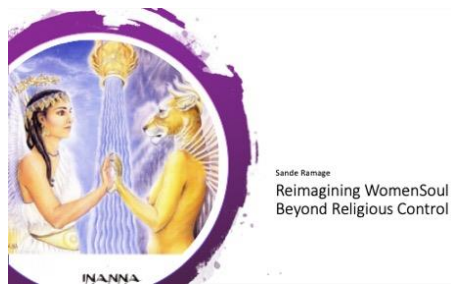


Reimagining WomenSoul Beyond Religious Control

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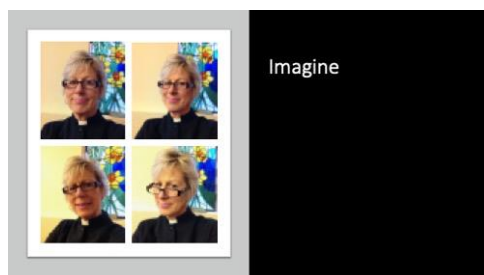


1: Thank you so much for the opportunity to contribute to this auspicious gathering today out of what runs deep for me.

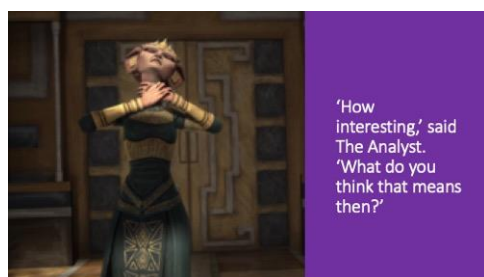
First, I want to acknowledge the symbolism of this place in the story I weave for you today. About 20 years ago, I attended a lecture series here by [Rev Dr Peter Cameron](#) who was held to be a heretic by the

Australian Presbyterian Church, prompted by a sermon he gave in 1992 called *The Place of Women in the Church*.

All of this led to me hanging out here, encouraged by Bruce Hansen, the minister of the time, and then trundling down to the cathedral after a chance remark by Jenny Dawson. This all led to the Anglican ordination process until I find myself full circle back at the beginning. I have learned not to dismiss these synchronicities even although I might not know what they mean in the moment.



2: Now I need you to imagine me in full clerical gear, cassock, surplice and clergy shirt. I'm getting ready to take a service with one of my female colleagues, in what looked like a robing room where choir boys and their conductor were milling about. I walked over to the mirror to check my lippy, as you do.



3: Instead of a dog collar around my neck, something I've come to see as symbolising organisational suppression of instinctual spirituality, I was horrified to see that my neck was encased with nylon fishing line, tied in elaborate and beautiful patterns. But no matter how gorgeous the patterns were, one yank and it would have become my death sentence.

'How interesting,' said The Jungian analyst, himself an 82-year-old Catholic priest, well versed in how the patriarchy can strangle the living daylight out of you. 'What do you think that means?'

It wasn't the first time we'd had to deal with my dreams about being captured. In fact, many dreams in my intense weekly engagement with him seemed to be shouting about this strange relationship I had with the institutional church and the patriarchal system and the damage done to my instinctual spirituality.

Reimagining WomenSoul Beyond Religious Control

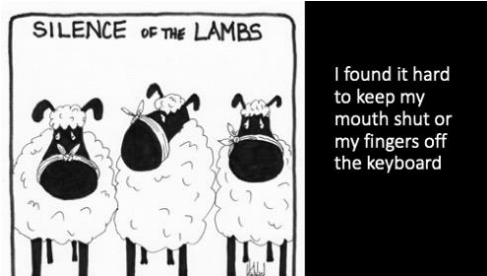
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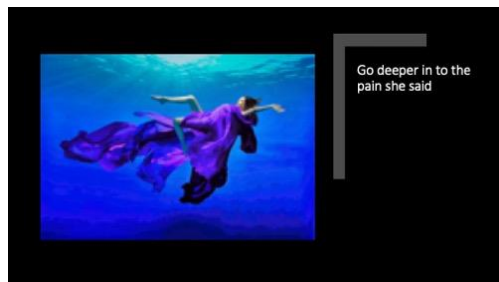
4: The dreaming sits within a lifelong spiritual quest that has included being adopted into Christian fundamentalism, a flirtation with Judaism and the necessary plunge into atheism, training and ordination as an Anglican priest, experience as a school, military and hospital chaplain.

