was ready to leave it and not sure how. I had met Kali in May of 2009, and by August that same year I had taken a contract and was living in China under a completely different name. I had left my work, left my city, left everything that I knew. China was a very intense experience; it was a very intense time of invoking Kali. What got me through the experience was singing to Kali this Maha Kali chant, everyday. Ooooooh my goodness, Kali. She is the destroyer, the destroyer of illusion.

Kali instigated the China transition. When I met Kali, I was asking for the change. And it was a lot about the name. You know, obviously Kali Dharma is not her birth name, and I began to wonder what my name could be. I want a name! I was with a yoga client and we were walking in the desert at sunset and I said, “What would your name be?” And he said, “Vmmmm.” He’s a six foot Irish Welsh businessman, and the way he said Vmmmm just echoed through the whole desert. I felt, “Ohhh! I want a Vmmmm!”

Through questioning about Kali, not only questioning her as a person, but Her as a deity, as an essence, that I really started shifting into illusion – disidentifying with my name and what was attached to it. This was around the time that I had started seeing a therapist who had identified the abuse. The last name Beck was really grotesque to me; it was my father’s last
name. I wasn’t who I thought I was, I didn’t know myself as someone who had been abused a lot. I didn’t know. And meeting Kali….it was the destruction….it was such destruction.

I had a relationship with China previously in a different way, and I chose a contract in there because I felt like I had developed an antagonistic relationship with China. I had started boycotting and becoming defensive about China. There was a real interesting karmic relationship I had with China. So while there, I felt like I was in the mouth of the dragon, the bowels of hell, really. I was with prostitution, not participating, but with a Chinese prostitute. I was forced into, almost, an arranged marriage, and was chased by mafia of China and was almost taken from the airport. There was a point where I couldn’t leave. It was pretty close to a kidnap situation. It was really challenging, and all the ugly things that China had to show me, were shown to me. What got me through was this continual connection to Kali; all I could sing was her mantra.

I did end up getting out of China, but literally, barely. If I had not crossed over into the ticket agent, I would have been kidnapped. It was so close. I was under a different name, Sedona Laddon and no body knew where I was. I was in some southern province called Fuscio of you know seven million people. No body would have known, my parents were unapproving of me going, they disengaged and totally separated from me, “You do what you do, don’t come to us.” It was very, very challenging. What ended Kali in that whole context was that I safely got back to Canada and I realized the safety of my name, and I went back to my name. That ended the time of invoking Kali. So that’s the end of the story, I went back to my original name, and I shifted my energy off of Kali.

The experience was so intense. It felt like I experienced the seediest scariest parts of the potential of human capacity, the seedy underbelly. There was this whole world that was illusion. It was the illusion of our whole world, and particularly what China is, energetically, and some of the bigger illusions that I later saw with Ayahuasca. So the greater illusion of what we have – from the bliss to hell – and what hell really is. In the experience I can’t imagine what would be worse, you know where someone has lost all freedom, that essential quality of freedom.

Who I am by name, by attachment to the name and the work and the place and the purpose – none of it really exists. To me China’s seedy underbelly is like hell but hell doesn’t even really exist, it’s simply a state of mind, a state of energy. Shift that. And that’s what Kali showed me, Kali showed me hell and how to shift it. Kali’s like, “Do you believe any of this is
really happening?” and sssssshhhht, She sliced it right in the middle and showed me the innards of life in a way that wasn’t beautiful. It was so hard. I say it ended there but it really didn’t. I met Kali in May, was in China from August until November, and came back mid-November.

I have a dog Stella that I am very close with. I got her at a time when I wanted to have children, so she was a very child-like entity in my life. I got back from China in November and I was very torn up, I had no name, I had no money, I had no home, I had no vehicle, I had no phone, my friends and everything had changed, and there was just nothing. I was completely without anything, no identity. Nobody knew what to call me, I didn’t know what to call myself. I didn’t know what I did, I didn’t teach yoga anymore, I had nothing. And so Stella was all I knew, Stella was my only constant. I was suicidal and ended up being admitted into the psych ward. At that point my mom said to me, “You know if you don’t have anything to live for, what about Stella? Do you love her? You know what the love is like with her, can you live for Stella?” And I recognized suicide as not really wanting to end my life, it was really me wanting to end a cycle. I wanted this over, I wanted this phase done.

There was so much disruption, and Kali was the catalyst. She really opened it. It was Pandora’s box. I don’t feel like I got the healing from Kali. I may have, I just don’t have the perception of you know the nurturing the taking in, the wings of Kali. I see it as I invoked something big, and I attribute it to Kali, because it was who I was calling in. As I grow into my awareness with Kali, maybe more will come out of it.

As I sat in the psych ward, thirty-seven years old, everything about it was also absolutely Divine. I was an absolute mess, and I actually had to say to the admitting nurse I wanted to kill myself. I didn’t want to kill myself, but to get in I had to say that. The nurse who took me in immediately said, “You know you don’t belong here, but it’s ok you’re here.” She introduced me to Hakomi and she said very discretely, “I’m not supposed to tell you any of this but here’s a woman, when you get out of here go see her.” And I did. And that was a real turning point for me. Everything was so Divine.

I didn’t have a place to live and a yoga client who was gone for six months gave me this great big beautiful mansion to be in, so I got out of the hospital and went there, was recovering, and a few days later Stella was hit by a car and died. That beyond anything was, “Ok, enough Kali, I’ve lost everything, I’ve lost my name, I tried to kill myself, and now I lost my dog. I lost it all.”
So, mid-November I came back from China, I got into the hospital mid-December, came out, and Stella died on Boxing Day. So by my birthday on January second this house opened up and I had all the money I needed and I was able to have counselling once a week and had all this healing work done and access to the best super foods and raw foods and started making videos and it was really, really healing. And by May of 2010 I moved to the coast, to Victoria. And that’s actually where the ending of _Kali_ came in.

Initially I felt like Kali was so harsh, but the second chapter of Her is so divinely placed – the house to heal in, _all_ the money that I needed in order to have the therapy, I found Hakomi which _changed_ my life – I went from this _grotesque_ way of victimizing myself style of therapy to Hakomi which was such a _blessing_, which then opened me up to Ayahuasca. Prior to that I had been really adverse to Ayahuasca, _no way_ did I want to sit in a dark room and throw up all night. _No way_. And then a year later I’m throwing up at night in a dark room.

So to conclude my story, I’ll speak about Ayrun with whom I experienced a strong transmission of the Divine Feminine. The back-drop is that a week or so before I had participated in a ceremony with Ouachuma, which is another plant medicine from Ecuador, a similar genre, and another form of the Divine Feminine. Though the experience was very painful, there was one very brief heart-opening experience with Stella.

I’ll touch on that, because it relates to my experience with Ayrun with the heart. With Ouachuma, I recognized Stella as asking if she could come into my heart. My reservation was, “Can I take care of _myself_ well-enough?” _I loved_ Stella so much that I was scared that I would hurt her if she came into my heart. The profound experience was that _she trusted me enough to take care of myself, and my heart_, to come into it.

Within _days_ of that experience, Ayrun and I made the connection that we had been adjacent days in ceremony, and the plant was communicating through us and we were very high with the vibration of this experience. We lay on the ground in meditation. My experience initially was a lot of anticipation of what was happening, and insecurity of where I was going. Once that wave of insecurity let go, there was this lightening for both of us. I felt like I was _lifting up_, and Ayrun beside me was also lifting up. It was like a levitating feeling to the point where I opened my eyes and was like, “Really?”

Then Ayrun asked me to work on his chest. He had this stuck feeling in his chest, and he asked if I would do some healing hands-on-work with that particular heart space. At first I went
in very forceful and was really aggressive in how I was patting his ribcage. The aggressiveness reminded me of when Stella asked to come into my heart, and then the gentleness and the softening came. His physical body started to dissolve, and from that physical body, this immense amount of light came through that pushed my hands, and I was playing with this ball of energy. That ball became so big, it was larger than my arm span. His physical body dissolved; there was no more spring to the ribcage. It was deep within, and deep without. His heart space felt like a fire hydrant that had expanded and I was playing with the water coming out of it.

That experience felt very exploratory and I began to feel very confident of what was happening. I didn’t question, I had no more insecurity as to what I was doing. I was very guided, like, “Put your hand over here, put your hand here, and just move through.” It was very opening and fluid and connected and formless. I don’t know if I had a form. There was a very direct sense of vulnerability, and the most comfortable vulnerability, raw, there was rawness, raw heart, but there was no filter. When this space came out of him, and this light, there was such safety, and all the light wanted to do was come out. There was no judgement, no observation, there was just playing within it. I was working on his body, literally, with my hands way above his body, and it felt like, “Holy cow, this is just so amazing.” I felt powerful in the sense of in-powered in the sense that the Divine Feminine was able to come through me, through this body enough that it could be sensed, both his and my body. Divine Feminine was coming through my body, in order to feel, what was coming through his body. It was a meeting in the Spirit realm.

Ouachuma, to me, is Divine Feminine. Ouachuma is the medicine of the heart and She is what facilitated this opening. Ayrun felt like the ultimate Divine Feminine in an identifiably form. In Ayahuasca it’s not tangible. I can’t touch Ayahuasca. Although, yes, I can touch the vine, sure, but in my sense that Divine form of Ayahuasca is not touchable. When it was coming out of Ayrun, my hands were sensing the energy, like touch without touch, and it felt like Divine Feminine right here, She sits outside of the body, She sits within.

There was a feminine quality because the energy was so nurturing. But also, with Ayrun, I have this paternal sense, and I wonder, what’s the difference between maternal and paternal? Can paternal not be loving and nurturing and embracing? So, that is sort of a curious place to be, is it Divine Paternal, Divine Masculine, is it Divine Feminine, or is it simply Divine that was moving through. Yet my translation of it was feminine.
Then he did the work on me. I went through my story, my tragic story of not receiving love, of not being in that heart space, and all the reasons why I couldn’t be. The energy was very feminine to me because I was just being held. We held the space. He held my third eye and he went deep into this place, and it allowed all the story to come through, and dissolve.

There was dissolving, and then physical sensations of the body shaking, and the temperature changing, and the rushing, similar to the Kundalini experiences with Bhagavan, and as well as with Ayahuasca. Ever since I’ve had the Kundalini awakening with Bhagavan and Ayahuasca, there’s this thing that physically happens within my body, it shakes. It happens spontaneously, a little rush of energy moves up the spine, like a flutter from the base right up through the crown of my head, like pfffish. Shimmers. So when Ayrun had his hand on my third eye and I was going through my story and it dissolved, my spine was so alive. And the Divine Feminine was just like, “I love you the way you are.” This is pure acceptance of you and Divine, “I see you as Divine.” You’re Divine, I’m Divine, we’re Divine, it’s Divine.

**Colleen’s Story**

My initial experience of the Divine Feminine came during an Ayahuasca ceremony two years ago. Up until that point I had profoundly painful darkness surfacing in ceremonies. I trusted that the darkness was surfacing so it could move on, and I was hoping it would move on. Sometimes it would, a little, and I would feel this lightness and I would be grateful for that. But there was never a sense of closure after these ceremonies, I would just be left wondering, “Why all this darkness? What’s the point?”

Then I started to have experiences in ceremony that greatly shifted things for me. It started with an experience of feeling some of the really deep pain that comes with being violated sexually. I had this vision of a large structure, like a teepee. There were a lot of girls inside, and a few women and a couple of men. Without language, we were sharing these stories of that kind of pain that comes from being violated sexually. I remember just wincing – that horror.

There was a deep knowing, without sharing in words, what had happened to them. It was a horrible cringe of, uuhhhhh, and I just felt sick that these people had gone through this. The pain was really heavy in this space, and at the same time we were in this bright white teepee, which felt so spacious with the really high peaks.

I was at the point where I thought, “I can’t bear this pain, I can’t share with these people anymore, I can’t possibly carry this.” when we were all surrounded by this blinding white light
that completely encompassed everyone in that circle. The light was strong, it was so powerful, and it completely took that pain and dissolved it, just like dust. And we could all breath again.

The circular space and the white light were very feminine. The white light presence felt like a mother who would come to you when you’re vulnerable, and do whatever she could for you. There was no anthropomorphic image; there was simply white light that emanated a feminine mothering presence. It was what you want when you’re a little baby before you have words and you don’t want to feel vulnerable and cold and alone and you want to feel embraced and encompassed and safe. It felt very much like the Divine Mother.

I felt so relieved that I had that vision, because it gave me the understanding that we can’t carry that pain. No. We can’t carry that on our own. And that’s why it’s unbearable; we are not meant to carry it. For me this was a lesson in taking the pain to a higher power, and letting the higher power do the work of the healing and caring of it because we as humans don’t have that capacity. It was a very moving experience.

I was also really nervous because I grew up as a fundamentalist Christian, and the idea of taking anything to a higher power really frightened me, to be honest. The higher power that I grew up with was not necessarily benevolent, was quite unpredictable, and you were always left wondering if you were going to be ok, if you were good enough, if you prayed enough, if you asked for forgiveness for the right things, if you sinned unintentionally… It was never clear that you were going to be ok, it was never clear that you were forgiven or loved – it was always sort of a dance, and second-guessing. That god, from my parents’ religion, was kind of vindictive. So I don’t think at that point I could have even said out loud, “I am going to pray,” because I was quite hostile to any kind of language and conversation around spirituality. I wasn’t interested in anything like that, and this experience with the Divine Feminine white light shifted everything for me.

I discovered that in a sense it could be that simple: You ask for help. You call out for help, and She’s there. You don’t have to grovel, you don’t have to beg, and you don’t have to do good works. You can just come in your messed up form with all your pain and She just accepts you. It was a huge shift for me. The part about not having to carry it anymore… I’m still working on that, but I am realizing that as humans, carrying other people’s pain can be damaging. It’s too much for one soul. It’s an on-going process of learning what I can carry and what I can’t, and trying to let go of what I can’t carry.
The experience with the Divine Feminine white light really helped me understand another vision that I had in a later Ayahuasca ceremony. Again, there were these dark horrible images of children being hurt. These kinds of images often surface for me even though I haven’t personally experienced these things. I never really could make sense of it, but I know, I can feel it in the pit of my gut, that this is happening all around. So I get upset and think, “Why is this coming up for me? This isn’t my stuff. I got enough of my own stuff!”

So these horrible images were coming up and they were very strong, and very sinister. Then all of a sudden everything went red, and there was this dragon’s eye and she was just beautiful, with gorgeous long lashes, and very tranquil. I could see her face, she was red and she was iridescent. She had this large body, all red, with some yellows and greens in her scales. There was nothing scary about her. She was very serene, she was lying there perfectly still and she looked right at me. She was so calm and I just knew there was no way that she was going to be any kind of threat. There was nothing to be afraid of, whatsoever.

Her tail went down into the core of the earth and actually sat in the core of the earth. She waits to be called, and when she is called she comes and she devours pain, she devours evil, and burns it. She takes it, it goes down through her body and down into the core of the earth where it completely burns, and then she spews out the ash through her mouth. The ash is like volcanic ash, fertile life-enhancing volcanic ash. It is so beautiful. The regenerative cycle of the volcanic ash comes up and feeds the earth again. She breathes it out and it sparkles with potential life. This particularly made sense to me because I’m a gardener and I know that vegetation does not thrive when there’s no volcanic ash. We’re completely dependent on it for our fertility on earth. It spoke to me very clearly.

In the sharing after the ceremony I said, “We need to call her more!” I just wanted to run through the streets shouting, “Come on come on!!!” I always thought and I’ve always hoped that there must be some way that pain can be transmuted into fertility, into beauty, but I’ve never known for sure. It seems to me that without something that can change the pain, that the earth would just be so full of it, that there wouldn’t be any space for any beauty to shine through, and yet we’re surrounded by beauty so what is that? What is that process? So this vision profoundly affected me by showing me that process.

This vision of the dragon, which I understand as an aspect of the Divine Feminine, also helped my health. I have had these on-going kidney infections and pretty much chronic pain in
my right kidney. If I lay really still, think about that dragon, and breath in a certain way that I sensed in the ceremony, the pain is eased. I breath from this deep deep core, and the out breath is like a “huuuuuuuuuh.” It’s not like there was any kind of language the dragon used, yet somehow she taught me this breath.

The presence of the dragon not only had a huge effect on pain management, but also in my faith in the goodness of the universe. Whether this dragon is an actual thing on some other plane or not is irrelevant. What she showed me was that pain can be healed, and that there is some way that broken people can be whole again. Through her I experienced that there is no pain – nothing so evil – that can withstand her and this molten core of heat and fire. The other key message for me was the calling, because in both of those experiences, I had to ask for help.

The same night that I had the vision of the dragon, I had a vision of this beautiful woman who was sitting cross-legged. I asked her, “Can I come?” And she said, “Yes, come!” I curled up in her lap and she stroked my hair, and I thought “Ohhhhh! I didn’t know all I had to do was ask!” I have been quite ill, and so now I can bring up that image and I can lie down and go into that experience again. It’s very soothing and relaxing.

There’s a strong message in these experiences about having to ask, and that she’s always ready to respond. She’s calm and powerful. She embodies a power that is not through aggression. In the past I’ve confused these ideas and she’s shown me that power is the opposite of aggression. She embodies peacefulness and has this incredible ability to pull out that white light and use that to burn evil and pain. These are not small powers. They are incredibly potent, and there’s a ferocity there. It’s not a fierce against people; it’s a fierce against what hurts people.

Since that vision of the dragon, I’ve been completely absorbed in painting. This painting is brand new, unfolding, starting to emerge. I dream about it every night, painting my experiences, and painting this white light. I’ve also been going inside and going down down down… When I think of that dragon, I think of going to that core, that centre core. Maybe I’m going down down down because that’s where the power is. It’s almost like coming down to the core of what you actually care about. It feels like I’m pruning; I’m a tree that’s being pruned of whatever is excess. I know something else is going to emerge; I’m just not there yet. My hope is that a different way of being in the world is trying to emerge.
For work I listen to difficult conversations and try to create something beautiful. I’m not sure that I’ll do that work anymore, but I would really like to use some of the lessons that I’m seeing in ceremony about changing pain into beauty, and create beauty. These experiences have changed my perspective on my work because I’ve often come away from some of those really difficult conversations feeling quite ill, and actually sick in my stomach, and the pain in my kidney feels like I’m hearing too much pain. So now I’m focusing on how I can transform these difficult stories into beauty. I’m learning to take in pain, not hold on to it, and actually change it. That’s going to be my on-going work. Whatever format it takes.

As a mother, I recognize I have more faith now that my kids will be able to make it through. The pain that they’re carrying can shift. It feels like such a gift to know that. They don’t have to carry that for the rest of their life if they ask for help.

I worry about my eldest daughter a lot. She’s very sensitive and she’s had a very hard run of things with her father, and she carries that. She’s going through puberty, and these emotions are right on the surface and they are so profound. It’s really helped me to be able to recognize that she will find her way through, and she won’t have to carry that pain for the rest of her life.

From the time I was about three until I left home at about seventeen, my mother would fly into random fits of rage and basically attack my brother and I, but mostly my brother. She would hit him with anything that she could reach. She would throw things at him and she would push him into furniture and tear his clothes and beat him with electrical chords, just horrible stuff. It’s been very hard for me to separate his pain from mine. He’s five years older than me, and I grew up watching him being attacked, and being woken from sleep, often, as a kid, with my mom beating him up. I don’t know how, but at some point I just started carrying everything that I saw him going through, it started to become mine, to the point I’d get sick, and to this day it’s very hard for me to keep a boundary.

In the last couple of months, since these experiences with Ayahuasca, I’ve been able to see him in a different way. He keeps it together. His two children just left home. They ran away and went to live with their mother, so he’s in a really hard spot. His heart has been broken. He fought for years to have custody of them, and then they left him. So despite this broken heart, he started working out, he started losing weight, and he started to cut out junk food. I’m just so proud of him, and I don’t know if I could have felt that if I hadn’t had these experiences.
because I would have been so wrapped up in feeling devastated. So that’s how it’s showing up too, that’s a big shift.

In the different roles I play with children at home and at work – as mother, as teacher, as mentor – it’s so clear that they’re hurting but there’s not a lot I can do structurally, or systemically for them, I can just love them. In the past this has seemed like a small thing, but it really isn’t. I’m more and more aware that that’s it. You love them and they feel lovable. Like the mother that I saw in ceremony that says, “Come,” and she loves you.

Now, things have really shifted in ceremony, the darkness isn’t surfacing so much. I drank two times a couple weeks ago, and there was no darkness, it was incredible. It was totally different. I didn’t know it was possible! Well, it’s not that it didn’t surface, it would start to, and I would just say, “No, that’s not mine. I don’t need to see that, it’s not mine.” And it was really quick to dissolve again. So that is a huge on-going transformation.

These images and experiences have helped me so much because they’re building my faith that people will heal. People will heal and I am not responsible for their healing. And I can call on the Divine Feminine when I’m in pain, especially the cross-legged mother. If I start to feel really stressed out I can go right into that vision with her, she’s there. I have to remember to do it. It is a bit of a discipline in that it doesn’t come without effort, and most of the effort is to not be distracted. If I take the time, I can go back there.

I’d like to end my story emphasizing that the burning and transformative energy of the dragon is not anger. It’s fierce, but not angry. It’s fierce as in, “Enough. This ends here.” It is like I would imagine the perfect mother would be able to say to her children with no anger, “That stops, right here, right now” if they’re doing something harmful. There’s good clean anger, but that dragon had no anger whatsoever. And that was really profound. She was just so tranquil. She had nothing to be afraid of. She’s so incredibly powerful, why would she be afraid of anything?

That might be the most important thing. We think the evil people do to one another is larger than anything else, but I was shown in my vision with the dragon that there’s something bigger than that. And that means everything. It means that the universe is a friendly place, and it means that there’s benevolence that outweighs everything else. It means that the truth will eventually write itself.
Figure 1: Colleen's Painting 1
Figure 2: Colleen's Painting 2
Kimmie’s Story

There’s a specific story I have to share. Something happened quite recently that has been very profound. So, I’ll just start with what seemed to be leading up to that story and then go into it.

To be honest, up until recently I didn’t really identify with the labels of God or Goddess. I’ve identified with a unified spirit that isn’t a gender, and that is balanced and has all energies within it. Although I experience the different aspects of those energies as masculine or feminine, I have not, until I moved to Victoria, really gotten to know this specific nature of Goddess or Divine Feminine in the way that I have since I’ve been here. I wonder if this has to do with the heightened feminine energy to the island that we live on. I know that this place seems to just grow that, have that, a lot more. Since being in Victoria I’ve connected with a Goddess group, and I do feel a more flowing intuitive sense.

I work in the field of energy healing and a while ago I shared an office with a woman who is a medium. She had Goddess stuff in her office that I would read, you know, books on various Goddesses that you could work with. I started to work with them in my own life a little bit and I was starting to feel into that. It was like, “Yeah, I trust that that’s a real thing.” I could feel it. It wasn’t a hammer over your head or anything like that, it was subtle, yet powerful.

I was going through some changes and so I decided to work with the Goddess Kali to help me get out of my rut, get rid of the old, and get on with it. Working with Her really accelerated my life. It was quite tangible, I felt Her energy, I felt myself being moved. I was in a place in the realm of career where I felt like things were just not moving and I was getting sluggish. I was feeling depleted and tired of trying to make things happen, of pushing, and doing masculine things. I was just like, uhhhhhh, tired, and getting a bit apathetic.

I was looking at a book on Goddesses and some Goddess cards. I was on Kali’s page, and there was an exercise with a warning: “If you really mean it, be prepared, because She is the Goddess of destruction, destruction of old patterns, and death, death to the old, so that you can get rid of what’s not serving you. It’s going to happen at an expedited rate, and it’s not always fun, but you’ll get there.” And I felt, “Ok, I think I’m ready for this.”

I called her name in three times with the intention to help me with my issue, and it was like a bull-dozer came through my life. There was so much energy, so much drive, and cutting
the cord. The apathy was gone. I took major action and let go of things that were not serving me. It was boom boom boom and then I was over somewhere else, in a new place.

It was about stepping out into the world with my energy healing practice, such as getting a website and going to some energy exhibitions where I actually had a booth, and saying, “Yes, I’m here. This is who I am, I’m standing up, I’m not hiding.” It’s like there were some underlying fears of people seeing me, or being scared of being ridiculed for what I was offering. My sense is this is from some other lifetimes. My family is very accepting, but not in this world, so also maybe fear of acceptance from them. This experience with calling in the Goddess Kali seemed to shift a lot of that. That was my first bigger experience with a feminine force.

It was the inner, there wasn’t anything externally that was destroyed. It was my attitude, my inner fear, whatever resistance I was having, whatever was putting me to sleep to not move forward in a way that was going to get me where I needed to be. So to me Kali catalyzed a releasing, a destruction, a letting go in quite a fast way of old energy that was holding me back, such as feeling small, feeling small as a person, period. You know, just not standing up in my light, knowing that I have a light but believing that it’s better to keep it on the sidelines a bit more and not stand up fully in public – those kinds of things. I know that I’m highly creative, I know I’m very intuitive, and that these are my talents and gifts in the world. So this experience with Kali helped me to be and stand in them more fully. And that was quite amazing.

The next big piece happened this past summer. Alongside being an energy-healing practitioner, I do hairdressing and I’ve been developing this holistic hairdressing practice. I’ve done hair all my life, it’s like being home for some reason; doing hairdressing is like being at home. It feels very grounding and, I don’t know, I just keep returning to it because it feels like a simple offering that’s very healing.

I’ve been developing a new way to do this work. Especially because it’s such a chemical based industry, I’ve been trying to find a new way to continue hairdressing that is in line with me, my life practice, my spiritual practice, and what’s good for the earth and for people. So, I’m evolving this way of doing hair that’s also educating people from a holistic perspective. I feel like I’m actually evolving a new way to do this craft, which feels kind of amazing because it’s a staple service in our world. It’s considered a trade, and yet it’s such an intimate experience. But I was doing a lot of imagining about evolving my hairdressing practice in my head, and as a side thing to growing my energy healing practice.
So, this summer, the little tiny two-chair salon that I work in became available for sale because the owner was leaving the city. I didn’t really want to buy it because it felt like it would take away from what my plan was, which was to grow the energy healing practice into something. I didn’t know exactly what that would be but to just grow the practice of it, to grow the client base and do that as an offering in the world more fully.

So the salon, which is a work and live-in studio, came up for sale. It came with extra space that the owner lived in. I didn’t want to do it, I just said, “No, this is going to take away from my healing practice.” But when I sat in meditation, the guidance that I was getting is saying, “This is the way you need to go”. My guidance is telling me that I need to integrate these things somehow, that I need to make a space that is about the physical outer balance (the hair-dressing) and also weaves in the inner (energy-healing). It’s not one or the other. We can’t just pursue spiritual practice (i.e. energy healing) and completely ignore our bodies. Our bodies are our Spirit, it’s a reflection of our inner space. We’re here, in the physical, and we have to take care of it too. And this feels like where I’m being directed to go, so I trust that.

This guidance feels like a Spirit guide, and it comes through as a voice and a feeling. I know it’s my guidance because it makes me feel calm, relaxed, and centered, and it feels like it’s coming out of my heart. There are many guides, but this is the one that I communicate with the most, and it has a feminine sense. I call this guide a Her because this particular guiding force feels more feminine. Her voice feels like a woman’s voice, and there is that soft flowy sense that you feel around feminine women in the world, or when you sense femininity. It’s a different feeling than masculinity, it’s more flowing, it’s not always gentle, but it’s soft and has a fluid sense to it. A masculine energy has a bit more linear and abrupt sense to it, it’s not always harsh either, a man can be quite gentle, but it’s still a different feeling.

I’ve been developing connection to this particular guide for many years and it’s now to a point where I can just have a conversation with Her. It’s an inner sense, an inner hearing. I can have a full conversation in deep meditation with this being. The connection is the strongest it’s ever been now. I feel like, as my vibration gets higher, I can hear and see Her more clearly. So when I’ve done lots of spiritual work – yoga, breath work, meditation – or if I’ve been doing energy work all day and I’m in a really deep connected space, it’s so clear, it’s like having a conversation, not quite like this, but it’s pretty close.
So, this is all juicy, but the juiciest is coming, and I don’t want to miss this! So, the next
day, after getting the news about the space coming up for sale, I went to a sound healing that I
had booked with a colleague. In that experience I saw a vision. I had a vision of the salon, and
how I would occupy these upper floors. The door burst open and then a White Divine Light
came up into the upper floors of this space and went out the top, sort of like the crown chakra.
White light shot out the top, and it was like the whole space was to be occupied by me, and that
the healing needed to go upstairs.

That divine light needed to go upstairs, so that healing was happening on all levels,
including the base levels, the more physical world such as hair-dressing but using natural
products and approaching people in a more sacred and revered way than just kind of like crazy
man-handling of hair. Notice how I say man-handling! Making it a more connective experience,
quieter. Once I saw that vision I knew I had to go with it, and that the doors would open. It was
scary, but I had to trust it. So I went to the person selling the salon and I said, “Yes, I’ll buy it.”
And what happened next is the juicy stuff.

I went to the burning man festival a couple months ago and had an incredible experience.
While there, my partner and I went to this eye-gazing workshop. We practiced looking into one
another’s eyes. You go right eye to right eye, left eye to left eye, and then different
combinations. We were looking for the different faces that we would see in our partner, and it
was pretty amazing. I’ve done this kind of thing before, where you literally see four different
characters in your partners face with this eye gazing.

So the workshop was just that. It was just seeing the faces and talking a bit about that,
but because we both work with these kinds of things in our lives, we took it a bit further after the
workshop and started to look into who these beings were within us. We saw it as one, like if I
saw this in him, that could also be a part of me. I could be projecting that onto him, as we do in
partnerships, and it could also be a part of him. So we both would check, because he’s quite
connected to his guidance as well. We worked with muscle testing, divining through muscle
testing, to find out what these faces were.

The piece that’s important to the story, I mean it’s all important, but the most pertinent
thing, was that one of the things he saw in me was this younger, very artistic young woman, like
in her twenties, who was using her creative artistic self as her power, but not in a powerful way.
Kind of abusing it like, “This is me, this is what makes me special, and I’m going to use this to
manipulate people.” It wasn’t a *healthy* energetic, she kind of had an attitude, like a negative ‘power over’ attitude with her creations.

Anyways, so, that was his perception and I tuned into it, and when I asked my inner beings about that, I recognized that in myself from an earlier point in my life. When I first started hairdressing that was how I got my power, that’s how I thought I was special, because I had gifts in creativity. I didn’t have to work hard, I was just really good at doing amazing creative things and I got a lot of love and attention for it. It’s what made me important, inside of myself, and without that I wasn’t interesting. So I would kind of use it, I would play that card a lot in various ways.

I traced it back to when I was about fourteen and very insecure and wanting to be accepted as beautiful and I didn’t think that I was. *From* that, I started to hyper utilize this creative talent for fashion and different things to be loved, to get love. Not being loved and appreciated for who I was, but being loved and appreciated because I have this special quality, because I can make myself and other people beautiful. It was a distorted way of getting love. Once I discovered the origin of that, I discovered this fourteen-year-old self within me who had started this way of being. I think I have undone a lot of that at this stage, but there was still this thing living within me.

So, as soon as I found her, I saw inwardly, not with my eyes out here but I saw inside of myself this Grove of Divine Feminine energy. It was a Grove of trees with an opening, and in the opening there was this *hugely* powerful high spiritual vibration feminine circle; a circle of Divine Feminine Beings standing in a Grove of trees. They weren’t in bodies, they were *beings* of light, but they were all unique, as we would see women standing physically in a circle.

The sense was, “Let her move into the circle”. I’m just going to start crying when I talk about this. I heard, “That will shed from her. She’ll be able to release this.” I saw her go into the middle, and the light of that circle *holding* her. And it was like layers of this sadness and whatever was holding was draining into the earth, and she was being free.

Then I saw her become who I feel like I am now and who I would have been, how I would have been so much happier if I had access to that silly, fun, cooky, fourteen year old girl. This girl who could just be a kid and have fun and not be trying so hard to be accepted. I saw her and I saw her dancing with my friends who are my best friends now, when they were fourteen, and how we would have been the perfect fit then but I was hanging out with these awful abusive
mean girls. So I saw her having that fourteen-year-old experience that she needed, in this circle, in the Grove of trees. This was huge, that whole process. I was crying, like right there, just me and my partner, standing in this public place at the festival, and just crying.

