

Emergence

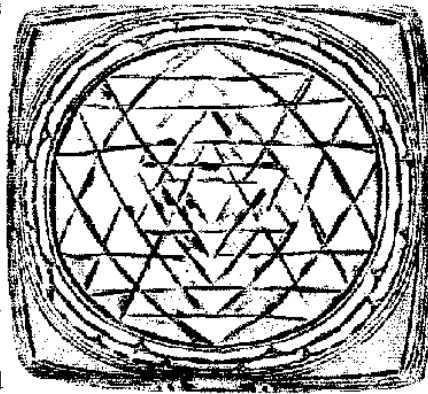
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Coming Out of the Dream

A personal account by Kavita

From as early as I can remember, this life felt to me like a dream. Most people seemed on automatic, imitating everyone else, children playing, adults working, not questioning who or what we were or the meaning of our existence. Passing images, changing scenes — but what was behind it? — That mystery drew me in, became my secret hiding place: a sense of timeless space, a sense of wonder, the unknown — where everything stopped, and where all had begun — that somehow felt more my true home, more my true self than the little girl acting her role.



them in, but made them as invisible as I could, conforming outwardly while taking refuge in writing poetry and walking in nature as ways of keeping in touch with myself. At times the tension between my inner and outer experience, two very different realities, each with their own often conflicting demands, was quite a challenge to negotiate. There would be long periods of 'forgetting', losing myself in the outer role, and then suddenly experiencing the boundlessness again — with both exhilaration, fear, and the painful sense of exile that would haunt me because I could not consistently live there.

I sensed there was something much greater than what met the eye and what most people were concerned with. What was before birth and after death — these were the things I wanted to know and without this greater context life seemed meaning-less if not absurd. It was hard for me to jump in and go through the motions others did, which often seemed so senseless compared to this mysterious realm of what was eternal and unchanging, and so immensely powerful as to sustain the whole universe.

Still I had to act my role, because as I learned early on it was better not to talk about these things, or the threat of psychologists loomed large. I dreaded the thought of falling into their hands, of being 'normalized', which to me would have been the same as having my soul destroyed. My parents were very loving and encouraged me in many ways to be creative and questioning, but also sensed when the gap was too wide between my perceptions and the norm. My mother would say, with all the best intentions for my well-being, "Better pull your antennae in. You can't live in the world like that." I never really pulled

In adolescence, I had particular difficulty accepting the role of a woman. "Woman" for me was an object, in particular a sexual object (inheriting as I did the image of woman created by the patriarchal society I was growing up in), and not only did I feel that I wasn't this somewhat contemptible object but I wasn't an object at all. I felt like the subject, the witness, the one watching it all. This caused a lot of confusion, because I identified the point of view of the subject with the male mentality (again an inheritance of the patriarchal point of view), although I also felt that at a deeper level the identity of the seer was the identity of us all, regardless of gender. All in all, given the confining images and expectations imposed upon women by a society where the male was supreme (even in the form of God) I had an uneasy relationship with men, to say the least, and used my intellect as a kind of shield, a proof against being taken as a merely sexual object. Though I enjoyed affairs (especially in the nearly all-male university I attended), I avoided a conventional relationship, which I felt would impede my freedom.

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I loved the world of the mind, and thought that going to university might bring some answers in my search for truth. But I was quickly disillusioned and realized that the intellect, especially in an academic setting where it was primarily co-opted to the interests of a competitive, materialistic society, would hardly bring the state of wholeness and authenticity I was seeking. I entered the creative writing program, and continued to write poetry, which kept me in touch with the yearnings, intuitions, and intermittent experience of a higher state of being. The poems often followed inner movements of energy I couldn't explain or understand through normal discursive language, and culminated in a book in my final year called "The I-Opening".

At times I would (involuntarily) go out of my body, and not be able to get back in — that is, I would find myself in a state of complete lucidity and awareness, as if my consciousness filled the whole room, but be unable to open my eyes, move my hand, or activate any part of my body at all.

By the time I left university, not wanting to contribute my energies to a soul-denying, consumerist society I saw as being irredeemably tied to the interests of big business and the military, I decided to leave the country. My dream, naive as it may have been, went something along these lines: a society where the basic material needs were taken care of simply, efficiently, and in common, leaving lots of time and energy for the higher aspects of our evolution: self-knowledge, creativity, and spiritual exploration and growth.

