

## **Priestesses and Power**

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So many spiritual books read over the years. A doctoral program focused on alternative spirituality.

Meeting a warrior Goddess during intensive breathwork sessions. Apprenticing with Her. Setting up altars. Honoring her iconography. Doing sacred sensual meditations with Her. Prostrating myself/Surrendering. Accepting her as my Ishtadevi/personal Goddess. Attending presentations of many spiritual teachers. Following Her kundalini guidance/energetic response and working with a few.

Kali, in your tribal form, present you are in the prehistory of India. Kali, in your early fierceness, present you are in the sacred scriptures of India. You rise to prominence in the Sakta tradition, and you come to power as Wisdom Goddess in the Tantric tradition. You we see in your divine yogini attendants, and in your human yogini practitioners. You, Ma, in the cosmic kundalini that manifests on all levels of creation – universe, world, nature, the coiled serpent energy at the base of our spines. In your form as goddess in the chakras. You we see in the sexual path of liberation. You, Kali Ma, in the Bhakti path of love...in your bliss-intoxicated devotees... You, the dark one, Kali. Awesome power...

From out of the body, the psyche, the collective unconscious, the void – as kundalini, ally, archetypal energy, goddess, cosmic creatrix – you, the dark one, Kali. You arise. You who have manifested in this time and place. You who have been here forever... Is it you that speaks in the many faces of the dark mother around the world? Is it you that rises to challenge the patriarchy?? Is it you that calls us to raise the Energy? Is it you that calls us back from the brink? You, the dark one, Kali, awesome power...

Meeting a priestess and priest of a fierce lion-headed Goddess. Energetic trance states being triggered in the priestess' presence. Eyes rolled up, channeling divine energy. The priestess. Then later me. Whispering the name of my Ishtadevi in my ear (priestess). Moving into the energy field of Her yantra/geometric representation (laid out on the floor), then blanking out and feeling the lightning roar of the Goddess coming through (me). Shaktipat/transfer of spiritual power. The priestess saying afterwards: you must have known Her in a past life.

The vibrations began when Amma started chanting the first night, and when Swami touched my forehead. Then the next day, as we chanted to raise the energy for Goddess to come into the yantra, my involuntary bodily vibrations increased - exponentially. As I watched Amma channeling the goddess, my own kundalini energies were further triggered... I tried to hold 'beginner's mind' as I contemplated what might happen next....As I stepped into the yantra I felt a sort of emotional force-field - my heart opened - and as I prostrated myself to Ma in the center, I went into surrender. When I felt Amma touch my forehead, for a second there was nothing... and then... and then... my body was electrified, my arms started moving of their own accord, my head started shaking, and growls started coming out of my mouth. The Goddess was moving through me! Jai Maa - Pratyangira Ma, Kali Ma, Amma Adi Shakti, Swami - All in service to the Mother!

More breathwork states. Dream states. Moving from Goddess to shamanic. Breath slowing way down.

Almost stopping. Feeling ripples of whole body vibrations that no one else could see.

internal pulsations were reverberating from one part of my system to another. sometimes the chest vibrating. my neck. sometimes the solar plexus or sacral region. sometimes my whole body with this intense miniature vibration... like everything was being rocked by pulsation, but on the inner plane. i called on the beings of greatest love to heal me... later i seemed to stop breathing... after a while my consciousness noticed this and 'i' would take a big breath... but it continued happening - i was really out there (or in there) but there was no content (and little breath (!)... when the music soared (and regular breathing had resumed), i felt my heart opening, and once or twice found the words in my head - blessed be all beings...

Floating through the ceiling and receiving star pillow/gifts, waking up vibrating with my tongue sticking out, like Her – like Maa. Jaguars walking through my dreams, snakes shedding their skins.

