

The Feminine Fire

The divine creative force you hold within

Volume 2, Issue 1 – Summer 2009

Rest and Tenderness

I'm writing this on the Summer Solstice, and I am thinking back to how the Winter Solstice came this year accompanied by such deep regret. I was shocked to realize at the time that fall was over. And the fall issue of *The Feminine Fire Newsletter* had not come out. My last chance for sneaking it through on the final day of the season was gone. Then before I knew it, winter and spring had come and gone, too. Time in all its tuneful turnings – as Dylan Thomas would say – had made its way down the rivers of the windfall light and I was out of it.

Out of time, and – I have to admit – pretty much “out of it” in general, too. Added to the cram-packed chaos of my normal life was something I had never really had to face before in any serious way: illness.

For years, without even looking, I had blithely been checking off the “No” box on every condition listed on those doctor's office checklists. Suddenly I found myself having to actually *read* those lists and, worse, having to check the “Yes” box on not one but two of those pesky questions. Two completely unrelated parts of my body were under siege. And although I am extraordinarily fortunate in that neither of these conditions turned out to be life threatening, I have spent several months being very ill and having to undergo not one, but *three*, major surgeries in short succession.

Talk about not knowing what you've got till it's gone! Up to now, the most debilitating problems I'd ever suffered were migraines (which, really, ought to be enough misery for anybody) and a bunch of injuries caused by being an exceptionally uncoordinated person with a life-long penchant for taking up sports that require a high degree of coordination!

In addition to making me appreciate everything that was *not* wrong with me even more, all this bodily suffering has spurred me to write about a topic I've thought about tackling for a long time: what is it that makes it so hard for us to be “in” our bodies. The

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importance of this – being able to truly *experience* our physical selves and to sit with those sometimes-very-intense sensations – is well known. And it is made even more significant by the realization, as discussed in my last column ([Vol1 Issue3](#)), that our ability to experience the Divine is intrinsically related to this ability to be in our bodies. In *The Divine Feminine Fire* this concept is explored in detail, showing how sacred texts from Christianity, Judaism, hatha yoga, and Tantra all link the presence of God – God in our hearts and our beings – to Sophia, Shekinah, and Shakti.

Given all this, it is incredibly ironic that so much of our mental energy is spent trying to ignore our physical beings. As women, we steel ourselves against the monthly misery of cramps, the relentless discomfort of pregnancy, and the excruciating pain of childbirth. And think how often we are required, as mothers, to somehow set aside our own illness to care for our children in theirs. Of course, this is also true for men who are taught to “suck it up” when they're hurt and “stay in the game” even when they're badly injured. All this detaching ourselves from the body gets to be a habit – one that makes it hard to be in the body and be comfortable there.

So how do we walk this line – maintaining our ability both to work through pain and deeply experience our bodies? Although I have no sure answer, the first step for me has been simply becoming aware that the issue existed. This has allowed me to *consciously* remove my focus from pain and

discomfort when necessary and to, just as consciously, allow a certain – more or less intense – degree of my awareness to focus on my body the rest of the time.

Another insight into this was provided in a note I recently received about my illness from my friend Oriah who said, “As I grow older I become less and less convinced that our bodies and our souls are in any way separate – and, minimally, your body is crying out for tenderness, for rest. You really do not have to be tough sweetie!” (oriahmountaindreamer.com) This is a thought that never occurred to me! Being tough – in the sense of “when the going gets tough, the tough get going” – has been my watchword. Oriah made me realize that if I hadn’t been trying to pretend I was so tough, I wouldn’t have had to detach myself from my body so much in the first place. I suspect the same is true for a great many of us. So, with that in mind, I pass Oriah’s words of wisdom on to all you “sweeties” out there who could use a bit more rest and tenderness!

News from the Muse

The Divine Feminine Fire is going to press and advance copies will be available in August. Here’s what people have to say:

In Dancing in the Flames I make the point that embodying the divine feminine is one of the most important tasks of our time. This excellent book shows you can accomplish this by getting to know your body, bringing your body and your dreams together, and uniting body and soul.

