

The Feminine Fire

The divine creative force you hold within

Volume 3, Issue 1 – Spring 2010

Hope – a thing with feathers

Well over a year ago I had the idea of writing a column on the topic of “hope”. The thought occurred to me one day while I was driving along listening to the song “*Ubi Caritas*” on a CD from Taizé – the ecumenical monastic order in France that has produced so much beautiful music. In this rendition a soloist sings portions of I Corinthians 13, the passage that contains Paul’s famous phrase “faith, hope, and love – and the greatest of these is love”. In the passage Paul goes on to explain that, although absolutely everything else in the universe will fade away, these three will abide.

That 1Corinthians13 has always been my favorite Bible passage will come as no surprise to anyone who has read *The Divine Feminine Fire* and noticed the emphasis placed on mystics like Hildegard von Bingen and Mahadevi Akka and their fascination with divine love.

But as I listened to this passage being sung it suddenly struck me that between my own personal obsession with the concept of divine love and the emphasis placed on faith by the Christianity of my childhood, I had never given the slightest thought to hope. But here was Paul saying it was one of the three most important things in the universe – so important, in fact, that “faith, hope, and love” have come to be known in Christian theology as the three great virtues.

Discovering this gave me pause: Hope could be a *virtue*?! And not just any old virtue but one of the three greatest?! The more I thought about this the more I found it fascinating – and, in some way, liberating. It filled me, as it were, with hope! Of course, as soon as I began seriously mulling this over, a friend slapped me with a fact that someone like me who has spent years studying Hindu and yoga philosophy should have noticed right away. Hope, she pointed out, is by its very nature future oriented and

In This Newsletter:

- Hope
- News from the Muse
- Women Inspiring...
Oriah Mountain
Dreamer
- Do a Creativity
Exercise
- About Teri



thus keeps you out of the “Now” – and, as any student of Eastern thought knows, being in the Now is often said to be the key to enlightenment. Or, as Eckhart Tolle puts it, “Hope is what keeps you going, but hope keeps you focused on the future, and this continued focus perpetuates your denial of the Now and therefore your unhappiness.”

But hope is indeed what keeps us going sometimes! If you’ve been reading my blog, you know that one of my closest friends in the world was diagnosed not long ago with advanced pancreatic cancer, and my life was awash with all that implied. I think I reacted like the friends and family of anyone in this situation – literally living in hope: Hope that your beloved is one of the tiny percentage that survives this disease; hope that the experimental drug he or she is on proves to be the long-prayed-for cure; hope that the hundreds of people praying and meditating will make a difference. Hope, in short, for a miracle.

From the moment I heard this diagnosis, I’ve been asking myself, how then do I reconcile this need for hope, this belief in hope – with my belief that “Be here now” is pretty much the secret of the universe!

Just as I first started pondering this someone sent me -- completely by coincidence of course! – an email that contained the first stanza from Emily Dickinson’s poem, “Hope”:
*“Hope” is the thing with feathers—
That perches in the soul—
And sings the tune without the words—
And never stops—at all—*

Then another friend suggested that perhaps Tolle's problem with hope is that he sees it as a projection of "mind" and that it is *thinking* about how things might be or could be that is the trap. Emily's "thing with feathers that perches in the soul" certainly doesn't sound like it comes from the mind to me. It sounds much more like it comes from the spirit. And the image certainly expresses exactly how hope *feels* to me, particularly at certain times. As I've briefly mentioned in other writings, my life has occasionally been graced with mystical experiences in which I've been filled with a sense of oneness and a living, pulsating love and bliss. Sometimes, even when the actual experience of mystical union has faded away, I can still tune into the bliss. At those moments, when I can sit in absolute stillness feeling almost as if I am suspended in light, I feel filled with hope. It is a sensation that vibrates around my heart, perched there – just as Emily's imagery reveals – with feather-light grace, pulsing with the rapidity of a tiny bird's heartbeat. This hope expands, yes, into the future, but it is also somehow timeless and – at least when I experience it in this way – absolutely, completely in the moment and in the Now.

When I first came across the idea that hope could be a virtue, I had a hard time with it. But when I think of each of us being filled with hope in this sense, it is easy to think of it as one. After all, when we contemplate a virtue, we think of something that does good....

With that thought in mind – may this thing with feathers continually perch in your soul and from there fly out into the world where it will grace Mother Earth and all her creatures with its goodness.

*Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all,*

*And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.*

*I've heard it in the chilliest land
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me -- Emily Dickinson*

News from the Muse

The Divine Feminine Fire seems to be doing well. On some days it hits the bestseller list in the spirituality/feminist and the spirituality/goddess categories on amazon.ca and amazon.com. Virtually any bookstore that doesn't have it can order it for you from NBN Distributors. To order an autographed copy see below.