Then I had this overwhelming sense that, “If you feel called, you can intend that any woman at this festival who needs this can come into the circle”. So then, everyone, all these energy fields came into this Grove and just started shedding. I felt this wave of clearing as all this self-image stuff released. That was huge. I saw the spirit of all these women who were at the festival come in; they didn’t physically come in, their energy came in. There were people coming from all directions into the Grove, filling the circle of feminine forms, and letting go of everything. This circle of feminine forms, which resembled light energy fields, held them all.

That whole thing was incredibly moving and so powerful to witness and be a part of. I was feeling it as well, so it was really big. I’ve been to this place, burning man, six times. It’s a place where I started out in that energetic of using the creative fabulous fashion thing as my power, as what makes me acceptable and important, and I’ve been completely shedding that through the decade that I’ve been going there. So that place also has a big role in that, for me.

So that journey of healing is my own journey. And this circle also seemed very much about all the women who were just where I was, or on various levels of that journey who need this right now. They could come into the circle of Divine Feminine Beings in the Grove of trees and let go of what needs to be let go of so they can continue on and be at the next stage of their journey.

The letting go seemed to be about women and self-image issues. Letting go of being loved for what’s out here, not so sure about what’s inside, and that not lining up. Like you might look totally amazing out here, but there’s something empty inside, and it needs to go the other way. It’s not that the outside can’t be amazing, you know, it’s just there has to be a balance between the two. And of course we know, that as we fill up inside we just are beautiful, we feel beautiful, and therefore our bodies are healthier and become more physically fit and healthy and more beautiful to look upon. And you know, we’re beautiful in all those stages; it’s perception of beauty.

So, the story continues when I get back to Victoria. I dance the five rhythms dance, which is an ecstatic dance and moving meditation, and my first class back I’m in the midst of what they call chaos, which is often a very altered state for me. My body is dancing itself and I
am sort of in a trance dance, and I find myself in the Grove again. But this time I’m really like in the Grove, it’s not just seeing the Grove. I’m out on another plane and I’m standing in a forest, almost as real as a forest.

This is probably one of the bigger spiritual experiences I’ve ever had, like, “I’m somewhere else right now”. Even though I know I’m in my body dancing, I’m somewhere else at the same time. And the feminine energy is saying, “Look where we are, look at where the Grove is” and I see the Grove is surrounding this business, it’s surrounding the salon space and what will be the healing space, and it’s basically saying, “We’re holding this, and everyone who walks through that door is in the Grove, and everyone that comes in is coming for healing, and as they shed hair, energy, whatever, they come more into who they are becoming, every single person, even the mailman. So although it just looks like a little salon (because you know I judge that a little bit sometimes), it’s hugely important that this is happening, because there’s a lot of people who aren’t ready to jump into energy healing, but there’s a lot of people who need your field and what you know and so just to have a simple experience there will be shifts and you need to trust that.”

So now as I work, everyday, the Grove with these feminine beings is guiding me. On Saturday this one gal came in for the other stylist that I hired and she’s kind of what I see as the unconscious female a little bit, fairly done-up in a shiny kind of over-done way, bit of a scowl on her face, attitudy. And my first thought was, “Ahhhh, I hope this isn’t going to take away from this experience,” because too much energy like that can affect me sometimes, bring me down. Then I hear, I hear, “Everyone’s in the Grove.” It’s like they’re all whispering to me, “Remember Kimmie, everyone’s here for healing, if she was in your energy healing office, how would you be approaching her?” I have to look at my hair-dressing business like that right now, because that seems to be the message. Everyday I’m living this right now, and it’s so profound.

Here is another example. I open the four directions of the Incan medicine wheel, which is a training that I have done. I had a split day so I had a few energy healing clients at home and then I had some hair clients. Normally when I finish my healing clients I close the directions, and so I go to close them, and I hear “No, the directions need to stay open for the rest of your work.” I hear that I need to open the directions for hairdressing just as I would for energy healing. And that I don’t need to do anything. I don’t need to be working energetically, consciously with people. My sense is that I don’t really need to advertise this, the field is there.
I tell myself, “Just stay centered, don’t default into the collective field of hairdressers, don’t do the victim story talk with people if that’s what’s coming up. Just hold your center, let them speak their story and just breath with them and let it move on it’s own, you don’t need to do anything.”

It’s quite humbling, because it’s very real to me, **every day**. And so I’m doing all that I can. It’s the biggest thing I feel that has ever been asked of me to do – to hold all this space for all these people. I know I’m not the only one holding it, but I’m the one who opens the door everyday and closes the door every day.

I’ve been using Henna, a sacred plant, for hair for just over a year. Now I have to do it as a sacred thing, and I need to honour it just as much as I would my energy work. I had an experience the other day, **oh my god** – so, Henna’s obviously very staining to the skin, so you have to put on this special cream around the edges, and I use this beautiful natural essential oil salve. I start putting it on and I hear, “You are anointing her,” as I’m putting it on, and I’m like, “Oh my god!” Putting the plant on is putting the earth on the crown chakra, and I receive the message that, “You are putting a sacred plant on people’s heads and you need to do it with reverence.” You know I joke with my partner about it being like applying plaster to walls, kind of like slapping mud on hair, but actually the energy of doing it is **so** therapeutic and beautiful, **I love it**. So, it’s quite interesting what’s happening there.

So that Divine Feminine experience is **so huge**, and such a tangible experience to me. Every day it’s there. It seems to be taking all the life lessons that I have had and amalgamating them into this hair-wellness space that is asking to be born. Even with me kicking and screaming sometimes! Not really, but sometimes it’s a lot of work. I feel like once the business has changed over I need to rename the business “The Grove”.

When I do my daily spiritual practice, I connect with the Grove, and as I go through my day I connect in with the Grove, especially because I’m in business **creation**, and creating this space. It feels **beautiful** when I’m there when I’m in meditation with it, or even just feeling its presence when I’m at work. It feels really strong, like rooted, grounded, practical, “here we are”, but also magical and mystical and with huge possibilities for evolution and heart to come forward.

Sometimes I’m a bit overwhelmed because there’s a lot of tasks to do, so I just ask, “Ok, what guidance do you have for me right now?” because I can’t see how this is all going to come
together and how I’m going to afford all this and do all of it. And they offer me guidance and insights; they’re helping me grow it. Also, if I’m feeling out of alignment, you know, if I’m feeling irritated or grumpy or judgmental or stressed while I’m in the act of doing my job, I connect with the Grove. I connect with the circle and the Grove and I say, “Ok, what’s actually happening here? Am I projecting, is this person just showing me something I need to heal, what is this, show me what’s happening.” When I really need to source, if I’m feeling disconnected or exhausted, I connect with the Grove, and this seems to help keep me aligned and in my heart. I feel like it is a huge amount of support, it’s like having a team of Divine Beings helping me. It’s pretty amazing.

So here I am! That’s my big Divine Feminine story unfolding right now as we speak. It’s pretty wild. I’m living it everyday. And it seems to be that this Grove of Divine Feminine Beings is holding that for me.

**Nikki’s Story**

When I think of the first significant experience that I have had with what I consider an aspect of the Divine Feminine, it’s when I was really young and we were living in PEI in the pink house. I don’t remember if the house outside was pink, but I remember my room was pink so I call it the pink house. In that particular room there was a crack in the wall. I remember being very content to spend a lot of time in my room because when I was in my room there was a Spirit with long dark hair who would appear to me, and I believed, in my three year old mind, that she lived in the crack.

She would have long conversations with me, and to be honest I don’t remember any of the conversations, just that I enjoyed them. I remember what She looked like, and that it was a comforting kind of feeling to be around her. There was no fear, there was no questioning, She was just like a companion or a friend, and She seemed like a normal everyday occurrence in my life. Since that time I’ve had many experiences with various teachers that would come through to me in an unembodied or ethereal form.

Not much later in my life, when I was five or six, my relationship with Nature was strongly forming. I perceive Nature as feminine. I perceive the Consciousness or Spirit of plants, ecosystems, animals, insects, rocks, the Moon, waters, and Gaia as a whole. My relationship with them is ongoing, just like having friends, companions, teachers, and guides. I
have direct conversations with them and I receive information from them through whispers, insights, and visions.

When my relationship with Nature started to form, I had just moved to Ottawa and we were living on base. I remember spending a lot of time either biking or walking in the forest, and spending time out on the grass with the dandelions and the sky. Nature was no different than the spirit in the crack who talked to me; Nature was my companion. I would have conversations with elements of Nature, such as the Wind. The Wind was my friend, and when the Wind was blowing it would feel like She was holding my hand, and She would walk with me or go with me wherever I was going.

I also have conversations with plants. I see a vibration in the physical plant when it wants to say something or be noticed. Plants will vibrate and shake and they will let themselves be known. This brings me to a few years later when I was in Chelsea Quebec. I would go for walks along the back hill and through the forest, and I usually would go in the mornings to wildcraft, or pick wild herbs. I remember walking down the back hill one day, stopping mid-hill, and closing my eyes and my third eye opened and everything around me looked like burnt sienna – browns and whites, those kinds of colors.

I sat down near a grandmother lavender that I had transplanted many times; she had lived on many properties with me. There were a few other plants, and as I sat down with them, the words that were given to me or the teaching was, “You can deeply commune with anything including us. You can deeply commune and healing will happen, and when you commune on that level, we reveal our purpose and what our medicine is. And it’s not medicine like the stuff that you would ingest if you were eating a plant, but medicine on the spirit level.”

So I commune with the consciousness of the plant. I’ve had plants tell me their names when I’ve never met or seen the plant before. Like tansy made itself known to me one year. I was walking along and there were these little yellow button flowers, and I just heard the word tansy and I looked and I thought, “I’ve never seen this plant before. But I’m going to take a cutting of it and take it home.” And sure enough, I looked it up and, “Oh, this is tansy!”

So I feel like my relationship with Nature is very much spoken to me through plants and landscape. When I have moved from one location to another, I know that I am finding rooting into a place when I become familiar with the plants in the area. Until that time I feel out of sorts and I don’t feel grounded and I feel like I don’t know where home is.
The land itself has an energy that I sense or feel, that communicates to me, as well as the animal beings that are there as well. Right now on the property where I live we’ve got bunnies and deer. They have characters and I’ve given them names. They are beautiful creatures; they come and they are very interactive and though I don’t have a verbal conversation with them. We talk to each other. They know when I call them, they come for treats, and they will also just come hang out, they’re very comfortable hanging out with me in the garden. I will speak with them, “Hey Frank, how are you doing today? Hey Curly, hey Emma” and they’ll respond to my voice. I don’t know how to explain it, other than I can feel or sense them just like I would feel or sense a plant or feel or sense the energy of the landscape or the land in the area. They speak to me, and I don’t mean verbally.

I perceive masculine and feminine energies in nature, but for me the feminine is stronger. I guess maybe that might also have to do with my framework with how I relate to source energy now. For me source energy is neither male nor female, it is both and it is neither, and yet when I pray, I usually pray to the Mother. When I was younger, and being brought up Catholic, my prayers were to God, and because God was presented to me as a male figure at the time, that was my framework. I left the church when I was fourteen and I spent a few years wondering and searching and not feeling rooted spiritually.

It wasn’t until my late twenties that I finally felt like I came home again into what I would call the Mother. So although I relate to both masculine and feminine energy in the Divine, the Mother is what is stronger right now in my life, and has been stronger for me for many years now. This Mother Divine energy for me feels nurturing, it feels encompassing, embracing, gestating, birthing, and process oriented. I think of seasonal cycles, I think of the waves and tides of our being, I think of relatedness, and I think of our moon cycles when I think of the Divine Feminine. I relate to the Divine Feminine as the potential of the One/All to express and manifest; the actively creative principle.

So for me, when I’m spending time in Nature, I feel all that nourishment that comes through and I associate that with Mother. Not necessarily my personal mother, but Mother energy. My connection with Nature is very palatable. I would be really sad and find myself probably quite disconnected from what I feel my essence is if that wasn’t happening. Living in a city environment is not my vibration, I just feel so disconnected. Most of my adult life I have lived as much as I can away from the core of the City. There’s a spaciousness in nature. There’s
a pulse or rhythm that’s different than a city rhythm. Coming to the city for me is kind of like having a coffee, it’s exciting, but it’s draining. Where as in nature, it is always feeding me; there is not a time when I don’t feel fed by the energy of Nature round me. If you want to put it in yoga terms, there’s lots of Prana, lots of life force.

For the most part I don’t feel lonely when I spend time in Nature. I feel very content, I feel like I’ve had a very full rich day, I feel like there has been a lot going on interactively. From the outside somebody looking at me may be thinking, “She’s just picking plants or she’s just taking a walk.” But I feel like there is a constant information exchange. The information is not of the head, it’s happening in my heart and in my body. It feels good. It’s just that plants and trees don’t reach out and hug you the same way that a person does. Somebody’s not going to come stroke you, but there’s a lot that can be received, and a lot that can be given as well.

I’m trying to be aware of giving and receiving when I’m interacting with Nature around me. So, for example, I might ask a tree for insight. If I’m feeling a lot of discomfort in myself, emotional discombobulation or something like that, I might go to some of the really big old grandmother trees or grandfather trees, who are well-rooted in the earth, who feel like they are places where I might go and receive some insight. In exchange I’ll ask, “Is there anything that I can offer as an offering, is there anything that you need from me?” Sometimes I’ll get a very general message, and sometimes I’ll get a very specific message.

General requests can be anything from helping to take care of the immediate local environment to a larger request on behalf of the forest or the trees for helping to increase awareness of what’s happening in our environment. Specific requests include a removal of a branch, a water offering, or a different kind of an offering. It might be very clear and specific on what’s needed for itself or for the interaction to be complete between us.

When I go to wildcraft plants, I always ask for permission. If I don’t listen, if I am stubborn, they will let themselves be known. Plants who want to be released can be picked very easily, those that don’t actually hold on, it will be really difficult to remove the plant, it will actually stay strongly rooted in the ground. Or if they have stingers they’ll sting you, they’ll find a way to say, “Hello, we just told you, no!” Sometimes they’ll ask for offerings, like they might want to have a companion such as a stone or gem brought to them. They actually interact with their energies, their vibrations, and so they might need to strengthen one another. Sometimes
they want you to help clear out the patch a little bit, to thin it, so that some individuals can grow stronger.

My connection with Nature that started when I was really young has continued to this day. I still feel Nature so strongly in its vibration and in its resonance with me. It has spirit or consciousness and something I can relate to and talk to. I don’t feel like I’m crazy when I do that. There is something that is perceptible and real there.

So going back to when I was younger, after meeting my spirit friend who lived in the crack, and alongside my developing relationship with Nature, I continued to have visions of Spirit in different forms or manifestation. One in particular was seeing Jesus and Mary. I was seven, lying in my bed one night, and Jesus and Mary came to the foot of my bed. They just appeared. Jesus actually sat on the bed and I saw the crinkles that happened on my bedspread, and I was like, “Whoa, this is so cool.” I felt sooo protected and cared for, and it was like a warm, soft, caring energy. I felt like, “Somebody is looking after me.”

Jesus sat down and Mary stayed at the foot of the bed the entire time exuding this lovely heart energy, she didn’t say anything to me verbally. Jesus did speak to me and said, “We just wanted to check and make sure that you’re ok, are you ok?” And I was like, “Yeah, I’m great!” I mean that was exciting right! Jesus and Mary visiting me! So yeah, I’m like really good! They stayed until I fell asleep and then I woke up the next morning and they were gone. After that day, I always had a sense that there was somebody watching out for me, I felt a sense of protection. I knew that there was some being somewhere who has got my back, basically making sure, “Are you ok? We’re here for you if things aren’t ok.” And that felt really good.

My next significant experience of the Divine Feminine energy was when I had my first orgasm, around thirteen or fourteen. Like most young teenage kids, I was exploring my body. As I was coming towards orgasm my whole body was a shifting of energy patterns. I was seeing in my inner eye shapes that were geometrical forms, and I was feeling as if my body was taking on those energy shapes, like a square, a circle, a triangle. The shapes were shifting very quickly, some of them were very complex in patterns, some of them were very simple geometrical forms, and the energy was expansive and contractive.

I was feeling my whole body taking on these different shapes, and as I reached orgasm the shapes became almost like neon colored, bright and intense. I wouldn’t have been able to put words to it at the time, but in my later years when studying yoga, it was like, “Ohhh, it’s that
energy that they call Kundalini, I get it.” I would now describe the lights and shapes I saw as Yantras. They moved and shifted, they were visual and yet they also assumed the form of my energy body, and I could feel them. I inhabited them, and they inhabited me. I can only guess that this is the language of Kundalini Shakti.

That experience showed up quite a bit when I was young while playing with this really great phenomenon called orgasm. Like wow, not only is it a great sexual pleasure, but I’m having all these really neat energy experiences with it as well. My body wasn’t just ending at the surface of my skin. I was feeling my energy bodies, which were both internal and external, creating those shapes. It was a very palpable sensation as if it was my physical body becoming those shapes, yet I was aware that here’s my physical body and here’s something that’s happening beyond the edge of my skin.

I won’t say that it happens every time I have an orgasm these days – I think I’ve integrated a lot of that energy in a different way now. Sometimes it will happen when I’m chanting. It seems to be most common if it’s early morning when I’m chanting, but it can show up at other times as well. When I say integrated, I mean that I become so fluid with it that it feels like that’s a part of who I am. It’s not other than and it’s not new or anything like that. It’s become another language for me to understand the world through, another lens for me to see or interact with the world through.

I feel like I’ve been able to take that experience and transmute it into other ways of working with people. When I am interacting with clients, I am able to sense their energy, able to see or feel inside what’s happening for them on a physiological, emotional, or mental level, or all of the above. My energy will move into another person’s energy field, pick up information and then bring it back as a piece of information. I can use this as a frame of reference for what’s happening between us, even as a diagnostic tool. That’s not the only way in which it manifests, but I feel like that’s been a refining of the energies that move and shape who I am.

My philosophy is tantra. I work with tantra as closely as I work with shamanism; to me they are not much different from one another. In the tantric realm, in my understanding, and I’m not coming from a theoretical basis, I’m coming from the lived experience of it – Kundalini is not something that starts at a certain place and ends at a certain place, I feel it as a very whole body being experience.
Kundalini energy is the experiences that arise out of those felt expansions and contractions or shifting of shape, it’s *manifestation* or *expression*. The awareness that grows out of that is the Shiva aspect, and so they go hand and hand, Kundalini being Shakti, the Divine Feminine, and Shiva being the Divine Masculine. As I’m experiencing something, and there’s an expression of it through me, I’m also gaining an awareness of who I am or who the world is and my place within it. The awareness and the expressions or the experiences are two sides of one coin, Shiva and Shakti. So for me, to define the Divine Feminine I also have to define the Divine Masculine, because I can only know them relative to one another.

Three rules of relationship between Shakti and Shiva are as follows: Sometimes matter appears more real than consciousness, sometimes matter and consciousness appear equally real, and sometimes consciousness appears more real than matter. And all of those three are completely valid and true, and none of them are true, because they co-exist simultaneously and they’re only pointing to a truth, which is a greater truth. The energy form of Shakti/Shiva ultimately is One, and yet appear as two.

I really lived deeply the practice of Kundalini yoga as taught by Yogi Bhajan for about four and a half years, and then came to a place that I came to with the Catholic Church as well. I felt like there were a lot of parts of the essence of the teachings that I totally got and completely resonated with, and there were some of the other practices and some of the dogma that I saw in the system that was developing that just didn’t jive with me. There was also a lot of lived experience I had with my students where I could not use the system as it was taught because they were coming in with things like lung cancer, or they were coming in with various limited mobility or other issues that prevented them from doing the postures and the breath work and the mantra work in a way that I was supposed to be teaching them.

So I broke away from that – and there’s a whole story around that with what started to pour through me. The bottom line was that I started to allow whatever was pouring through me to come through, *to be its own expression*. Energy, Shakti, Divine Feminine was moving my body and having me do postures in certain ways. And I really listened to the essence of that, to whatever was coming through me. I think this was perhaps picking up a lot of those energy shifts from when I was fourteen and then seeing how it became new forms of energy changes or energy shifts as I grew into my twenties.
In terms of a *manifested* energy, I call it Shakti, the Divine Feminine energy. I still don’t know if there was a teacher *being* who was also directing some of it, because I was having some really interesting experiences at the time with spirit beings in my environment. There was that energy of *Spirit* and *Mother* coming through and *expressing* my body. Then I would teach what moved through my body, which, when I look at it today, doesn’t look like it’s anything *brilliant*. It’s not like, “Oh I’ve discovered something that nobody else has discovered” but it was new for me, I had never been exposed to it in that way, so directly from Source.

I started presenting what moved through me in my classes, and I didn’t even have a name for it at the time. People were like, “Oh, we love this, what are you teaching us now and can we learn how to teach this?” That’s actually what launched me into training teachers at that time. I developed a set of principles and came up with a name I could give what I was teaching so that as I’m training people they actually had something to sit with and call it a body of teachings. At the same time I was doing my own research on tantra, and trying to understand what felt like the essence of the teachings that Yogi Bhajan had taught.

When I was in my twenties up until my mid-thirties I was really struggling with myself on many levels. I was doing a lot of reading, a lot of personal processing, and a lot of healing work of early traumas. My *strongest* spiritual teacher, my therapist Madeline, was a very strong presence in my life. I feel in many ways like she spiritually *mothered* me. She *mothered* me through some of the more challenging times in my life. She was the *firm* mother, and she was also the extremely loving compassionate space-holding mother. She was the *womb* space who allowed me to go through my gestation and my process when I was dealing with and struggling a lot with the Dark Mother force that kept *ripping* through my life at different times.

Ultimately I feel the embodiment of the Mother through her. And though she doesn’t formally teach or practice tantra, her entire being exudes it. She is a beautiful example of embodying her full humanity and living fully in the ways of the Divine Feminine in her capacity to hold space and sit with other in their process and her total trust of the body and emotions and their messages. She exudes the multi-dimensionalism of Mother to me, and I feel very blessed by the relationship. A lot of what I read in texts lived through her as a teacher for me. I worked with her intensely for ten years seeing her twice a month, and then for two years I saw her once a month. I also did retreats and study circles with her, including an intensive three year journey of six women working together which was a *beautiful* unfolding of things.
We worked with a sexuality circle. The first year we engaged in a very head-oriented understanding of sexuality; we did a lot of journal article reading and discussion of those journal articles and what sexuality is from a very psychological point of view. The second year we looked at our relationship history and we told our life stories from the lens of our relationships, and looked at sexuality from that perspective. The third year we did a year of journeying with Mother. Our personal mothers as well as what is Mother. It was beautiful work – a closed circle of six women – it was amazing. So I feel like I received a lot of deep teachings from Madeline, just in whom she is, in what I received through the years of counselling, and also what I received in the circles and retreats I did with her. That’s where I experienced and saw a lived example of tantra and the Divine Feminine that I was starting to understand from reading texts and books. That’s where they merged together for me.

I’ll speak a bit about the Dark Mother that comes through at certain points in my life. Around the same time I had the energy pouring through me which led to a different expression of yoga and teaching yoga, I split up with my second husband and I decided to shift my own energies and clear space. I went down into the basement and made myself a room, it was my office space but I shifted it into a bedroom space so I felt like I really was in a cave. I was in this cave in my basement and was communing deeply with the energies that needed to move and process through me. That’s when stuff was really pouring through me as well and it was a complete transformational shift at the time, on all levels.

Emotionally there was a lot going on. With any kind of transition with a relationship there’s a lot going on. I felt like there was both a sense of relief and also deep grief. I was attending to my duties as mom because I had my kids with me and they were young at the time. I was still mothering and doing all my day-to-day mothering stuff, and I was highly aware of an inner process that was happening.

The Dark Mother comes through in these points of strong transition in my life and says, “We’re just going to tear everything apart” and, “Let go of all the structures that you know yourself as and that you’ve lived your life as, and completely obliterate them.” But what comes through is not an emptiness or an isolation or somehow being broken, but rather a new energy. What was coming through and moving me strongly at that time was this new energy that was allowing a huge transformation in my life to occur. It had me regenerate emotionally, it had me regenerate spiritually, it had me regenerate even in how I was teaching what I was doing as I was
working, all of that. It was a huge growth time, because it was at that point that I founded a non-profit organization, I was offering the teachings as teacher training, and I was moving my life around, literally! Not long after that I ended up moving to a new house with my kids. There was so much change within a very short amount of time. Shakti came through, and she came through in multiple ways!

The Dark Mother also came through at the age of fourteen, around the time when I was experiencing my first orgasms. She was part of my life at that time because I was in a pretty deep depression and I was suicidal. I was in the bathroom and I was contemplating suicide. I had this knife, and I was like, “Ok am I going to slit my wrists or not?” And at that moment I felt some force, I’ll call it the Mother, come through. She whispered to me that I was going to have two children, one of whom I was going to name Josh. He would be my firstborn, he would be a real rascal, extremely intellectual, he’d come in as one of my spiritual teachers, he would have a little bit of freckling and he would be sandy blond. That whisper that came through to me was the reason that I chose not to commit suicide, it was transformational, it snapped the depression, and it was like, “I have something to live for at this point, there are Spirits who want to be born of this body, and I don’t know when that is going to happen but clearly I need to keep going.” That was big, really big.

So when I was seventeen I met the boy’s dad, he became my first husband. I was young, really young. He was the first guy I ever really dated and we got engaged when I was nineteen. We were already planning a wedding and everything and I got pregnant and we didn’t tell any of our family, and we thought, “Ok, let’s just have the wedding because maybe they won’t like this anymore!” We were both really young. I was twenty and pregnant when we got married. That was also a really strong time of the Mother force, the Divine Feminine in my life – being pregnant, and giving birth.

That first birth was very difficult. We were on the brink of life and death, my son and I. He was ten and a half pounds, I’m not a big woman, and they had underestimated his body weight. I’m thankful actually because then I was able to give a vaginal birth because they didn’t realize that he was going to get as stuck as he got. And he got really stuck. Two doctors were first using a suction, and then forceps, and then they ended up having two nurses pushing, and there was third degree tearing which means it goes into the muscle level. In any case he eventually came out, and that was glorious. But that moment of life and death, I was very highly
aware of meeting the brink of life and death. When he was born I was elated because I’d just given birth, and yet he was in distress and so I was still very aware of that sense of being on the brink of life and death. I feel that that was another time in my life where the Mother force spirit was very strong.

That Mother force – I keep going back to the image of Mary standing at the end of my bed, that sense of the mother being there to protect, totally there for the process, you know, this is womankind, this is the Divine Feminine happening right here. We meet this every time we give birth, we are always on that brink of life and death at that moment. So that feels like a very significant gifting time, that physical experience of it.

I want to say a bit more about the Dark Mother. She is a force that sometimes would appear as something that comes from the outside and wants to rip my life up, but then I was starting to identify that this is actually a force that lives within me, the Dark Mother within me, because I can feel myself wanting to go and clear everything out. So I started to create a ritual around that. In the darkened time of year I go through a journey: I go through my house and clean up everything, I clear out stuff, I burn all my journals from that year, I burn everything. I get rid of most of my symbolic material so that I have a fresh clean space to grow into through the next year, without any ties to anything. So it’s very Kali, and, I love Kali! We have a good relationship, believe it or not. But I had to learn to tame that Kali force, that Dark Mother force, because otherwise it could be very detrimentally destructive.

I have gone through three significant relationships and divorces. That was a lot of energy to process and hold, and at the same time, to come to a place of peace with myself. I feel like I’m at that place now in my life where I can be totally at peace with that part of my life. What I’ve learned with that Kali force in my relationship with my most recent partner is that I don’t have to go and destroy everything all the time. I might have an inclination sometimes to do that, to go and just rip everything apart, I can feel that when it starts to upsurge in me. And I can now choose if that ripping apart is going to be useful for me. I ask, “Do I actually need to clear this out completely, or do I just need to allow that energy to transform and transmute itself?” I feel that I’m learning this right now in this relationship.

This relationship has been continual learning and opening, and at times quite difficult and challenging. We are continuously transmuting and transforming so that we can be in a very loving space with each other, and recognize what’s useful for us and what’s not useful. I feel
like *wow*, I’m finally learning! I’m saying this now and yet I’m watching out! Who knows what I’m going to manifest soon! I feel like I’m learning how to tame that dark force and work with it appropriately, and finding the tool that doesn’t always have to be about completely breaking down stuff. It’s another integration of that energy.

I am so thankful for that dark force, because I know I would not be the woman I am today without having had all of those *clear* breakdowns and also *complete* changeovers. I feel like I’ve lived many lifetimes in this lifetime, and I’m *very* thankful for that. I feel like I’ve integrated a lot of teachings, in my being, which allow me to then offer that out to others as well. I feel *extremely* fortunate and very blessed to be gifted in the place where people will come and listen. They give me the opportunity to talk and to teach, and I can see that it benefits them, and that feels like, you know, what better job to have in the world, right?! When I get to do something I’m passionate about, and make a living out of it, and know that I’m helping others, know I’m being of benefit.

So I’m *thankful* for those dark forces. I don’t have regrets, but I also don’t feel like I’m totally *proud* of my life. There are places where I know that I could have done better, and there are places where I know that I have compassion for the woman that I was at the time; she didn’t know better. Standing here now, ten, twenty years later, I look back at it all and say, “*Wow, I’ve come a long way!*” And I don’t need to repeat that lesson, I got it now, and that’s good! It’s nice to offer that out to people as well, to students or to friends and to say, “I see that you’re struggling and I’ll walk with you through this struggle or I’ll hold space for you as you go through this struggle. *Perhaps* it might be useful to hear that I’ve walked a similar line, and in that time in what I went through, here is what I learned.” Sometimes I will have that conversation, sometimes I won’t. Sometimes I know to just keep my mouth shut and allow them their process.

The most recent deeply significant experience that I’ve been having with the Divine Feminine is what I’ve been experiencing through my body the past year and a half. I don’t feel I’ve had much of a break in my body for a long time. Even those times when I haven’t been teaching actively, I’ve still been working on either program development or renovating a house. What’s manifested is that I’ve been having excess bleeding over the past year and a half. At the beginning I thought, “Well, ok, maybe my hormones are just shifting.” But as time went on the
spotting grew longer and longer on either side, and I thought I should check this out with a doctor even though I had my pap a year ago.

So I went through all the “Well-Woman” appointment with my doctor and she said, “Well, I can’t tell for sure, but it seems like your uterus might be enlarged.” And I was like, “OK, well what does that mean?” And she said, “Well it could mean anything, it could be fibroids, it could be endometriosis, it could be a cyst, it could be cancer, we don’t know, so let’s go do some investigation.” I also noticed that I had a lump in my breast, and so she felt it too and she goes, “Yeah, it feels like a lump.”

So I went through this real intense period at the beginning of this year of being told that I might have cancer, and therefore to investigate and go through all the testing. I felt like I was thrown into this place of sheer panic because there’s such a long waiting period for answers, and even when you get answers you don’t really get a clear answer, or at least I didn’t. For three months I felt completely at a loss, but in a very deep and good way. Once again I felt like I was coming up on this brink of life and death. Am I going to be given a diagnosis that says, “You’ve got cancer in your breast or uterus” and what does that mean to me?

I started to investigate my relationship to my breasts and my uterus, my womb. I asked myself, “What do my breasts represent?” If I actually do have tumors, cysts, or cancer, why would that be showing up in my breasts? I thought of the way in which I nurture others, the way in which I nurture myself, and the life-giving mother’s milk. It was a very powerful process to go through, and I said to myself, “You know, I’m not going to try and down play it one way or the other.” I don’t know what my diagnosis will be, so, why not work with this and just say, “Here I am, possibly being told that I might have an illness that may or may not result in an earlier end of my life than I expected.”

It was beautiful to come back to my relationship with the Divine Feminine, to come back to what my body represented of that energy, and where I was not in integrity with it. I could see that I was actually living out of harmony and out of what I feel the Divine Feminine rhythm is all about. This was a strong teaching I received from Madeline that I wasn’t honouring since I had moved here, in fact I hadn’t been honouring it in the past five years. I had been very much in a solar go go go get things done mode, and feeling influences from strong male forces around me to do life a particular way, and it was counter intuitive. It wasn’t natural for me. It was really good to come back to that lesson and to say, “You know, I know what my rhythms are and I
know what I need. I need time and space to gestate and process, to feel, and to breathe and to allow creative force to come up and through me and not to force things and not to be so rigid on having to get things done in a certain way by a certain time.”