Skulls. Making friends with death. Helping stuck souls. Meditating in the cemeteries/cremation grounds. Energetic movement within leading me on my path. Immersion experiences followed by years-long plateaus of integration...

had been following a path that was slowly revealing itself to be a part of goddess oriented tantric traditions, and felt a call to meditate in a graveyard. no, i wasn't crazy, and no, i'm not a ghost whisperer. rather, it was an inner directive. part of the left handed tantric path in india, however, we weren't in india and i didn't have a guru. surprisingly i found a few kindred souls who wanted to join me. . the columbarium being in a residential neighborhood, not

situated conveniently on the ganges like in india, we chanted together inside my car. creating safe sacred space, in hope that energy raised would be of assistance to any souls who were stuck there...the more chanting, the more heart opening energy, the more we sent it out freely to those in need...

another night two of us ventured to an old military cemetery. because my friend was more comfortable between the worlds, i put him on the side where i could feel the heavier energies. we circled to create safe space, and then laid down to meditate on top of the car. i was listening to some heart expanding chakra music, and found myself focusing my energy on creating a ladder from the earth to the sky, right through the trees in front of me... then found out that unplanned, we had both been guiding folks to the same earth-sky light ladder- me with my heart expanded energy and he with his dreamtime/out-of-body energies...

Another priest and priestess from the High Andes of Peru. Inka. Offerings to the lower, middle and upper worlds. White for the Apu/Mountain Spirits, Red for Pachamama/Mother Earth. Masculine and feminine. Tantric mandala. Breathing our intentions into the leaves. Snake/Jaguar/Condor. The priest from the Andes saying 'I know you.' Cleansing. Hemi-sync bells around my head that make me cry. Heart keening as initiatory karpay energies are blown into the top of my head. Altered state, night walking initiations on Mt. Shasta. Sipping sami/ecstatic energy. Four years. A new name for nature mystic states.

when the shaman blew into my head, and then into my hands, my body started vibrating, and my heart was overflowing - there i was with tears streaming down my face. and just in case i had any doubts about the tantric connection, a few weeks later i had a dream in which the female and male master shamans appeared together, demonstrating sacred sexual practices...

at the beach, watching the waves break on the shore, the sun playing through the clouds. I am moved to start chanting to the sun and the sea. the qero/quechua words for father sun and mother sea are in my mind and on my tongue....inti taita, mamacocha, inti taita, mamacocha, inti taita, mamacocha.... as I chant, i feel a shift at the base of my spine, I feel my body vibrating, my head expanding, my heart filling up... i feel the focus of the energy pulling me towards the sun...inti taita, inti taita, inti taita... my head keeps expanding, my heart keeps filling... the sun keeps pulling my attention...as if - as if the earth's own personal star being is calling me, opening me, shifting something in me...

Ongoing healing and self care for the emotional and physical body. Wondering how one walks the path while working in the world – even at a spiritual psychology school with a ‘revolutionary education’ model. Working issues of boundaries and shadow. Of spiritual bypassing. Even here. Watching our efforts to move forward blowing up, as the institute is bankrupted. Brought to its knees. Calling out what is happening. Calling within for spiritual activism. Confronting/sometimes being pinned by shadow forces in the dreamtime. Having to witness the cycle of destruction when it is not enough. When we don't unify in time. Then our disbursement, like dandelion seeds in the wind...

sitting in a circle, we close our eyes... and follow the tone and follow our breath into center - place of inner guidance, inner wisdom, inner love... visualizing the sparkling energy at our core, we breathe deeply into it, and sending it around the circle, energy rises and a circle of safety is created... silently we focus again on the breath, letting it take us deeper and deeper into meditation... time out of time... we breath into our hearts... calling in beings of greatest love to surround us. goddess love, star being love, angel love, spirit guide love surround us. father sun, mother earth, mother ocean, fairy love, crystal love assist us. the energy raises higher and higher. hearts expanding, tears falling the power of big love rises exponentially... then - the tone chimes again, and we call out into in the center of the circle the vision we wish to see in the world... i see a world in which all beings come back into balance with the earth! i see a world in which the oceans are clear again!... i see a world where the power of love is greater than the power of division! i see a world in which all are honored for the gifts they bring!.... and then.... we connect with all people of open heart across the institute. With people of open heart across the city.... With people of open heart and around the world... with all beings of greatest love... ` and then - and then... together we send this energy out across the planet! together we send waves of big love winging out around the globe... we breath and we breath and we breath.... back into center... back into our hearts... back into our bodies... we thank the spirits. we ask that all sentient beings benefit from this energy... we open our eyes...