In the process, my theology, my thinking about Godde and expressed through the SpiritedCrone website was deemed 'not Christian' by church authorities in the Wellington Anglican Diocese. That was a bit awkward given I was employed by an organisation contracted by the Ministry of Health to provide Christian chaplains in the New Zealand public health system.



5: To be honest, the turmoil with the institutional church has gone on in various entertaining ways since my last year at theological college when the Christchurch Diocese also thought there was something not quite right about my theology. You could say I'm a slow learner about my unsuitability or that there was a message I was unable to hear because I was so out of touch with the possibility of

a spirituality unfettered by patriarchal domination, so out of touch with an inner way of knowing. So deaf was I that I destroyed thousands of words and hours of creativity that was Spirited Crone website as I tried to process this latest disconnect from Christianity, what I had thought was my mother tongue



6: I was in deep trouble as I struggled with the latest revelation of my unsuitability. My supervisor, herself a Jungian analyst, suggested that I go deeper into the pain and handed me a 1984 publication called, [*The Illness that We Are, a Jungian critique of Christianity*](#), whilst waving me out the door saying 'see if you can find John Dourley, the author.'



7: I devoured the book in two days and set off on the quest to find John. But if I'd known what an intellectual giant he was (emeritus professor or religion from Carleton University) and how revered in the Jungian world, I probably wouldn't have had the courage. But stepping in where angels fear to tread, I persisted, and we agreed to one session to see how it went.

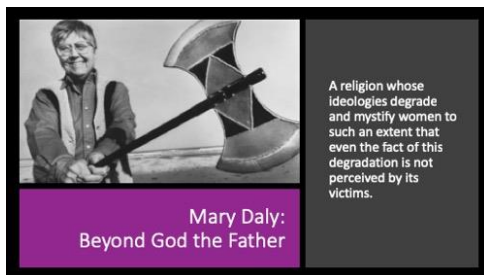
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8: We began with a dream where I had been kidnapped from my home and forced to drive blindfolded through the night. As the sun came up, I eventually summoned the courage to stop and remove the blindfold, only to discover that there was no-one in the back seat. I was devastated.



9: I remember sitting bolt upright in bed gasping at the realisation that I was colluding in my own capture and had been for some time. I wondered if I'd submitted to 'a religion whose ideologies degrade and mystify women to such an extent that even the fact of this degradation is not perceived by its victims', as Mary Daly so eloquently and

uncomfortably put it in [Beyond God the Father](#) back in 1973.



10: What unfolded in an hour of analysis each week was a startling and enriching encounter with my depths that went way beyond anything I'd encountered through my institutional church life, professional supervision, counselling or spiritual direction.

The engagement of my psyche through dreams and active imagination significantly challenged me about how I had become dislocated from my instinctual spirituality and colluded in that dislocation whilst starting to show me how to reimagine and reconnect with my ground of being.

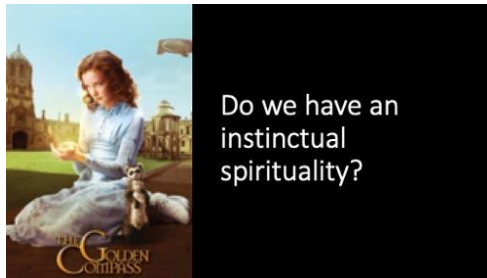
And then the attempt to reconnect with the source of all that is, that arises, not from my intellect, although it may be processed in collaboration with it, but from my creative unconscious that seemed, in some mysterious way, connected to a collective unconscious populated with symbols that keep arising across time, place and cultures.

But there was more. These hours, through the elegant artistry of my analyst and the almost mystical engagement of my psyche had become the most holy and sacramental experiences I had ever had. So, it was fascinating for me to find another book John had written called *The Psyche as Sacrament* in which he said, 'a sacrament can be described as that reality through which the holy makes its presence felt'. Yes, yes, yes and I was noticing, experiencing and naming this for myself unfettered by any authorised, institutional version.

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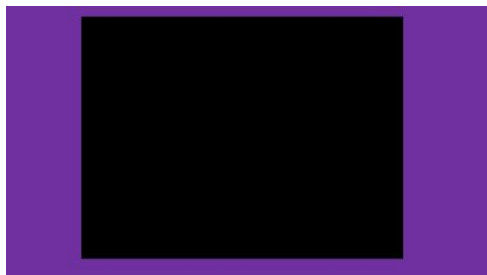
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11: But first I had to come to wrestle with this idea of an instinctual spirituality and the best way I know is through the movie *The Golden Compass*, based on the first book in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials Trilogy*.