I finally went in for an emergency mammogram and ultrasound and it was all healthy normal glandular tissue, I just have breasts that have glands that are close to the surface and so we couldn’t tell the difference between a gland and a lump. And it was like “Whew!” But we were still trying to figure out what was happening with the uterus because I was still experiencing excessive bleeding. So again, I went through a similar process of “Ok, what does my uterus mean to me, what is my womb all about?” This was my relationship with the sexual aspect of the Mother. Although my breasts are also sexual parts of my body, they’re really about how I nourish because I associate breasts with the mother’s milk; whereas my uterus and my womb are attached to my vagina and vulva, and so it is about how I am relating to my sexual energy. Why am I bleeding excessively? Why is my womb crying?

I went for all the testing, and again, found healthy pink tissue. There was nothing wrong, no abnormal cells, no fibroids, just normal tissue. My hormone levels came out normal too, so I wasn’t perimenopause. So that told me that what was happening in my body was happening on an energetic level.

As I was processing through my sexuality and thinking about the Divine Feminine in general, I was also talking a lot with my friends, saying, “You know, I’m still experiencing this and it’s not going away, can you be a sounding board for me so I can actually understand what this means?” One of my good friends said, “We can look at this as being an abnormality or an excess, or we can look at it as a message; maybe you’re actually bleeding on behalf of the feminine everywhere.” As soon as she said that, it struck something inside of me and I was like, “Huhhh, that actually really fits for me right now.” So not only am I experiencing this on an individual level, because I know where I have been out of integrity with myself on so many different levels over the past few years, but it also feels like there is something greater than me expressing itself through me.

Interestingly, over the summer when I supposedly had time off where I could really start to nourish myself, the bleeding increased, in fact it ended up being ten weeks straight without a break. I had my periods, which I could tell were my periods, but then still the other days I would have some level of bleed, for ten weeks without break. That was very curious to me. At this
time when my body ought to be regenerating, why is it continuing to manifest these symptoms and even more so? That propelled another deepening into what is happening here?

I started to do a ritual in the mornings. The same friend who spoke about bleeding on behalf of the feminine everywhere had brought back some gifts for me from India. She gave me these little bags of sandalwood, one was yellow-white sandalwood and the other one was red sandalwood. So for the ritual, I decided to put out a bowl of water every morning during the heightened time of the bleeding, and I would put some of the red sandalwood in the water and I would let it sit until the next morning. Then every morning I would also go out to this beautiful big grandmother tree on my property that has a Qwan string wrapped around it, with some feathers to make it look pretty. Qwan is the soul, and in the Thai tradition every organ in your body is considered to have a soul and you also have an overall soul. Everything that is alive around you, plants, trees, animals, they all have souls. If you’ve been ill or had a trauma or a scare, the Qwan can sometimes go missing, it will wander away. So you put a Qwan string on your left wrist to remind it to come back home, and you wear a Qwan string on the right wrist to help keep energies within you.

So every morning I would go out to this beautiful grandmother tree with the Qwan string wrapped around her. I would take the bowl of red sandalwood, which represented the feminine everywhere, and the red waters that women have every month, and I would offer this water at the base of the tree. I poured the waters at the base of the tree and placed my hands on the tree and asked that particular tree to take these waters through her roots to the feminine and the earth everywhere, to all beings and to the feminine in all beings everywhere, male or female, it didn’t matter, animal, person, it didn’t matter, the earth herself, it didn’t matter, to just spread it through her root system.

After a week or two of doing that ritual every morning, I also started to feel the trunk of the tree, the masculine, and this energy that rises to the sky like the phallic symbol, the lingam. At that point I felt, “I can not have the healing of the feminine, nor ask for healing of this in my own life without also healing the masculine.” Because I’ve been in overdrive, this is part of what’s been manifesting, I’ve also been hurting the masculine in myself, which is now hurting the feminine in myself. So please may there not only be a healing to the feminine everywhere but may there also be a healing to the masculine everywhere, so that we can find that place of balance and wholeness and integrity.
I’ve maintained that ritual for the ten weeks of the bleeding, and I’ve also been going to my acupuncturist. I hadn’t been doing acupuncture in many years and I came back to it. That was another one of those things I discovered in my journaling, something that I have been away from for so long that feels true for me. My body loves acupuncture. I practice other modalities, but my body loves acupuncture, so I started going back for acupuncture and my body started to respond. So it’s starting to shift, I feel partly from really listening into what those energies are calling for in me, partly from asking for the healing of the feminine and the masculine within myself and for everyone, and in all things everywhere, and partly from seeking treatment. I’m listening to the messages shown through my body and I know that I’m doing what I can to put things in place. I am in transition; I need to come back to fully honouring the feminine.

What I see for myself is that I’m being called by the Divine Feminine into a different stage of my life, and though it’s not fully present here now, I can certainly see it in the next twenty years. I’m being asked to be the Crone, to come into my Croning time. I can see myself when I’m sixty-five, I’m toying with whether I want to have dreads or not, I’m going to have all white hair and it will be in it’s Kali form, you know, messy. I foresee that my style of teaching will be much less out of the masculine model – less structured and more community based. I also see myself in a very feminine way of apprenticing and mentoring. I see the style of teaching as being communal and interdependent, and as a holding space, a gestation, a process. I have a strong vision that’s forming right now of all the intricacies that need to be included. This is the next phase of the Divine Feminine manifesting itself through my work and my life. It feels like a wonderful thing to grow into, these Crone years. Since my sons are in their early twenties, I figure it will probably coincide with me being a grandmother at some point in the next ten or twenty years as well, and that feels really good.

Ariel’s Story

First off I would like to share that this process of reflecting on my story has been really neat, as I am just now making a connection with this term the Divine Feminine. These experiences that have happened to me are experiences with energy, they are connection to the universe, they are spiritual. The experiences were very neutral in terms of gender, and very much connected within me, so I think I’m really identifying with the Divine Feminine in terms of my own blossoming, of my own feminine power, and I really see it as a furthering of connection to Self.
As I am coming to understand it, the Divine Feminine is very much an embodiment of my own power. Thinking about this in terms of the Divine Feminine has been really useful because it’s honouring that powerful energy that I can tap into, within me, that’s part of me. Of the different types of experiences that can occur, a sense of embodiment is what I really relate to when I think of Divine Feminine, and my experiences have deepened that connection. When I’m mindful about it and think about it, this connection to myself is sacred. It’s about honouring my sacredness, as I am, myself as a spiritual being. I’m not always conscious to it, I’m not always connecting to it, but when I sit with it and think of the Divine and think of these experiences, it’s about opening up to my own sacredness and my own power and my own wholeness.

All through my life, even as a kid, I have had really vivid intense dreams rich with metaphor. I have the sensation that something is going to happen, like a premonition, a feeling that it is somehow connected to my real life, and then somehow eventually it does connect in my waking life. Looking back I think, “God the dreams I had as a child, how did these dreams come from a child?” In my dreams there was often a sense of me being in my family, and being young, but somehow I’m guiding, and I’m supernatural, and there’s just this weird spiritual connection that would occur. I would know things about my family, I would just have a sense of my family together and why we were together, and what lessons we have to play with each other in our lives.

Knowing I have a pretty enriched dream life, I decided to start a dream journal a little while ago. I had always known I dream so intensely, and that I needed to start writing these down. So literally, I sent out this intention to the universe, “Give me what I need to see, and let me remember it so I can do this.” I fell asleep and a half hour later I woke up in a sweat, a complete and utter terrified sweat. There was some sort of dark energy coming after me. My ex-boyfriend was in the dream fighting off this energy from me, almost as a protector guide. I was lucidly telling myself, “Ok, you need to wake up! You’re going to die, if you don’t wake up, you’re going to die. Wake up! Wake up. Wake up.” I woke up and then I could hear this dark energy making these hissing noises, whishing, in my ear. And that’s happened repeatedly in my life, where I’ve had this dark energy. I did a ceremony a day later to invite my own spirit to protect me, and to resolve that issue, because I’m done with this dark thing coming after me in my dreams. I did that ceremony and I haven’t connected with the dark energy since.
I think that related to my healing around stepping into my truth and speaking my truth, and that I don’t need to be persecuted. Somehow there’s a connection to the persecution realm. This persecuting energy, like something spiritual wants my spirit to be gone, like there’s some darkness that wants to push out my light. And so I’m stepping into my truth and saying no to that, and saying, “You don’t need to come near me anymore, and you’re not going to get me, and it’s not going to happen. So deal with it.” So we’ll see what happens.

There’s some days where I think I’m just a loony toon and I even doubt that I’ve had these experiences, and then there’s other days where it’s like, “When am I going to start levitating?!” You know what I mean?! Do I have some sort of power or intuition within me that I have yet to even scrape the surface of? And I guess what I want to do is figure out how I let that happen. Is it just going to unfold naturally? I know I’m on a path, I’m on my path of personal growth and increasing my self-awareness, and being present in the moment with people.

Two years ago I went on a six day, very intense back-country hike, in a very remote place that you boat into. I had made plans to go with a colleague from work, and I was feeling kind of nervous about it, and I actually had a… ok, I’ll call it a premonition now, although at the time I wasn’t seeing this. I was having a foreboding feeling, I kept on having an image of a helicopter, and that something was going to happen. I saw myself on a cliff, and a helicopter was going to need to help me, or help my colleague, I wasn’t sure who. And I just disregarded it, cause I’m like, “Ok, you’re just nervous, you have an overactive imagination blah blah blah.” And I really sensed a foreboding of going, but I knew I had to go, it was like a right of passage, I just knew I had to go.

So we got dropped off, and within five hours the accident occurred. I slipped on mud, flat land, and the pack came down on me, and I shattered my wrist. All the little bones up here and then both of these wrist bones were broken and so my hand was kind of off, and going in another direction. I had never broken anything before, nothing like that had happened, so I, I mean I feel a little embarrassed about this because of hearing other people who have had real facing death experiences, but there was a moment where I wondered if I was going to live.

I was in the mud, sick to my stomach because I was in so much pain, my friend was in terror looking at me and I said, “I’m going to live right? Like I’m not dying here?” Because I didn’t know if a blood vessel was broken, I didn’t know, I had never experienced it before. So,
in that moment, I faced my mortality, and it was the most powerful experience of my life. It absolutely blew me away.

The pain subsided, the hormones, the chemicals or whatever kick in, and I was in shock. I knew, instantly, like within a couple of minutes, that I had been chosen. This knowing completely transcended, “I’ve got a broken bone in the middle of nowhere.” It was like instantly I knew, “Oh my God, I have been chosen, I have been selected, I am being taken care of, this is going to change my life, my life is going to altar in front of my eyes.” That was the first five minutes of this.

I couldn’t carry a pack and so we got my friend all packed up, and left stuff there and left a note out for people in case someone might be coming. Then we decided to go forward to the next campsite because there was no water source back and we didn’t know when the next boat was coming. I was walking through the forest for five hours just blissed out, and bawling. I was trying to comfort my friend because I wasn’t bawling in pain. This wasn’t pain and fear; this was connected to the Divine. Everything was technicolour, I was just there, I had never been so present in my life. All I was thinking about was, “Next step next step next step, get to the campsite, that’s all you need to worry about, get to the campsite, that’s your goal.” And I was in Bliss. I was shaky, and every so often I would feel pain, but for the most part, just blissed out, gratitude, bawling, like I’m just snotting and bawling.

I felt gratitude for being chosen, and for knowing that my life was changing. I’ve been chosen to wake up further, and come into my power further, listen to my truth further, and take action and move forward. The experience was incredible because, God, you learn who you are, you face what you’re capable of when you’re in a situation like that. Other things I was grateful for were coming up, like I was grateful that I had reconnected with my sister – we had just reconnected before this had happened. And I was just so happy. Relationships were important, being alive was important. And I was coming into a place of acceptance. Like I had… being a recovering control freak… I had no control, all control had been stripped away from me, everything had been stripped away from me, I was just in my body in the moment. I have never felt so alive. I have never felt so alive.

I looked up and I said, “I will listen, I will listen to myself, I will listen to you, I will follow my truth.” I knew that it was happening because I needed to get a message. I felt like I was in a rut, with where I was living and working for this company. I’ve always been a seeker,
I’ve always been seeking the meaning of life. So I was in that moment of, “Uhhhck. What am I doing here? Why am I here? Why am I working in this business? What am I getting from it? Who am I and what do I want in my life?” And it seemed like this experiences was a facilitator to catapult me on my path, to further me along. I have kind of a warped sense of humour. I’m here with a broken bone, and I’m going, “Ok, like really? I’m so stubborn that I had to break my bone in the middle of no where for me to get this?” I was having this conversation with sky. So there was a humour in that.

We got to the next campsite and that was when the fear came in again because then I was trying to realize how I was going to live the night with this arm, with the pain, and I was looking for some strong painkillers. No one was around; we didn’t think any other boat was dropping anyone else off so we didn’t think we were going to see anyone. And lo and behold, an hour later, my friend hears rustling. Apparently this couple had gotten dropped off an hour after us, saw our note, and I could hear someone yell, “We don’t have a satellite phone, but I’m a doctor and I’m a nurse.” So again bawling, and grateful, because the sense that I had at that point in time was, “Ohhh, so I’ve been chosen to go through this really traumatic experience, but, I’ve gotten the point.” I got the point, it was an instant getting the point of this whole experience, and so now I get to be supported. I knew instantly I was safe.

The couple helped re-set my wrist, they used beach wood to kind of put a splint around it, and they had really strong pills. We ended up hiking the next day with them because they didn’t want to leave us alone, and so I was hiking up huge steep cliffs with ropes with my one arm to get to the next campsite. The day after that the rangers had caught up to us and airlifted me out. It was a pretty surreal experience.

So the transformation in that was also learning to ask for and receive help. Nothing like this had ever happened to me before so I was trying to go back to work, no one was telling me not to go back to work. I just thought, “Well don’t I go back to work?” But you know, I can’t, I have my arm in a brace, how am I supposed to type and those kinds of things? I ended up having a doctor look out for me. I had it set in Port Alberni and then something wasn’t healing right and so I went to my doctor and he said, “You need someone to see this now.” He went and basically barged in the hospital to talk to the surgeon. He got into trouble for it, but knew that I needed to see someone because if I didn’t my wrist would have been screwed; they wouldn’t have been able to fix it. So the next day I got surgery. There were all these events of being alone with it,
but also learning how to ask for help and being vulnerable on a whole new level. I also faced some underlying issues of lack of support.

I have the splints up on my bookshelf in my place, just as a reminder. I think the biggest thing that happened for me was feeling nothing matters. The instant that I didn’t know if I was going to make it or not I realized what real stress is, and when I really should be stressed out or concerned. I realized that these things that I was worrying about in my life, they’re inconsequential. I will always be taken care of. I am so taken care of. If I can survive being in the middle of nowhere, in the middle of nowhere, with no one around, and some how support came to me in that situation, then nothing in my life, nothing in this western society life is ever going to impact me to a degree that I’m not going to be taken care of. It’s a pretty powerful knowing; it’s a powerful thing to get.

That’s where I feel chosen as well. If only everyone could experience something like that! It’s life altering. It was life-changing, I have a whole new perspective. In terms of the Divine Feminine, there wasn’t a feminine symbol or anything that was happening for me in that moment, except for myself. It felt very much I am a part of, and I am supported by, this, whatever this is; energy, or existence, I don’t quite know how to articulate it. For me, the Divine Feminine is however this energy or existence expresses through me, how this energy or existence flows through me, or moments when I connect to it, and connect to that power. That is an expression of the Divine Feminine. I really relate it to an embodiment of myself. I don’t know how else to describe it, that’s just how it seems to be for me.

Another transformative aspect of this for me has been nurturing the feminine of me. I’ve always had the message growing up, “You don’t need to get married, you can do whatever you want to do.” And so I made this decision to do the business corporate thing, have career success, and I did this in my twenties and early thirties, and it’s interesting because I think there’s a real masculinity to aspects of that. I really spent a lot of my earlier adult life fostering my masculine aspect. What I see happening now for me, within the last few years, is a switch to nurturing the feminine of me; the nurturance, the openness, the empathy, the caring, the asking for support, being vulnerable, being open to being taken care of, and re-defining strength in a different way.

Especially in the last two years I’ve had a realization of who am I and what do I want to impart in this world, and I want to allow that feminine aspect of me to blossom and flourish. And that’s where I’m really realizing, you know, I want the family. I’ve done enough work on
myself that I would love to impart that on a child. I just think that there would be so much in that. My real lesson right now is opening up to being feminine so that balance between the masculine and feminine is there, allowing the man to be a man, and a woman to be a woman. If I fully embrace that in myself, then it allows the man to fully embrace his masculinity within him. I don’t want to emasculate the man, and I want to allow that providing energy into me. So I get to be the woman, I get to be feminine, I get to nourish that part of me, I no longer have to keep it all together, and take care of myself, and take care of everything and be independent and be a leader and be all these things. That’s always part of me and that’s not going to go away, but I really want to just allow now. What I love about the Divine Feminine and calling it the Divine Feminine is that it that helps me embody what is feminine and what it means. And it’s not just being a caregiver – there are many aspects to that female power, and I’m allowing that feminine power more into me and who I am.

I also want to speak about when I first moved here about five years ago. Back to that blissed out knowing state…interesting, so I just made this connection right now….the blissed out knowing state that occurred after I broke my wrist, was the same blissed out knowing state that occurred with a Buddha figure that I had purchased at Pier 1. I was feeling really really low, depressed, had just moved here, was anxious about selling my house, and was concerned for my finances.

I was in Pier 1 walking around and I saw this Buddha that had just been taken out of a box, it hadn’t even been put on a shelf yet. It was literally being unwrapped just as I was walking by. I looked at it and I had to have it. It was so weird, because I don’t tend to identify with symbols or idols or anything like that, yet it called to me. It was this Buddha baby that has a very gentle angelic face, and I instantly felt better just having this.

I went home and put it on my hearth and started connecting with it. It was there in the room and my vibration started to rise and rise and rise, and I don’t know how this happened, but I just got into this altered state of consciousness, similar to what I had in the hiking experience. So this is a really powerful connection for me to make….because I have sometimes doubted that blissed out state I had hiking.

I was very present with the Buddha. I was no longer alone. My vibration went through the roof and I went into this altered state of consciousness where I just felt truth. I was connected to the universe, the Divine. And there was this insane amount of gratitude, like it was
this pouring gratitude, and I was blissful, and bawling, and sobbing – just on the couch, vegging out, in this state, with this little Buddha by the side.

It was a heaviness that lifted off, something just shifted, like my heart opened. I didn’t feel so closed in and so victimized, so hurt and so alone. Things just opened up and I felt whole. I was sitting there fully, I mean, if anyone had been there, it wouldn’t have happened, I was just loving being there by myself, but I wasn’t by myself.

Then something clicked in my head and I realized, “my house” and I just knew, “Oh my house is selling. It’s happening right now.” I could sense it was happening. I knew it was done. I went and wrote the sale price in huge numbers on this flipchart paper and stuck it up on the wall. I had that staring at me, I had the Buddha there, and I was in this blissed out state for about three hours.

So the next day, I’m having breakfast and I’m checking my messages and I just kept on getting these messages about people wanting to see the house. I think I had had three within a half hour, and there hadn’t been any movement for a month, like not one person had seen the place for a month, or two months even maybe. And all of a sudden I had three house showings and I was just like, “Here it is.”

Then I called my realtor and he said, “How did you know?” He assumed that I had found out somehow. And I said, “How did I know what?” And he’s like, “You have an offer on your house.” I’m like, “Oh, well yeah, I know I do.” It was that no-time time thing happening for me, where you lose a sense of time, time shifts, and that’s what happened on the hike too. This dimension thing, actually, it’s the same thing that happened when going inward with a past life experience that I had. Time just seemed to… I don’t know, it’s just weird.

Another experience I had with feeling whole, feeling the Divine Feminine, and feeling me as Divine Feminine was an integration experience I had with a cranio-sacral therapist. I had a conflict with two aspects of myself. The cranio-therapist was holding me and providing loving energy, and she said something and it just clicked for me. It was like two parts in me were meeting each other for the first time. I was able to see what was happening. I saw what I was doing to myself from an objective point of view; it was my higher self seeing, my centered self seeing that. I wasn’t seeing what was happening from a part, I was seeing it from my essence, and therefore the two parts could integrate.
I hadn’t been conscious to this abusive part, and this victimized part, and how hard this one part is on this other part. I don’t know how, but I just didn’t see how abusive this part of me was being, and it was like they saw each other, and it was just a very human experience, and it just integrated. Energy shot through me, like shhwooooo – warm, strong, whgghhhhoo. I sweat buckets within five seconds, the cranial sacral therapist was like, “Woooff” cause I was dripping, my whole body was just wet, drenched, and then tingling, and then feeling kind of like I had let go, like something had died or integrated or let go. I was whole, I felt more whole. So that was a connection to the Divine Feminine, my energy, the energy within me, through me.

It’s the awareness that caused the healing, and then it was almost like it opened up a channel of energy. It’s almost like there was a dam of stuck energy, and something tweaked (the abuser and the victim meeting each other) and it opened. It’s not like that part (the victim or abuser) goes away, it transforms, so the energy transforms. And what causes that transformation is awareness, compassion, and love. All of a sudden there was a waterfall of energy that went whoosh, through me, or could come through me again. That energy to me is Divine energy, it’s my essence flowing again. It’s part of me, it’s of me, but it’s around me as well. It almost felt like a flushing out process. A dam opened, something opened.

I’m feeling called to talk about this past life experience that happened with my therapist this summer. I was taking a part of me to therapy that had been triggered by the Vancouver riots. I didn’t realize it was an issue until I started talking about it and I got quite emotional in this session with my therapist about how triggering it was to see this violence and this persecution and this kind of blind fear, like an irrational fear. What that spurred was a journey into looking at what’s being triggered on a deeper level for me. What part of me is being triggered by this sense of persecution and violence?

There was a knowing sense that I had noticed with my therapist, we would instantly know at the same time that something was happening. I felt very connected to her and she would say things that I was thinking, she was that in-sync with me. So we journeyed in, and at this moment when I could sense the energy was not in this lifetime, it seemed like it was a cord that went way farther back, I knew, we both knew instantly, simultaneously, that this was something bigger. A feeling of calm went over the room. A knowingness and calm came over, and it was like whhoooa, here we go.
Sometimes journeying into these places can feel a little contrived at first, but with this it didn’t, I was intuitively guided to go to where I went. The images were very strong and I was very present with them. The place that I went was very dark ages, medieval-like. There were trees in the background and there was what looked like a center square, quite dirty, and rural but still with a community. And there was a woman hanging by a really large hook. A hook was in her back, and she was hanging there, half alive. It was an environment of persecution. She was hanging up on a hook, there were people around, and I had the sense that she was incredibly powerful, incredibly intuitive, and spoke her truth. The metaphor would be the witch burning – like a witch at the stake kind of situation.

I connected with the fact that she was conscious, and I rolled her down from the hook, and took her off the hook. She was in and out of consciousness. I was guided to wash her feet with lavender water and to really honour her. It was such a strong connection. I was so there, it was me but it wasn’t me, and I just knew what this person needed, I knew what this spirit needed. So I washed her feet with lavender.

My therapist asked me, “Does she have anything that she needs to say?” and I said, “She just needs to be honoured as sacred as who she is.” I was called to hold her, to hold her as sacred, and she relaxed and transformed, and I could feel we were nearing completion of our journey together. My therapist said, “Ok what is it that she needs? Does she want to be with you? How does she want to integrate with you? What needs to happen here?” And it was very clear that it was time for her to ascend, time for her to let go and ascend. So I watched that process. I watched her ascend.

At this point, I would normally come out of the journey and come back into the present time, but I couldn’t leave. It was so bizarre. I was deep in this journey and I was feeling this energy, and yet I knew that I was sitting on a couch in a therapist’s office with my eyes closed and I couldn’t open my eyes. I said to her, “I’m not done here. I have to be here still. I’m not leaving.”

I don’t know how this happened, but I connected with the fact that I needed to face the persecution. And so I was guided by my therapist to have eye-contact with someone in the crowd. This was terrifying. I had to develop and build up the resilience to do this. Then I found someone and had eye-contact with him, and it was instant knowing: fear. As I felt this in my body she asked “What do you see?” and I said, “Fear.” And somehow there was a
transformation process or a forgiveness process, I’m not sure how it happened, but then at that point I was able to come back up.

As I was coming up back into reality, I experienced this incredible release. It was like shooting warm energy, phheewww, flowing through me. I’m not sure if it was coming from the ground up or from top down, but my whole body just got shot through with energy. I was overcome with sweat, completely tingly, everything was tingling, throbbing tingling, my whole body. I was incredibly dizzy for about 10 minutes after. I tried to stand up and my therapist of course sat with me as I recuperated and fully came back out of this experience. Whether it was a metaphor or past life experience or whatever it was, it was this healing or releasing and connecting to this incredibly powerful energy of this woman. And she is with me to this day. I just have to think about her and she’s there.

About a month later someone posted an image on facebook that totally resonated with me. It was her, it was just like, “Oh, there she is.” So I put her on my desktop on my laptop. She was quite ratty and tattered and dirty, she had been hanging from a hook, but this picture was her ascended self. It was such a powerful metaphor for me, to see her jumping off a cliff to fly. Reckless raw abandon, and complete fearlessness and connectedness, and her connection with nature, like she was part of the cliff, she embodied the cliff, she embodied the sky.

I feel a sense of “Is that my ancestor? Is that who I am? Is that my past life? Is that a metaphor for connecting to Divinity, or healing an aspect of myself that wasn’t allowing me to connect to Divinity?” I’m not sure yet what that was about. But it was incredibly transforming. I mean I walked out of that office changed. I’m deepening into it, it’s still integrating, even as I speak now.

It’s interesting because some of this speaking truth and not being persecuted for it stuff started coming up for me in school. I got really triggered because I felt like I was really stepping out and speaking my truth and I was taking risks and I wasn’t sure that I was going to be in an environment where that was supportive. I talked with a friend afterwards, and I hadn’t told her the story about this past life experience, and she said, “Do you want to know what I see? I see a very powerful woman, persecuted, burned at the stake, that’s what I see.” That connected me deep into that place again, and to that woman.

Sometimes I feel incredibly grounded, and sometimes I wonder….this is going to sound really weird, but I feel different. In the past feeling different has been alienating, and somehow
I’m disconnected. But now it’s a sense of, I feel….and different isn’t even the right word, it’s like, I know things, and I don’t know if people around me know those things. But it’s not disconnecting, and this is part of this transformation, it’s no longer alienating me from people, it’s just making me start to ponder, “Ok, where is my growth going, and who am I? And what does this mean?”

I’m being honoured as well within myself. I’m noticing that I’m really speaking my truth and I’m no longer feeling shame for it, or projecting that I’m being looked at weird for it. In fact I’m actually being validated for a lot of my sharing. However there are still thoughts in my head that I get all the time, like impressions of situations that I can sense, and it contradicts or it might go against or be something completely different than where the path of the conversation is going. Like someone is saying something and in my head I’m like, “That’s not right! There’s a bigger truth to this.”

There is a knowingness, and I’m not quite sure how to articulate it and if I don’t know how to articulate it I don’t, so I just kind of sit with it and go “Ok, it’s ok, it’s integrating, you’re alright, it’s alright.” It’s. a sense of knowingness sometimes and I….. whhhoooo. I think what’s happening is, for lack of better words, the ego is stepping away, so I’m more clearly understanding when it’s a knowingness versus a need to feel worthy or a need to feel special.

What’s come out of this experience with this woman in the past life is speaking the truth without fear, but also speaking it in a way that’s articulate, because I’m noticing that I’ll get feeling impressions of things, and I don’t know how to put it to words. I’m noticing too that my wounding around my family of origin is fading away and I’m in a different state of peace with it, and power. I’ll kind of get into pain with it, or a victim place, or get upset by something, and I’ll very quickly choose a different connection. It’s instant. I’m really connected to staying in power. Staying in power.

It’s partly remembering that it’s all projection anyway, it’s all a story anyway, so just choose the most empowering story. Choose to think the most empowering thought. Choose to hold compassion. Often in the past I’d think that I would have to dip into those places to heal them, and now I’m like no, I don’t need to go deep into those places to heal them. I’m not repressing what’s going on, I’m choosing a state of consciousness, I’m making a choice of my state of consciousness.
Even last night I was feeling some sadness around relationship. I love being alone, I love being single, I love my life, but I want to find my soul mate and really connect with someone, and possibly have kids. And I just felt sadness last night. This kind of loss of hope, like it’s not going to happen, it’s just not going to happen, how is it possibly going to happen. And then I just stepped out of it and into my power. It’s not about blindly hoping; it’s about realizing I’m whole. *I am whole right now.* Without someone else in my life, alone here, in my apartment, I’m whole. I tap into the wholeness and it becomes more expansive around me.

In the past life experience there was definitely an integration that occurred, like in the cranio-sacral experience. There was integration in releasing the woman, and honouring her and acknowledging that she exists within me, acknowledging that power within myself, but also acknowledging the dark side too. It was almost like she is love and truth and this other aspect is fear and hatred. Once I had eye-contact and I saw the fear, it was compassion. It was harder, it wasn’t like the type of emotional release that occurred in the cranial-sacral session, but there was definitely strong compassion and a realization of what was happening there. Not taking on the persecution as my fault. Not taking on something’s wrong with me, or wrong with her. It was, “Oh, I’m actually in power, you’re afraid.” I gave *back* what wasn’t mine.

It was unfinished business, I couldn’t leave because I was angry and resentful and rageful. I was like, “I’m not f-in leaving, this isn’t done! *This isn’t done.*” That’s when the therapist suggested to look in the crowd. And it took me five minutes to get off my knees where I had been helping her, to move my body to face it. I had to ground and will myself and just go phewwww, “You have no choice, because you’re not going back until you do this.” I just knew I had to, and I was afraid of what I was going to see, and afraid of getting persecuted myself, but, what was so incredible, was that I didn’t see this big dark dank ogre devil, I saw an unconscious man, scared shitless. Just fear, *fear,* and somehow, it helped me understand why it happened.

I mean it’s not resolved in terms of me having full compassion for that but I at least have an understanding. And I’m not taking it on to the degree that I might have before then. It’s funny saying *I’m* not taking it on. It’s neat because I’m kind of connecting with her too, is that me or her? It’s me not taking it on, and I notice that manifesting now in my life further, a lot more solid boundary and more solid connection to myself. I don’t project a story out to why they’re doing what they’re doing. It’s no longer about me. Often now I’m not even relating it to
how I should be taking this personally and in a negative way. There’s often not even a story that happens with it.

Every so often I’ll feel a little bit of shame or embarrassment or “Ohhh, did I step over the boundaries or was that right?” I will just like with heart on sleeve go ‘blah’, and then afterwards I’ll kind of get a little cringy, “Uh oh, was I too open, was I too honest, was I too this, was I too vulnerable?” It’s almost a habitual pattern that is dissipating, because I’m not carrying it. I connect with it and go, “No, you’re ok, you’re ok, breathe.” And then I let it go very quickly.

On the one hand I realize that these experiences happen for transformation, and on the other hand it’s not necessary to attain a sense of feeling that way all the time. It’s not about, “I want to feel more of this” because I don’t think you can actually function. If I’m sitting on the couch blissed out, I can’t get much done in terms of my purpose in my life! I think I just needed to say that because I’m working through this for myself right now. I was just thinking I wish I could figure out how to connect like that on a regular basis, but it’s like well no, because if I’m connecting like that on a regular basis, my job is done on this earth, in my opinion.

Yet I do want to strengthen and foster that connection. I’m not sure how deep it goes. I feel pretty incredible, often, and I’m able to choose to be grateful, often. I mean there’s tons of time when feeling incredible appreciation or love and I’m like, “Life is so amazing!” I guess I just really want to ground it further, or understand it, or embody it, or really start to come into how I am to use this. I’m sure I already am. I think it also grows by using it. If I’m aware of it, I’m using it and keeping that tangible connection with the Divine alive. I am Divine Feminine, and I want to continue to keep this relationship with myself alive. I want to keep the relationship with this woman in my past life experience alive. It is alive. She is right here.

Erica’s Story

When reflecting on my experiences of the Divine Feminine, the first thing I think of is my birth, and when my mom was pregnant. I’m the second child; my brother was born four years before me. My mom wanted a girl so badly but because of her childhood and her relationship with her parents, she believed that you never get what you want, so she was sure she was having a boy. Even in utero, my feminine essence was not recognized.
When I was born, after I had crowned, my head came out, and the doctor asked my mom if she wanted to pull me out of her. She did, and as she held me up and looked at me, her first thought was, “What’s wrong with his penis?” She was expecting a penis, a boy.