And so, regardless of meditative efforts. I am laid off. My fall-back plan. A move to a place where African Traditions ruled. New Orleans. Without thinking too much. Because if I did, I would panic. Months of Shock. Grief. Emotional fallout. Confronting the president and HR manager in dreamtime.

Wrestling with questions of power misused. Questions of co-optation. Questions about turning a blind spiritual eye. Why didn't naming what was happening bring change? Why weren't protective spiritual measures effective? Was the place too 'stuck' in the first spiritual/transpersonal wave to change? Was the universe tired of our 'stasis?' Was this the only way the energy of the place could be shifted? By dispersing it?

All questions that would come to light later. In the moment, I could only put one foot in front of the other. Make the move happen. I was in shock. Operating on automatic. And after driving across three deserts, and the whole state of Texas, I was even more disoriented. A death/rebirth experience... into the green of Louisiana.

went out to lake ponchartrain, and suddenly i knew that the blue agate crystal needed to go into the lake. the one i had been waiting to give away throughout my cross country journey had found it's home here in nola. breathed prayers and heart energy into the crystal, for healing of the lake and gulf, threw it into the water, and... looking up saw a buffalo soldier in the cloud formations - native american pose, african american face, and after a while, an indigenous woman's face looking down at me from the clouds....

later at a voodoo festival - listening to the priestesses and priests speak about the west african tradition, feeling the energy at a banishing ritual, walking through the french quarter and feeling like i could be back in time... all the witchy ghosts and ghoully hallow's eve decorations on the balconies.... saluting the ancestors of new orleans as i drive by the cities of the dead/above-ground cemeteries... having dreams of river initiations, and feeling the call of the mighty, muddy mississippi...

and oh the music - on frenchmen street, almost every night, getting high from the energy, jumping up and down with the band, the trumpets, the brass and everyone else!... brassaholics, soul rebels, funk and blues.... walking the french quarter and ending up at a caribbean festival instead, then following musicians playing in the street, dancing behind them (oh those second lines!)... listening to a gospel choir at a street festival - high on the energy of the music and this sensual city, again and always:)...

I thought I was coming to New Orleans to learn about African based cultural and spiritual practices. To partake in the ecstatic practices the city is known for. That I was coming for relief. Music, dancing in

the streets, archetypal parade energies. I was. I was also moving away from my astro-cartography/planetary warrior lines (Mars), and closer to my love and power planetary influences (Venus and Pluto). I thought I knew what that meant. I did not...

Never wanted to live in the South. So much heavy energy from centuries of oppression. It was overwhelming. But New Orleans was different, yes? All that celebratory energy. Like the river herself, creating deltas out of two-thirds of the country's sedimentary flow, the creativity of New Orleans was legendary.