Marion Woodman, Jungian analyst, author of *Dancing in the Flames: The Dark Goddess in the Transformation of Consciousness and Bone*.

I sometimes suspect we don't really know what embodying the divine feminine would look like in an ordinary human life. The Divine Feminine Fire offers valuable insights into this by exploring the lives of saints and the modern day mystics who are our neighbors, our sisters, ourselves. This book stirs the imagination, stimulates our thinking, and takes us deeper into the mystery.

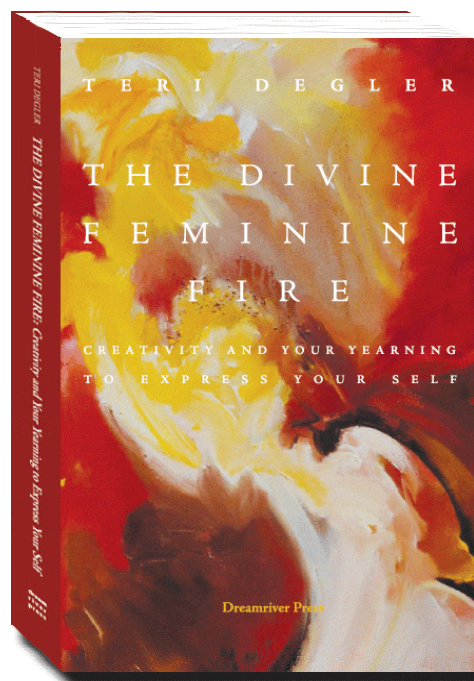
Oriah Mountain Dreamer, author of *The Invitation* and *What We Ache For: Creativity and the Unfolding of Your Soul*.

Teri Degler offers us a feast of wisdom. Her broad knowledge of yoga and of Shakti, Sophia, and Shekinah is presented in an amazingly clear and comprehensible way – and the creativity exercises are wonderful. She dives deep into the recesses of once hidden knowledge to show how Divine Love and Divine Wisdom are our constant guides. The Divine Feminine Fire will appeal to anyone who wishes to expand and deepen the spiritual “practice” we call daily life.

Dorothy Walters, PhD, author of *Unmasking the Rose: A Record of Kundalini Initiation and Marrow of Flame: Poems of the Spiritual Journey*.

With engaging warmth and a great breadth of understanding, Degler illumines the power of the Divine Feminine and Her presence in the great spiritual traditions of the East and the West. She also shares the ways in which the Divine Feminine is calling to us in our lives through our longing, our divine discontent – all that summons us to the fullness of who we are....

Lawrence Edwards, PhD, author of *The Soul's Journey: Guidance from the Divine Within*, President of the Kundalini Research Network, and Founder of The Anam Cara Foundation.



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Women Inspiring...

Sandy Brand

Sandy Brand is one of the most inspiring women I have ever met. She is a tremendously gifted artist whose work hangs in homes and corporate offices from Paris to Dubai. In 2005 she was selected as one of Canada's top professional painters by the United Arab Emirates and flown there to take part in the Emaar International Art Symposium. And I am incredibly



honored that one of her paintings, "Vulnerable" (above), graces the cover of my new book, *The Divine Feminine Fire*.

Sandy not only paints, she skis, caves, treks, flies planes, and rappels down treacherous mountain cliffs. All this is enough to qualify as "inspiring" but it is made even more so by the fact that an acute case of childhood polio left Sandy severely impaired from the waist down on her right side and able to walk only with a full leg brace.

To celebrate her 50th birthday in 1997, this amazing woman rappelled down El Capitan and led an entire team – both the first Canadian and the first woman to do so! One of the most challenging cliff faces in North America is El Capitan, a 2,650' drop. Although it takes less than a half hour to rappel down, every rappel begins with an ascent, and the hike up the back of El Cap takes a good ten hours. For Sandy, carrying a 42-pound pack, it took two days. "The way



I move you can usually double the time it takes," she laughs, "I'm kind of like a snail – but I get there!" The rappel down, she says, was the thrill of a lifetime. She says leading the team – eleven men and two women – during the eight months of training was also an adventure. "I learned so much dealing with such strong personalities – climbers are a very independent and determined lot!"