I’ve known this for years; I can’t remember how long ago my mom told me. I was thinking and writing about it recently, and realizing what a huge impact that would have on a tiny little person, to be so not seen, and so misunderstood. I think that has informed so much of my life; my relationship with my mom, my relationship with the feminine, and my relationship with the Divine Feminine.

Growing up people often thought I was a boy. It’s the same with my daughter, who is four, but it doesn’t seem to affect her. I know my mom did not embrace her feminine; her mother had made it very clear that she wanted a boy for a first-born. Granny always denied her feminine as well. So there’s this whole history in my lineage of not embracing the feminine, and embodying it, and this is something I’ve really been working on healing – the ancestral denial of femininity.

Spirituality was not part of my upbringing, family, or circle of friends. My relationship with the Divine Feminine is relatively new. I have started to study and worship Her, informed by yogic philosophy, the deities and mythologies of Hinduism, and yogic and Hindu practices. Embracing a form of spirituality that honours and worships the Divine Feminine has really helped guide my own process of working through blocks, and owning and embodying my feminine essence. I find the connection with and sensing the Divine Feminine can be very subtle, ephemeral, ethereal, and can be hard to keep ‘hold’ of. It is always there, but it can be easy to miss.

About seven years ago I took belly-dance lessons and that was a huge step towards embracing my feminine, and sensing the Divine Feminine. Just being, moving my body that way, and working with my body, instead of trying to force it to… like I had done lots of cycling and some other forms of activity that were more yang, masculine, Shiva kind of energy, but the belly dance was way more feminine. The movements in belly dance actually work with your body, especially for women, so this dance really got me into the feminine movements and also connected me to a feminine lineage in a really positive way. One of my belly dance teachers put it so perfectly, and I never would have thought to use this word, but she said that the movements are ‘archetypal’.
Belly dancing felt really good, and I seemed to be naturally good at it. I could let that energy flow, the sensuality of it, and the sexuality of it. I could feel that energy and allow it and facilitate its movement and its growth and its flowing and have it flow through my whole body, and transmit that to other people.

I’m a very ideal student; I tend to go really in-depth with things. I was practicing at home and creating my own choreographies and I think the intensity and depth with which I went into it, along with it being such a historically feminine thing that was created by women and for women, it touched a really deep long suppressed, ignored, and unknown part of me. And that was able to come out, and I think other people saw it through how well I danced, not that you have to dance well for it to transmit. That had a big impact on my life. I would say that was my first experience with the Divine Feminine.

It was shortly after the belly dancing that I met my husband and now we’re married and have a child. I think that experience prepared me for meeting my husband, who is, in some ways, very in touch with the feminine and his feminine essence. So this amplified things, especially around sexuality and body. In previous relationships and the previous circle that I had been involved with there had been a lot of confusion around sexuality. There was a lot of shame and a lot of, not promiscuity, but a lot of ‘freedom’ around it. The use of sexuality didn’t seem very conscious, but rather used as an addiction to numb emotions and other stuff. Whereas being with my husband, there’s no shame and it’s fun and it’s pleasant and enjoyable. There is softness and playfulness and expansion. We enjoy each other’s bodies and each other’s company and I don’t think I was at all ready for that before the belly dancing and getting into my body that way, along with him being just so the right person to be with.

On a similar note, regarding what can be accessed and transmitted through feminine forms of dance, just a year ago I was at a Sacred Temple Dance workshop. This form of dance focuses on the Divine, and bringing women together through yoga and dance. We were all dancing towards a vase of flowers, and I saw the universe in one flower. It was the first time I experienced that sense, that knowledge that I had read about, that the universe is in everything.

Other ways I started experiencing and growing my connection to the Divine Feminine were through accessing and tapping into my intuition and psychic abilities, as well as receiving insight and healing from past life experiences. Two years ago I started my diploma program at the Pacific Rim College. On the first day we did an intuition exercise where we took each
other’s pulses. When I took this woman’s pulse I had these images come up: one was a soccer ball, one was a red man’s tie and one was a bird flying. I told her that afterwards and she said that she plays soccer with her grandson, and she makes red silk men’s ties, and she wasn’t sure what the bird symbolized or what that was about. I just thought that was so cool! Nothing like that had ever happened to me before and for it to be so accurate and so clear was really exciting. I was getting lots of messages and images from people’s bodies. I was able to tap into the Akashic realm, and know and feel and witness on a very deep-knowing level that our bodies hold our entire history.

With another woman I saw this image of her in a rocking chair when she was older. She was alone in the room but there was a man there who might have been a grandson, like a grown grandson, or maybe a son, who had just walked out of the room. There was such a state of equanimity in her being alone. Another image was from a man and he was swimming. I could see him swimming underwater, and it was right in the pelvic region. Knowing a bit about his relationship with his wife, I’ve known them for quite a while, I have an idea of what that represented, but it’s so personal. Another time when I was doing polarity healing with a woman, I asked what this body needs and I saw this big mound of coffee grinds. She ended up having coffee and feeling a lot better. It slowed down her pulse too, which is kind of interesting. So I was able to develop this ability quite a lot in the two-year program, especially through the yoga therapy and Thai massage. Tapping into and connecting to my intuition and psychic abilities are qualities of the Divine Feminine for me.

I also had a lot of past life experiences, especially in marma therapy. The marma points are Ayurvedic acupressure points and they’re basically like mini chakras. There’s one hundred and eight of them on the body and you can access the different koshas and the different layers of consciousness through them, as well as all the vayus and all the chakras, everything. I had several past life memories come up when I was being massaged through that.

A lot of the past life experiences that came up were around sexualized violence, which is really interesting. You see, I’ve always had this fear of rape. I mean all women are afraid of rape of course, a healthy fear of it, but I’ve always had this really personal fear of it, as though I experienced it in this life-time. So, I had always guessed that it was some sort of past life thing coming forward. In three of these past life experiences I had through the marma therapy, I was a
man, and I was doing the violence, which was such a shock. The first time, I was like, “What?!?” I hadn’t even thought of that concept, me being the one doing the violence.

In one of them it was me raping a person. The other one I walked into the house where some man was, I think it was my wife who was in the bed, and this man was raping her, and then I killed him and said to her, “I’m sorry you had to see that,” and then this present time me who was witnessing said to him, “And I’m sorry you had to do that.” That felt like a huge lightening, and a healing. In the most recent one, I was a man in a business suit. He (I) raped this woman, and then I think ended up killing her, and then left. Then I, as the witness (and I don’t know if I got him to go back or if I as he went back) cleaned up her body and presented her and tried to make some amends that way. It was like giving her some dignity back, it felt like another chance to attempt some healing, and it felt like the right thing to do. It was almost like I didn’t really have a choice; it was just like this is what we’re doing. It was kind of, mmm, I was going to say the logical thing but I don’t know if it’s logical, it’s just what happened.

The whole time with these past life experiences I knew I was in this classroom being massaged. I was having these images come up, these experiences, and I was me, and this was me but not me. They just kept happening and I said something like, “How many lives am I going to have to go through?”

These past life experiences felt like a chance to make some karmic amends, and to potentially get lots done in this lifetime. They have helped me understand this life, such as this feeling that I have had throughout my whole life of being petrified of being raped. I can understand where that comes from now. As well as the parents who I was born to, with them being so, especially my mom, being so asexual, and understanding that a bit more – why I would have chosen this situation to come in to because there had been so much violence and so much damage done in the past.

I feel like so much of my work right now is transforming some really deep-seated core beliefs that have been passed down through so many generations of women. Sometimes it seems so hard. Then when I stop and remember what I was taught consciously and unconsciously from my mom from my grandmother and how far back the line goes, I give myself a bit of a break and say, “Ok, you’re doing a lot of work here.” And I’ve definitely noticed, my mom said it too, the shift in her since I’ve been doing a lot of really intensive work in the last two years. It’s so great to see that carrying backwards as well as forwards. I’ve noticed so many changes. This leads
me to speak about two very strong experiences I’ve had, also in the past two years: working with the goddesses Kali and Lakshmi, forms of the Divine Feminine.

This past spring I started a forty-day Lakshmi mantra discipline. I was going to see a cranial-sacral worker, and one of the things she said that was such a huge revelation for me was that I operate from a place of lack. I spent the next week and a half focusing on it with awareness and seeing where that’s the case. All these new things were popping up and I was realizing, “Oh yeah, that’s from a sense of lack too, I didn’t have this and this and this.” And so I started the Lakshmi mantra, because Lakshmi is about abundance – abundance and beauty and harmony. You can’t hold on to her; you have to be willing to let it flow, and the more you’re willing to let the abundance flow, the more the abundance will come to you.

I would use mala beads as I chanted her mantra, usually in the evening. I would start with talking to her a little bit, thanking her for the abundance of the day and then asking for certain things to be abundant, mostly for an abundance of sense of self, and also for my daughter to have that. And I really felt the change…it’s one of those things that’s hard to describe…I felt more full, not as depleted, I didn’t feel the lack as much. And I definitely felt more radiant and more myself. And I knew the abundance of the universe, rather than just being able to say it and mentally know it, but actually physically emotionally and spiritually know it.

I also saw the effect in my daughter for sure. She’s really come out of her shell in the last year. She’s so her, which has been a big part of what I’ve been wanting to give her as a mother, for her to be able to know herself and love herself and be herself. Because I feel like I’m still working on it at thirty-five, and for her to have that already at four, I’m just so grateful for that. So that’s been a big, very tangible, visible change.

During the forty days with Lakshmi, there was one day where my head started turning side to side on its own, and then it stopped to the right and I had this big flash of anger towards my mom. It was just ready to burst right out of me, and my next conscious thought was to try to bring forgiveness to her, to everything. But then I knew that I had to stay angry. It wasn’t time for forgiveness yet, now that I was actually feeling the anger, it was time to be angry, and to feel that and to honour that rather than sweep it away and not give it its expression. Given what my mother came from and her childhood, she did a really good job, but there was still that sense of not being seen and not being connected with. That’s the biggest lack, that’s where the anger comes from. Yeah. And underneath that there’s grief and hurt from not having that in my life.
Interestingly, two years before that, and before I even knew who Lakshmi was, I had this image appear, this image of somebody holding two lotuses and turning and winking at me. I knew it was one of the deities, but I didn’t know until later that it was Lakshmi. So that was actually my first experience with Her.

Before I did the Lakshmi chanting, I did a forty-day mantra discipline to Kali, which was huge. This was December last year. I was sitting on the couch chanting to Her, the fire was going in the fireplace, and I had this feeling like I was about to birth something. We had two miscarriages before my daughter was born, and then when my daughter was born it was an emergency C-section and it was not what we had hoped for. So there was a lot of trauma and emotion still around those three experiences, and I find it hard to separate the three. So this time when I was chanting I felt like I was going to birth something so I put my legs up in the position and used my hands to help what was being birthed out, and there was this tiny little wrapped up body, and I was just crying and crying and crying. I offered this little wrapped body to the fire and then I felt someone sitting beside me, like a very motherly energy, and I put my head down on her shoulder and it was really comforting.

That experience that was evoked through chanting to Kali set off a lot of the grief because in January of this year I was having so much grief. I feel that what I birthed during my mantra experience with Kali was the miscarriages. And I’m not sure if it was from the miscarriages or from the C-section, but I was overwhelmed, overcome with grief, and I could barely function, it was so foggy and hazy. Yeah….

So, those two experiences with Kali and Lakshmi, they were so not what I was focusing on. The anger that came up with Lakshmi was not at all what I was focusing on, I was focusing on abundance and growing my abundance. And then with Kali, I can’t remember, I don’t know if I had a specific intention, mmmm, I don’t think I did with her, I just wanted to experiment with her mantra, and grief is what came up. I don’t know if those things were things that had to be moved before I could get to the other things, or if it was just the practice itself that was able to bring up something that needed to come up.

When I look at my Kali statue, there is so much fire and so much intensity, it’s not even anger, it’s this undirected….I guess it’s the intensity of Her. I didn’t ever feel anger about the miscarriages and I didn’t feel anger about the C-section, but with my mom, it’s only been in the last year that I felt the actual anger. I’ve always known, because I’ve always been really irritable
with her and not always very respectful and I’ve always wondered why that is and haven’t honed in on it until this year.

My most recent experience with the Divine Feminine was just a couple months ago when I had another miscarriage. I was in the hospital for the miscarriage and I decided to try to connect with this little being because I kept wondering, “Who are these beings who keep deciding to come in for six weeks and then go, and what did I agree to, to go through this much sacrifice?” And I sensed this little boy, who I had sensed before. Ever since my daughter was around two he was hanging out quite a bit, like I would expect to see him over my left shoulder, he was such a strong presence. So in the hospital, I had this really direct connection and I was able to talk to him. I asked him what he needed and he said he was scared. I told him that we’re here for him and that we’re ready to love him when it’s time and we’re here to welcome him when he’s ready to come. And I got super emotional about it, even now…

I started wondering, well, how much is this about this loss, because I know he’s there and he’s waiting for us, and how much is this about grief for my body and that I’m not able to do what women do. I think it is more about me and my health and I guess it probably comes back to the lack again and not being strong enough and all my health stuff that I’ve been finally really treating in the last year and a half.

I’ve only had one period since my daughter was born, so it has been over five years of not having a bleed. When it did happen, it felt so good, my body felt so good, and there was so much blood, there was more than there had been before and it was so great to share it with people and it brought out a lot of positivity from other women, which was so great. I felt like that was my gift to other woman, because we tend to forget what a positive thing this is. Yeah, my body felt really good, and vibrant. And there was a huge amount of relief that it finally came.

Being able to bleed means vitality to me, to be able to have enough to shed that blood, plus the cleansing of it. It’s like pregnancy; it’s one of the definitions of being a woman. It’s such a clear symbol of femininity, and of health and vitality. So when that bleed happened, I felt like, “I am a woman! I can still do this!” So that’s another interesting shift to note, starting to honour my body in a different way, and to notice, appreciate and love the femininity of it.

I remember with my first bleed I was so embarrassed about it, I didn’t tell anyone. My mom found out because she saw it in my underwear in the laundry. She congratulated me and
she seemed kind of excited about it but it was also kind of weird. I was really uncomfortable with it. When I was younger, I was always so uncomfortable with having a woman’s body. When I was getting changed I wouldn’t touch my breasts, or even look at them. The first time I used a mirror to look at my yoni it was so uncomfortable, almost sick to my stomach uncomfortable. So yeah my first bleed was not a happy experience, there was a lot of embarrassment and probably shame as well.

There is so much emotional stuff that’s involved with women’s menstruation. With a neuro-emotional technique that I’ve been doing, a couple of times I checked in with my menstruation and with my uterus and yoni to see what’s been held there. What I saw in my uterus, just a couple weeks ago, was this vast space. It was like me standing in a desert, just this big open vast dry arid space. In these images that come up for me, especially when working with the neuro-emotional technique, are also the image of me alone. Loneliness has been such a big part of my life and it’s a pattern that comes up again and again.

Looking back along the family line, from all the women that have come before me, I see a lot of loneliness. And this loneliness seems like such an anti-feminine thing. Women seem to naturally gather and support each other. The relationship component is such a big part of the feminine energy, so that’s something else that I’ve really been working on healing, not having that loneliness so much. I wonder how to do that – if it’s through other people, other women, or if it’s through a relationship with the Divine – and how to have a healthy way of doing that.

With Kirtan I’ve had lots of crazy experiences, especially with the Ma chants, where I really feel the mother energy. One time it was very much like nursing from a breast. I was being nurse, and it was this milk of abundance and life that was super abundant and flowing freely, and it was really nice. And there was this older, wiser, and more mature woman presence, similar to the Kali experience. The chanting has definitely brought me to a level of consciousness where spirit appears, the magic stuff. There are images and presences that are not here in the physical form, but that are so present.

Seeing the images of the Divine Mother, the nurturing and abundant wise mother energy, is a reminder that that presence is here, that energy is here, and it can be connected to anytime. There was so much that my mom wasn’t able to give me, but these other energies are able to give it to me. I’m trying to get the same fulfillment from these non-physical energies that I would from my mom. Part of me wants it from my mom but part of me doesn’t want it from her.
There’s this weird resistance of her, wanting to be mothered and nurtured, but not wanting it to be her.

My relationship with the Divine Feminine also has to do with me being way more receptive to life, being willing to go out into life and receive the experiences, receive the energy and be. Going out into life is more masculine, but to be in life and allow things to happen to me is more feminine. Before there was so much fear. I think from not being seen and not being known for so long, and putting up the walls and not being able to let the walls down. Now I’m able to interact, to experience life and let life experience itself through me. I try to let myself grow and come into my bigness, and although there still is lots of contracting and lots of fear, I’m very aware of it when it’s happening. I feel like I’m way more capable and willing to do and be more often now; I go out into life and experience it more.

There have been little steps of it so many times through out my life, and each step feels like such a huge shift, a huge change. Looking back, connecting the dots backwards, it’s like I have to constantly remind myself to keep going out into life, to keep allowing and receiving and experiencing, and to not put up those walls. And to see daily life, washing the dishes, as a divine act. Being present as much as I can. Being enlightened in the world rather than from the world. Being conscious, being in presence, being that, doing that in my every day life, because you have to live your everyday life. Everything can be sacred or mundane, there’s no distinction; it’s how I decide to relate to it.

Kat’s Story

I’m forty-four years old and it’s been a long and bumpy road to get to where I am. I had a pretty troubled childhood, teenage years, and adulthood. It’s taken me all this time to peel away the layers of all the trauma. I have let go of so much to get to where I am. It’s taken all this time for me to find myself again, to connect with the Divine Feminine – the purity of who I am, who we all are.

I thought that just because I could matter-of-factly tell the story of what had happened in my past that I had dealt with it. But really I spent the next twenty, thirty years trying to figure it all out, and it’s taken me all this time to realize that I’ve always been there. The Divine Feminine is always there. She comes through friends, through family, through mentors, and in male and female form. I see and feel the Divine Feminine in gentleness, nurturing, supporting, and caring. And that can come through pretty much anybody, in any situation. I feel like I’ve
finally arrived at that place where the Divine Feminine is so much a part of who I am. The Divine Feminine is so much a part of you, and of everybody. It’s like love. If you listen to and tap into that, and you live life through that, it’s pure and gentle and respectful.

In my story there’s no beginning and there’s no end, and there’s a whole cast of characters. I guess maybe I’m the main character because it’s my story, and it’s my life, and everybody who comes into that is the cast of characters. Sometimes it’s a comedy, sometimes it’s a drama, and sometimes it’s heroic. It’s an ebb and flow of all of those things. Sometimes it’s been a tragedy, like when I’ve been sexually abused; that was a tragic part of my life.

When I was a child my biological father sexually abused me. My parents split up when I was three and I stayed with my father. He used to go away to camps and he would give me to people who would take me for a period of time. He would pay them for me to stay there. Some of them I knew, some of them I didn’t know, some of them were really quite nice, and some of them were horrible.

I think it’s taken me so long to get to where I am because I’ve had many negative hurtful experiences in my life. I’m half First Nations, and I grew up in a number of different redneck towns, and had a lot of people be pretty horrible and harsh towards me. I had a lot of people be abusive towards me, sexually, emotionally, and verbally, so I was ashamed of who I was – as a First Nations person. If somebody asked, “What’s your ethnicity?” part of me felt like I would die inside. I was so ashamed, like, “Ohhhh they found out”. It’s like people labeling you, and then you take on those labels as your identity and you think that that’s who you are, and it’s taken me all these years to peel away, strip away, and examine and realize that these labels don’t belong to me.

I’ve also gone through a rash of terrible relationships. It’s just been in the last two years that I haven’t been in a relationship. There’s been a couple of times where there’s been a little interest, but then I realize that I’m not in a place where I can share who I am the way that I want to share in a relationship. I haven’t solidified that within myself yet. It’s really new for me to be in this place of understanding myself as Divine Feminine. Yet in a way it’s not new because it’s always been there. The Divine Feminine is always there. It’s like finding your authentic self, and then living your authentic self.

In my relationships, due to my childhood experiences and my self-inflicted trauma of choosing relationships that weren’t healthy, I have these ingrained paths of how I deal with
situations. I’ve spent a good part of my life trying to clear all those paths and now that I feel I’ve cleared a lot of them, I feel sort of fearful.

I needed to clear away all those things in order to be in a place where there’s purity of my own spirit, where I am in touch with my Divine Feminine. When I’m in touch with my Divine Feminine, then every action, whether it’s thought, physical, spiritual, or emotional, is coming from a place of who I am. I’m not being reactive to somebody, or trying to live up to something outside of myself, or trying to prove that I am a good person or a loving person.

When I’m not in touch with my Divine Feminine – who I am – and understand that this is me at my core, pure in spirit, when I forget about that and start doing things for other people, no matter who that is, whether it’s teachers or employers or friends or lovers, when I quit listening to the Divine Feminine within who I am, I don’t make the choices that are authentic. I have to listen. I have to listen to that voice within, and that feeling within. I have stripped away everything to find my foundation again.

I believe in reincarnation. When you’re born into this world, when your spirit is brought into this world, you have a path, and your spirit chooses all the things it wants to learn. It’s who you are, it’s your spirit, and I have to stop and listen to myself, listen to my spirit, and be in touch with my Divine Feminine. Depending on which situation I’m in, it could be listening to my own intellectual voice, or tapping into my authentic emotional self, and living through that rather than being reactive to whatever approaches me. I stop and pull myself back and kind of sink back into myself. But it’s not really sinking, it’s more like opening myself up and letting it out.

I know when things come from this authentic place, from this connection to the Divine Feminine, because it comes from a place of love. It’s a softness, a softness of spirit. There’s no attachment to it, there’s no ego, and there’s no power. It can’t be rattled because there’s nothing to rattle. It just makes sense.

Of course I’m not there all the time. I’m going through something right now with work and I have to back myself out, pull myself back, and settle within, doing what I can do, and not allow what other people are doing effect me. I am focusing on doing what I do best, and just being who I am. When I get too attached and therefore have expectations of what should be happening, I lose contact with that feeling of authenticity. When I’m able to re-connect with my
authentic self, it’s peaceful. There’s a sense of letting go, and a deep knowing that I can’t own anything, I can’t control anything.

Twenty years ago when I first went to see one of my therapists, I didn’t even know what a boundary was. I had none. I had no boundaries. I didn’t even understand that whole concept, and now I do and it’s interesting because I’m finding that I need to have a boundary at work. There’s personalities of my x-husband and my biological father at work, they can manipulate and twist words around and make you feel like you’re responsible for something that is not your responsibility. I’ve allowed myself to be emotionally jostled, and I’m having to pull myself back from that and remind myself that this isn’t about me. I need to pull back, settle into my authentic self, and trust that and support that. I need to recognize, remember, and live and breath that. I want to live and breath my authentic self, my Divine Feminine, my purity of spirit, who I am. I want to connect back into that. This challenge at work is reminding me of this.

Another thing that helped me connect to the Divine Feminine was getting in contact with the child within me that was hurt and wasn’t taken care of and wasn’t protected. With one of my mentors, we worked on a lot of imagery and writing: writing to myself when I was a child and mothering myself. I had to mother myself because I didn’t have the mother or the father to protect me. I ended up learning that it wasn’t me protecting the little girl; it was the little girl protecting me. I was the injured party and she still had the purity of spirit. We both looked after each other. That’s definitely one of the things that was really life altering for me. She’s always there. Like even right now I see an image of her…she’s just here. And she’s ok. And I’m ok.

This pure spirit has always been here. You can’t hurt, or you can’t damage that pure spirit; that pure spirit is pure. The damage happens, and the pain and the wounds and all of those things happen in this vessel, but there is this pure spirit that is never damaged. It’s something I’m also really just starting to understand and articulate, like even as I’m speaking this, I’m understanding more about my life and who I am.

I have seen and experienced the Divine Feminine in and through my mentors. I’ve had a lot of great mentors in my life who have been integral to causing a shift at times when I was drowning. One of my mentors had a mentor who was one of the most amazing loving spirits, like a mother, like a mother earth. The story my mentor told me about this woman was really powerful for me because of my sexual abuse. The sexual abuse that happened when I was a child kept recurring in relationships because I would pick people that were similar to my
biological father and so the way my partners treated me felt normal, even though it was completely messed up. I carried that, I allowed that to define me; I was a sexual abuse victim. But then my mentor told me this story about this woman who would counsel inmates.

This woman, in her fifties or sixties, walked into an inmate’s room. The inmate was extremely angry and he came straight up to her and grabbed her boob, and was really trying to intimidate her. She put her arms down, and… this makes me cry… she put her arms down and looked in his eyes and said, “It’s ok.” He was so angry, seething, and she simply said, “It’s ok.” She completely embodied that knowing that he couldn’t hurt her, because of her purity of spirit; she was in touch with her pure and loving spirit. She disarmed him. He eventually broke down and sobbed and she held him in her arms and said, “It’s ok.”

That image helped me so much, because I realize that we all have our stories, but if we can find that love and that pureness within ourselves, we don’t have to be the story, we don’t have to be damaged goods. Nothing can affect that place – that purity of spirit that is in all of us. This, to me, is the Divine Feminine.

I remember the first time when I went into counselling, maybe twenty years ago. I knew I was spiraling and was self destructive and I knew that I needed help. Yet I was so fearful, I was terrified, to go into counselling. Because I could feel that I was going to be peeling away all this stuff that didn’t belong to me but I identified with… I thought it was who I was. So once I peeled away all those things, I was terrified that there was not going to be anything there. It’s like you have this cover, and when you peel it all away and there’s empty inside, how terrible is that going to be? But it’s not, now that I’ve finally come to that place.

From a young age I’ve always been a people pleaser. Love me love me, I’ll dance, I’ll do anything! Can I help? Keep me keep me keep me… and I always got rejected and shuffled off to another family. Cognitively I didn’t understand why I couldn’t stay with this good family and why I was shifted over to this horrible family. And now I’m coming to a place where – this might sound kind of harsh but I don’t mean it to sound harsh – where I don’t care. If you don’t like me, I don’t really care. When I say I don’t care I mean if somebody doesn’t like what I’m doing or doesn’t like who I am or doesn’t connect with me, I know it’s not about me.

It’s a funny place to be when you first get there. These past two years have been amazing. It’s been a flat line and I’ve also grown more than ever, I’ve grown more within who I am, or maybe just re-established more with who I am because I’ve allowed the space. I think
that’s part of why, and I didn’t even realize it at the time, I sequestered myself up on a mountain. I think my Divine Feminine guided me there. It was exactly what I needed to do. I needed to go away in order to be able to really find that solid place of resonance within myself and understand that that is who I am, and then I could come back out. I cocooned myself. I spent a lot of time with myself on this mountain, and loved that time and that quiet.

I have a dog that I am out with a lot. I adopted her, and she has helped me heal so much. Like I mentioned earlier, I believe the Divine Feminine shows up in animals too, in everything. Last weekend I actually decided that I was going to do nothing, not get in the car, not go off the mountain, I was just going to do what I wanted to do for myself, and if that was staying in my pajamas all day then that’s what I was going to do. So I did that all Saturday, and then Sunday I woke up and took my dog outside and came back in and made some coffee and was sitting in bed with my dog and cat. We were all lying in bed, and I stopped and noticed I was feeling so grateful, so grateful, and I had tears pouring down my face. My dog was just looking at me and I was like, “We made it! We made it.”

When I was with my first counsellor twenty years ago I remember saying that I felt like I had finally woken up. I was sooo terrified, I was wondering, “What happens?” and feeling, “I don’t want to fall asleep again!” And I remember her saying, “It’s ok, yes you’ve woken up and yes you have a better grip on things, maybe there will be times where you might fall asleep for a while, but you will never go backwards.” I was so afraid, I didn’t want to go backwards and make terrible choices for myself. Now I really understand that I can’t go backwards, because the more I understand my authentic self and the more I live and breath my authentic self and resonate my authentic self, I can’t not be that. It’s like hummmmmm, like ommmmmmmmmm. It’s like a new language but it’s an ancient language that I’m tapping back into. When you resonate at that level and you have that connection, you can’t not be there. I don’t know exactly how to describe this; I just realize that I am here.

About two months ago, I was in the darkest darkest time I’ve ever been in. It was for a day or two. I would say that it was sort of a depression that I went into. I could feel myself going into it, and I knew that it was happening for a reason. I always felt like my life had a much bigger purpose than just the day to day hum drum of doing the job that I’m doing right now. I’m a real estate assistant and my work is very boring, there’s not really a lot of meaning to it. I would really like to work with people to help them find their voice, in whatever form that ends
up being. I know that every experience that I’ve had in my life has a greater purpose, just like going into this dark dark dark. Even though this experience was darker than I’ve ever gone before, it was almost like I was watching myself or watching a movie. I was like, “Ok, I’m going to let myself go into this,” and the whole entire time it was happening it was also like, “I want to go to this place so that I understand what that feels like so I can speak the language of what that is, and come back out of it, and not get caught up in it.” It’s the ebb and flow.

I was feeling it, I was in the darkness, but I was also on the other side, and maybe that’s the little girl in me, the purity, being able to watch it. I wasn’t afraid at all. I was flabbergasted. I actually started to write again, and so I wrote everything that was coming out and I didn’t hold back. I read it the next day, and wow, that was a deep deep dark scary place that I went to, although I wasn’t scared, and it was like a release. Not that I won’t have gloomy dark days again, but it was like because I didn’t resist it, I just let go and was a witness to it, it wasn’t so scary. I could just see it. It was like a dance. And I could give lightness to it, because it’s just all part of the spectrum, its all part of the rainbow. You can’t have one without the other; you can’t have joy and purity without understanding the darkness, because then you don’t have a perspective. This is the Divine Feminine; She is everything, all things. And She finds the purity in everything, She illuminates the purity in everything.

I’m letting go of ownership of anything. If I had tried to control that dark experience, it might not have been as beautiful of an experience as it was. When I tap into the feeling, my authentic self, and let go of expectation, there is no angst. It is just being who I am. Usually I’m very compartmentalized and organized. I’m a Virgo. I like order. I used to want order in absolutely everything, and now I’m letting go of that. Even by trying to put order into what the Divine Feminine is, is actually allowing me to let go of order in it.

I’m realizing more and more that the Divine Feminine is part of everything – flowers, mountains, nature, animals, mentors – and that’s the beauty. She’s the beauty in everything. She’s not one particular thing, She’s not just mentors or angels or goddesses, She’s all of it, in everything. It’s when we get away from that understanding or when we haven’t found that understanding, experienced it and felt it and breath it, that’s when we…that’s when I have made choices in my life that aren’t healthy.

I’ve always needed to be in nature. I once lived in Victoria, on the twentieth floor of a condo, and I couldn’t stand it because I couldn’t get out of the building and on to the earth. I
called it concrete-itis, because it was constantly not being able to be connected to Mother Earth. That’s why I love Bear Mountain. Anywhere I’ve lived I’ve always needed to be able to get on to the earth. It’s a feeling of such reconnection.

I’ve done visualizations where I’m connecting to spirit and letting the purity come in and the unhealthy negative release into Mother Earth. When I first learned to do this, I felt bad, and Mother Earth and Divine Feminine told me, “It’s ok, She can take it, that’s what She’s here for.” I felt bad and guilty because I didn’t want to give Her my problems, but that’s what She’s here for, and that’s what we are here for. That’s what I want to do with life, with my time here; I want to be able to help others let go of that pain, in whichever way they need to let go of it. I have a strong desire to learn the tools to be able to help others help themselves to get to a place of purity and kindness and connection with themselves, with the Divine Feminine, and feel supported. It’s such a beautiful place to be and we all deserve it, everybody deserves it. Every man, woman, child, and creature of this earth, we all deserve this. I didn’t realize that before. I thought I deserved to be abused, I thought that was my lot in life; I thought I wasn’t good enough to not be abused. Now I’ve come to the place where I know nobody deserves to be abused no matter what, in any way shape or form. It’s amazing.

I realize too that I can’t make anybody do anything or teach anybody anything. I feel like the more I live it, and the more I resonate the knowing that I am and we all have the Divine Feminine in us, it allows other people to be in that place, in which ever stage, or wherever they are. I don’t even need to articulate it. I don’t need to have a discussion about it with somebody in order for them to be able to feel that and it doesn’t even have to be a conscious occurrence between me and somebody else. I’m coming to that place in life where I know that if I just live true to who I am, I give the space to others to be able to do the same.