* People continue to check out the fabulous French writer and internet personality Lilou Mace's interview on the book on youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJvE1J3f-MY>. Another really good interview was on *A Fresh Start with Sallie Felton* on 106.9 FM in Seattle. Check out her show on Contact Talk Radio! Here's the DFF interview: <http://contacttalkradio.soundwaves2000.com:8080/ctr/salliefelton021810.mp3>

* **Don't miss this amazing conference** – a truly extraordinary gathering of authorities on kundalini in a gorgeous setting! I'm honored to be speaking...

Kundalini Research Network Conference

co-sponsored by
The Himalayan Institute in
Honesdale, PA
May 14-16, 2010

Perspectives On Kundalini: Clinical, Research and Traditional Views

A few of the speakers include:

Lawrence Edwards, PhD – KRN
President

Barbara and Charles Whitfield, MD –
celebrated authors and teachers

Sat Bir Khalsa, PhD – Assistant Professor
of Medicine, Harvard University; leading
researcher on Yoga

Jyoti, PhD – Spiritual teacher, author and
founder of Kayumari

Pandit Rajmani Tigunait, PhD –
Spiritual Head of the Himalayan Institute

Paul Pond, PhD – Director of Research
for the Institute for Consciousness
Research

Dorothy Walters, PhD – acclaimed poet
and author of *Unmasking the Rose*.

To Register Himalayan Institute

Women Inspiring... *Oriah Mountain Dreamer*

When I look back at the women featured in this column I see that one thing they have in common is that they are all “what-you-see-is-what-you-get” kind of women. They are women without pretence. They don’t put on



airs. They don’t wear masks. And while they always speak their minds with kindness and deep compassion, they do indeed speak their minds! Oriah has these wonderful qualities in

spades. She is one of the most authentic human beings I have ever known – and this aspect of her has been an inspiration in my life. I met Oriah many years ago when I first interviewed her during the beginning stages of research for *The Fiery Muse*. Later I was able to tell the fascinating story of her spiritual journey – at least up to that point in her life – in the book. Since those days, Oriah has become renowned. Her books – including *The Invitation*, *The Dance*, *The Call: Discovering Why You Are Here*, and *What We Ache For: Creativity and the Unfolding of Your Soul* – have become bestsellers.

All this means that many aspects of Oriah’s life story have become widely known. (See www.oriah.org) So rather than re-telling them here, I’ll pass on some thoughts she recently shared with me on what she does to receive creative inspiration and how some of these practices might benefit you in both your creative work and your daily life.

When asked what helps her become inspired, Oriah says, “Silence and conversation. These are the two probably most critical for me – deep conversation with other creative and thoughtful people and lots of deep silence in which to mull, pray, and be open to inspiration that comes.”

One of the things I’ve noticed about Oriah is that when she *is* in deep conversation, she listens with intense focus.

She contemplates what you are saying and strives to understand exactly what you mean. Given this, it doesn’t surprise me that hearing what other people have to say is another key to inspiration for her. As she says, “When I hear a good story, it makes me want to tell it!”

For Oriah, absorbing what others have to say extends to reading. “Reading really good writing inspires me.” As she adds, does reading works by and about “people form different creative genres. Even if what they are saying might not apply exactly to what I’m doing, it stirs the pot in a new direction.” Recently she’s been intrigued by visual artist Michele Cassou and her book *Point Zero: Creativity Without Limits*. Cassou says she is out to show us how to slay “the three dragons that roam the land of the Creative Quest: the Dragon of Product; the Dragon of Control; the Dragon of Meaning.”

For Oriah, the Dragon of Meaning has particular resonance in terms of writing fiction. She finds that trying to impose meaning – rather than letting what meaning there may be rise up naturally – can be a major block to creativity. “It has to be about the story, and telling a good story!” And then, she says, inspiration can flow. The deep silence that Oriah also finds so necessary for inspiration comes in many forms: “It can be silence in stillness, in meditation, on a walk, washing dishes....”

She adds, however, that you also “have to have *empty time* – time that is not scheduled for anything. Time to stare at the wall if you want; time to go for a walk – but not a purposeful walk – more like wandering.... You need time when absolutely nothing is scheduled or planned....”



For those who want to become more creatively inspired, Oriah also recommends asking yourself these two questions: “Do you have something to say? Are you willing to



commit to it?" Oriah cautions that you need to consider these two questions carefully – for if you are indeed willing to commit to what you have to say it will almost certainly mean that you will have to make changes in your life: "As Mary Oliver says, 'Something is going to have to go, let it go....' Laughing, but still entirely serious, Oriah adds, "For me, this means that I can't keep house like my mother and still write books!"

The beauty of Oriah's writing – whether it is in carefully honed words of her books or the more spur-of-the-moment comments made on her heartfelt blog – makes it clear that she continually asks herself these questions and makes sure she is answering them in the affirmative.

On a recent blog she refers to the way aboriginals of Australia are said to dream creation into existence and writes:

I want my writing, my "dreaming"...to include images and metaphors and descriptions that reflect both the struggles and the joy of life....Good writing – like good music, painting, or any other art – evokes the universal by touching the particular that sparks our sensory memory and our heart's imagination....