drums, two trumpets and a tuba, rhythms so good, the crowd gets bigger and bigger and we take over canal and bourbon, dancing the electric slide in the street...thunder and lightning don't matter, we just keep on dancing... the joy theater sign accompanies us as we walk to marie laveau's final resting place. a city for the dead... xxx's all over the walls of her tomb... is she still there? or is that her palpable presence at the voodoo shop altar we visit? a beautiful dark woman with neon blue eyes at the grave talks with us - is it the energy from the other side coming through?... spanish architecture in the french quarter, art and music on every corner. colorful creole cottages and shotgun houses discovered on long hot walks through the marigny...green trolleys taking us through the arched canopy of live oaks with those big 200 year old pillared houses on both sides...the city delights with beauty around every corner... the mississippi winds its way around us, cooling the heat coming from every pore as we walk, ride, dance, eat... gumbo, etoufee, po-boys, crawfish, fried chicken, red beans and rice and lima bean dishes that melt in your mouth - the best food in the country... wide open waters of ponchartrain, the green waters of the bayou, standing trees and alligators' beady eyes staring back as you shrink away from their nearness... dragonflies making it safe for human skin as they dine on the mosquitos... tall cypress trees 700 years old with that mystical spanish moss hanging down... cajun camps on the bayou, mardi gras indians in their stunning beaded presence, african americans, from trini and new york, west africa and haiti grounded in traditions hundreds of years old - all healing, rebuilding and reenergizing the city...the creative heart of the country... there are no strangers here...

I was fooled. For the first few years. A center for African American cultural creativity opened its arms to me. So I put my administrative skill set to work. To support their goals, not mine. (Their goals were enough). But I sometimes found myself running in circles. Caught between the prophetic

director/cultural priestess who channeled inspiration all hours of the day. And the staff who weren't sure what I was doing there. Two hours 'happy chatting' telling me why not. Instead of just getting shit done.

But then Maafa.

early saturday morning in new orleans. walking to congo square - we hear the drums calling up ancestors... the ones who sang and danced here every sunday during slave times (and birthed something new)... will they help us with the ritual today?

everyone in white, sun beating down... we gather to send love and healing to the ones who died in the middle passage - the ones who jumped overboard and the ones who perished in the hold - and the ones who somehow survived and made it possible for many to be here today...ashe welcomes us, calling us altogether... the children dance their prayers, the singer calls the orishas to bless the ritual... multi-faith we are - christian voices rising in solidarity, buddhists chanting their support, muslims calling a benediction down from allah... and then the drums start again, and the haitians move in circle, dancing their trance, calling down the spirits to guide and bless the ones who suffered so... the witness trees are honored, the wandering souls are danced and drummed into healing... the loa come and ride the waves of energy... then the indian chief speaks his native tongue - calling the four directions, blessing all our relations - reminding us of the days when the natives took in the africans fleeing the whip, and the healing power of the trees who witnessed all.... call and response - all our voices raised together to heal and love the ones who withstood so much....

we follow the drums out of congo square to the tomb of the unknown slave, where chains cross and manacles rust with the blood of so many... we walk in the treme, we walk in the french quarter, we walk and we walk and we walk in remembrance and healing for the ancestors of new orleans....

I believed in the cause, am thankful for the work. It would only be a matter of time before other financial doors opened, right? That's what I thought when I had an interview with a young woman who wanted to start an esoteric mystery school. That's what I thought when preparing a cross-cultural presentation on the Dark Goddess as part of this school. Until this young woman shot herself in the foot trying to show everyone who was 'top gun.' I mean wizard.

In the mean time I was caught up in the celebratory energy of the city, still. Down on Frenchmen.

Getting high off the brass bands and second lines parades. Amazed by the archetypal energies of the

Mardi Gras krewes. Goddesses and Druids. Buffalo Soldiers and naked-suited Amazons on horseback. Moving sculptures of fairy lights and giant blinking red shoes. African warriors and multi-colored dragons in the streets. I fought for beads with the best of them :)

And the open Voodoo rituals I got up the balls to attend. Recognizing the Dark Goddess and my Polish bloodlines on Dantor's altar. My love of the sea on La Siren's. And the skulls of the Baron were like old friends from the Goddess' cremation grounds. Chanting raised the energy. The drawing of veves/sacred symbols focused the energy. And the drumming and dancing triggered the energy/me into ecstatic states. I was ridden by the spirit, almost. My fierce goddess/Ishtadevi was the guardian at the gate. If She said the Loa's could come through, it was ok with me...