This set me off on a long, round-the-world (over seven years) quest, through Africa, Europe, and Asia, living and working in traditional societies as well as alternative communities. I stayed in tribal villages as a free-lance journalist in Tanzania, and later worked in a regional development plan researching the traditional healing techniques of the 'witchdoctors'; worked in a neurophysiology laboratory in London; as a gardener and goatherd on a Greek island; interviewing and writing about shadow puppet healers in Malaysia; staying with pre-Dravidian hill tribes in South India to explore their use of music in healing; living and working on organic farms and New Age communities in New Zealand and Australia.

As I went along I found I was looking less and less to political or social reformation and more and more inside, feeling that external social change could only come from transformation within. Drawing on realizations that came through poetry, lucid dreams, and myths that sometimes seemed to emerge as if from the land itself of ancient

cultures, as well as my own psychic terrain, I began to sit regularly to tune in to deeper levels of consciousness as they became more accessible to me. (It felt rather like tuning into different channels on some inner television!) I felt particularly guided by a Great Goddess form that would often initiate my meditations, ending at times in a formless sense of all-embracing, non-conditional Oneness reminiscent of that timeless openness experienced in childhood.

Being the non-conformist I was, with an innate distrust of group mentalities and authority figures, as well as a strong inner guidance that I cherished and did my best to protect, I avoided gurus, organizations, and spiritual systems as long as I possibly could. But finally my experiences began to move faster than I could handle, and I felt I was out of my waters. At times I would (involuntarily) go out of my body, and not be able to get back in — that is, I would find myself in a state of complete lucidity and awareness, as if my consciousness filled the whole room, but be unable to open my eyes, move my hand, or activate any part of my body at all. This would happen in a state between waking and sleeping, or associated with lucid dreaming. I seemed to be the space of consciousness, and my body in that space at the same time, but it was an inert object, and I was frightened that I'd never be able to move again, or that I'd be found and taken for dead or unconscious.

This situation prompted me to seek guidance. I turned first to Buddhism, which appealed to me for its sobriety, rationality, and intricate mapping of the different levels of the psyche. I did a Tibetan Buddhist retreat, and went from there to another retreat of Vipassana meditation. Around the third or fourth day of the Vipassana retreat, I felt an intense stream of energy surge from the base of my spine to the point just behind my forehead, and run up and down in continuous waves. The sensation was like liquid electricity, and indeed it felt as if I'd been 'electrified', with tingling all over my body, as well as the strong central current in the spine. It never stopped again, and for months afterwards I could hardly sleep, as so much light was created that even in a dark room with my eyes closed I couldn't 'turn off the lights'!

There was a sense of expansiveness and lightness, at the same time I felt very ungrounded, again as if I were split between two dimensions I didn't know how to integrate. I was also frightened by the strength of the sensations: at times the current was so powerful that I couldn't help shaking, and at other times the pressure in my head at the point where the current turned, spun or pounded with such force that I felt I was about to explode. During the ten days of the retreat, several more points along the spine burst into what felt like a radiating ball of fireworks, and altogether I was quite bewildered about what was going on. But when I

spoke to the teachers, they told me just to ignore it, that all experiences were to be observed and let go. I couldn't let go though; this energy had a life of its own, and in fact trying to observe it only gave it more power!

When I left the retreat, I felt like I was nine months pregnant and looking for a place to give birth. I ended up in a yoga ashram where energy phenomena, including the kundalini, were recognized and worked with. Through lots of karma yoga (mostly work in the garden), chanting, hatha yoga, kriya yoga, yoga nidra and breathing practices, I eventually became more balanced. In a kind of slow motion replay, I recapitulated the almost meteoric rise of the kundalini along the chakras that had happened during the retreat, experiencing one by one for longer periods the respective qualities associated with the different chakras. Gradually I integrated the 'electrical' energy, which was still always there but now befriended and more familiar. I stopped going out of my body, though for a while there were still 'teaching dreams', where suddenly during sleep energy would rip through a certain circuit in my head or body, seemingly re-arranging my nervous system and perceptual framework. Sometimes there was the sense of the presence (or even an internally visible form) of a spiritual figure or master initiating these energy circuits with their touch. Strange as this might sound, it actually felt quite natural.