Interestingly, I’ve been really wanting to get involved in exactly this that I’m doing here, and being involved with aspects of life which are so joyous and have so much meaning. I can get so caught up in the noise, and live the noise that I forget what this is. There’s no drugs or alcohol or anything out there that is any more beautiful than being in touch with this, this purity, the Divine Feminine.

I wish everybody in the world could be consciously in touch with this and living it, because if you’re coming from this place, you can’t harm other people. I mean you may have to be honest and truthful, and that honesty and truth may hurt somebody, but they’re not hurting
because you’ve intentionally inflicted pain upon them. Rather it’s that you’re being truthful to who you are and your spirit, and what’s happening with them is what they need to work on, what they need to deal with.

If you’re in a situation, work wise or partnership wise or friend wise, where you’re living untruth together, even though you think that what you’re living is the way that you should be living because that’s the situation, step back from it and be honest. It may be a painful process that you’re going to go through, I mean that’s even with friends, there’s been times where things have come up and I’ve been hurt, but then I’ve stood up for myself and said this hurt me, what you did, what you said is not acceptable to me, it’s not the way that I deserve to be treated. Even as painful as that was, to actually stand up for myself, and as painful as it was for them, our friendship became stronger, our love for each other became stronger, because nobody likes to hurt anybody. Your soul weeps. You’re hurting yourself.

If you speak the truth, then you allow others the space to speak the truth. This purity of spirit is disarming. Like the woman who reflected back onto the inmate, “You can’t hurt me, you’re hurting yourself.” He had so much anger, and he was trying to direct that anger at her, and she just reflected it back, and he was able to witness his own pain. The most powerful way I’ve been helped is just having somebody be a mirror for me, because we know, we know what it is that we need to do.

When you’re struggling with something, it helps to have a pure presence reflect whatever that struggle is so that you can see it and understand it and let go of it. Then you don’t need to own it anymore, it doesn’t need to be a part of you. Then you see the purity, when you strip away all those things, it allows your purity to come out and resonate. I think that’s some of the strongest work that can be done, being that purity of light. You can help everybody that you come into contact with by standing in your purity of light, by being the Divine Feminine. It’s like paying it forward, by allowing people to come in to your life and sharing what it is that you’re doing, you’re helping it grow. It helps everyone resonate his or her own purity more and more as you walk through life now in touch with your own purity of spirit. You forever help evoke loving change.

Sharing my story here feels like something’s been put back into motion that I was asking to be put back into motion. I really wanted to get back into this, reconnect with my Divine Feminine, and have Her be a more significant part of my life consciously. Grow that part,
whatever it is, and pay attention to it, and allow it to develop in the way that it is meant to develop. Sometimes I battle with thoughts of, “I’m forty-four, I should have being doing something more than I’m doing,” or “If I really wanted to be doing this why aren’t I, why haven’t I written a book, why aren’t I doing talks?” That’s the ego telling me that I haven’t done enough, but the spiritual Divine Feminine side of me says it will be what it will be and allow it to unfold as it unfolds, have no attachment to it and it will come. It’s when we try to hang onto it and have expectation of it that it won’t flow. The beauty of it is the process. It’s so amazing. I’m so thankful to be sharing my story, doing this, because I’m finding my own voice, and this is part of the journey. Amazing. It’s beautiful, absolutely beautiful. Thank you.

Sybille’s Story

I would like to start my story at the point when I was nine years old, when I found myself seeking for something that I couldn’t find in my world. I was brought up Christian and it was after we went to a service with my family that I said to my dad, “Dad, I love God, but I don’t think God likes what we’re doing here.” He looked at me and he asked, “Well, why do you think that?” And I said, “Well there’s no joy, there’s no connection. People look so sad, they’re only concerned with what they wear, and I don’t think he would like this.” And my dad asked me, “Well what do you think God would like?” My answer was, “I think he would like it if we danced and if we sang and if we were happy in his house.”

That was the first sense of me awakening to, “Something is wrong here,” and from there I started, in total innocence, on a quest for something more, for something different. In my teens I did lots of silent Christian retreats where I learned to go into deep listening. I had a very loving connection with God and was communicating with Him frequently, and yet there was always something missing, there was always this sense of… still that’s not it.

At the age of eighteen I was so deeply involved with the questions of “How are we all connected to something bigger and why can I not perceive it?” that I was looking forward to the moment of my death. I was not suicidal or tired of my life. My longing to know was just so huge. I somehow had a sense that at the moment I die it would all be revealed to me. In that deep longing during a silent retreat I had my first moment of “awakening”. I was standing at the top of a hill in the dark of the night and yelled my longing out into the starry sky… and then something opened and all was connected. For a short period of time I was able to perceive that
we are not separate, that I was the stars and the universe and the universe was me. For a short moment I had a sense of what it felt like, what was driving me on my quest.

When I was nineteen a friend introduced me to Zen Buddhism and I started meditating. For ten years, throughout my twenties, I practiced Buddhism and dedicated my life to meditate and find out what keeps us feeling separate. In the deep wisdom of Buddhism and in the silence I found a lot of what I was looking for, a lot of answers to what makes sense in this life for me, but still there was a missing piece. It still felt like I was studying a foreign form that did not really match my soul.

At twenty-eight I came to a crossroad in my life. I had finished my training as a public school teacher and everything looked like I was ready to settle and start my professional life. That thought scared me immensely. I experienced Germany as a very fear based and career oriented society, and I felt like I was living in a box. My soul was whispering, “No, there’s more…”

I had also ended a ten-year relationship that had not worked out. On the outside I had a very healthy, happy looking life and yet I knew it was not for me. So I decided to leave Germany. I left my job, my many friends, my loving parents and family, my beautiful apartment and everything behind, and came to Canada. I was twenty-nine and I wanted my own family. That was at the forefront of my mind. The other voice was more like a faint little whisper, a vague sense of searching for something that I didn’t know what it was.

So I came to the small town of Duncan on Vancouver Island. I’ve lived in Paris before, I’ve lived in beautiful cities and towns in Germany, and I’ve travelled the world! And I came to Duncan, a small town that looked a lot like a redneck place to me. It made no sense at all! I lived with a family of a friend of mine that I had met years earlier. We had the same dream of starting a private school. I shared a room with one of her children. I had no privacy. I got a job at the local Waldorf high school. It was very challenging. My English was limited, I had no papers, no money, no car, nothing made sense and yet I woke up every morning going for a walk and yes, my soul knew it was in the right place. Later on in one of my Kundalini dance journeys, I actually felt and I met the female spirit that called me here to Duncan. It was a native spirit who actually called me to come here from Germany.
Four months later I met my now husband, who had come from Toronto to Duncan; same strange journey, and I now know we came here to meet each other, our souls had to meet. There was a knowingness from the very beginning that our relationship was meant to be.

So I did my plan A; we bought a house, we had two children, and I started my own private school. I knew I didn’t fit in the school system so I started a home schooling business from my own home. It was successful and I felt like I did all that I thought I had come here for, and still I was unhappy. I mean of course I love my family, but unhappy in the sense that at this point I really missed the support of my family and friends I had left behind, and my soul still hadn’t found what it was looking for.

My relationship was challenging for seven years. I knew there was more and I had to go on a search again. As a result of doing private counselling to help me manage my depression, I started a training called Integrated Body Psychotherapy (IBP). That was the first healing journey for me where I learned tools to heal deep layers of my past, my family of origin, my relationship, and my life. Then I found Kundalini dance. So my IBP teacher, a precious older lady in her seventies, lives in Duncan and my Kundalini teacher came to Duncan all the way from Australia. I started to understand why I had come here.

I first connected with the energy of the Divine Feminine through the Kundalini dance. Here I found my missing link: the Divine Feminine made the picture whole. It took me a long time to understand all this on a conscious level. My connection to the earth, the feminine life force beneath, together with the Divine Masculine above, the God that I had this relationship with from my childhood. I followed an intuition that there was deep truth for me in this form of dance. I had experiences of Kundalini awakening, loads of energy freeing and lots of energetic blocks releasing that were beyond what I could do in the IBP work for healing this lifetime.

Within the Kundalini dance was an eight-day dance retreat called “Awakening”. Each day we danced into one of the chakras to resolve blocks in the chakras and alchemize the shadows into the light. Through the dance I started to go into this trancelike state and I was retrieving a lot of powerful visions and images. One of them was of crystals being planted in my chakras as a power support. Another one was a connection with the Lady of the Lake from the old Arthur myth. That was what first reassured me that I had a deeper connection to the mythical realms, because I did not know anything about the Lady of the Lake. I hardly knew the myth from some past history lesson.
So what happened during my dance was that I was in a place where I couldn’t move through a piece and a lot of fear was coming up. At that point I had a vision. This lady dressed in white came out of a lake and came towards me. She took off her hood and said, “I am here for you.” Initially I just took it as an image as so many other images that have come up before. But throughout the eight days she kept on coming at different points of my dance, empowering me to the point that I needed and supporting me to open to new dimensions.

One of the times she came in she handed me this sword of light. In the myth, the Lady of the Lake is the keeper of the sword and she hands the sword to Arthur for him to fight his final battle. I didn’t know anything about that either. It all happened in my visions without having the background information. She handed me the sword of light and I used it to cut through so many past lives and restrictions that I had. I had huge liberations, huge expansions, and complete loss of ego. At the end of those eight days I was at a point of being so dissolved, having shed my old structure of being. A whole new possibility of being had emerged, with this Lady of the Lake being my ally and guiding me through all the steps to get there.

That was my first experience of being supported by Divine Feminine energies, and fully trusting in them and being carried by them. I developed a sense that actively accessing the Kundalini energy and the energy of Mother Earth would support me to become who I am in a bigger sense. My relationship with God was always outside of myself, like something that was up in the sky, and had authority. In my dance I experienced that I can call the energy of the Mother inside of me and She becomes me, She becomes my energy, She expresses through me. The embodiment of the Divine energy through me was a whole new experience. In this form of dance I had found a path to actively experience the union with all that is that I was so longing for in my earlier life.

The Kundalini energy is very much about accessing both the Divine Masculine and the Divine Feminine, calling them, and bringing them both into our body temple to be. We simply need to acknowledge the Divine within ourselves, to become Divine. This experience brought a shift from the outside to the inside. I experienced the Divine Feminine as the nurturing, the life-giving, the unconditional love and compassion aspects of the Divine, whereas the God, the male God, represents clarity, guidance, and light.

I think what had shifted in me became most visible in my relationship with my husband. After I came home from this “Awakening”, he found it extremely challenging because he
couldn’t relate to me the way he used to. It was very confusing, but I could hold my ground as the new self I had found. It brought me into such a state of just being, and just being with him. He kind of ran his old patterns and they didn’t work anymore, so they just fell and we came down to the core. At the core I shared my experience with him of the Lady of the Lake, and he had a matching King Arthur piece!

I had done a painting previous to this journey, with a woman emerging from the waters and a symbol in it. When I came back from the dance I looked at it and I said, “Oh my gosh,” and my husband came and joined me and looked at it and said, “Oh my gosh.” I saw the Lady of the Lake emerging in there, which I had painted previous to my eight-day Kundalini dance journey, and he saw the almond shaped symbol of a portal, that he had been seeing as a re-occurring symbol in his life for years. He could never figure out the meaning of it, and there it was in the centerpiece of that painting:
Figure 3: Sybille's Painting 1
The myth of King Arthur and the Lady of the Lake gave us a new sense of purpose together. A new and bigger picture for our relationship emerged. We would use the sword of light together, embodying the Divine Feminine and Masculine in our relationship. The shape of the portal was the pathway to other dimensions, opening to so much more than we could possibly perceive in our limited 3D reality. We realized how connected we were on this journey of our souls.

The other phenomenon I experienced was that by stripping back all the layers of the ego of my old structure, I entered a very deep sense of listening, being able to hear people, read people, understand people, on a much deeper level. I had the openness and the clarity of perceiving others and interacting with others on a much deeper level now. There was an opening of all senses.

This guided me to the next step of what I think I’m meant to do here. I started facilitating groups of dance, I didn’t know exactly how it would look like, but I was in such trust. I started to follow this trust and an inner knowing even though it wasn’t logical. I hadn’t finished any of my trainings, I wasn’t a certified facilitator of any kind, you know, the outside again didn’t make sense. But I felt it was my calling to step out right now and I followed that.

My inner knowingness became stronger than the judge that protested, “You have to have your certificates and you have to have this and this and this…” I started to make my choices from an inner knowing, which to this day is how I’m being guided through my life. I sit in this deep trust; I won’t know the next step, and when I’m ready I will know. The way I approach my whole life shifted to a deep trust that I will be guided. I don’t have to worry about it.

I also started to paint again. I had gone to art school in Germany for my teacher training and after I finished my training in Fine Arts I never picked up a brush again. But after my second Kundalini Awakening retreat I started to regularly paint again. I had this new impulse of combining the dance with the painting. Previously I always had this block in my painting caused by the belief that I’m not good enough, I was stuck in the head. Now I was inspired to combine the dancing and the painting because during dancing my awareness shifts from my head to my heart.

I gave myself a period of trial. Over the summer I danced one chakra at a time. I had a canvas up and painted throughout the journey, and my whole style of painting completely shifted. I was so excited, and as I was doing it I knew that it was to share. Halfway through my
journey of the chakras I started to invite friends to join the process. It was amazing what happened. The transformative state that was created by combining the two art forms was the feeling of unity I had been longing for. The combination of dance and paint opened a whole new dimension, that’s all I can call it, it allowed me to enter a space of non thinking and accessing spirit on a whole new level. I was totally amazed by the process, because I had no idea, I had no background information, no knowledge of what I was doing. My husband, who has a degree in psychology and is a counsellor, joined one of my groups and commented, “Oh my gosh, this is the purest form of art therapy”. And I’m like, “Oh really!”

It’s giving expression to the soul on canvas. I am teaching this process now. I start by connecting with the Divine Feminine and Masculine in a meditation. I work with different themes, such as archetypes. Then I take it onto the dance floor and allow exploration and expression through our bodies, often with the use of visualizations. From the opened body we allow our souls to express their journey on canvas through color and shape. It’s a powerful process, I feel very honoured to witness and hold space for others to express themselves on such a deep level. There is often a feeling of sacredness in the room, the presence of the Divine in all of us shining through.

I also weave in what I’m doing in what’s called the Evolutionary Priestess process. Now we’re working with the Queen of Death archetype and so in my dance process I weave this in, working with the archetype of dying to the old and emerging to something new. I start with a meditation, or a piece of whatever is up to access, then take it into the physical expression into the dance and then from the dance right onto the canvas. It’s a powerful process; it’s very rewarding to witness and hold space for that.

Working with archetypes through the Evolutionary Priestess training has become another essential part of my life. I started this training right after I did my Kundalini Awakening retreats. This was another miraculous incidence of a very special teacher finding her way to Duncan, this time from Portland, Oregon. It’s amazing work. In this training we work with the thirteen archetypes of the feminine such as the great mother, the goddess of love, and the queen of death. The first weekend it was the great mother, and I experienced this great connection with the big open arms of the Divine Mother that holds me. I experienced the safety and security of the connection with the Divine Feminine that’s here to support us. This brings such relief for me, and empowers me to live who I am.
In this Evolutionary Priestess training I had the sense of *coming home so deeply*. All the pieces fell into place of how my journey had started, my quest, finding the Divine Feminine as the missing piece and now the archetype of the priestess. I remember having been a priestess in many lifetimes and now I was offered to be a modern priestess in this new world. That was what my heart was longing for and my soul was searching for. The priestess brings the connection to the Divine Feminine back into the world.

The Dalai Lama put it so beautifully – that it’s the women in North America who are going to change the world. In this process the Divine Feminine plays an essential part. We have the freedom in North America as women to explore the Divine Feminine, and to bring her back into the picture. We are stepping out of Christianity. It’s the end of the time of Pisces and the beginning of the time of Aquarius, and ultimately it’s the end of the time of Christianity, in my perception, as we have lived it until now. It’s the beginning of bringing in the Divine Feminine to heal, to bring back the full picture, and the human beings to their full potential. I have the sense that we as women are the ones in the forefront of this work. Even though there’s a lot of beautiful men that are working on the same evolutionary edge and ultimately we’ll do it together, yet I feel to bring this piece of the Divine Feminine *in* is very much our calling. That is the role of the priestess.

The core piece of the priestess is her *innocence*, and commitment to life, love, and joy. Out of this total innocence, the priestess holds the greatest perspective possible, the greater than imagined. She holds the possibility that we’re capable of living something beyond what we can imagine, something that has never been, something that is greater than we’re able to perceive in our three dimensional minds. She *holds* the space for that possibility, for any piece to contribute to the greater than imagined. I, as a priestess hold space for that possibility to evolve past our consciousness of fear and separation, and it’s not one of us who can do it. There are many women waking up to a higher calling and a clear remembering. They may not call themselves priestesses, it has many different shapes and forms, but we all steward the possibility of the greater than imagined, that which has not been possible so far.

This is where my experience of a past life regression fits in beautifully, because it’s where I received the very strong image of what our evolution energetically looks like. I don’t know what it looks like in 3D reality, but I received this vision as an image for the energetic process. This came as a surprise two years ago, when I didn’t understand the relevance of this
story at all. I have since learned that I have a gift as a mythic dreamer to retrieve these visions from the archetypal realms so I can share them as stories that help us find our way.

I had never done a past life regression so I didn’t know the procedure of it. I thought it had to do with trance but it was a very simple process. I was lying on a massage table and I was guided to a bigger perspective, looking back onto the earth and this land and one part of the world to retrieve a piece of information from my past. There was no breathing, no trance, no nothing involved and I just tapped into this altered state and retrieved this story:

I land in northern Africa, bare foot and in a plain white garment, humble and innocent. I am in a different body, not my own body. I feel pride and value, and deep unknown power underneath the shyness of a young beautiful woman. No jewellery, no adornments, just one simple golden ring on my right hand. I am holding a tray and my feet are walking some clean white and black-chequered palace floors.

There is a flask with crystal clear water and a glass on my tray, that I am supposed to bring to someone. The water is of extremely high frequency, a high crystalline vibration. I am walking towards a bed with a dark red velvet canopy. I can’t see the person, my eyes are lowered and I am not supposed to look up.

I look at my ring, a small clear crystal, growing big, being the center of a fountain, crystal clear water pouring from a fountain. I set down my tray to bathe my slender markless hands in the crystal clear water. My long black hair falls over my shoulders. In the safety of my innocence I desire nothing but playing with the clear waters of this beautiful fountain. Like a child, distracted with the fascination of the magnificence of water, I forget about my task. As I watch the water so intently, I become one with it, my childlike Spirit dives into the fountain, gets sucked under, spout out the top, and enters the cleansing cycle of the waters moving in the shape of a torus.

My Spirit moves through many cycles of purification to meet a person behind the veils of the water. There I recognize a woman of great power. She is dressed all in red, her hair in a black bobtail. Her power has lost its innocence; her red-lipped smile is not pure. She wears adornments with powerful symbols. I can feel the walls she has erected around herself for protection of her heart. At that point, from all the cycling I had done through the water, there is huge Kundalini energy starting to rise in my body and I have this huge gush of heat and tons of energy swamping me.
I feel lots of heat and energy in my sacral chakra and floating up through my heart and my hands and I start to shake. There is energy in my knees and the base of my spine. My hands are extremely charged as I confront this woman above the fountains. We are both hovering above the fountain, the woman in power and the woman in her innocence. She feels untouchable, invincible, but she is only protecting herself. She is me, and it is me also who has to open her.

I feel a huge expansion of my womb. I bring the energy up from my womb into my hands. I am holding the tray again, offering her the sacred water to drink. I have to find the strength to make her drink it so it can help her to free herself from the shield of protection and break down her walls. Only if I confront her with pure innocence and trust and complete fearlessness, will she drink.

I have another gush. My lower body feels like it’s on fire, like a huge fever is rushing through me. I have to throw back the blankets to not burn from the heat. The heat starts to rise into my hands and heart as my breath deepens. I see the power of the woman in red turning her into a falcon, her eyes reflecting a dark and evil force. She has to drop her armour. My body feels unbearably hot, so much fire! My breath deepens and accelerates as I turn into a white dove. My task is to penetrate the power of the woman in red with my own innocence. The two need to make peace, up there, above the fountain.

I need to ground! Power and innocence need to make peace. The dove penetrates the falcon, and brings her down through the cycles of purification into the fountain! The two Spirits go together through many cycles of purification, until the fountain shoots them up into space. There I find myself floating, completely peaceful in the dark surrounded by many golden stars. The young woman is motionless and defeated; her soul has slipped into the body of the older woman. Her face has changed!

I am in the body of the older woman now and I see a tree, an old wide gnarly tree; the Tree of Life representing the Mother. It has one eye, is old and tired, and bears but one little golden leaf. It will die soon, but it carries one golden seed in a nudge of its trunk. That golden seed is being placed into my hands and needs to be brought back to life soon. It wants to be planted in front of the dying mama tree, so that the nutrients of its decay can nurture the seedling.

I get water from the fountain to quench its thirst and feel overwhelmed with the responsibility of taking care of this new seedling, when a circle of sisters appears around the two
trees. They are chanting and mourning for the dying mother tree. I become part of the circle, now in a white gown like all the other sisters. In the circle I find strength and courage to tend to the new seedling, the new Tree of Life.

I still didn’t drink from the water offered. The water is to be shared in the chalice of the water of life with each woman that in turn also gives a drink to the seedling. It’s growing fast and very strong, yet needs the protection of the circle. I recognize some of my sisters’ faces. There is Mary Magdalene, Mother Theresa, my aunt, my great grandmother, Tasha, Ambe, Ahlye, all my sisters from past and recent life times. And Isis!

There is a message from the seedling: “The New Power lies in the strength of this circle of sisters that will bring forth the change.” We will bring forth something more powerful than anything that has been before. There is an exchange of energy or a message. Then there is a circle of men forming around the women, creating a ring of protection. Their task is to surrender and trust, and open their fucking hearts! I see Judas in the circle, Hitler, my grandfather, Jesus, my husband, Paul… many of them. They are being driven to the point of surrender and there is no more fear of the male. They have lost their power over us. Their survival is dependent on the magic of the inner circle, of the tender care and love, the nourishment of the little seedling.

That is the story of my past life journey, wrapped in a picture, a vision, a painting. It came out like this and I never went back to artistically correct it. That is the image I was holding after the journey. There is my story in a nutshell:
I think there’s some power in that story. It wanted to be shared. This story has given me a landscape, a map, of what my soul is up to in this lifetime. There was the piece that brought me here from Germany, and then all my teachers came to Duncan to find me, that’s how it feels sometimes, without being egocentric at all, I just feel like I am the most blessed soul on this planet to have been gifted with all these possibilities. I feel a big responsibility to be that circle of women, to hold that space, and that possibility for change.

I feel very focused on the inner process, the inner work, working in small circles, and my knowing piece is the next step is to grow bigger, to connect. I have this vision of all these dots of light on this whole planet of all the people doing this precious work, of all different religions,
and male and female. There is tremendous work being done on this planet right now and I feel the next step is to connect the dots, to create this grid of light around the planet to help make the shift, so we don’t fall into the old paradigm. To create a new grid of light by connecting the dots of all the precious people that are doing their work, to create on a bigger picture the circle of women, the circle of the earth, to hold this space for change to happen – from a world that is ruled by the ego into a world that’s ruled by the heart.

I feel like I’ve been one of the many blessed beings who has followed her impulse. There was this little voice inside that did not make any sense and yet it was strong enough to make me leave my country, my family, and my friends behind to go to completely no where, to a small town, because I knew that inner voice and then it became stronger and stronger and now I understand it. I have found the missing piece, I am connected with the Divine Feminine, she moves and breaths and lives through me. I am a priestess. I know my calling. I know at this time there’s many of us on this planet who have this impulse, who have this calling, and I’m inviting anybody who feels the slightest bit of it to follow it and listen and see where it takes you because it’s… for me it’s the adventure of my lifetime. My life has never been more exciting than these last three years. It’s just bursting with joy and energy and excitement. My relationship with my husband is supportive and creative and keeps blossoming and my children are a reflection of so much joy and love.

If you have that voice in you, anyone who reads this or hears this, follow it. We can be in this together; the only way to make a change is to bring all of us together and do it together.
Thank you. Thank you for listening. I am grateful.

Krista’s Story

I recognize myself as the Goddess; I recognize myself as the Mother. Through using the power of transfiguration and through my own practice, I awaken more and more every day to the Goddess within me. I have this experience with the Divine Feminine on a daily basis because it has become the way that I live my life. I’m thirty-nine years old now, and it took me a long time to get to this state in my life where I understand that I am the Goddess. I was always interested in the Goddess, I was always studying Her a little bit, and I was very much interested in Tantra.

In my early twenties I started travelling to India, Thailand, and Nepal but I couldn’t find a teacher. I started to read more about the Goddess, I even got a book back then on the Mahavidyas, the ten cosmic powers. But you can’t learn these things from books; you need
someone to initiate you, to teach you these things. You need the initiation, and then you need to open and receive it through your own experience. You also have to find the right teacher.

I studied and practiced yoga for years. I studied the Chakras, energy, and consciousness through Integrative Energy Healing Studies at Langara College. I also studied ceremony and ritual, so you can see I was already starting to work with these ideas – energy, consciousness, chakras, ceremony, and ritual. So although at the time I was not doing the tantric work I eventually found (which is what opened me to fully embody the Goddess) I was doing a lot of related work and building a strong foundation. I continued to learn a little here and there about the Goddess, but it was never really deep. I was implementing practices and I began to understand on a certain level that I was a Goddess, and there were these moments when I started to experience being the Goddess but I wasn’t able to experience the pure form of the Goddess – to understand that, to really feel this, to be this.

Then five years ago I found these tantric teachings through a teacher who was part of a school that works with the Mahavidyas. When I found this, that was it. I started working with the Goddess and I took it very seriously. Some people take the program and do not have that resonance, but I started to experience resonance and to work with Her very very deeply. The swami at the school gave me the initiations of the Mahavidyas, and I began practicing and understanding everything in a very deep way.

Earlier in my life I had had some experiences of Kundalini, but it was not the same connection as this. Here it became a whole way of being, like fully living it. It is a whole way of embodiment. There were some earlier experiences, some mystical experiences of Shakti, this energy, like wow, ahhhhhh, but I hadn’t yet experienced that and being harmonious with that. I was enjoying the bliss coming but not knowing what that was and not knowing who I was yet.

Now that I’ve had all of these initiations with the Mahavidyas in the last five years, I have this understanding that I am the Goddess, and I have completely consecrated my life to this path. That’s how I feel, that’s how I understand, and that’s how I experience it. Everything I say is from my own experience. I experience it, I embody it, I feel it, and I awaken to it. I have awakened through working with these given Goddesses throughout these past five years.

I’m not sure if I can think of it as one experience where I felt completely embodied and in harmony all at once, it happened very subtly. It was so natural, it was like, “Ok, I’ve got my Kali initiation, so now I’m Kali, now I’m going to work with Kali, and I’m going to experience
how She is.” One way to know the Goddess in all Her forms is through making love. When I make love and I transfigure as Kali it becomes very obvious; I know Her.

Another way to know the Goddess is through dance. One night I was doing a dance performance with a bunch of women, there were maybe twenty-five of us and we transfigured ourselves as Kali. That night in the dance everything became intensely Kali: strong and ferocious. Later that night I made love and it was very ferocious. From there the energy of Kali developed so strongly in me.

A lot of the development comes with the tantric ability of being in this state of multiple orgasms that goes for hours. When you’re in this state, you get pushed beyond the mind so much that the mind is no longer there to tell you, you are this or you are that, you simply go into what is a much more natural form. When we go into our natural form, this is awareness of the Goddess. Our natural form doesn’t have preconceived expectations and ideas; it’s pure being. When we get beyond the mind, we’re in this moment of pure being, and pure being in a woman is the Goddess. I was born in this woman’s body, so this pure state of being is the Goddess. Then I merge with Shiva and we become one, we go beyond this, beyond any of this.

Specifically, I work with and embody the ten Mahavidyas, the ten Goddesses that represent the cosmic powers of the tantric tradition. It is through this practice that I experience the Divine Feminine. As I mentioned, I’ve had initiations and experienced the Goddess in Her ten forms through the Mahavidyas in the past five years. Some I have worked with for a period of a couple months and some up to seven or eight months. I’ve gone through the whole cycle to see which ones I resonate with the most. The ones I resonate with the most will be the ones that I will work with for this lifetime. But I still work with them all because they all embody a certain aspect of the universe. Through working with them all, through each particular embodiment of the Divine Feminine, I’ve awakened within myself all of these aspects of the universe.

Each Mahavidya, each Goddess that I awaken to, I experience as a tool for me to experience the entire universe. The whole universe is within me, and through the Goddess I can access all of these elements of the universe that are within me. She shows me all these different beings, these different aspects of myself that may be dormant. It is all within me, so it’s simply going into this experience and awakening different faces of Shakti that I have never seen. And this is amazing.
I would have to say that of course for me, the process of lovemaking is where this experience is very dominant. Usually I am making love for a couple hours a day, so for those couple hours a day I am completely transfigured as the Goddess. For example, now I’m working with the Goddess Kamalatmika, who is the Goddess of abundance. So in those hours of lovemaking, I have completely disappeared, this whole connection to my ego or whoever this physical woman is, has disappeared. I go beyond that into the Divine state. In these hours I am beyond my mind as well, because I’m in the state of orgasm, which is Kundalini Shakti. I’m beyond mind, I’m beyond this ego of myself, and I awaken to the Divine Self, my Divine nature.

Ahhhh, Kamalatmika, She is beautiful, She is amazing, She is such a wonderful Goddess. I also sometimes do a ritual to really connect to and honour Her. There can also be times when I may be working with Her but the energy is a bit different and suddenly Kali comes through that day, or maybe suddenly there is a whole other energy that is being evoked. It could be a different face of Kamalatmika, but often it is another Goddess for some reason because of what is going on with me, mentally and emotionally. What I need to work with is now being shown in this form of the other Goddess.

I experience this very regularly, being in the embodiment of the Divine. When I say that this happens in the state of orgasm, it means I am Satchitananda. I go into this state of pure bliss and experience the feminine in all her beautiful forms. I’m no longer worried about, for example, what this body looks like. This experience of pure bliss, Satchitananda, is so beyond anything, and it is extreme energy.

I take all the experiences of the Divine Feminine through lovemaking, and then I merge with Shiva and I meditate. I bring Shakti into Shiva, into pure consciousness. I move all of this wild and amazing Shakti energy that has been created and put it into consciousness and bring it into oneness. I find stillness. After love-making I always sit and meditate and bring all this tremendous energy into pure awareness. I’ve created tonnes of Shakti energy, I’ve awakened my Kundalini, I’ve had many emotions and energy flying through me for hours, and then in the end I put all this into awareness. All this pleasure and amazing bliss that I have I put into the awareness of my spiritual heart. I rest in the spiritual heart. Then the energy is quite peaceful. Various things can happen at this stage, and there is great stillness.

Shakti is chaos, She is chaotic and like a storm. Shakti is the storm and Shiva is the pole to balance it. The awareness is Shiva, the meditation is Shiva, and all of this Kundalini energy is
Shakti. If you let Shakti go wild, you can potentially become irritated, so instead you can bring Shakti into different chakras. A lot of people put Her in the Sahasara, the crown chakra, I put Her in the spiritual heart.

All of the energy created, all of this Shakti, brings you into a very deep meditation. If I go into a meditation without working with all of this Shakti first, it’s not as deep. So the two together are really deepening. I do this with my partner; we always finish lovemaking with meditating together, we always connect with each other this way.

In this tantric practice, my partner does not see me in the form of a regular woman. He sees me as nothing less than Divine Shakti, the Goddess, and he is Shiva. It is important to understand that in this tradition and in this practice, both of the people who are together recognize one another as Divine. My partner recognizes me as Divine, as Shakti, and he also recognizes me as this in daily life. My partner not only sees me as the Goddess when I’m making love; it becomes the transfigured state all the time to recognize my divine nature. This is the way we relate to each other, we relate to our divine forms and so we are able to move beyond these perfections or imperfections of human personality.

Of course we have to go through these layers through our day, we still have to clean everything up and work through our stuff, but if we can see and experience our partner in a much higher form, daily, it is much easier to drop all of these other things that are not so important. We are not those anyways; I’m not my mind, my personality, my body, any of these things – this egoic side, this is not truly who I am.

I would not be with anyone who did not see me as the Goddess. My understanding of human nature is that our true form is Divine. So let’s elevate and honour that in everyone. I make it a practice to see everyone I meet in their transfigured state, in their Divine form. In relationship it’s really important. I would not be with any man who sees me as a regular woman. Sure, I’m in this physical body, but if you don’t see this Goddess, then for me it’s worthless.