multi-skull painted fence as i walked down the alley to the voodoo ritual... inside, the sparkling sequined altars to the loa - full of as many skulls as i've ever seen.... i knew the ritual was dedicated to erzulie dantor, the loa syncretized with the black madonna of poland, but seeing her image on the walls of the temple - an image familiar to my grandparents - was calling me home... i listened to the initiates summoning the spirits in haitian, and watched the mambo priestess drawing cornmeal mandalas on the floor... i danced and swayed in the heat - as we circled the altar and asked the spirits to turn away the hurricanes... the more i looked at the sacred symbols, the more altered i became... the energy started building, and my guides were the guardians at the gate... i felt my hands vibrating, and my dance step changing... trance was close - i could feel spirit knocking on the door to come through... i sat down and let the kriyas happen... my head was vibrating... there was ONLY love... though i didn't get ridden by the spirit - not quite...it was close, and welcome.

Then I ran into an African priestess in the streets who decided she wanted to hire me after all. For her tour guide business. When I couldn't learn the cemetery tour word for word, she found other things for me to do. But she had a hard time sharing power. A hard time trusting her workers. And a hard time paying us. When I refused to accept her accusation of misdeeds, it was time to go...

More presentations at the cultural center on my favorite topics: Spiritual Women of Power. Small groups, deep satisfaction in the places we went together. The African Meditation Priestess and Priestess of Yoruba that I worked with in public ritual. With their deep presence and words of power I felt met spiritually. And blessed.

blm ritual invocation: we gather to ask that the human community wake-up; that the old spirits come back, that our ancient practices be renewed, and that the endangered species return. We together make a LOUD noise to vibrate throughout the worlds. We lift our faces to the SKY and project our prayers into the clouds. We ask the Sky Spirits to cleanse our minds, hearts, and bodies; to let the rain come down and wash away the stench of fear, hatred, and violence, and the scars those leave upon our Earth. We shake our rattles and drum our drums, and let our liquid bodies become one with the rain! We ask Spirit to clear the energy of those who would do harm, to replenish the earth, and to wash away the tears of those who have lost loved ones. (Yeye Teish/MPZ)

Powerful rituals. Yet little gain financially. And in spite of many applications completed, no universities offering employment. The one who did? The owner of a Voodoo spiritual shop in the FQ. Learning the tarot. Learning about the healing aspects of the Loa. Doing spiritual readings professionally. Integrating meditation and connection with highest guides (theirs and mine). And profound energy and messages coming through the cards.

However, the dynamics in the store. Sometimes overwhelming. Like a hurricane, the owner would enter and assume the 'commander' role. Me with a PhD and all my spiritual training. Running scared from a self appointed Root Queen/Priestess. Not for long. When the time was right, I confronted her disrespect. And ended up leaving the job. Did the Loa's think I had learned the necessary? And was ready to move on? Maybe.

Like the Tour Guide Priestess who was committed to creating an Afro-centric tour, this priestess was committed too, in her way. To reeducating the public on African Traditional Religions. She also occasionally offered insight and healing recommendations. But oh, the power dynamics in between that one had to dodge like bolts of lightning coming from Shango!

And there were other things I had to dodge. The Black Witch. With platinum blond hair and a shiny personality. A bubbly friend and a spiritual confidant was what she appeared to be. But her spellwork was tying men to her, maybe against their will? Was she making other questionable deals with Daemons? And why did her friendship disappear when I refused her minimum wage offer to design spiritual curriculum?