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I remained in the ashram, eventually teaching yoga, until a scandal involving the director broke up our serene and well-ordered life. I left, as did many others, continued to teach yoga, and worked with people with disabilities for about two years (I actually found some remarkable spiritual teachers among them, though I didn't appreciate it as much as I should have at the time!), and then went to India in search once again of a spiritual master. I found a master whose teachings resonated so wonderfully with everything I had ever intuited, I felt as if my whole life had come to fruition from the very first meeting. The teaching was that of non-dualism, Advaita Vedanta, in the line of Sri Ramana Maharshi, the basic tenet being that everything that appears is a projection of the Supreme Consciousness, and we are That Itself, not the limited appearances we think ourselves to be. My teacher told me that I had perceived the truth and that now my spiritual 'experiences' would stop.

Indeed, three luminous years followed, where my inner world flowed so perfectly with the outer, that there seemed to be no division. I felt that I had found what I had always been looking for, both inwardly and outwardly; in fact, that there was no longer any difference. Poems flowed, heard from a source beyond mind, and ended in the publication of a book, with the support of the community, called "Love Songs of the Undivided".

The love affair expressed in the poems was that of Consciousness itself with its own creations; the merging of the small 'me' into the Universal 'I'; the Oneness of the Supreme with all its forms. During this time I experienced myself, not just as the body and mind, but the Consciousness itself in which they were arising, and sometimes (in meditation, satsang, or at the end of writing a poem) their forms would 'lose their lines', dissolving into the boundlessness of that Consciousness Itself. Altogether this was a time of openness and transparency to the timeless, formless Divinity within all things.

I was close to my teacher and worked at his house, doing the garden, helping to prepare meals, cleaning, serving guests. Though he was not well-known when I first came to him, he quickly became famous and a small 'inner circle' grew up around him. Towards the end of my third year, I got caught in an unfortunate personal story that, I suppose in my openness, hit me unusually hard, and brought up a volcano of emotional turmoil, a shadow side as tremendous as the light I had been experiencing. I was told to "drop the story" but I didn't know how; it had obviously triggered something very deep, concerning sex, abuse, deception, and abandonment. For the first time in my life I wanted to have a healthy, inspired, committed relationship with a man, but instead ended up for the next few years on a kind of sexual spree, only spinning more furiously the vicious cycle of being used and abandoned, falling into increasingly unhappy sexual encounters.

A few years later, my teacher left his body, the community broke up, I lost my home and income (I had been running a guest house for visitors coming to my teacher), my Indian visa expired, and I found myself more desperately alone than ever. I felt that I had lost everything, both on the spiritual and worldly levels. The sense of despair was so intense I felt perpetually on the edge of a breakdown; my whole world had fallen apart, and all sense of identity was gone, both of the small 'self' I had been and the big One. I didn't know where to turn or what to do, and often all I could think of was suicide. Once again as vulnerable and lacking in the support system of a like-minded community as in my childhood, I was again haunted by the fear of breaking down and falling into the hands of the medical or psychological establishment.

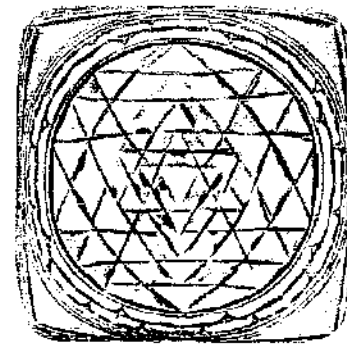
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I tried a few different spiritual teachers, hoping to find someone who could help me integrate the spiritual and psychological dimensions. I still loved the non-dual teachings as the ultimate truth, but I felt there must be a way of working with the personal in the light of the Universal, clearing the psychological clouds for the truth of spirit to shine through. Most of the spiritual teachers I met, however, didn't want to get involved with psychological questions, as if spirit and psyche were two separate realms (not very non-dual, I thought!) When on the other hand, I looked for psychological systems or therapists who integrated the spiritual in their work, it was difficult to find ones who had had the depth of spiritual vision or understanding that I was used to, even if they were very skilled at psychology in its own terms. So I continued to wander, homeless, rudderless, in a void in every sense—the spiritual, psychological, and physical.

Spiritual Emergence Network, Australia

I am using the past tense, but actually this is the present. I am still trying to find my way out of the darkness. I try to understand why all of this is happening, what I am meant to be learning, and what to do from here. Alternatively, I try to surrender and just listen. In some ways, it makes sense: a total stripping away of anything the ego could hold on to, breaking up all of its self-definitions, positive or negative, until it finally breaks into the Infinite.



SRI YANTRA

This mandala depicts the multiplicity of Creation by the interpenetration of the ascending (male) and the descending (female) vortices of creative energy.