



The Feminine Fire

The divine creative force you hold within

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Women Inspiring... Kavita Byrd



The original idea for my “Women Inspiring Women” column was to showcase women I’d interviewed and met in my workshops whose stories I wasn’t able to fit into my books.

The story of this month’s inspiring woman was, however, told in

The Divine Feminine Fire. But this woman, Kavita Byrd, has been doing so much and leading such an inspiring life since then I’ve decided to give you an update on her fascinating journey.

Kavita, always a pioneer, attended Princeton in the days when the school was first beginning to accept women. After graduating she began a spiritual search that, as recounted in *The Divine Feminine Fire*, took her from working as a gardener in a near paradise that she found on an unspoiled Greek isle, to studying yoga in ashrams in India and Australia. When the book left her she was based once again in India, and she has remained there for most of the intervening years. There she has been studying and practicing the teachings of non-dual spirituality, Advaita Vedanta, near the famed ashram of Sri Ramana Maharshi in Tiruvannamalai, South India. Recently she has been living at Bodhi Zendo, a Zen retreat not far away in the Perumal Hills, a pristine mountain setting where she can continue to practice quietly in a non-dual tradition. While there Kavita has also been able to begin to make concrete strides towards her goal of helping to bring the divine feminine into consciousness.

As is told in *The Divine Feminine Fire*, Kavita’s early fascination with the divine feminine began when she was on the Greek

isle. There her work, first as a goatherd and then as a gardener, gave her time to simply sit and immerse herself in the awesome beauty of nature that surrounded her. As she did, she became increasingly conscious of energy patterns that were moving around her and within her. She also began to feel her consciousness expand and to perceive a unifying principle that wove its way through all of creation. The first time she associated this interconnectedness with the divine feminine, Kavita was working in the garden and looking out across the sea to a mountain on another island that the villagers called the Sleeping Goddess.

“I used to love to gaze across at her and feel her peace and stillness. I would open myself to the sense of eternity she radiated...From another point on the island, I could also see the mountains on the mainland in the distance, overlapping each other in the sparkling light of sunset, like waves pouring into the sea. This also felt to me like the melting of time, of earth into water into pure light, and myself melting into their Oneness. Later on I found out that the island where I was living was on the fault line of the huge volcanic explosion and tidal wave that had once destroyed an advanced civilization on Crete and Santorini thought by archaeologists to have worshiped the Divine Feminine. I felt that this “wave” of the Divine Feminine had somehow ripped through time itself and broken into me.”



This sense of connection with the divine feminine never left her. Years later she found herself looking for a centre or retreat focused on the divine feminine and feminine principles of compassion, cooperation, co-creation, and inter-connection – a centre that would foster intuitive awareness, emotional openness, and peace-making, the qualities she felt were so desperately needed in a world where the opposite characteristics – violence, aggression, and domination – were rampant.



She says, “After years of living in ashrams and spiritual communities, under male teachers and patriarchal traditions, I had become more and more convinced of the importance of bringing in the feminine, creating a place and a paradigm that integrated feminine wisdom and values, as well as more actual women teachers and leaders into spirituality and society....At the same time I could not help but see the violence, political, and environmental, escalating at an alarming rate everywhere in the world – and it clicked; I knew that this had to do with the missing feminine voice. I began to see that the key to the disconnect between spirituality and its principles of peace, interconnectedness and Oneness, on the one hand, and the current state of our world, on the other, was the missing influence of feminine values in the places of power....”

Kavita was unable to find a centre that fulfilled her vision. So, in true trail-blazer fashion, she started to think about how to found one. Undaunted by seemingly insurmountable obstacles, she sat down, created a proposal based on her vision, and began sending it out. One of the many encouraging responses was from Dena Merriam, founder of the Global Peace Initiative of Women, a growing and powerful group of women. (See sidebar.)

With the encouragement of GPIW, the vision for the center is moving forward. It has

been given an official name, The Shakti Center, and there is now a core group supporting the concept that includes powerhouses like Jean Shinoda Bolen, Sharon Salzberg, Joan Borysenko, Elisbet Sahtouris, and Andrew Harvey. Kavita’s next step is to create a website that will be a “virtual” center and will encourage even more support and the funding needed to make the center an actual physical reality.

Knowing Kavita’s inspiring spirit, I have every confidence the Shakti Center will come into physical as well as virtual being.

Kavita is quick to give others credit for the progress that’s been made so far, and – true spiritual seeker that she is – she’s loathe to put herself forward in any way. Still, I know how Kavita has inspired me over the last decade, and I’m sure it is this ability to inspire that has moved the vision of the Shakti Centre to this point and will continue to move it forward.