I want to find images and metaphors that are equally strong in evoking the experience of joy and contentment. And I want the words to be vivid and real, to contribute to dreaming a world that is vivid and real. I want to avoid spiritual platitudes that reassure me that being is enough but do not reflect the full taste or vibrancy of being. I cannot claim to know how this dreaming works, but it is not a simplistic matter of magical thinking. It is something that happens on a deeper level when we engage the moment completely and let our creative life flow outward in images, songs, stories and movements that hold colour, texture,

sound, shape, scent, and taste. There are hundreds of ways to dream the world into being with all of the fire and the beauty of that first moment of creation. The contentment I feel in this moment is not marred by my desire to share it with words. And as I write this, one of the season's first butterflies appears- wings of brown velvet rimmed with red and gold. Trailing threads of sunlight, it dips and dives on windwaves, a flicker of movement so tenuous and tenacious it takes my breath away. And I think of a quote by Trina Paulus — a guidance for all of us who want to take the risk of participating in dreaming the world into being:

"How does one become a butterfly?" she asked pensively.

"You must want to fly so much that you are willing to give up being a caterpillar."



Creativity Exercise **Weather Watch!**

This is more a creativity "experience" than an exercise. It was triggered by the euphoria I felt on the first day of March – usually still deep winter here – when it was suddenly and inexplicably spring. Spring the way it should be. The sun shining; the sky that piercing blue that begs to be described with worn-out words like "indigo" and "azure"; snow melting; the run-off glistening in little rivulets along the edges of winter-pocked roads...

I went outside, breathed-in deep the sharp air, and let the sun warm me. I wanted to walk, to run, to bike, to move, move, move. But when I sat with the feeling – really made my body sit quietly with it – I realized that what I *really* wanted to do was to “make” something. I wanted to create. I wanted to allow that feeling to build and to flow – to move upward and outward into my art...

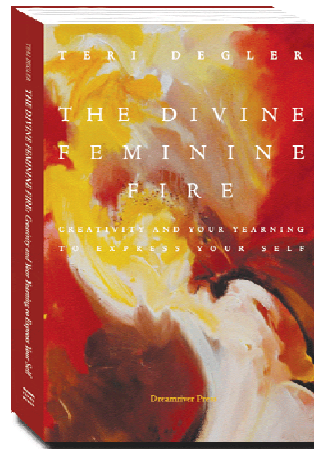
And so, thankful for things like lap tops – not to mention simple old pads of paper and pens – that allow us to work unfettered anywhere, I got to work...

And what did I write? A piece about how weather affects our creativity and how being tuned into the weather and how it makes you feel can be a marvellous source of creative inspiration.

For this to work, of course, you have to go beyond the stereotypical ways weather is supposed to affect us – gray skies are gloomy, etc. – and step into how changes in climate really make you feel. Naturally, the way you internalize weather and the seasons will be tied up with how you experienced them as a child: the kind of climate you were raised in; what your life was like during the different seasons of the year; the time of year and the type of day something marvellous or something terribly traumatic occurred....But to begin, just pick a day, any day, and soak up the weather:

1. Find a place with at least some degree of “nature” around and have pen and paper or other easy-to-carry art materials ready.
2. Enter that deep state where you feel protected, filled with light, and open to creative inspiration – either before or after you go outside. See Ex .1 in TFF Spring '08
3. Spend some time walking, just experiencing what the weather is doing – when thoughts intrude, don't resist them, let them flow out as if your mind has a trapdoor that opens and lets them float out. Let the cold rasp against your face; the wind blow right through your soul; the sun melt into your skin like butter...
4. Find a place to truly *sit with* all this for a while...and then let your consciousness move outward – and become aware of the flow of prana – life energy – around you. Let yourself dissolve into its rhythm; feel it pulsing around you, through you, and in you. When you are ready let it flow upward and outward into your creative work.

Order an autographed copy of *The Divine Feminine Fire*



To order your autographed copy and save over 10%! Send \$16 US or \$20 CAN plus \$6.00 for shipping and handling to:

Teri Degler
747 Don Mills
Road
PO Box 45602
Toronto, ON,
Canada
M3C 1S0

Please make cheques payable to "Teri Degler"

About Teri

Award-winning writer Teri Degler is the author/co-author of nine books including *The Fiery Muse: Creativity and the Spiritual Quest* (Random House of Canada). A long-time student of yoga philosophy and mystical experience, Teri is a widely experienced public speaker. She has taught workshops in the United States and Canada and has appeared on many national radio and television programs. For more information, or to book her for workshops, go to teridegler.com

To sign up to receive this free quarterly newsletter just email:

teridegler@sympatico.ca

Your email address will be not be sold or given out in any way.

Photo credits:

Butterflies by Cheryl-Anne Miller

Oriah's photo by Sophie Hogan

Sunset photo by Oriah's husband, Jeff