Now without even part-time work, I was thrown back on myself. Couldn't make sense of it all. I, who had never been fired from a job in my life, kept getting fired by priestesses in New Orleans. I, who had only wanted a true friend, had to decline a deal with a daemon. What to make of it? What to make of all these spiritually-related power dynamics? Did the city want me here or not? I wrestled with this question ad nauseum. I wrestle with it still. If I hadn't been accepted into an artist and writer community in the nick of time, I wouldn't have been able to stay.

does scorpio in the ascendant, and venus and pluto in my house of philosophy explain this sometimes exhausting focus on love, death and power dynamics experienced from an early age? maybe it has to do with family dynamics, losing my heart/grandmother when I was twelve? or being socialized with the 'original' love and death story as a catholic? perhaps, past lives coming through?

in my twenties i read the sacred masculine: martin luther king, gandhi and cesar chavez, trying to understand how they managed speak truth to power, and love in the face of violence. in my thirties, off doing research on social justice issues in nicaragua and guatemala - gathering stories on how people lived and loved in the face of human rights abuses...

in my forties first in the form of the warrior/mother goddess kali in my meditations (queen of women and power, also love and death). then skulls became a regular feature of my dreams as i watched beloved family members, friends and a graduate institute die within a few years. all the while challenging myself to speak truth to power...

then a move to a place where my astral-cartography warned there was a venus and pluto line. Glutton for punishment was I?

And in spite of city power dynamics – theirs/mine/ours. In spite of inter-generational trauma – enslavement, epidemics, the federal flood. In spite of well deserved anger increasingly felt in the streets, still, the beauty of the city shines through. Where else does the traffic stop for the Black Indians? Where else do Mardi Gras parades extend for weeks? What other city second line/dances through neighborhoods all year long? With beaded artistry and feathered plumes, with archetypal energies and ritual chants, with brass bands and baby dolls, the African and Native American lineage stay strong. Like nowhere else...

Is this what sees the people through all the trauma? Partly. Finding spiritual succor wherever you can. Culture, dance, music, art, gospel churches. What else saw me through? Three years of participating/co-facilitating a weekly meditation circle. Healing freely offered and freely given. Centering and grounding with these healer spirits. Not to be taken lightly - a meditation circle that holds together so long. A source of solace.

And a long series of dreams/experiences with the Baron. That let me know something was happening below the surface. From purple dream jackets for protection. To purple dream umbrellas with his imprint. From the Baron leaning over my bed while I was falling asleep. To hugging him back in dreams. Not to mention the Ghede priest spitting rum on my shoes in waking time! The patron saint of the City of the Dead seemed to have taken me under his wing. Was this about re-connection with my

ancestral lineage? About banishing negative energy? About transitions and transformation? About justice? Likely all of the above.

***Purple Rain. I mean Dreams.***

A glowing purple dart in my left thigh waking me up.

Making purple blazer to keep circle of vampires from biting me.

Fashion designer that looks like black Michael Jackson showing me his work, including glitzy purple blazer.

White male wearing only purple turban and shorts (outside on beach).

Purple fingernail dream

Going towards purple light in the forest dream

Purple umbrella with Baron Samedi face on it (reaching for the one I want, using my umbrella to try to get it, being told that's not the way it works by a white male, going around to the other side of store [outside type cabana], and grabbing it - seeing the face on it, then seeing a female relative)...

Cloud/shamanic lion/ purple tower dream

Purple dressed Prince/Baron (?) black man telling me 'the cemetery romance is over.'

Spiritual energy continues to be palpable for me here in the supernatural city of New Orleans. From the Voudou priest so powerful that one can feel it in every drum he touches. In every dance he generates. In the way his initiate group moves the energy. From watching a woman writhe while ridden by the spirit. From seeing a woman pick up a sword during same. To hearing her tranced out spirit message whispered in my ear. And from feeling my own body shake when two well known priestesses lay their hands upon me.

And so. Women and Power. The theme that runs throughout my experience in this financially edgy city. Here I am, living in a building once the property of the Catholic Church, holding space for the Goddess. Here I am, confronting the shadow of women and power/Venus and Pluto. Outside myself, inside myself? Here I am, being pushed to expand my spiritual skill set. Starving artist? No, starving spiritual apprentice. Career limbo? No, the Bardo of Becoming. Embraced by my sister priestesses? No, a descent of the Goddess to meet her shadow sisters.

In fact, a shamanic dismemberment of all my spiritual expectations of how 'it's supposed to be.'