Pullman describes humans as having an instinctual spirituality, represented as a daemon appearing in childhood as an ever-changing creature before settling into a particular animal in adult life. Alas, the Magisterium, or the institutional church, is out to sever children from their daemons.



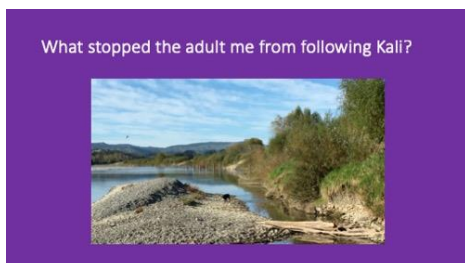
12: Let's hear what the actors in the movie had to say about it.

[Click to watch Defining Daemons](#)



13: As a child, I used to feel this instinctual spirituality and always be searching for more of it. One way I did that was to run to the front of the Baptist Church every time there was an altar call. My sainted mother, in some embarrassment at a daughter who never seemed able to stay saved, eventually started putting her elegantly gloved hand on my knee before

the call. But sometimes the pull was too strong, and I raced forward anyway.



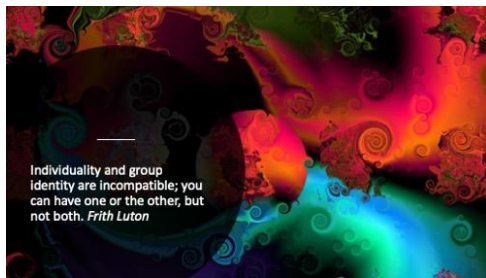
14: I had tendencies like Kali my Labrador, who became a vital part of analysis once she started the annoying habit of diving into water in my dreams. 'So,' the analyst would wryly observe, 'what stops you from following Kali into the unconscious?' Indeed! What stopped the adult me from believing I had a power within that was connected to an even greater power

than anything an institution could provide? I had no answer. [Check out Kali here.](#)

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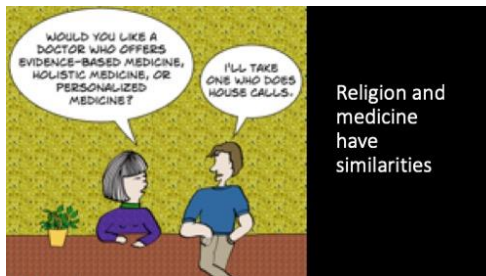
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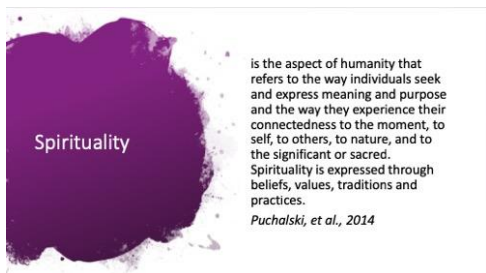
15: The Jungians talk about the process of individuation, or as Frith Luton, a Jungian analyst says, 'becoming conscious of what is truly unique about oneself, is inextricably tied up with individuality and the development of personality.'

The first step is to differentiate ourselves from those we have admired and imitated but then she says that 'individuality and group identity are incompatible; you can have one or the other, but not both,' and quotes Carl Jung who reckons that membership in organisations, support of isms, and so on, interfere with the fulfilment of that task. 'Such collective identities are crutches for the lame, shields for the timid, beds for the lazy, nurseries for the irresponsible.' That's a devastating critique in the light of our common need for connectedness and a challenge for religions.



16: However, it stayed with me as I disentangled from the church relationship and felt my way around the concept of instinctual spirituality, whilst working in a status rich health system, highly reliant on scientifically validated evidence based approaches.

For seven years I'd done the hard yards of exploring all the academic literature around spirituality in health care so that I could present, teach and convince my colleagues of the value of incorporating spirituality through a project that seeks to embed a non-partisan approach to spiritual care at MidCentral DHB.



17: And by spirituality we mean the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, and to the significant or sacred. Spirituality is expressed through beliefs, values, traditions, and practices. [Puchalski, et al., 2014.](#)

[2014.](#)

This is about what matters to people, some of whom may be associated with a religious tradition, but increasingly in New Zealand, whilst we are more religiously diverse, the greater number of people do not associate with any religious tradition.