It’s not only through lovemaking that the Goddesses work through me. They also work through me in different ways… they really kick my ass in fact! It can be really hard, they show me different things, different places; they take me deeply into my lessons. This can be through embodiment while I’m making love, but also through meditating. I meditate with them daily, using their mantras, making altars for them and worshipping them. There is a reflection of all of
us within all of them, we are contained within them. They have taught me various lessons through all of them at various times and they all have a different way of showing.

When I was working with Dumavati it was very challenging. She is the most difficult one of all. She is known to have this path of suffering into bliss, finding the bliss through the suffering, and I didn’t resonate with this so much. I was like, “Uhhh, Dumavati, why do I have to work with Dumavati? I would much rather be in the bliss!” She is the bald widow, all of the other Mahavidyas have a Shiva and she has no Shiva. No hair, no Shiva and everything is grey and smoky and, uhhhhhh!

I went to my teacher and said, “I want the next initiation, I can’t take Dumavati anymore, she’s kicking my ass.” I was suffering, it was this emotional suffering, and uhhhh, everything was difficult and I just, uhhh I couldn’t see how there could be this bliss in this Dumavati. I couldn’t see it, but I just had to hang on… and finally, I got to such extreme bliss; I love her so much! She finally somehow showed me, through this path of suffering, I was able to finally go into pure pure bliss. And this was really beautiful.

I’m still leery to work with her though because I know she is very difficult. Last year I worked with her for a short time again. I don’t know why I chose to work with her because I had such a hard time with Her. I made an altar for Her at this ceremony I was doing, and this is how she appeared. I had a playlist on the computer that was a three or four hour playlist. I had checked it earlier and everything was running fine. Then when the time came for the music, there was suddenly a stop between every track, there was always a gap before the next song. Dhumavati is known to be the Goddess of the gap, she’s the Goddess of the void, and this is Her energy. So it was very interesting how she showed up and created a gap between every song on the playlist. It made everything difficult, I had to do a lot of extra work because of that. This is the way She shows.

She also appears in smoke, which is so beautiful. If you meditate on a stick of incense it can give you great bliss if you know Dumavati. I couldn’t believe it, I’ve had incense all my life and then, after working with Dumavati, I saw this smoke of the incense, and She’s so beautiful, she appears in this incense and Her whole story unfolds. She tells the story of the universe somehow in the smoke, through this beautiful dance, it’s so incredibly beautiful. So she has great beauty, but usually people are like “uuuuhhhh, it’s smoke, and it’s in my eyes” and it’s not so nice, but she has great beauty in what we see as the darker and not so nice things of the world.
My work with the Mahavidyas has definitely deepened everything; it’s helped me to awaken to be in pure love in a way that wasn’t understood in a practical way before. The Goddess has changed and transformed *everything*, because when you *see*, when you *understand* yourself as the Goddess, it also means that you honour yourself in a different way. When you are the Goddess, you’re worshipping the Divine in yourself in a certain way. It gives you a great confidence in your being to understand *I am the Goddess!* And I’m not going to take less than *that*, and *don’t you dare piss off the Goddess!* There’s a certain level of respect that you have for yourself that you hold very high when you understand yourself as the Goddess. Not overboard like I’m the Goddess and da da da, but understanding *you are the Divine form.*

It also really helped me in understanding how we are on this planet, how we are in the world, that we are all God and Goddess. I feel this myself, vibrating within me, and it is in every one of us. I’ve had this feeling for a lot longer than I’ve been working actively with the Goddess. It is a natural feeling. Working with and embodying the Goddess opened me to understanding the state of wholeness, to understanding this connection of divinity that is within all of us. The deeper and deeper you go, the greater the expansion through everything. Through this, this experience of divine femininity, we see the universe in its *wholeness*. The feminine being is this great great *great* wonder, and so is the Divine Masculine, and in the merging of these two you can go beyond everything. This Divine Feminine still needs the Divine Masculine to go into holistic love, to have Shiva and Shakti merge into one.

I finally understood that I can do anything that I really want. A lot of the limitations that we often have, which are set by our human personality, is illusion. Through the Goddess I came to believe and understand that I could do a lot. She took away a lot of these boundaries that I had of what I was capable of. When you start to live in this quite high state a lot of the time, and the more you’re living from that, the more that becomes your experience and then everything begins to resonate with you on this higher level. You see yourself *as* this, you experience this, and then this come to you through relationships, through other people.

The work I do now is to help other women embody the Divine Feminine. It’s really really beautiful to be able to share this with people. I was doing Shakti groups with women in Thailand for a couple of years, and now I teach tantra because this is how I came to embody the Divine Feminine. I teach tantra, I teach Shakti, I teach women’s awakening, and I hold rites of passages for women. I’m sharing what I love to share, and what transforms the most.
I hope that all women can awaken to the Divine Feminine within and experience themselves as the Goddess. When I think of a lot of sexual experiences that women are having all the time, it breaks my heart. We have so much potential that we can awaken to every day and remember who we truly are. Our divine feminine form is a natural gift and it is so precious.

Sexually, women have been so limited to their true potential. There is lack of education around it, and all this shame and guilt. There is such grace to experience this feminine beauty. Women especially have amazing orgasmic potential, and it brings you to a state where you are in pure ecstasy. This is our birthright to experience such a thing. It devastates me to imagine women not experiencing this.

To see yourself as Divine, this is the key; to see yourself and love yourself and adore yourself as the Goddess. Connect with the Goddess, make an altar in your room for the Goddess, and be really devotional this way. And dance! Dancing is a great way to invoke the Goddess. One way to really understand Her is to go out and dance and move this beautiful body that you are gifted with, and to transfigure yourself. Transfiguration is to see the divine light shine through you; it’s to recognize the divine within. See yourself in your pure Shakti form. You can do this in the mirror for two minutes everyday. This transfiguration exercise helps you to awaken to the Goddess within you.

A long time ago the women who were doing a lot on this planet had a lot of their power taken away in many ways. Now the Goddess is being re-instated and there’s a lot more love coming from women in a certain way, and on a different level, and we need to let this happen more and more on the planet. The reason I’ve come here in this incarnation now is to awaken women to this potential that is within them. This is my vision. To really awaken to this pure joy of our existence. If you come into this joy daily, and if you realize your true nature, there’s nothing better. There’s nothing else that we come from.

Caroline’s Story

My relationship with the Divine has always been a deep inner strength within me and has carried me through a lot of my life. I grew up in a very loving environment around God and church and religion. No big fears, a happy experience as a kid, and with God and church. I always loved God, and the God I knew as a child was masculine; he definitely had that gender. Later on I started to experience God through nature, the out of doors. I stopped going to church so church become the out of doors. Then I realized that this out of doors was referred to as
Mother nature, and I began to wonder, “If I’m feeling God in the out of doors, where does Mother Nature fit in, where does Mother fit in?”

This takes me to my personal story. When I was a young girl, age eleven, I lost my mother to mental illness. I didn’t lose her to death; I lost her to mental illness. And of course, a young girl coming into puberty is always seeking guidance of mother, the nurturing mother, the love of mother. So I became very stalwart and strong. “It’s ok;” I would tell myself, “I don’t need a mother, I can mother myself”. And I did mother myself, to a large degree.

It was not until my early thirties that I started to open to, to feel, and experience, a deeper relationship with the Divine Feminine as Mother, and the Divine Feminine as Mother Earth. I was at a yoga retreat in Mexico and I went to a rolfing session that was being offered at this retreat. I took off my clothes and he, the rolfer, looked at my body to see possibly where I needed work. His eyes riveted on my abdomen, which had a big crescent moon scar, and he asked, “What happened to you there?” I said, “Well, I had three major surgeries in my early twenties and the third one was a final and complete hysterectomy.” As he took a little more history, a lot of emotion started coming up for me about the fact that the mother in me had been removed. I had spent the last ten to fifteen years wondering if I still qualified as a woman, because the mother in me had been removed, and I couldn’t be a mother. Even though I had adopted a child and made every attempt to be a mother, it was a very strange and foreign experience for me.

And so, with permission, the rolfer started to work on my body, around my scar, and my deep abdomen, and oh my god, there was a lot of tears, a lot of burning sensations, a lot of painful massage. Then the rolfer asked if he could access the scar from inside me. I thought, “Well gee, that seems pretty radical,” but I trusted this man as a healer and I said, “Ok.” He knew exactly where to go, into my vagina and up under the scar tissue from inside. At that moment I went into complete recall of the operating room; the doctors’ faces, the whispers, the words, the terrified feelings – like I was a number in the operating room and I was here for my castration.

When we completed the session and he came out of my body, he rested his hands gently on me, and my tears, my sobbing, began to slow down. He offered me this: that no matter how much mother I had lost in my body or even with my own mother, that Mother was everywhere. That Mother was out the window and in every tree and in every bird and on the land, and every
rise and fall of Her body was in the earth. *He painted this picture for me that gave me my first sense of union with the feminine.* I went out from that session that day with a whole new relationship with the *earth* and with the fact that *Mother* was never very far away. The distance from Mother that I had experienced for so long began to close; the gap began to close.

This was also the beginning of my conscious journey to *own* my feminine, my Divine Feminine nature. Prior to that I didn’t know if I still was a feminine! You know, if you can’t have babies, then what are you? If you can’t have your period, then you must not be a girl, you must not be a woman, I must be some sort of neutered thing – and that was very hard to be. It was very hard to own my femininity or my sexuality in any sort of way with those uncertainties. And so now, *I felt* the beginnings of access to Mother and to owning my femininity and sexuality.

This led me to many great yoga classes and awakenings of my chakras and a deeply connected Self with Spirit. In every one of the many yoga retreats I did, ohhhh the scent of sage in the air! The presence of nature was sooo palpable. I really got to lie within Her, in the big nature of central Mexico. Here there was a hot river with cool tributaries that would join it, and I would go in the river where the temperature was 104, 103. It was *perfect*, you know, hot tub temperature. It was a rushing river with little waterfalls and sandy bottom. I would always go down to the river and *soak* under these little waterfalls, and it was like being in the Mother’s womb, who was gushing her divine nectar around and all over me. That was all part of the experiences, the big wow, of understanding the Divine Feminine.

Over the next several years I started to take tantra yoga classes at this particular yoga retreat. I began to hear, what was probably the most surprising thing ever in my life, that there is a yoga for sexual people! I thought yoga was for celibates, and if you were sexual you kept that very far away from yoga, and your yoga teacher certainly would never be sexual because he’s a yoga *teacher*! I had all these misconceptions about spirituality, and the separation of my spirituality from my sexuality. *And, I was a young Scorpio girl!* I mean I had a *lot* of sexuality, and was constantly throwing it around in an unconscious way, not in a way that I was aware of what I was doing. So for the first time I realized the consciousness that I was experiencing in yoga, and with nature, and in my chakras was the same consciousness that I could begin to experience in how I would run my sexual energy. I realized how I would *hold* myself as a sexual
being, not just as a young unconscious cute thing, but as a spiritual being who was claiming the chakra that carried a lot of consciousness that also was the sexual centre.

It was during that time that I had the first experience with my yoga teacher of something called sexual healing. I was rooming with my girlfriend at the retreat and she went and had the experience of sexual healing, came back to our room, plopped on the bed and said, “There is no way I could ever describe what sexual healing is. You have to experience it yourself.” I said, “Well I’m not attracted to Charles! He’s my yoga teacher, I wouldn’t want to do that!” and, “Are you in love? Did he go down on you?” All my thoughts about what sexual healing might be were steeped in the old paradigm of what sex is. And she just said, “Indescribable, otherworldly, spiritually magnificent, go ask him if you can have a session.” This was real high gradient for me. I got real nervous and scared, and then went to Charles, and asked for sexual healing. He said, “Let me think about it.” The next day I went to his cabin and I had a life-changing experience.

That life-changing experience was simply being touched and loved in a non-sexual way by a man who remained covered, while I was nude. He massaged me, there was plenty of him giving to my body, he stayed covered, and his genitals didn’t distract me. Every minute though my mind kept saying, “Well surely he’ll start doing something sexual with me any minute now.” He never did. He did a massage on me that included my second chakra, all around inside and outside. His eyes were always wide open and my eyes were wide open. He would ask permission to touch me, ask permission to enter me, and give me feedback the whole time about how I looked, what my yoni felt like, what messages it was apparently carrying in his vision and view (because he was my yoga teacher for seven years!). I could not believe that I was being touched by a man and he didn’t want to have sex. This was something that could never fall into the category of sex. The name of it at the time, and still remains, is sexual healing.

He also went into the scar tissue, and evoked my tears and my fears and my uncertainties about myself as a woman. I admitted that I had never had vaginal orgasms, and that I didn’t know what those were. The doctors had told me I would never have them because of the surgeries, and Charles simply said, “Well, I don’t believe that’s so, I believe with enough love and integrous massage, your vagina, your yoni, will awaken to all of its divine potential.” And ohhh, I couldn’t believe that could ever happen to me. I was crying, crying, and crying.
Insecurity and low self-esteem really rose to the surface during that healing session. I never thought that I could become equal in the world of women. As a young girl I read cosmopolitan and different magazines and women talk about their orgasms, and I knew clitoral orgasms, but I didn’t know anything vaginal so I felt that I was broken. This sexual healing experience changed my life. It opened me further into the mysteries of the Divine Feminine, to the embodiment of myself as a whole woman, to my inherent wholeness, and to a deeper integration of sexuality and spirituality. This integration of sexuality and spirituality enabled me to further express and feel myself as a Divine Feminine.

So now I’m going to fast-forward the story a little bit through the sixteen years that I spent with this yoga teacher as his wife. Two years after that sexual healing experience we were married, and together we developed *Tantra: The Art of Conscious Loving*. We wrote the book and we developed the seminars and the work that remains very popular today. Together we did many sessions with woman; he taught many women to do this healing work on me, and he taught me how to do it with women.

These sexual healing experiences opened me to an orbit that continued to change me over many years. When a woman lays back on her back, opens her legs to another human being, in a non-sexual way, in trust, something really big begins to happen. Mother Earth enters her there. The Goddess, the Divine Feminine, is within us, we give life through our second chakra. This Divine amazing Feminine who has the capacity to bring forth life.

It was *the letting go of the fear of women, and of myself, which awakened the fullness of my Divine Feminine*. To look at my yoni, to touch myself, and to be touched, entered and massaged by other women, with love. I want to wrap a bow around the story; the real bow on the story is that men can do a lot of healing with women and a lot of awakening work, but women with women, in a non-sexual, non-lesbian, non-gay energetic, *is one of the keys to awakening the Divine Feminine in all of us*.

This opened up a career and my connection to my dharma. I started creating workshops for women only. I sometimes describe it to the group of women as, “You’re learning to be a midwife for your sister who isn’t here to deliver babies, she’s here to deliver herself. And it is your love and your tenderness and your gentleness, in an initiatory contact of a blessing and an awakening, that will open the door for her to claim herself”.


There was fear and trepidation and excitement, and there was further awakening and healing of the Divine Feminine in myself and in many many women. I was in awe of the magnificence of the feminine having a brand new experience with an intimate glove. With the beautiful music playing and candlelight I would lead the groups, “Ok, look into your sisters’ eyes, wait for her invitation to invite your touch.” Women had a chance as both receivers and as givers to be in their full power and truth and love. Nobody was pushing their way into anybody.

Many women have never had that experience of someone just looking at them lovingly and waiting for permission, especially in their sexual center. We’ve been so conditioned that it’s our gift to him and he can take it when he wants it and if you’re going to be popular, you better give it away. At least in my day that was the case. So all these women, of all ages and shapes and sizes were waking up to, “Oh my God, this is my sacred center, I own it, I can heal with it, I can change the world with it, I can go way beyond just pleasure with it, it’s a center of consciousness!”

This is a center of consciousness that never really gets the sanctity or blessing that other parts of our selves get, in church, or wherever you get blessed. Down there is still forbidden territory, there’s no blessings going on in church for down there. So we create our own little churches, we create our own little circles of the feminine. And that’s where I have been in the last twenty-five years, in these circles of the feminine, creating experiences that help women awaken to their Divine Feminine through their second chakra. I founded and developed an institute called the Divine Feminine Institute in 2004, and I did that not because I was any expert in the Divine Feminine, I did that because I wanted to create a University for the feminine soul. Which includes sexuality, sexual healing, and bringing sexuality to one another in a new paradigm.

Culture tells us where we are dysfunctional, and one of the areas where we’re the most dysfunctional is the sexual. So to bring the consciousness that we are awakening, and the intelligence that we are awakening, down into this lower chakra, that seems to be, in a nutshell, what I’m here to do. There are so many places in the world where women are used, abused, sold, and mutilated. I can’t sit quietly by for that anymore. I’d like to train enough teachers so that the United Nations has someone to send to every country to teach people about the reverence for the feminine. That’s my big vision. I don’t know if that will happen in my lifetime. Ambassadors of the feminine – wow – I get passionate about that!
So, it certainly wasn’t an overnight awakening, and there are still a lot of years of this lifetime yet to go for me. I feel like I am now *so embodied* in the balance of my masculine and feminine. In fact, now my masculine has to keep up with my feminine. The masculine part of me, the one that is more logical, rational, gets the job done, keeps track of things and is organized, is lagging way behind.

My relationship with men has come to a place of greater wholeness, and will only continue to develop that way. As a woman further embodies herself, owns the fullness of herself, and reclaims her full feminine divinity through a fully awakened and integrated second chakra, a new version of the masculine also starts to show up that is in balance with this new feminine. Not only the women’s inner masculine, but also the men that start to show up in these women’s lives. And I don’t mean a real man who *only* is sexual with women, I mean a real man who can love men *and* women.

I also feel for myself that the *balance* in me as a divinely feminine *embodiment* is a woman who loves men and women equally, on every level of their being. I’ve had the opportunity to *really* be in love with several women in my life, and I never thought of myself as gay or lesbian. Those labels never stuck. The love that I’ve had with several women, the in-loveness, the passion, has been as important to me as the men that I have been *in love* with. It’s all equal, it’s all love honey! I know that’s overused, but it’s true. It’s all love.

Oh, how blessed I feel that I was introduced to the idea and the *practice* that the feminine is not only equal to the masculine in spirituality and sexuality and every other way, but in many ways surpasses and *is* the guiding Aphrodite of our age. She is the teacher of love. She is the one who brings the compassion and the tenderness and the understanding by and large more than men do. Men gravitate towards the woman who nurture, they gravitate towards the women who carry this marriage with their feminine.

Next Monday there’s a ceremony being held for me in which I will marry myself. It’s not a marriage to myself as Caroline; it’s a marriage to the feminine sacred soul within me. For this ceremony I will write out three or four simple vows, I won’t even call them vows, I’ll call them mantras. In the ceremony, with a beautiful girlfriend minister who will facilitate this ceremony for me, I will say my mantras, and these are mantras that I will plan to make a habit of saying everyday. On my left hand ring finger where I’ve always worn wedding rings since I’ve been married for the majority of my adult life, I now have a gold band that I have bought for
myself. I can always reach over and touch the circle of gold as a reminder of the integrated whole Divine Feminine within me, and within all of us. This is not just me, this is a global thing, and precious beings are choosing to study, to cultivate, and to excavate the Divine Feminine. I am so happy about that.

Sharing my story is a reminder to me, to you, to men and women of all ages and sizes and shapes, and religions and nationalities, of what is needed. She needs to be understood. She definitely needs to really be understood. She has been relegated to childbirth and cooking for way too long. She with a capital S, Her with a capital H. It’s all part of re-programming my own spiritual mind from the time I was little, about Her, and listening to the voice of Her within me. The mind wants to listen to all the things that have already been said and sound like good ideas, but the voice of the feminine is not coming from up here in the head so much as waaaay down here in the deep vaginal realm. So I often touch myself, I put my hand over my mound of Venus, and the other hand over my heart, and I listen. I close my eyes, I listen, and I ask, “What is my feminine soul wanting me to know?”
Chapter 5: Discussion

The co-researcher’s narratives inform us of what is Divine Feminine to each participant. From Jessica’s experiences with Ayahuasca and the Goddess Kali, to Nikki’s experiences with Nature and Kundalini, their stories inform us of the transformative power of transpersonal experiences and the Divine Feminine.

The Discussion chapter is divided into two main sections: Reflections on Contemporary Experiences with the Divine Feminine and Significance of this Study to Counselling Psychology. In the former, I draw from the narratives and apply them to the varying ways the Divine Feminine is experienced: through Goddesses, Shakti and Kundalini Shakti, one’s Self, Nature, Mother, and through Spirit guides, visions, and past life experiences. In identifying these experiences, we can address how spirituality and the Divine Feminine can be used to enrich counselling.

The latter section, Significance of this Study to the Field of Counselling Psychology, addresses more closely the varying forms, methods and practices the integration of spirituality in counselling can take: through Plant Medicine and Nature, Goddesses and mantra, altered states of consciousness, and perception of Self as Divine Feminine. Throughout both sections, I draw connections with relevant research from Counselling Psychology. I also include information regarding some of the spiritual practices that the women speak about in order to broaden counsellor’s and educator’s knowledge of the varying forms of spirituality, and inspire creative integration. In turn, I provide some examples of how others and myself are integrating these insights into practice. The chapter then concludes with Strengths and Limitations, Directions for Future Research and Dissemination of Results and Concluding Remarks.

In this Chapter, I draw on quotes from the co-researchers’ stories in Chapter IV, and reference them by name only. My personal experience is also spoken of most extensively in this chapter. The participant-researcher’s voice is considered a strength in qualitative research and narrative inquiry, while the counsellor-practitioner’s voice is considered a strength in Counselling Psychology. Consequently, I am intentional about integrating these voices in contrast to primarily using the researcher’s voice as I did in Chapters I-III.

Themes of Contemporary Experiences of the Divine Feminine

*The Goddess Speaks: Every place you see is my temple.
All events are acts of worship to me.*
At all times are my holy celebrations, as I am the nature of all.
(Devi Gita X.3 from Frawley, 2003, p. 229)

Spirituality is seen as vital to psychological health (Vaughan, 1993), and transpersonal psychology in particular validates spirituality as a path to wholeness (Cortright, 1997). A growing body of evidence points to the importance of spirituality when addressing psychological conditions (Stanard, Sandhu, & Painter, 2011). This section highlights and discusses some of the main themes of experiences with the Divine Feminine that are shared in the ten narratives, as women currently experience the Divine Feminine. Accordingly, their unique definitions of the Divine Feminine and types of transpersonal experiences are also included.

Historically, Counselling Psychology focuses on cultural competence and promoting strengths; therefore, it is important that counsellors have knowledge about clients’ spirituality, and are skilled at addressing spirituality – including the respect and involvement of other professionals who work with spiritual issues (Hook, J., et al., 2012). Furthermore, it is beneficial that counsellors maintain awareness of their own spiritual beliefs, values, experiences, and biases. These are a few reasons why the narratives in this research are important, and why I focus extensively on experiences of the Divine Feminine, which are broken down into the six themes that follow.

The Divine Feminine experienced through Goddesses. Goddesses are personifications of the feminine aspect of the Divine. Specifically, Tantra views the Divine Feminine as the embodiment of wisdom and the energy of consciousness, and the Divine Masculine force as perception, being and will (Frawley, 2003). Through worship of the Goddess, we are brought in contact with the reality of the Goddess directly within ourselves.

Aside from Kundalini Shakti, the Tantric Goddesses are one of the themes I am personally most passionate about. For the past two years I have engaged in a practice of worshipping the Dash MahaVidyas, the Ten Wisdom Goddesses of the Tantric tradition. I embody the Goddess through meditating on her Yantra (sacred geometrical form), chanting her Mantra (word of power), and learning through readings or initiations from teachers about Her essence. While intensely working with a particular Goddess, Her energy will manifest within me in my outer world. Most recently I have been meditating on Bhuvaneshwari – Queen of the Phenomenal World. She is the Goddess of the space that is within all of creation, and this space allows all things their form and function. I became much more conscious of this space within
manifestation, and the particular ‘holding’ of space that She is master of. As a counsellor, I found myself resonating with Her, as holding space is fundamental to what counsellors do. Space holding allows a deep wisdom to emerge that is born from the primal creative force.

Krista’s experiences with the Divine Feminine primarily flourishes through her worship of the Dash Mahavidyas. Through initiations from her teacher, she began to practice, understand, and embody all ten forms of the Goddess, which encompass the ten cosmic powers—all the powers of the Universe. She awakened to the energies of the ten Goddesses, identifies herself as the Goddess, and has consecrated her life to this path. She continues to awaken daily to the archetypal energies of each of these Goddesses through meditation, ritual, worship, mantra, dance, and love-making.

Erica, Nikki, Kimmie, Jessica, and Krista have all spoken of Kali, the Goddess of the Destruction and Transformation. As noted in Chapter II, and validated by Her prominence in the narratives, Kali is one of the most popular and sought after Goddesses in the West. Kali represents aspects within ourselves and within society that have been denied, repressed, or suppressed for too long and are now bubbling up and finding voice through Her power (Bailly, 2000; Ballentine; 2010; Gross, 1978; Kempton, 2013). She represents the destruction of the illusion of time and death, and brings a swift and ferocious end to what is untrue. Ballentine (2010) speaks of Kali:

She is the most dramatic manifestation….She is the great champion of the needs of the whole. When the time is right, the seed will push up – even through concrete…. Kali lives in each person, and She appears at just the right time and says, OK, NOW! That is, if allowed. If She is thwarted, which can be done for a while, we get out of rhythm with the universe. We then are out of tune. We are holding back. If we continue to do that, She will show up and lop off a few heads (egos), and push us on through to the next stage. (p. 27-28)

The co-researchers portray Kali similarly. Jessica states, “My association of Kali is: If you want a destroyer, Kali is the one…. She is what gives birth, and She is what slays our demons and our illusions.” Jessica’s narrative explains an “up-rooting and un-plugging”, taking out what was foreign and reclaiming her own essence and her own authenticity. “There was so much disruption, and Kali was the catalyst. She really opened it.” Kimmie specifically called
on the Goddess Kali to clear her life and make a shift. Kimmie describes the evoking of Kali as Pandora’s box:

I called her name in three times with the intention to help me with my issue, and it was like a bull-dozer came through my life…. There was so much energy, so much drive, and cutting the cord. The apathy was gone. I took major action and let go of things that were not serving me.

For Kimmie, Kali catalyzed a releasing, a destruction, and a fast letting go of old energy that was holding her back.

Although mostly known for Her fierceness, Kali also contains a deep Motherly love. Kali is seen as a Goddess who encompasses and transcends the opposites of life. She is seen and simultaneously understood as a bloodthirsty demon-slayer, and an all-loving, compassionate Mother (Ballentine, 2010). Jessica affirms, Kali is “both vicious and the most nurturing and loving, all in one”. Jessica experienced Kali in the form of a woman, as well as through her mantra discipline. The energy of Kali showed up strongly in her life through her experiences with the “underbelly” of China, losing her sense of identity, the death of her dog, and being admitted into the emergency ward on suicide watch. All this points to the ruthless and harsh nature that is associated with Kali. Erica’s forty-day mantra discipline with Kali brought a visionary symbolic experience of birthing one of her miscarried children, which was accompanied with a motherly comforting energy (hence the dual nature of Kali emerging here).

A lot of grief arose for Erica at this time, which she attributes to her Kali mantra discipline. When Erica looks at her Kali statue, she shivers and sees “so much fire and so much intensity”.

Erica also experienced the Divine Feminine through her mantra discipline for Lakshmi, the Goddess of abundance. Prior to working with Lakshmi’s mantra, Lakshmi appeared to Erica in a vision, holding two lotus flowers and winking at her. She subsequently entered a forty-day mantra meditation to help heal a sense of lack, and to bring in the feeling of abundance and prosperity and harmony that the essence of Lakshmi carries. In Tantric cosmology, Lakshmi is the nourishing and cooling power of moon-nectar, which balances the fire, lightening-like Shakti of Kali (Kempton, 2013). Lakshmi gives us a sense of having enough and being sufficient; through her, we recognize the abundance and beauty within.

This illustrates that the Divine Feminine is currently being experienced through Goddesses. Background information on Kali, Lakshmi, and Bhuvaneshwari has been included to
highlight how archetypal energies associated with particular Goddesses parallels experience. It is useful to note that five of the ten participants experience the Divine Feminine through Goddesses of Vedic origin, which I feel relates to the profound influence of yoga in the western world (Krista, Nikki, Kimmie, Nikki, and Jessica all practice yoga). It is worthwhile for counsellors to be aware that clients who practice yoga may also have a spiritual connection to the Goddess. This connection could be a possible source of strength and wisdom the counsellor could draw on.

**The Divine Feminine experienced through Shakti and Kundalini Shakti.** Shakti is the power that runs through all the Goddesses and through all manifest form; She is the energy behind and through and beyond everything in this phenomenal world. Shakti is the power of the Divine Feminine. She is “not a power which is asserted against something, but a power that enlivens everything from within” (Frawley, 2003, p. 47). Several participants describe Shakti when they speak of how the Divine Feminine comes through everything. For example, Nikki, Kat, and Jessica all speak of experiences of perceiving the Divine Feminine in all – through themselves, other, animals, and nature. An aspect of Shakti is also Kundalini or Kundalini Shakti, the energy that lies dormant at the base of our spine, constantly awakening to greater and lesser degrees within each of us.

My awakening to the Divine Feminine was through an experience with Kundalini Shakti several years ago, which became the impetus for this research on women’s experiences with the Divine Feminine. I experienced a thunderbolt of lightning though my spine/central channel; subsequently, my perception of the world drastically changed. I am still integrating this profoundly powerful experience. Divine Love started pouring through my being and I experienced myself as a pure vessel for this Divine Light to flow through. It was not of me, but I was experiencing its grace through me. Veils were dropped and I awoke to dormant aspects of myself. My sexuality and sensuality burst into a thousand golden petals. I was in a state of pure bliss. There was also the opposite: I felt extreme disconnect in relation to my marriage partner of eight years. I could not understand that we were married, and even the idea of marriage did not make sense. In certain ways my brain felt erased and re-set – all the intellectual knowledge that I had accumulated didn’t matter, didn’t even make sense, was not relevant, or paled in comparison to a greater process that was going on. My senses were amplified and I was extremely sensitive to the outside world. My energy was running constantly on high, sleep was minimal, and my
emotions fluctuated dramatically. My dream world flourished and I experienced battles of light and dark, imbalances of masculine and feminine energies and persecution. It took about six months to stabilize the most dramatic of these effects.

Nikki experienced Kundalini Shakti around the time she was taking Kundalini Yoga training. She felt energy pouring through her body, and she allowed what was pouring through her to “come through and be its own expression”. Kundalini Shakti guided her to move her body and do postures in a certain way. She states, “There was that energy of Spirit and Mother coming through and expressing my body”. Nikki also experienced Kundalini Shakti quite profoundly in her early teens when she started having mystical experiences through orgasm.

Krista also had some mystical experiences with Kundalini Shakti early in her life. She speaks of Shakti as chaos and the storm, and Shiva as the pole to balance it. For Krista, all the Kundalini energy is an expression of Shakti, the Divine Feminine. Through love-making she amplifies the intensity of Kundalini Shakti, and then directs all this Divine Feminine energy into the heart chakra. Several other co-researchers speak of experiences that can be described as Kundalini Shakti; for example, Ariel had some strong energetic releases and integrations during her cranio-sacral sessions, and Jessica spoke of shivers of light and vibrations moving through her spine.

Simon (2009) asserts that it is time for our understanding of Kundalini to come out of the realm of esoterica and to enter ordinary discourse. “When we experience intense spiritual openings, movements and changes occur in our subtle body; at the energetic level of our being, Kundalini begins to stir, and rise” (Simon, 2009, p. 1). The book, *Kundalini rising: Exploring the energy of awakening* (2009), contains a collection of essays exploring different aspects of Kundalini experience, including what Transpersonal Psychologists have to say, the relationship between Kundalini energy and sexual energy, and the role that Kundalini awakenings plays in the unfolding of our highest human potential.

In my roles as a counsellor, yoga teacher, and researcher, I have people come forward to describe and ask for guidance for their Kundalini experiences. For them, there is often a sense of relief that there is someone to talk to, because these experiences can be perceived as odd and unusual, and perhaps even embarrassing because they can closely mimic psychotic breaks. If these powerful transformational experience are held in silence, it minimizes the opportunity to consciously integrate the shifts in energy, emotion, and perception that often accompanies these
experiences. Counsellors, helping professionals, and educators can help facilitate the integration of Kundalini experiences by being aware of and openly inquiring into them within their area of influence.