By the next year only the highest mountains would do and Sandy was headed for Nepal. Trekking in the Himalayas was as much a spiritual adventure for her as a physical challenge. One physical challenge was trekking to the summit of Gokyo Ri, a 17,575' peak. A spiritual one was coming to terms with an experience at Gorekshep. Known for being the last habitation before the Mt. Everest basecamp, it is also the take-off point for the trek to the 18,210' crest of Kala Patthar – famous with trekkers for its awesome view of the Himalayas and as the only place where Everest, from basecamp to summit, can be seen in totality.

On the morning when Sandy's friends were preparing for the trek up Kala Patthar she sat, alone and despondent, in a rustic eating area drinking a cup of tea. Between mild altitude sickness and her brace, she felt she simply could not make the steep, switch-backed trek up the mountain. Suffused in misery, she stared into her tea. Suddenly, she became aware of an orange-robed Buddhist monk with a prayer book sitting cross-legged near her chanting. Certain she had been alone in the room until that very instant, Sandy was stunned. Overcoming her shock, she sat watching the monk and

letting the sound of his chant wash over her. Quite suddenly she knew she could make it up the mountain. And when she did, she not only had the view of the

Himalayas and Everest, she also was blessed with the sight of a sundog – a rare solar phenomenon in which a rainbow encircles the sun.

Since then Sandy has made two more trips to Nepal and taken up three-track skiing. Clearly for Sandy the word “disability” doesn’t exist. Having had polio, she says, “has been an advantage in many ways.” The first, and most important, is that her original illness as a child led her to art. “While everyone else was outside playing,” she says, “I would lay in bed and draw.” This well-honed skill is one reason Sandy’s art is so powerful – for, although her work today is mostly abstract, it is underpinned by an ability to draw that an old master would applaud. Beyond this, she says, every painting is a spiritual experience. As is, she says, teaching art to others. She gives classes at her studio in Toronto and takes international groups on painting trips to her native Scotland. What’s next for Sandy? She’s planning to learn to water ski this summer... (visit www.sandybrand.com)

Creativity Exercise

Taming the Harsh Inner Voice of Criticism

Creating a safe, protected mental space where that harsh inner voice of criticism that so often hampers our creativity cannot affect us is a key to keeping the creativity flowing in our lives. (See [Vol1 Issue1](#)) But it doesn’t banish this negative voice from our psyches. This generally requires a good deal of inner work – effort that doesn’t so much banish it as transform it into a useful voice -- one that offers constructive criticism. Regardless, the first step in dealing effectively with the harsh voice of criticism is becoming able to recognize when it is whispering inside your mind.

1. Find yourself a quiet place, have writing materials ready, and sit comfortably with your spine straight. Bring your focus to your breath, breathe slowing and deeply, and see yourself filling with light. Create your protected space. (Learn about this in [Vol1 Issue1](#))
2. As you sit in this safe, light-filled space, allow your consciousness to move back in time to the last time you gave up on, almost gave up on, or weren’t able to even begin a creative project you cared about.

3. Sink back into your memories of that moment remembering the negative, self-criticizing words that went through your mind at the time. Keeping in mind that you are in light-filled, protected place, consciously allow those words into this space.
4. Sit with these words. Listen to the voice behind them becoming aware of exactly how it sounds – its timbre, tone, and pitch.
5. In the same way that you consciously allowed this into your space, consciously remove it.
6. Bring your awareness back to the inner light, see it building inside your protected space, cleansing it and filling it with love.
7. See the light building around your heart, then flowing upwards and outwards, through your hands and into your writing as you have in past exercises. (Learn about this in [Vol1 Issue1](#)).
8. Write about what you have learned about the harsh voice of criticism. Perhaps you now recognize it as being very similar to that of someone from your past or perhaps it is a composite of all the voices who have told you weren’t good enough, talented enough, gifted enough.....Regardless, you will now be able to recognize this voice for what it is and tell it to stop before its destructive diatribe takes hold of you and thwarts your creativity.

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 and to book her for workshops go to www.teridegler.com.

email: teridegler@sympatico.ca to sign up for the newsletter. Your email address will be protected!