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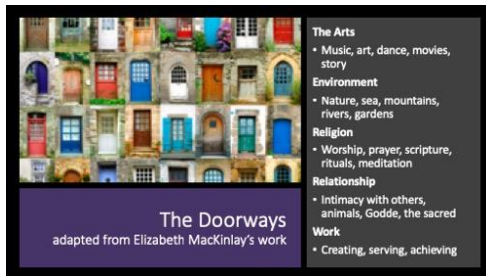


What is sacred rises
from within

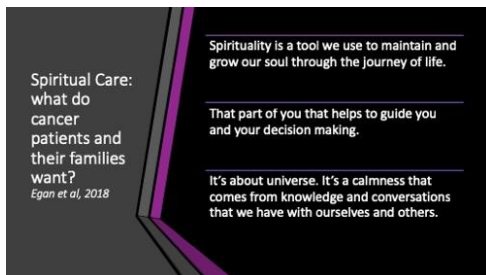
Sacred Feminine by Amanda Hart

18: However, my experience of listening deeply to many people over the years confirms that the sacred is alive and well in many and varied forms and that people are not keen on being told what is sacred by any individual, religious or cultural tradition. Whilst we might share some common understandings, the deep stuff, the sacrament of the psyche arrives from

within and ends up differently for each person and at different times.



19: And we all tend to approach it through a range of familiar doorways, generally grouped into the arts, environment, religion, relationships and work.



20: Cancer patients and their families who graciously contributed to a [project we've just had published](#) talked about it all like this.

- Spirituality is a tool we use to maintain and grow our soul through the journey of life. (Participant 3)
- That part of you that helps to guide you and your decision making. (Participant 5)
- It's about universe. It's a calmness that comes from knowledge and conversations that we have with ourselves and other.' (Participant 9)

Our group were also adamant that they wanted to be seen as a whole person and that nurses and doctors should be able to effectively engage with patients on the topic of spirituality given that 'the spiritual element is as significant as the diagnosis.' (Participant 9)



21: However, one of the most difficult things for health practitioners to do is to shift out of their highly technical training and conditioning into a space where they can listen and value what matters to a person, especially if what matters seems to be at odds with evidence-based medicine.

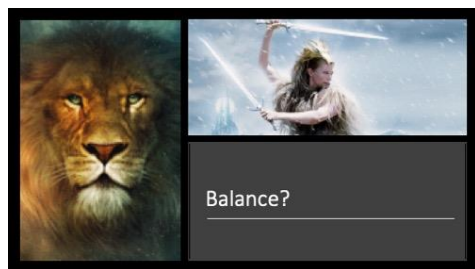
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I couldn't help but notice the similarities with institutional Christianity that has sidelined instinctual ways of being in favour of developing an authorised intellectual line of what we mean by Godde, or not, and couldn't help wondering if I had swapped one dogma ridden crutch for another.

As the dreaming continued, I got the picture that my struggle to rediscover and incorporate the instinctual side of my being was being mirrored by the pressure health and religious systems are under to incorporate different ways of knowing. The separation and dislocation experience for me was re-emerging as reintegration.



22: That balancing act first emerged for me as a child when I'd use my other trusted method of searching for the more by walking through the back of the wardrobe into Narnia. There I discovered Aslan, the personification of all that was good and the enthralling White Witch, she of the dark night, thrillingly blanketing the world in snow, accompanied

by her wolves, guardians of the underworld.



Meet Daisy, my inner Rottweiler

23: Truth told, most of us probably prefer to be seen as nice. Me too. I'd rather you remain blissfully unaware of my inner Rottweiler that delights in pinning people to the ground by the throat. I can be dogged, fundamentalist even, in my pursuit. Such are the challenges and delights of tangling with our shadow side.

Some say the Jesus character in the Christian myth shows the ideal of an integrated self but if so then one of the great failings of the story tellers was leaving him as an unattainable ideal by getting him off the cross and mysteriously resurrected without narrating the three day descent into the underworld where the struggle to become whole unfolds. Whereas, Inanna goes the whole distance.



Inanna Queen of Heaven

24: You probably know the story of Inanna, Queen of Heaven, that recounts how she meets her sister, Ereshkigal, Queen of the Underworld, or in other words, meets the dark, shadow side of herself, and the process of how that is all integrated. It's not for the faint hearted.