The Divine Feminine experienced through one’s Self. Many of the co-researchers experienced the Divine Feminine through their own being. Ariel experiences the Divine Feminine through deepening her connection to Self and further embodying her power. Whether through dreams, an altered state of consciousness following a hiking accident, deep meditation with a Buddha figure, or a past life experience, these transpersonal experiences helped Ariel connect with and come closer to what she expresses as the truth of who she is. As she wondrously says, “I am Divine Feminine”.

When Ariel broke her bone in a hiking accident, she went into an altered state in which she distinctly felt she was chosen to wake up. She had an experience of bliss that was similar to the experience of bliss she had had in the presence of a Buddha figure. She states, “In terms of the Divine Feminine, there wasn’t a feminine symbol or anything that was happening for me in that moment, except for myself.” For Ariel, the Divine Feminine is however “energy” or “existence” expresses and flows through her, and she perceives herself as Divine Feminine in moments when she is connected to that power. We can feel a strong sense of this as Ariel describes her experience with the Buddha figure:

My vibration went through the roof and I went into this altered state of consciousness where I just felt truth. I was connected to the universe, the Divine... there was a heaviness that lifted off, something just shifted, like my heart opened. I didn’t feel so closed in and so victimized, so hurt and so alone. Things just opened up and I felt whole.

Kat softly states, “The Divine Feminine is the purity of who I am”. She experiences the Divine Feminine as her authentic self when she is in touch with her pure and loving Spirit. She describes some of her experiences with the Divine Feminine as listening to the voice within, pulling herself back and sinking into herself, and then opening up and letting her authentic self out. “It’s peaceful, there’s a sense of letting go, and a deep knowing.” She knows when she’s connected with the Divine Feminine/herSelf because she’s coming from a place of love; “There’s a softness of Spirit, and it’s pure, gentle, and respectful. There’s no attachment, no ego, no power – there’s nothing to rattle”. Kat sees the Divine Feminine within herself, and ultimately, within everyone and everything (a.k.a. Shakti).
The Divine Feminine is always there. She comes through friends, through family, through mentors, and in male and female form. I see and feel the Divine Feminine in gentleness, nurturing, supporting, and caring. And that can come through pretty much anybody, in any situation….The Divine Feminine is everything, all things. She illuminates the purity in everything.

**Women’s bodies, women’s mysteries, women’s sexuality.** Many of the co-researchers experienced the embodiment of the Divine Feminine through their unique anatomy, through women’s mysteries (pregnancy and menstruation), and through their sexuality. The movements of belly dancing connected Erica with her sensual self, as well as opened her perception to and connection with an ancient lineage of women. Sybille also experienced the embodiment of the Divine Feminine through dance: she connected with Mother Earth, the Kundalini energy within her, and learned to call on different aspect of the Divine Feminine to express through her.

Nikki experienced the Divine Feminine through-out her pregnancy and the process of giving birth. She also experienced the Divine Feminine speaking to her through her breast and moon cycle abnormalities. For example, a lump in her breast instigated a deep reflection into what the nurturing and life-giving aspect of the Divine Feminine was calling attention to in how she nurtures others and herself. Nikki’s moon cycle irregularities sparked a reflection on what her womb was bleeding for, and how her uterus represented her relationship with the sexual aspect of the Divine Feminine. Nikki felt a strong sense that her womb was bleeding on behalf of all womankind.

Presently, there is a lot of work being done by professionals and para-professionals worldwide to encourage women to re-connect with their womb. When women listen to the language of their womb, clear their wombs of past trauma, and re-connect with the primal energy within their womb, they re-connect with a phenomenal power that is sourced from within (Prakasha, A. 2011; Prakasha, P. 2009; Rigoglioso, M. 2009). Prakasha (2011) states,

The deepest, most ancient secrets of life lie within the womb of every woman. The womb is the holiest temple in your body, the most energy-filled place in your body, the place from where your inner voice, deepest guidance and clarity, stillness, creative expression and power arise. It is your primordial voice and connector into the web of life, the web of interdependence that connects all living being to each other….This power
of creation is what each woman holds, but usually only exercises in the process of giving physical birth. (p.2)

Erica experienced the Divine Feminine through a recent miscarriage. She was able to talk to the soul of the baby that was attempting to be born through her. Erica felt a deep grief over “not being able to do what women do.” Her grief was also connected with her moon cycle that had stopped for five years. Erica shared how being able to bleed is connected to vitality and cleansing, as well as, like pregnancy, a clear symbol of the Divine Feminine. Erica’s experience faintly echoes what Daniluk and Browne (2008) reported in their research regarding women feeling shame when their moon cycles begin at puberty and cease at menopause. Through Nikki’s and Erica’s stories, I am also reminded of Moloney’s (2009) study (see Chapter II): reclaiming moon cycles as a spiritual phenomenon was found as key in healing menstrual shame, connecting with female spirituality, and giving birth fearlessly and powerfully. The women in Moloney’s study also experienced their moon cycles as a sacred connection with the Divine, and birth as a transformative opening to Spirit.

Caroline, Nikki, and Krista all spoke of experiencing the Divine Feminine through their sexuality. Caroline felt access to the Divine Feminine through “fully owning her femininity and through conscious sexuality”. This was facilitated through sexual healing experiences that opened her further into embodying the Divine Feminine. Caroline follows the path of Tantra, and, as Frawley (2003) accurately notes, “Tantra regards the body as a sacred ground for the Divine Self to be realized” (p. 26). As mentioned earlier in the theme of Shakti and Kundalini Shakti, Nikki experienced the Divine Feminine through orgasm. She experienced the shifting energy patterns of her whole body. She sensed her body take on different shapes and saw geometrical forms with her inner eye. One of the most powerful ways Krista embodies the forms of the Goddess is through love-making. Being in the state of multiple orgasm for hours moves her into a natural state of pure awareness of the Goddess. She experiences what she describes as a pure state of being – a state in which she is the Goddess. She awakens to her Divine Self, her Divine Nature. When she is in orgasm, she is in Satchitananda: “I go into this state of pure bliss and experience the feminine in all her beautiful forms.” Krista clearly recognizes herself as the embodiment of the Divine Feminine – as the Goddess Herself. She states that through transfiguration she awakens every day to the Goddess within her.
As we conclude the third theme, we can increasingly see how the themes start to overlap and merge with one-another. For example, experiencing the Divine Feminine through Kundalini Shakti and through the Goddess can also include experiencing the Divine Feminine as Self. As a researcher and a counsellor, I feel that ultimately all experiences with the Divine Feminine offer the possibility of deepening connection with one’s Self. To see the Divine Feminine within or as one’s Self is a significant step towards self-empowerment and recognizing one’s wholeness.

Externalizing attributes is often one step in the process of coming to realize that we possess all energies within us. Embodiment practices and working from a somatic lens have become increasingly popular avenues to help heal trauma and dissociation, and discover and access hidden aspects within one’s self. This contributes to personal growth and realizing one’s potential. Recognizing one’s Self as Divine, is also key to understanding and embracing the Divine Feminine – for she is exactly that: manifest form.

As we move forward, I am acutely aware that the door is barely being opened for each theme – offering a tiny dewdrop to tantalize the senses, and spark curiosities and contemplations! As one of my mentors often says, listen from the heart, not the intellect, and allow what resonates to dip in a little deeper, and the rest to flow through.

**The Divine Feminine experienced through Nature and Sacred Plant Medicine.** Several of the co-researchers spoke of how they connected with the Divine Feminine through Nature. Nikki perceives Nature as feminine, and perceives “the Spirit of plants, ecosystems, animals, insects, rocks, the Moon, waters, and Gaia as a whole.” She communes with the consciousness of plants, has direct conversations with them, and receives information from them through careful observation, whispers, insights, and visions. Her relationship includes a giving and receiving. For example, she gives offerings to the plants, and listens to and responds to their requests. Kat feels the Divine Feminine in Mother Earth and in how Mother Earth supports, absorbs, and transmutes pain. Caroline also experiences the Divine Feminine through Nature, particularly the mothering and nurturing qualities. Both Kat and Nikki do not feel at home unless they can connect with Mother Earth on a daily basis. Ballentine (2010) notes of Nature, “We come more fully into our bodies when we relate more fully to Her body” (p. 147). We are made of earth, water, fire, and air, and the more we notice the elements, give thanks to them, and call on them for assistance, the more they will reveal their wisdom to us.

In Chapter II we read of the importance of nature-based spirituality and its connection
with the Divine Feminine (Funderburk & Fukuyama, 2002; Leonard, 2003; Manning, 2010; Stromstead, 2001; Warwick, 2002). Eco-psychology, which honours and elevates our relationship with the earth, and promotes earth as healer and teacher, is becoming increasingly popular as a discipline within psychology. As hypothesized, perhaps part of the present disconnection from and violence towards our bodies many of us experience is related to our disconnection from Mother Earth. For many, re-connecting with Mother Earth intentionally may be a vital path towards healing, re-connection, experiencing wholeness, and accepting the natural cycles of life.

Jessica’s and Colleen’s connection with the Divine Feminine came through Ayahuasca, a sacred brew made from two Amazon plant species. Aya means Spirit or ancestral, and huaasca means vine. Communities have utilized this brew more than 3,000 years ago in sacred rituals as a way to reach the Divine and cure various illnesses (Tiwari, 2012). Jessica also connected to the Divine Feminine through the plant medicine Huachuma, sometimes known as San Pedro. Huachuma is a cactus native to the Peruvian Andes. Of Ayahuasca, Jessica says, “She opens a channel to Goddess, She’s a plant that’s receiving messages from Goddess, She HerSelf is Goddess. I understand Her to be all of these qualities.” And of Ouachuma, Jessica says, “Ouachuma, to me, is Divine Feminine. Ouachuma is the medicine of the heart and She is what facilitated this opening”

Through Ayahuasca, Colleen had a vision of a female Dragon that transmuted all pain and suffering into fertility. This Dragon was serene, calm, and powerful. “She waits to be called and is always ready to respond….She devours pain, burns it, and transmutes it into ash.” Colleen further stated:

When I think of that Dragon, I think of going to that core, that center core. Maybe I’m going down down down because that’s where the power is. It’s almost like coming down to the core of what you actually care about. It feels like I’m pruning, I’m a tree that’s being pruned of whatever is excess.

Both Jessica and Colleen felt the motherly quality of Ayahuasca, the sense of being held and cared for, as well as the strong “take-no-shit” and firm qualities of Ayahuasca. In conclusion to this theme on Nature and Sacred Plant Medicine, I would like to note the cross-validation of the co-researchers’ experience with the literature in Chapter II, which high-light that nature-based spiritualties bring a deep understanding, awareness, and acceptance of the cycles of life.
The Divine Feminine experienced through Mother. A strong theme of the Mother aspect of the Divine Feminine came through for most of the co-researchers. Beyond this research, I have also found that people most readily associate the Divine Feminine as Mother. This parallels the literature which illustrated that the Mother is often the most accepted aspect of the Divine Feminine (Comas-Diaz, 2000; Estes, 1995; Woodman & Dickson, 1996).

Jessica strongly states, “I associate Divine Feminine as Mother”. She describes how she felt the Divine Feminine mothering her, as well as channeling mother energy through her. Colleen shares how her experience with the white light felt very much like Mother: “It was what you want when you’re a little baby before you have words and you don’t want to feel vulnerable and cold and alone and you want to feel embraced and encompassed and safe”. Colleen also experienced a cross-legged Mother in one of her visions who said, “Come!” and she approached Her, curled up on Her lap, and had her hair stroked.

Nikki describes her experiences with Divine Mother energy as nurturing, encompassing, embracing, gestating, birthing, and process oriented. She experienced the Divine Feminine as Mother through-out her pregnancy and child-birth. When Nikki spends time in nature, she feels all the nourishment come through that she associates with Mother. Of Mother energy, Nikki states:

I think of seasonal cycles, I think of the waves and tides of our being, I think of relatedness, and I think of our moon cycles… I relate to the Divine Feminine as the potential of the One/All to express and manifest – the actively creative principle.

Nikki also felt the Divine Feminine in the form of Mother through her mentor Madeline: “I feel the embodiment of Mother through her… She exudes the multi-dimensionalism of Mother to me.” Madeline embodied the firm mother and the loving, compassionate, and space-holding mother. Madeline was the “womb space” that allowed Nikki to go through her “gestation”, she was Nikki’s “spiritual Mother”.

Erica felt a mothering presence through Kali, as well as a mothering energy through Kirtan (call and response chanting). She saw and felt the nurturance and abundance of the wise Mother, overflowing and freely flowing. Kat connected with the mothering aspect of the Divine Feminine through connecting with her inner child. Sybille experienced “the big open arms of the Divine Mother that holds us with safety, security, and support”, and she learned to call the
energy of the Mother into her. Caroline also felt the presence of the Mother through the Divine Feminine, especially through Nature.

As illustrated, almost every co-researcher experienced the Divine Feminine as Mother in some form. When clients experience mothering qualities through the Divine Feminine, their connection to the mothering aspects within themselves is facilitated. Being able to mother one’s self or self-sooth is a valuable tool towards self-regulation, which leads to greater freedom from dependencies on external circumstances. We now move to the sixth and final theme of experiences with the Divine Feminine.

The Divine Feminine experienced through Spirit guides, visions, and past life experiences. Kimmie experiences the Divine Feminine in the form of a Spirit guide. She senses this guide as feminine because of the quality of Her voice and the overall flowing, soft, fluid, and feminine feel of Her. She has developed a relationship with this guide over the past three years and has conversations with Her in deep meditation. She describes these conversations as an inner hearing. Most recently Kimmie’s experiences with the Divine Feminine have been through visions of what she calls The Grove, which is a circle of feminine beings of light within a grove of trees in the forest.

Nikki speaks of experiences she had with the Divine Feminine through Spirit guides when she was as young as four or five years old. For example, she had conversations with a Spirit that had long dark hair, who lived in a crack in her wall. This Spirit was like a companion and a friend, and felt very comforting. Nikki also had a visitation by Jesus and Mary. Nikki also alluded to being visited, guided, and taught by various “ethereal beings”.

Through Kundalini dance, Sybille had some very powerful visions that connected her to the Divine Feminine. The Lady of the Lake appeared throughout her eight-day dance journey to guide, empower, and support her to open to new dimensions. From the Lady of the Lake, Sybille received a sword of light to cut through restrictions. Sybille has memories of being a priestess in many past lives. She had a beautiful vision of what our evolution looks like energetically. In this vision, Sybille, as a young pure maiden, is to pierce a woman of false power with her innocence. They both spiral through a purification process and a tree of life appears with a golden seed. A circle of women, with a circle of men around them, nourish the seed into growth.

Ariel had a powerful past life experience in which she connected with a persecuted woman who was hanging on a hook and almost dead. In the past life experience, Ariel was
guide to honour this woman for her wholeness and sacredness. She brought her down from the
hook, washed her feet in lavender water, and watched her ascend. Then she looked into the
crowd and met fear in the eye. Ariel felt this woman as an aspect of herself, and continued to
experience a spiritual connection with this woman after the past life experience. Erica also
experienced the Divine Feminine when she accessed her intuition and psychic abilities, and
through past life experiences.

Transpersonal experiences with the Divine Feminine are varied, as are the ways each
woman defines the Divine Feminine. These six themes give us beautiful and varied answers into
the primary research question, “What are contemporary women’s experiences with the Divine
Feminine” and one of the secondary research questions, “What is the Divine Feminine”. We
have also seen how many of the women’s experiences are cross-validated by the literature on the
Divine Feminine in Chapter II. Awareness of these experiences can increase counsellor’s,
helping professional’s, and educator’s sensitivity and openness to similar experiences their
clients or students may have, as well as to their own experiences. In the next section I address
the significance of this study to the field of Counselling Psychology through focusing on the
changes and transformations the co-researchers attributed to their experiences with the Divine
Feminine.

**Significance of this Study to Counselling Psychology**

*There is a tidal wave moving, and cannot be stopped. It is coming from deep within every cell.
It is a surge of feminine Truth needing to express freely and safely….The Divine Feminine is
calling for this change, for balance, harmony, growth, and LIFE.*

*(Andrea, personal communication, October 4, 2011)*

This study is significant to the field of Counselling Psychology for several reasons. First
of all, women’s voices and spirituality have been under-represented in Counselling Psychology
and Transpersonal Psychology (Borysenka & Dveirin, 2007; Gilligan, 2003; Hartelius, Caplan,
& al., 2008). Secondly, with the rise of interest and acceptance of incorporating spirituality into
our models of health and wellness, it is increasingly important and valuable that counsellors
increase their spiritual competence (Cashwell & Young, 2011; Hook, Worthington, & al., 2012;
Lines, 2002; Plumb, 2011; Stanard, Sandhu, et al., 2011). Many counsellors, myself included,
incorporate spirituality into their initial client assessments. Stanard, Sandhu, et al. (2011) also
affirm that the assessment of spirituality is a new and growing area of interest for counsellors.
Transpersonal psychology in particular aims to validate and increase awareness of the benefits of
integrating the spiritual realm within psychology, although spirituality is becoming more popular across mainstream psychology as well. In 2011, the American Counseling Association published the second edition of *Integrating Spirituality and Religion into Counseling*. Chapters in this book include Spiritual Competencies, Counselor Self-Awareness, Human Development and Transformation, and Communicating about Spirituality in Counseling. There is even a Chapter on Working with the Divine Feminine! Concerning the Divine Feminine, it has been postulated that through re-imaging the Divine as Feminine, there is transformative power (Goetz, 2010), including the potential to heal spiritual wounds (Funderburk & Fukuyama), promote spiritual, psychological, and evolutionary growth (Perot, 2008), re-claim the self as sacred (Duckett, 2010; Moloney, 2009), and reconnect with an inner source of guidance (Comas-Diaz, 2008).

Would Nikki have recognized the significance of her bleeding and identify her relationship with the Divine Feminine without having had Jesus and Mary sit on her the bed? Would Jessica have come to know, accept and overcome her abuse without the nurturance and empowerment of Kali? Reflecting and meditating on spiritual experiences and subsequent validation can ignite transformation. Through the co-researchers openness, we witness the significance of spirituality and transpersonal psychology as a path to wholeness.

There are a few cautions worth noting as we explore the significance of this study. Transpersonal psychology is deeply concerned with discerning between spiritual experiences and psychotic episodes or transpersonal experiences that lead to further imbalance. There is often a tender line of distinction between what experiences lead to overall growth, and increased health and well-being, and what experiences lead to overall destruction and breaking down of personality structures and boundaries. This topic can evoke some tension, as the nature of the Divine Feminine Herself honours both destruction and creation equally, and many spiritual disciplines encourage the diminishment of the predominance of the ego to some degree. We know that when we are going through deep transformation, there is often a destruction that precedes the birth of something new. As well, profound transformation can occur precisely when there is a temporary loss of ego. One may ask, to what degree do counsellors hold the space for destruction, knowing that this darkness can transform any moment into re-birth, freedom, and expansion of being?

Another concern within the field of transpersonal psychology is spiritual by-passing. This is where we may, for example, experience a beautiful transcendent state of awareness, and
fail to integrate it into our daily life and our whole personality, which can lead to a greater split in mind and body rather than greater integration. There is a caution that spiritual experiences can lead one to being more disconnected from reality rather than including and transcending reality simultaneously.

Engaging one’s spirituality has immense transformative power, and consequently equally creative and destructive power. Ariel speaks of how she felt an increased sense of responsibility to act and be in the world as a result of her spiritual experiences (personal communications, 2012). All ten co-researchers I interviewed are high-functioning adult women who appear to have integrated their spiritual experiences into their daily life. That’s not to say that their lives are easy and that challenges don’t arise, but they all associate their experiences with the Divine Feminine as ultimately beneficial (including the darker experiences, once they are integrated). However, it is important to hold the possibility that this is not always the case. Another common focus within transpersonal psychology is positive psychology – focusing on the positive and growth-enhancing attributes as a path to wholeness rather than focusing on illness or pathology, though both are addressed. This research naturally leans into positive psychology – illuminating and highlighting the strengths and transformative benefits of women’s experiences with the Divine Feminine, which, in my personal and professional experience, is one of the primary gifts of including spirituality in one’s quest for wholeness.

However, I am not promoting that counsellors address spirituality with every client. I would say that over the past nine years of my private practice in counselling, that spirituality lightly comes up with most of my clients, and deeply comes up with half of my clients. One’s spirituality can be very personal, and needs to be greatly respected. I do not introduce spiritual practices unless I intuit that it would be a very good fit which means there is already a demonstrated opening, natural inclination or awareness. More often, I validate and highlight clients’ spirituality that they already practice and resonate with. I may not even use the terms spirituality and transpersonal because it can distract from the underlying process. The focus is on discovering and amplifying the inherent strengths that have not been recognized, validated, or in some cases, diminished through cultural, societal, and familial conditioning. When considering if, when, and to what extent to integrate spirituality into client sessions, it can be helpful to consider that spiritual development models includes a first phase where there is a lack
of awareness of the importance of spirituality, a second phase where there is discomfort or over-
identification, and then a third phase of integration (Daniels & Fitzpatrick, 2013).

The previous section focused on the main themes of the experiences of the Divine
Feminine. Here I focus on the specific changes that the co-researchers attribute to their
experiences with the Divine Feminine. In the field of Counselling Psychology, counsellors are
midwives to change and transformation. Therefore, it is valuable to highlight what change and
transformation the co-researchers themselves attribute to their experiences with the Divine
Feminine. The most common vehicles for these changes and transformations were: Plant
Medicine and Nature, Goddesses and Mantra, Altered States of Consciousness, and Perceiving
Self as Divine Feminine.

**Plant Medicine and Nature.** Of her experience with plant medicine, Jessica states, “My
first encounter with Ayahuasca was a very big spiritual awakening for me”. Jessica’s spiritual
awakening included a realization of the interconnectivity of everything. She experienced
relationships with people in her past lives that helped explain her current relationships with
people. She received direction and clarity from her experiences with Ayahuasca: Ayahuasca
confirmed for her that abuse did happen, as well as who some of her abusers were. Ayahuasca
was a vehicle to coming to terms with the abuse in a healing way that included feeling
compassion, understanding, and love for herself and her dad. She felt releases of seeds that were
planted in her that were not of her, and a clearer connection with her authentic self. Her
relationship with herself shifted from “How can I change myself?” to “How can I accept myself
as I am?” Ayahuasca also gave her the opportunity to meet her inner child, to mother herself,
and to see and feel that Mother is always there. The quality of her relationships is stronger and
clearer, which she attributes to Ayahuasca. Jessica says,

> Ayahuasca also helped me find my voice. I feel like that was one of the biggest
> transformations, finding my voice. *So much* is about speaking up. I feel I have been in a
> situation in my life where I didn’t have a chance to say what was going on in my life, and
to speak. So, to find my voice in a way that was so directly connected to Spirit – it’s a
> mantra, and it has an image – it’s so beautiful.

Jessica continues to feel Ayahuasca guiding her in her everyday life.

Colleen’s experiences with the Divine Feminine also came through plant medicine. A
vision of Divine Feminine white light and a Mother figure shifted her perception of God/dess.
Prior to those visions, she saw God as someone who was frightening, vindictive, and unpredictable. Through the visionary experiences she discovered that you can call out for help and She is there, “You don’t have to grovel, you don’t have to beg, and you don’t have to do good works. You can just come in your messed up form with all your pain and She just accepts you. It was a huge shift for me.” Colleen also said that a key message for her was “the calling”, the asking for help. Colleen continues to call on the Mother figure to be caressed, soothed, and comforted.

Colleen also felt great relief from all the pain in the world as a result of her experiences:

No. We can’t carry the pain on our own. And that’s why it’s unbearable, we are not meant to carry it. For me this was a lesson in taking the pain to a higher power, and letting the higher power do the work of the healing and caring of it because we as humans don’t have that capacity.

On a very practical level, the dragon gave her a breathing technique for her kidneys, which helped her pain management. Her vision of the dragon also profoundly affected how she viewed pain; in her vision, pain transmuted into beauty, and she understood that ultimately all is transmuted into beauty.

What she showed me was that pain can be healed, and that there is some way that broken people can be whole again. Through her I experienced that there is no pain, nothing so evil, which can withstand her and this molten core of heat and fire.

Coleen’s faith in the goodness of the universe was restored. These experiences have also changed Colleen’s perspective on her work. She now focuses on how she can transform the difficult stories she hears into beauty. As a mother, she has more faith that her kids will make it through their pain. “These images and experiences have helped me so much because they’re building my faith that people will heal….It means that the truth will eventually write itself.”

A few months after our interview, Colleen informed me that the Dragon appeared again when she was having a challenging time at work. She was at a gathering of families of murdered and missing Aboriginal women.

I was desperately sad and very much alone. I couldn’t sleep and was in anguish, and in the wee hours half asleep She came and looked over Her shoulder at me and flexed Her wings like She was waiting to do Her work today. And wow did I need that help! The next day I worked twelve hours straight, transforming pain into beauty. I couldn’t have
done it without Her. It was like She was saying ‘I’m here’, and telling me I had to go right into the pain to transform it. It was heartbreaking and beautiful all at once (personal communication, January 29, 2012).

The use of plant medicine is controversial, yet it is increasingly receiving attention within the therapeutic world. Whether it is for MDMA assisted psychotherapy, medicinal uses of marijuana, or shamans using Ayahuasca and Ouachuma to help heal the heart, clear the psyche, and travel to the other realms to call back lost parts of the soul, it is worthwhile to become more educated on the current use of sacred plant medicines. Recently, I was at a Counsellor’s Café sponsored by the BC Association of Clinical Counsellors entitled “Responding to Client Use of Medicinal Marijuana or Psychedelic Drugs” led by Bruce Tobin, PhD, RCC. Tobin asserted that in the past few years there has been a rise in research literature and stories in popular news media “suggesting that cannabis and hallucinogenic drugs, currently illegal in Canada, may nonetheless have significant potential as psychotherapeutic agents” (personal communications, June 3rd, 2013). The discussion that evening included contemplation regarding the extent to which professional practitioners can legally and ethically tolerate, condone, or promote the medicinal use of plant medicines. Both Jessica and Colleen’s stories of their experiences with the Divine Feminine through Ayahuasca and Ouachuma clearly exemplify some powerful positive shifts and benefits that occurred in their lives as a result of communing with these plant medicines.

Another study exemplifying the positive shifts that can occur with the use of plant teachers is Espinoza’s (2013) recently completed dissertation on sexual healing with Amazonian plant teachers. She explored how seven women’s sexual/spiritual lives were transformed with sacred plant medicine. Her research was guided by the belief that sacred plant medicines hold important lessons for plant-facilitated psychotherapy for women who have experienced sexual trauma. Her findings illustrate how sexual trauma can be healed through energetic purification and openings on all levels (physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual).

Nikki receives insight through her relationship with nature. For example, she received a teaching from grandmother lavender and a few other plants: You can deeply commune with anything including us. You can deeply commune and healing will happen, and when you commune on that level, we reveal our purpose and what our medicine is. And it’s not medicine like the stuff that you would ingest if you were eating a plant, but medicine on the Spirit level.
Nikki says she is very content and she feels fed when she spends time in nature. Nikki feels rooted in a place when she becomes familiar with the plants in the area. Her relationship with nature involves communing with the Spirit of the plant through presence and deep listening rather than ingesting it. She has recently started to change her life path due to her strong relationship with the plant world (personal communication, July 7, 2013). She now mentors others on how to grow a relationship with plant teachers and plant allies.

Nikki’s relationship with nature is an example of deep awareness of the aliveness of all things. Since I have interviewed Nikki, I have spent time in her home space, in some community gatherings with her, and in one of her workshops. She effortlessly emanates calm, groundedness, sensitivity, wisdom, and compassion. Her appearance is humble, soft, and gentle.

Duckett (2010) has developed a Wheel of the Year training that is an earth-based psychology for women, giving us one framework through which therapists can incorporate earth-based spirituality into their work with clients. The Wheel of the Year has been used as a spiritual psychology with female prison inmates to tell stories and heal wounds, and with adolescents for developing healthy relationships and incorporating Menarche rituals. Duckett’s Wheel of the Year training, based in transpersonal psychology, is a way of integrating the seasonal cycles in nature with women’s spirituality. The wheel “provides an overarching psychospiritual framework for recognizing, understanding, and responding to experiences and processes that may occur over the course of a woman’s life” (Duckett, p.137). Duckett contends that women in general, and especially those involved in herbalism, midwifery, or returning to or maintaining their earth-based roots often have transpersonal experiences they have no way of understanding or working through within traditional psychological frameworks. Common transpersonal perspectives and methodologies such as visualization, ritual, past life regressions, and shamanic journeying can be of help in these situations.

My suggestion for counsellors and helping professionals is to be aware of, inquire into, and explore the healing potential and assistance that can come through the natural world on the spiritual level. This does not necessarily mean we need to ingest plant medicine. In fact, Nikki shared that she purposely does not practice ingesting plant medicines to show that we can still develop a strong spiritual relationship with them; ultimately, the plant teachers point to what is already within us (personal communications, June 2013). Encouraging our clients to connect
with nature is perhaps one of the most natural, economical, neutral, non-intrusive, and accessible ways to facilitate a spiritual opening and connection.

**Goddesses and mantra.**

*All the Goddesses confer power. Shakti, after all, is power. The fierce goddesses offer us the power to fight our battles, the inner ones and the outer ones. The wisdom goddesses give us inspiration and insight and the skill of speech. Lakshmi and her queenly sister goddess, Tripura Sundari, embody the skills of success – worldly and spiritual.* *(Kempton, 2013, p. 84)*

Here I highlight the transformations that the co-researchers’ attribute to their experiences with Goddesses and the use of mantra. Jessica used Kali’s chant to assist her through challenging times: “What got me through the experience was singing to Kali this Maha Kali chant, every day.” Jessica felt pure acceptance from the Divine Feminine through Kali: “The Divine Feminine was just like, ‘I love you the way you are.’ This is pure acceptance of you and Divine, I see you as Divine. You’re Divine, I’m Divine, we’re Divine, it’s Divine.” Kimmie spoke about invoking Kali to clear and get rid of the old: “Working with Her really accelerated my life. It was quite tangible, I felt Her energy, I felt myself being moved.” For Kimmie, Kali catalyzed a releasing, a destruction, and “a letting go in a fast way” of old energy that was holding her back. Kali also helped her stand more fully in the world with her gifts and talents.

Working with Lakshmi’s mantra helped Erica work through issues of lack, and bringing in abundance, beauty and harmony into her life. As a result, she felt more radiant, more herself, and she perceived the abundance of the universe. She witnessed her daughter shift as well: “She has “come out of her shell, and is more herself”. Anger also arrived for Erica when she was working with the Lakshmi mantra. Erica attributed this to feeling the lack of what her mother was not able to provide her, and underneath that, deep grief and hurt. Chanting also provided the experience of Mother energy with a mature wise presence. Through chanting to the Divine Mother, Erica had a vision of being nursed from the milk of abundance, and she felt life as abundant and flowing freely. Seeing and experiencing these images reminded Erica that the Divine Mother’s presence is here all the time, and can be connected to anytime.

In Tantric worldview, the Goddess manifests on all levels of the universe from the physical to Pure Consciousness – She can be represented in an anthropomorphic form and as the Absolute beyond all creation *(Frawley, 2003)*. In this view, the Divine is everywhere, in all form, as well as beyond all form. Through consciously working with the energies of different
Goddesses, we can experience archetypal energies that are both in the Universe, and within ourselves. They become a vehicle for transformation and self-expression.

The use of mantra is a form of Bhakti yoga, the yoga of devotion, which is centered in chanting and devotional singing. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of different Goddesses representing different archetypal energies that we can call on and invoke through mantra (Kempton, 2013). When chanting mantras, we embody the essence of a particular archetypal energy through the power of sound/vibration. Mantra is translated both as ‘word of power’ and ‘training the mind’. Personally I have used mantra as part of my yoga practice for over a decade, and as appropriate, I offer particular mantras to clients to incorporate into their daily Sadhana (spiritual practice). Not all mantras are specific to Gods or Goddesses, but as we have witnessed from Jessica’s and Erica’s experiences, chanting mantras to a particular Goddess helped them move through challenging times. Mantras are effective, but not necessary to invoke particular Goddesses. For example, Kimmie simply called on Kali, she did not use Her mantra. Furthermore, Goddesses may make their appearance to us un-summoned, as happened with the apparition of Mother Mary at the foot of Nikki’s bed.