But it isn’t so much Kavita’s ability to bring a vision into reality that inspires me as the fact that she is *doing* it. She is walking the talk. For the last many years, she has lived an idyllic life in ashrams in South India, most recently in the Zen centre perched on a ridge in the stunningly beautiful Western Ghats and overlooking verdant sub-tropical valleys. She could easily have chosen to do nothing more than remain in places like this following her inner spiritual journey. But Kavita realizes that at this critical time in history the divine feminine is calling us to what she calls “sacred activism” – a call to action that demands each one of us do what we can to bring about a world of equity, justice, sustainability, and interconnection. In short, a world that truly manifests global Oneness.



Inspiring Words from Kavita

The inner feminine creative fire has led Kavita down many pathways, from writing her first book of published poetry, *Love Songs of the Undivided*, to inspiring her to give harmonium lessons when she was nearly destitute in India. It also led her to study the healing arts and become a craniosacral therapist. It is now spurring her to write her new book, *Journey to Wholeness: The Role of the Feminine in Unity Consciousness and Global Transformation* and, especially, to be the impetus behind the creation of the Shakti Centre. About this process, she says, "I've become aware of a fascinating dynamic between deep meditation and the creative connections that seem to magically spring out of it. And that is this: when we are tuned into that deep place where everything is interconnected, everything begins to connect up at the top, the surface of consciousness and our lives too. And this is what I feel is behind this whole story, the kind of synchronicity happening around the unfolding of the Shakti Centre projects, and the greater birth of this new level of unitive consciousness that it is part of!"



From Love Songs of the Undivided.....

By Kavita Byrd

My heart makes love

In secret silence

To all that is.

My womb gives birth

To the universe

And my breasts

Suckle the stars.

Who knows near or far

In this cave of silence

Whose earth is the sky

No one sits but all

Existence.

I am this

Which never dies

Which rocks the seas of being

In its dreams

And cradles all creation

In the infinite unseen.

The Shakti Centre

The Shakti Centre is intended as a living intentional community, a sanctuary for spiritual practice and an international center for research, healing, creative expression and social change, helping to bring the values and wisdom of the feminine into contemporary spirituality and society. It would serve as a base for an alliance of women spiritual teachers and wider organizations of women and men working for inner and outer peace through new integrative paths to spiritual, psychological and global healing. Our vision is to create an engaged, evolutionary paradigm that at the same time embraces the values of the feminine so needed to bring balance into the collective consciousness today, as a vital basis for world peace and transformation.

<http://www.shakticentre.blogspot.com/>

The Global Peace Initiative of Women

The Global Peace Initiative of Women (GPIW) was founded to help awaken and mobilize spiritual energies in places of great need with the goal of aiding in healing and unifying the world community. GPIW facilitates this by seeking to gather together those of great insight, wisdom, compassion and dedication, many of whom are working quietly for the upliftment of the world. A major focus of GPIW's work is to aid in building a global network of contemplative leaders who through their inner work can help transform the causes and conditions that lead to suffering at both the individual and collective level. This work is under the stewardship of a group of women spiritual leaders and practitioners. It is GPIW's mission to help manifest the special qualities of the Divine Feminine, or Shakti, which enables the inner transformation now required for us to meet the challenges facing the Earth's community of life.

<http://www.gpiw.org/>

About *The Feminine Fire Newsletter* and this excerpt on Kavita Byrd

The *Feminine Fire Newsletter* is written and produced by award-winning writer Teri Degler – the author/co-author of ten books including *The Fiery Muse: Creativity and the Spiritual Quest* (Random House, Canada).

Her recent book, *The Divine Feminine Fire: Creativity and Your Yearning to Express Your Self* (Dreamriver Press, USA), has become an amazon.ca # 1 Bestseller in both the feminist spirituality and the goddess categories.

For three decades, Teri has done research on yoga philosophy, Tantra, kundalini, and the lives of extraordinarily creative women mystics and ordinary women who've had extraordinary creative/spiritual experiences. Kavita is one of these women. Her story is told In *The Divine Feminine Fire*, and she is being featured on Teri's forthcoming *Women Inspiring Women* website.

Much of her work has also focused on the divine feminine known as Shakti in Hinduism and the surprising parallels that can be found with Sophia and Shekinah in Judaism and Christianity. Teri's freelance writing has been featured in many magazines, including such divergent publications as *More Magazine* and *SageWoman*. She has also taught numerous workshops on creativity and creative writing in the U.S. and Canada.

Originally from Idaho, Teri has an MA from the University of New Mexico. She now lives in Toronto.

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