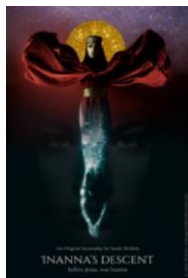
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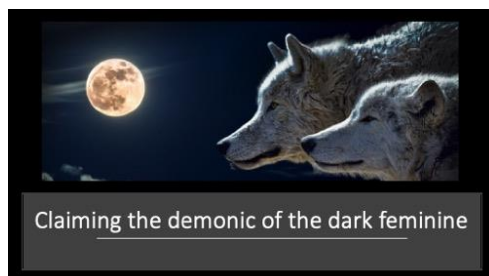


25: As Inanna approaches her sister's territory, Ereshkigal becomes furious, ensuring Inanna is stripped naked and brought low before killing her and hanging her corpse on a hook where it turns into green, rotting meat.



Her image is Christlike
Sylvia Brinton Perera

26: Out of this messy tale of revenge, loss, grief, substitution and eventual resurrection, emerges Geshtinanna who Sylvia Brinton Perera suggests in [*Descent to the Goddess: A Way of Initiation for Women*](#), symbolises what emerges from Inanna's descent and return for she is humble and humanly conscious. Her image is Christlike, yet more personal and deeply feminine when she gives her life for just one person. But it's a torrid emergence.



Claiming the demonic of the dark feminine

27: Perera argues that the implication for modern women of the early 1980's is that the full range of the demonic of the dark feminine must be felt and claimed before there can be any passionate and individual comradeship between women and men as equals. She suggests that Geshtinanna is a model of one who can take her stand, hold her own value, and be lovingly related to the masculine as well as

directly to her own depths, a model of one who is willing to suffer humanly, personally, the full spectrum that is the goddess.



But things have changed
heaps in 48 years, right?

In 1970, Whetu Tirikatene-Sullivan was the first MP to give birth while parliament was in session. She returned to work within weeks and cared for May-Ana in her office, which was considered extraordinary.

28: You might argue that this is somewhat irrelevant because we're in a new time and look, we've got all those women in high positions in parliament and the church who have managed to infiltrate the patriarchy of the system and ourselves.

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29: But remember Agent Smith in The Matrix movie and his rant about how humans continue to be a virus, a disease, a cancer of the planet. His answer to that was that they, the machine, the institution, The Matrix was the answer.



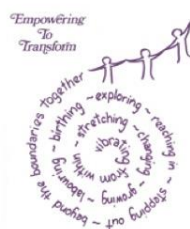
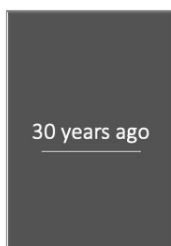
30: I categorically refute his argument and propositions that continue to strip humans of their responsibility to be people of soul. By soul work I mean fully engaged in the task of making meaning through creativity and connection, underpinned by the journey to the interior, the process of awakening. Not to the beliefs of any particular religion, creed or

tribe, but to the truth that emerges from within.



31: This is where Reimagining WomenSoul becomes an infinitely challenging task. Whilst we can always learn from the past, we can't rely on what someone else has already done because spirituality is emergent and dialectical. It is shaped and formed by the context in which spiritual language is expressed. And if no-one's talking about it, or worse, talking about it

in ways that exclude or ignore the dark journey to the interior as part of the task to become integrated people and communities, then it will go underground until it can find enlivened expression.

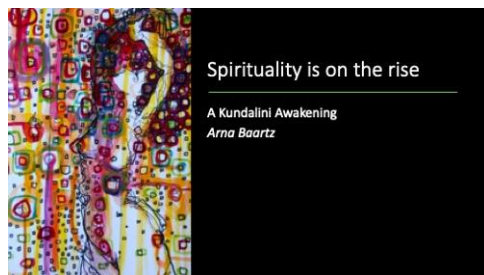


32: 30 years ago, some of you met here in Christchurch with high hopes. Some of those dreams may have been realised but I suspect it might seem as though we have gone backwards with the institutional church apparently becoming narrower and spirituality becoming trivialised or marginalised in the wider community.

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33: Even so, spirituality is on the rise across the world and this is particularly so in health where there has been an exponential rise of academic papers on the topic over the last 20 years.