Nikki experienced what she refers to as the Dark Mother, who allowed “huge transformation” in her life to occur, and regenerated her emotionally and spiritually. The Dark Mother arrived when she was debating whether to end her life or not, and spoke to her about two children that were to be born through her. This had the effect of snapping Nikki out of her depression and giving her something to live for. As a result of Nikki’s experiences with the Dark Mother, she created an annual ritual for Her. In the darkened time of the year she goes through a journey of clearing. She eventually came to understand that this Dark Mother force that seemed to come from the outside and rip her life up, was actually a force that was within her. She says she has a good relationship with Kali now, the Dark Mother force, but that she had to tame it or it could be detrimentally destructive. She’s also learned, through Kali, that she doesn’t have to destroy everything all the time. Nikki feels thankful for the Dark Mother because she wouldn’t be who she was today without the clear breakdowns and complete changeovers She evoked.

Working with the Mahavidyas has helped Krista awaken to pure love. She started to honour herself in a deeper way. Through identifying with the Goddess she gained greater respect and confidence in herself. She started to understand that she could do whatever she wanted and that a lot of her previous limitations were illusions. Embodying the Goddess helped Krista open
to the understanding the state of wholeness and the connection to divinity that is within everyone. As she started to live in this heightened awareness more and more, this started to be mirrored in relationships that came to her. She has also awakened to her purpose in this incarnation – to awaken women to the potential within them, and to awaken to the pure joy of existence.

Recently I had a client ask me to recommend her a Goddess to study and meditate on and I suggested Lakshmi. This client was experiencing lack in life, even though she was financially stable, beautiful, full of inner resources and surrounded by outer support. Through her contemplations with Lakshmi, she was able to release guilt and shame she was holding about having material wealth and enjoying her beauty. Of course Lakshmi’s manifestation of wealth and beauty have their shadow side as well which can show up in attachment to wealth and beauty, but nevertheless, “Lakshmi continues to invite us to worship her by making ourselves beautiful – inwardly, outwardly, each of us in our own way” (Kempton, 2013, p. 95). Connecting with Lakshmi assisted this client to embrace her wealth and beauty, not in an attached or overly identified way, but in celebration and offering to the world.

I have not been able to find research within the field of Counselling Psychology about the use of mantra and its benefits. The closest connection to Psychology would be the use of positive affirmations. Similarly, there is not much research connecting Counselling Psychology and women’s experiences with Goddesses. We have Comas-Diaz’s (2008) exploration with her client who had a powerful experience with La Morenita Guadalupe which I mentioned in Chapter II. Through her experience, the client felt a profound love for herself, was then able to integrate the mother within her, which then allowed her to enter into a mature relationship with a partner. Women’s studies and religious studies are speaking about the psychological value of connection with Goddesses (or saints, holy figures, and guides), but there has not yet been a prominent integration in the Counselling Psychology literature.

*The transformative power of the Goddess energies can untangle psychic knots, calling forth specific transformative forces within the mind and heart. It can cleanse our mental and emotional bodies, put us in touch with the protective powers within us, and deeply change the way we see the world.* (Kempton, 2013, p. 14)
Altered States of Consciousness: Visions and past life experiences. Here, the focus is on the co-researchers experiences of the Divine Feminine through Altered States of Consciousness (ASC’s) that arose without the use of external substances, and how these altered states positively affected and contributed to their well-being. The most commonly researched ASC’s within the field of Counselling Psychology are those induced by meditation, ritual, and prayer (Cashwell & Young, 2011). Counsellors and helping professionals can work with and even induce ASC’s as part of supporting clients’ integration and growth towards wholeness and expanded perception. As counsellors become increasingly aware of the variety of ASC’s that can be experienced, and the wisdom learned through these states of consciousness, they can start to draw out the unique strengths within their clients from these often overlooked ways of knowing. In January of 2013, the topic for the Counsellor’s Café sponsored by the BC Association of Clinical Counsellor’s was, “The Ethical Considerations of Working with Altered States of Consciousness”. In this Café, Swarn Leung spoke of how the role of the therapist changes more to that of a mid-wife, that is, providing safety, witnessing and being present to the movement of the psyche, and not strategizing or directing (personal communications, January 22, 2013). Following I highlight some of the transformations that the co-researcher’s attributed to their ASC’s.

Kimmie had a life-changing vision with The Grove of Divine Feminine Beings. Her initial vision with The Grove facilitated a shedding and releasing of layers of sadness and heavy self-image issues connected with her teen-age years. She then witnessed everyone (at the festival she was attending) who needed or wanted to, come into this circle of Divine Feminine Beings and let go of what they needed to be let go of so they could continue on and be at the next stage of their journey. The letting go was about women and self-image issues, and letting go of being loved for external reasons rather than one’s inner essence. The Grove of Divine Feminine beings helped not only her shed sadness and self-image issues, but a collective of people who were at a festival she was attending. Kimmie continues to connect with The Grove through her spiritual practices, as well as through the day, especially when she asks for guidance. She also sees the Grove as surrounding her business and holding space for healing.

Kimmie’s experiences with The Grove shifted how she relates to her clients at work. Prior to the experience with The Grove, she saw a separation between her energy healing clients and her hair dressing clients. After the experience she recognized that all her clients were there
for healing, and to treat each one as Sacred. The Grove showed her to hold everyone in that light, just as the Grove was holding everyone in that light. This was further confirmed when she was closing the four directions of the Shamanic Incan tradition and heard, “No! You need to keep the directions open for your hairdressing clients as well.”

When she is feeling disconnected or exhausted, she connects with the Grove to stay aligned and in her heart. Kimmie feels The Grove of Divine Feminine beings guiding her. “It is a huge amount of support, it’s like having a team of Divine Beings helping me, it’s pretty amazing.”

As mentioned previously, as young as four years of age, Nikki had visitations by Spirit guides. These visitations have given her a permanent sense of feeling cared for, looked after, and protected. She receives warm, soft, and caring energy from her Spirit guides.

Ariel’s ASC that happened during an accident brought her profoundly into the present moment: “I’ve never been so present in my life, I have never felt so alive”. She felt gratitude for being chosen and for knowing that she was chosen to wake up further, come into her power further, and listen to her truth further. What was truly important to her came to the forefront; being alive was important, relationships were important, following her truth was important, and she embraced acceptance (rather than control). Another shift from this experience was feeling vulnerable on a new level, learning to ask for help, and facing some underlying issues of lack of support. Another transformative aspect for Ariel was allowing the feminine part of herself to blossom and flourish – the nurturance, openness, empathy, caring, asking for support, being vulnerable, being open to being taken care of, and re-defining strength in a different way.

Ariel’s altered state experiences through her accident, meditation with a Buddha figure, cranio-sacral sessions, and past life experiences infused her with a sense of wholeness and integration. She now feels a connection to Divine Feminine energy within her. She also experienced clairvoyance; for example, when she knew that her house had sold. Ariel’s past life experience connected her with the power of speaking her truth and no longer identifying with being persecuted. As a result, she speaks her truth and honours herself more frequently, and no longer feels or projects shame. She feels a deep knowingness, and a desire and choice to stay in her power. She realizes that she is whole right now, and she feels incredible appreciation and love for life.

Following Sybille's past life experience, her relationship with her partner shifted to a new
level. They re-discovered that their souls were on a journey together and that there was a bigger purpose and much more for them to do together. Furthermore, Sybille’s senses were opened and heightened. She was able to listen to, hear and understand people on a deeper level. She could perceive with great clarity. She was also guided to the next steps of her purpose – facilitating and integrating dance and art, and she started painting again. She started trusting and following an inner knowing that was not logical, and to this day her choices are guided by a strong inner knowing, and deep trust. Sybille now also feels a big responsibility to hold space for circles of women, which she is currently doing in her life. She has a beautiful temple yurt on her property and regularly gathers women for ritual, sacred holy days, and dance and art workshops.

Erica’s past life experiences helped her make karmic amends, understand why she was petrified of rape in this lifetime, and why her mom was asexual. As a result of these past life experiences Erica felt she was able to transform some deep-seated core beliefs that had been passed down through many generations of women.

In my private practice, the most common way I work with ASC is through breath work. As appropriate, I will guide clients through specific breath patterns that alter their emotional and mental state, bringing them to a state of deep peace and calm, greater clarity, and expanded awareness. I also regularly explore the dream world of my clients’, and any connection they have with the spirit world through visions, psychic experiences, past-life experience, or other varieties of spiritual experiences. I have consistently found great benefit from the wisdom illuminated through exploring these experiences. Clients often hold some fear about these experiences, and so it is very helpful for counsellors to normalize and speak of the benefits and treasures of wisdom that can be garnered from such experiences. Taylor (1995), in her book The ethics of caring, does a wonderful job of illuminating the responsibility and care required when working with and/or inducing ASC’s.

Perceiving Self as Divine Feminine: Embodiment, women’s mysteries, sexuality, and Kundalini Shakti. The co-researchers’ experiences of perceiving the Divine Feminine within produced many positive shifts, which are highlighted below. Here, counsellors and helping professionals can witness how spiritualizing the body has a positive influence. Simply bringing in spiritual vernacular opens up this possibility and has a positive effect. Ariel shared how the term Divine Feminine is useful for her because it honours the powerful energy that is within, and helps her remember that she is Sacred and that she is a spiritual being.
It’s about opening up to my own sacredness and my own power and my own wholeness….What I love about the Divine Feminine and calling it the Divine Feminine is that it helps me embody what is feminine and what it means. It’s not just being a caregiver, there are many aspects to that female power, and I’m allowing that feminine power more into me and who I am.

Embracing a form of spirituality that honours and worships the Divine Feminine has helped Erica guide her own process of owning and embodying her feminine essence. Through developing her intuition and psychic abilities, she knew and felt and witnessed “on a very deep-knowing level that our bodies hold our entire history”. Belly dancing also helped Erica embody her feminine essence, and prepared her to meet her husband and move into sexual experiences that were “pleasant, enjoyable, expansive, and free”. Through the long absence and then return of her moon cycle, Erica started to honour her body more and in a different way, and she started to appreciate and love the femininity of it. This was a great shift from feeling embarrassed and uncomfortable about her moon cycle, and in general being very uncomfortable with the femininity of her body. Erica’s experiences with the Divine Feminine brought her into embracing and being more receptive in life. She is reminded to simply be in life and to allow things to happen to her, to let life experience itself through her. She has deep awareness that everything, every simple daily act, can be sacred or mundane, it’s how she decides to relate and be present to it.

Nikki’s experience of the Divine Feminine through pregnancy and giving birth brought a heightened awareness of how everywoman, at the moment of giving birth, is on the brink of life and death. She says that this experience and awareness was a “very significant gifting time.” Nikki comments on how beautiful it was to come back into relationship with the Divine Feminine through what was showing up in her body such as lumps in the breast and excessive bleeding from her womb. These manifestations helped her see how she was living out of harmony with the Divine Feminine rhythm, and urged her to come back into harmony with it. For her, this meant more time and space to gestate and process, to feel and breath, and to allow creative force to spontaneously arise. Nikki’s experience with her bleeding womb inspired her to perform a daily ritual on behalf of all men and woman, asking for healing of the feminine and masculine everywhere so that there is balance, wholeness, and integrity.
Noble (1991) asserts that the power of the menstrual blood is a core issue in returning to female self-government. Prophetic priestesses gave oracles while they were bleeding (Noble, 1991). Victoria author, Kyla Plaxton, wrote a book called *Little women’s guide to personal power: How to turn your monthly menstruation into the biggest blessing of your life*, and she is creating groups and activities that prepare young woman to embrace their moon cycle in an empowering way rather than in a shameful or embarrassing way. She currently tours with Chapters Indigo to educate young women on the gifts of their moon cycle (personal communication, July, 2013). Counsellor’s can play a role in educating about the power of the moon time, and providing positive reframes that celebrate and honour the moon cycle rather than diminish or hide it. For example, with women, I am very upfront about bringing the awareness of their moon cycle into sessions, and drawing out the deeper wisdom that often arises during their bleeding time. I encourage them to pay extra attention and inquire into the messages of their dreams, intuitions, and emotions during this time. Women connect with their blood by collecting it to feed their plants, perform rituals, and drink it (Noble, 1991; Krista, personal communications, 2012).

For Kat, the Divine Feminine is the purity of Spirit of who she is. Kat says that when she is in touch with the Divine Feminine,

Every action, whether it’s thought, physical, spiritual, or emotional, is coming from a place of who I am. I’m not being reactive to somebody, or trying to live up to something outside of myself, or trying to prove that I am a good person or a loving person. Recognizing, feeling, and being in touch with the Divine Feminine helped Kat realize that she isn’t “the story” and that she is not “damaged goods”. She realized that nothing can affect the purity of Spirit within, the Divine Feminine. As result of feeling this purity of Spirit within, she says she has grown more into who she is. She knows that every experience has a greater purpose, including going into the dark. She realizes more and more that the Divine Feminine is not only herSelf, but that the Divine Feminine is in everything – flowers, mountains, nature, animals, and mentors. She’s let go of ownership. She has a desire to help others see their own purity of Spirit and connect with their Divine Feminine by speaking and being Her truth. Her connection with the Divine Feminine, her purity of Spirit, is helping her find her own voice.

Sybille discovered that actively accessing the Kundalini energy within her and Mother Earth energy supports her to become herself. Through embodying the Divine Feminine energy
expressing through her, she experienced the union with all that she was longing for. Through
dance, she learned that she can call the energy of the Mother inside of her and become Her. “We
simply need to acknowledge the Divine within ourselves, to become Divine.” Through
connecting with and embodying the Divine Feminine, Sybille says she found the missing piece.
She is a priestess, she knows her calling, and her life has never been more bursting with joy and
energy and excitement.

As a result of understanding herself as Goddess, Krista emphatically says she will not be
with anyone who does not see her as the Goddess. She sees her partner as Divine, as Shiva.
“We relate to our Divine forms and so we are able to move beyond these perfections or
imperfections of human personality.” She continues, “If we can see and experience our partner
in a much higher form, daily, it is much easier to drop all of these other things that are not so
important.” This orientation translates into all of her life, seeing everyone she meets in their
transfigured elevated state.

Caroline says, “my relationship with the Divine has always been a deep inner strength
within me which has carried me through a lot of my life.” Caroline’s experience of sexual
healing resulted in feeling embodied and inherently whole. There was also a deeper integration
of sexuality and spirituality, which enabled her to further express and feel herself as Divine
Feminine. Caroline attributes her awakening to the Divine Feminine through sacred sexuality
and sexual healing as connecting her to her Dharma and opening up her career. She facilitates
circles of the feminine and creates experiences that help women awaken to their Divine Feminine
through bringing consciousness into their second chakra. Since her experiences with the Divine
Feminine, her relationship with men has come to a place of greater wholeness. She says,

As a woman further embodies herself, owns the fullness of herself, and reclaims her full
feminine divinity through a fully awakened and integrated second chakra, a new version
of the masculine also starts to show up that is in balance with this new feminine. Not
only the women’s inner masculine, but also the men that start to show up in these
women’s lives.

Nikki’s experience with Kundalini Shakti through orgasm shifted over the years, where
she can now use the energy as a diagnostic tool with other people. Overtime she has felt a
refining of the energies that move and shape who she is. In later years when Nikki felt this
energy pouring through her again, she ended up creating her own system of yoga to teach
students, from what was coming to her directly from source. “Shakti is not an external power but one’s own power. To worship Shakti is to take back one’s own power, which is to recognize the power of one’s own consciousness, the womb in which the energy of enlightenment is born” (Frawley, 2003, p. 47).

The unique contribution this study brings to the body of research literature is the detailed accounts of women’s very personal and intimate experiences with the Divine Feminine, and bringing research on the Divine Feminine into the field of Counselling Psychology. Each of these ten co-researchers provided rich in-depth information on the Divine Feminine and how She has influenced and transformed their lives. The changes and transformations that the co-researchers spoke of are the types of changes and transformations that counsellors hope to facilitate and inspire in their clients. It is hoped that counsellors, helping professionals and educators are inspired by the positive contribution that spirituality and the Divine Feminine can have in individuals’ growth towards health and well-being.

I suggest counsellors, helping professionals, and educators in the field of Counselling Psychology maintain a heightened awareness of the possible value spirituality and the Divine Feminine may have in the lives of their clients. This is not about imposing spiritual values, the Divine Feminine, or personal agendas on clients; this is about exploring our own attitudes about spirituality, including our fears, shyness, and certain intimidations we may feel. This is also about recognizing that spirituality and the Divine Feminine play a valuable and transformative role for some individuals, and that validating, affirming, and amplifying that can be beneficial for clients. Counselling is often about asking the right questions. I feel our clients (and all of us) already possess all the wisdom we need within, and that as counsellors, one of our roles is to facilitate the expansion of perception and awareness.

**Strengths and Limitations of the Current Study**

This research contains several strengths worth noting. First of all, the method of narrative inquiry was a good fit for women’s stories. Secondly, this method was quite rigorous (four analytical readings). After completing the transcriptions, analytical readings, and initial narratives, each participant was sent their narrative to verify that it accurately represented her voice. Only one co-researcher had extensive revisions (approximately ten percent of her story), indicating that this method produced trustworthy results. Thirdly, due to the interviews, the process of transcribing, and the extent of the analysis, as the researcher, I felt I deeply and
thoroughly experienced each of the co-researchers’ stories. Fourthly, through this method we have an in-depth and holistic view of each woman’s story. Because the descriptions are rich, detailed, and true to life, the reader can feel into and possibly vicariously experience the women’s stories. We are privy to these women’s experiences in a very intimate way that quantitative research often does not allow for. Fifthly, the extent of the researcher’s involvement in this method increased the opportunity for my own transformation, understanding, and integration of the Divine Feminine. The researcher is not only an outside observer, but a participant as well. Finally, often the co-researchers’ lives are enriched through their story-telling. They gain further insight into and integration of their experiences.

This research also has its limitations. As with qualitative research in general, the findings are not generalizable. These stories represent ten stories of ten women, aged thirty-three to sixty-eight, who live and function well in North America. Therefore, the findings may not find resonance with client populations that struggle with moderate to severe psychological imbalances, with men, or with children and young adults. In addition, the focus of this inquiry was on growth-enhancing, life-enriching, and meaningful experiences with the Divine Feminine; therefore, unhelpful or debilitating experiences with the Divine Feminine may not have been brought forth. Furthermore, because of the strong spiritual focus, this research may be adverse to those who have a negative perception of or experiences with spirituality and/or the Divine Feminine. I was also focusing on growth-enhancing experiences with the Divine Feminine, and how She enriches the lives of

Another limitation is that a story captures one moment in time. As soon as the story is told, it changes; therefore, these stories cannot be taken as ultimate truths, but rather a particular truth from a particular perspective in a specific moment in time. Similarly, the researcher is not privy to what is not said. Each co-researcher chooses how they want their story represented. Furthermore, this research is on the Divine Feminine and the Transpersonal, two topics that, by their very nature, are difficult to define, compartmentalize, and fully understand rationally. Concerning the strengths and limitations of this study, is it worth noting that depending on one’s worldview, a perceived strength in the eyes of one person may be perceived limitation in the eyes of another.
Future Directions for Research and Dissemination of Findings

Future directions for research include interviewing men about their experiences with the Divine Feminine. Over the past four years, I have spoken with men who are very much in touch with the Divine Feminine, and who are interested in sharing their experiences. Men’s transpersonal experiences with the Divine Feminine would offer a rich perspective, and promote the inclusion of both genders in the important topics of Divine Feminine and Spirituality. Including men could also help dispel fears that patriarchy is being replaced by matriarchy, and generate collaboration rather than competition. This would also illuminate and draw attention to the aspect of the Divine Feminine that is within all of us – the Shakti energy that runs through all manifest form independent of gender. Furthermore, it would be interesting to conduct similar research on both women’s and men’s transpersonal experiences with the Divine Masculine.

Other possibilities for future studies are to research a particular aspect of the Divine Feminine in depth. For example, researching the Divine Feminine as She is experienced in the natural world (the elements, Mother Earth, plant medicine), as She is experienced through Kundalini Shakti (Primal Life Force) and sexuality, as She is experienced in the unique form of women (wombs, breasts) and women’s mysteries (pregnancy, moon cycles), and as She is experienced through a specific goddess archetype, ascended being, saint, or guide. Further research could also be conducted on women’s transpersonal experiences or spirituality in general, with a primary focus on the variety of ways that spirituality promotes growth, wholeness, and expansion and deepening of consciousness. If I were to do this research again, I would focus on one or two specific topics, such as Kundalini Shakti, women’s sexuality, or women’s blood mysteries. The breadth of information that came from these women was so large that it was impossible to give each topic enough space and time to explore in depth. For the same reasons, I would also engage in five rather than ten narratives.

Concerning ways to disseminate this research, I will continue to find avenues to offer informative lectures and experiential workshops on the Divine Feminine and Spirituality. I have facilitated a round table discussion in a world café format on the topic of the Divine Feminine, presented at local conferences in Victoria, as well as presented this research at a conference on Psychology and Spirituality in Atherton, California. It would be beneficial and important to continue to present this research at various psychologically related conferences, as well at local helping-professional organizations here in Victoria.
Furthermore, there is a gap in Counselling Psychology programs that are offered at the Masters and Doctoral levels throughout Canada. To date, I have not found a Masters or Doctoral program in Counselling Psychology in Canada that offers courses specifically in Spirituality or the Divine Feminine (though there are some courses that allow space for integrating spirituality, and some professors that integrate spirituality into their course content). For my Doctoral program, I audited several courses in spiritual and transpersonal studies from Universities in the United States, in order to incorporate them into my Directed Studies in my degree program at the University of Victoria. Counselling Psychology programs in Canada could benefit from offering elective courses in Spirituality and the Divine Feminine. Future directions for research could also include assessing student interest in Counselling Psychology courses in spirituality and the Divine Feminine, and developing course curriculums in these areas.

Another way to disseminate this research, other than teaching courses in Spirituality and/or the Divine Feminine in Counselling Psychology programs, is to publish the findings of this research in the Canadian Journal of Counselling Psychology, the International Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, and other counselling related journals. The narratives could also be published as a book. Stanard, Sandhu, et al. (2011) suggest that spirituality is the 5th force in Counselling Psychology, indicating that interest in integrating spirituality and spiritual competence will continue to grow, and that this study is timely.

Concluding Remarks

As I near completion of my dissertation, I reflect on this journey of researching stories of contemporary women’s transpersonal experiences of the Divine Feminine over the past four years. I take an eagle’s view perspective as I look at what changes have arrived for me as a result of my own experience with the Divine Feminine, as well as through immersing myself in the stories and lives of these ten women who were co-researchers of this study. I feel more embodied and increasingly perceive the sacredness of this body temple that I reside in. I perceive the energy of my womb and listen to her guidance. I follow my moon cycles, and the cycles of the moon, and consciously tap into the energies of creation and destruction, manifestation and release through ritual. I am increasingly inner-directed through the wisdom of my body. I have greater respect for plant medicine, as well as the aliveness of all things. I accept the dark and the light more, which means I accept all parts of myself more; through this acceptance comes great freedom to be and to create.
The co-researchers have benefitted from their experiences with the Divine Feminine, from feeling accepted, whole, and loved, to feeling their own selves as Divine. What a gift! To perceive the divinity within one’s self. When my clients have a direct experience of their own divinity, any challenges that they are working through are held in such a beautiful container. Their ability to include everything and transcend, and to hold the paradoxes of life, is greatly increased. Many of the co-researchers found their voice, cleared limiting beliefs, healed trauma, re-connected to lost aspects of themselves, and aligned with their Dharma (life path) through their experiences with the Divine Feminine. Acknowledging, affirming, and deepening into the experiences of our divinity is a valuable element of healing and self-actualization.

As a researcher, I was amazed at how interested people were in the topic of the Divine Feminine. Many were able and eager to relate to their spiritual experiences through the lens of the Divine Feminine. In certain circles, there remains unnecessary stigma surrounding spirituality, spiritual experiences, and concepts such as the Divine Feminine. Counsellors, helping professionals, and educators can lessen this stigma by boldly approaching these topics with their clients and within academia. We need to open ourselves up to these experiences, and continue to increase our awareness of the spiritual dimension and the positive contributions it brings to people’s lives.

These ten stories of contemporary women’s experiences with the Divine Feminine have illustrated that She is alive and relevant in our time. We are now in the Aquarian Age, which is a time where the Divine Feminine and Divine Masculine energies are coming into greater balance. The Divine Feminine is seeking greater expression, and it is through Her manifestation that the Divine Masculine will flourish. When women fully step into their Divine Feminine power, they enable men to embrace their Divine Masculine power (as well as their own Divine Masculine within). This will shift relationships with ourselves, with others, with Mother Earth, and with all that is. As explored in Chapter II, we are coming out of patriarchal times, times when women’s power has been suppressed, oppressed, and repressed (by men and women alike). To witness women remembering and embracing their wholeness and men supporting this movement is exciting.

I have always felt that the greatest work we can do is to know our own Self. As we delve into the mysteries of our own being, we automatically liberate others to do the same. As we seek to balance the Divine Feminine and Divine Masculine energies within us, we come closer to the
Heiros Gamos, the Sacred Union, which brings us into Oneness – and in order to experience Oneness, we must experience duality. May this research, a tiny drop in the ocean of Life, inspire us to have a deep, rich, and meaningful relationship with the Divine Feminine within and without, and to abundantly give and receive Her many gifts abundantly in the world around us.
References


Appendix A

Participant Consent Form

Women’s Stories of Their Transpersonal Experiences with the Divine Feminine

You are invited to participate in a study entitled “Women’s Stories of Their Transpersonal Experience with the Divine Feminine that is being conducted by Dawn Rabey.

Dawn Rabey is a student in the department of Educational Psychology at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by Email: DawnRabey@live.ca or Phone: 250-661-8679.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Educational Psychology. It is being conducted under the supervision of Honore France. You may contact my supervisor at 250-721-7858.

Purpose and Objectives
The purpose of this research project is to explore and describe women’s stories of their transpersonal experiences with the Divine Feminine. The objectives are to understand the meaning of these experiences with the Divine Feminine, what change is attributed to these experiences with the Divine Feminine, and to understand what is the Divine Feminine. Other objectives are to increase the representation of women’s voices in the field of counselling psychology, to increase the representation of transpersonal experiences in the field of counselling psychology, and to encourage representation of marginalized experiences.

Importance of this Research
Research of this type is important because it will increase two under-represented areas in the field of counselling psychology: women’s voices, and transpersonal psychology. This research can help to empower women because it will reframe some historically oppressive views into liberating and powerful realizations. This has the potential to enhance mind/body/spirit health and wholeness for not only women, but for men, society, and the earth.

Participants Selection
You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a woman who has had a transpersonal experience with the Divine Feminine, and you can tell (or express in an alternative form) a story about your experience with great detail, clarity, and richness. You also have an interest in sharing your story, and see the value of story as a vehicle for transformation.

What is Involved
If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include a half hour initial meeting to go over the informed consent form. Then we will meet again for 1-2 hours for an open-ended interview where you will share your story. This portion will be tape-recorded. Following this interview, there will be 2-3 more meetings to discuss the re-storying of your story to ensure that the narrative accurately portrays your experience. Each meeting will be held in a private comfortable location (usually your home or mine), and may also be over the phone, with
the exception of the interview which will be in-person if possible. After each meeting, I will take some observational notes. I may also transcribe portions of your interview.

**Inconvenience**
Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, mainly, the time involved.

**Risks**
There are minimal anticipated risks to you by participating in this research. Mainly, you could potentially feel uncomfortable with subject matter that you share in the interview. If this should happen, I will take extra time to de-brief with you following the interview or refer you to a counsellor if needed.

**Benefits**
The potential benefits of your participation in this research include gaining more clarity and understanding of your experience with the Divine Feminine. As well, through sharing your story with others, there is the potential that others will be transformed, inspired, and otherwise positively affected. You will also be increasing the representation of women’s voices and transpersonal experiences in the field of counselling psychology.

**Voluntary Participation**
Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will be used only if you give permission.

**On-going Consent**
To make sure that you continue to consent to participate in this research, every time we collaborate for the purposes of this research I will ask you for your informed consent.

**Anonymity**
In terms of protecting your anonymity, the extent of anonymity will be your choice. You may choose a pseudo name and change any identifying data to ensure that you remain anonymous. Or you may choose not to remain anonymous. You may also change your decision throughout the process as you determine what you are most comfortable with.

**Confidentiality**
Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by storing any identifying data in a locked filing cabinet of which only I have access.

**Dissemination of Results**
It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: directly to participants, dissertation, published article, and presentations at scholarly meetings.

**Disposal of Data**
Data from this study will be disposed of within 5 years. Any electronic data or taping will be erased, and paper copies will be shredded. If for some reason I feel it will be helpful to keep any of the data beyond 5 years, I will only do so if I contact you and receive your permission.
Contacts
Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include Dawn Rabey (researcher) and Honore France (supervisor). Please see the beginning of this form for their contact information.

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

__________________________  __________________________  _________________
Name of Participant          Signature                  Date

* A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.*
Appendix B

Participant Information and Story-Telling Preparation

Name:
Age:
Place of residence:
Ethnicity:
Culture:
Job/Career/Life-work:

Spiritual/religious background:

Present spiritual/religious orientation:

How would you describe the Divine Feminine?

Date(s) of your transpersonal experiences with the Divine Feminine, with a very brief description of the experiences (please list all):

The following are questions that show what I am interested in; however, this is not an interview in a conventional sense, this is a story-telling – where you pass on your story, as in oral tradition. These questions (the ones that are relevant to your story) will be answered quite naturally within your story-telling (they will not be asked in a question and answer, i.e. typical interview, format). So, without getting caught up in these questions and feeling like you have to answer them or that they de-tract from your story in any way – please use them as inspiration or connection points as you reflect on your story a day or two before we meet for the audio-taped story-telling.

Primary interest:
Please tell me your story of your experience(s) with the Divine Feminine.
Secondary interests:
How did your life change during or after this experience?
How was this experience transformative?
How did this experience contribute to your growth towards wholeness, or overall health and wellness?
How would you describe your spiritual development or connection in relation to the Divine Feminine?
How would you describe the Divine Feminine?
What is your current relationship like with the Divine Feminine?

The questions below are helpful for getting into the mind-frame of telling a story. And again, they are not to be answered linearly, and will not be asked as such, but rather they are here now for you to look at, and contemplate, as you re-member and prepare to tell your story.
Where does your story begin?
Where does your story end?
How old were you when the story began?
How many chapters does the story have?
Is it a comedy, tragedy, romance, heroic journey?
Who else is involved in the story?
Who are the key players in your story?
Who is the main character?
And, be creative as you like! Words can be limiting – especially when trying to describe the transpersonal, the spiritual, and the Divine Feminine! Feel free to bring along any poems, images, art, dance, or other creative modalities/representations that you feel would enhance depth and breadth and richness of your story.
Appendix C

Review of Narrative Account

Dear Co-Researcher’s Name,

Thank you for your on-going participation in this research! It has been about a year since we did our in-depth interview of your story of your transpersonal experience(s) with the Divine Feminine. Since that time, I have transcribed your interview verbatim, and gone through a 4-step analysis procedure. Once the analysis was done, I proceeded to write the narrative of your story, attempting to order it in a way that flows, and using almost exclusively your words from the transcript.

Now it is time for you to read over this narrative, and to verify if it represents your voice. Keep in mind that this interview was done a year ago, and the narrative is taken from your transcribed words from our interview at that time. Your story might be quite different now than it was a year ago; however, what is important is that you feel this narrative accurately represents your story at the time it was told. It should feel like you are reading your own story, told in your words, your voice, and your perspective.

Please let me know if there is anything you would like omitted, added, or changed. Feel free to edit the copy I am sending you with any (and as much) changes as you would like (please make the changes in a different color or in a way that I can see what you have changed). You can email me the changes, additions, or omissions, and/or we can talk on the phone or meet in person to discuss anything you would like altered. Or you may not want any changes and simply indicate that your story is good to go! Once you have indicated that you are fully satisfied that this narrative represents your story at the time it was told, your participation in the research is completed!

Also, please let me know if there is any identifying data that you would like removed or altered. As discussed at the beginning of the research, it is up to you whether you would like to use your real name, or a pseudonym. Let me know if you would like to use your real name (first name), or if you would like to use a pseudonym (and if so, please choose a pseudonym you would like me to use).

Thank you so much for your time and for your continued participation in this research!

Sincerely, Dawn Rabey