However, don't get over excited because all this needs creative and imaginative leadership lest spirituality becomes owned once again by a system that can't help slicing and dicing it into palatable chunks with the sharp sword of reason in the holy name of science. In Aotearoa, Maori help balance this tendency but none of us can conveniently ride on the back of one group's organised spirituality, which only takes us back to the situation of letting someone else decide for us.



34: It seems to me that women are healers rather than saviours, with a significantly untapped capacity to re-energise and reconnect with the wisdom within that could be a vital force in the integrating process in our world. But it doesn't come easy.

Based on the story of Inanna, it requires that we lead the way on the journey to the centre, becoming familiar with the darkness so that we can help others with this reclaimed way of being, the integration of the instinct and the intellect.

This can be a very personal, individual and often isolating experience that often resonates strongly with women, but one that can also be marginalised as just someone's personal story. Other times diagnosed as an illness or condition, once again stripping us of our role to birth healing from within because of our innate connection with the Goddess, even if right now that might seem a bit weird and tenuous, given that we too have largely become slaves to the tyranny of the intellect.



35: I'm grateful to the women who energized around this gathering today because there is still a strong need to speak, write, paint and sing out spiritual and soulful truth, standing up to the powers that try to suffocate and deny us a voice.

However, if we are to step up and be the healers that we need to be through that painful descent to the interior, we need to find ways to have practical and strategic alliances with other women, and men, who have also come to the realisation that the patriarchy and the systems it has embedded are still killing us.

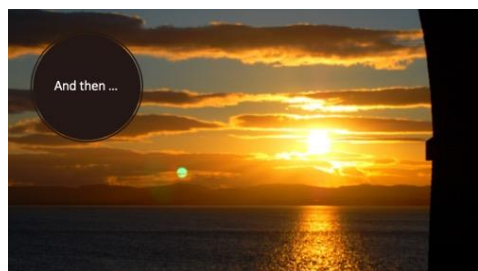
I hope that out of today a strong, creative group will emerge that encourages and supports women across New Zealand to keep on reimagining and expressing womensoul in our own ways. To find pathways and methods to foster spirituality that integrates intellect and

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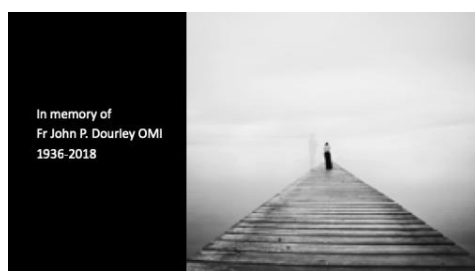
instinct taking us beyond the patriarchal system that seems intent, perhaps unconsciously, on separating us from the source of our wisdom.



36: Which brings me to a Thursday in late June when I was, as usual, emailing The Analyst with my latest dreams. This time Einstein had been to visit. Always a treat.

And there'd been a creature remarkably like The Great Mother on a good day. She'd reached down to Kali and me, put her face near ours and breathed out. It was like music and honey and the sound of water trickling over stones and as though the sun was shining and the stars twinkling all at once. Breathe in she said. We did and were filled with nothingness and the totality of eternity.

I couldn't wait to have a conversation about all this with John, but because he was always very concerned about what was happening in my conscious life, I also let him know that the avalanche of deaths I'd been dealing with at work had finally stopped.

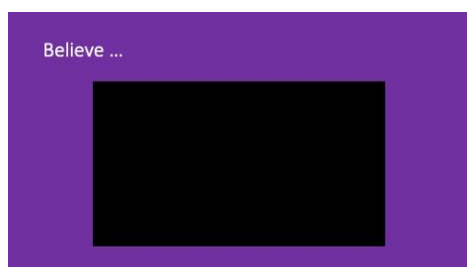


37: Next morning, I rang Ottawa at the usual time. No answer, no matter how many times I tried. John was sitting by the phone in his analyst chair, quite dead. I like to think that he'd read my material before he died and that he had smiled knowing I was beginning to interpret my own dreams and move in a much more instinctual way in time with my own being and the

unconscious where, it is said, the gods and goddesses arise from.



38: I miss this most remarkable and humble man every day but the gift he left me with was the reclamation of my instinctual spirituality and the passion to dive deep to integrate complex sources of energy and diverse ways of knowing so that I can keep writing and speaking out of the Godde within.



39: May you be blessed as we reconnect and rebalance spirituality within our own Self and the communities in which we live and move and have our being.

[Click to see Nina Paley's rather wondrous You Gotta Believe](#)