

**The Vulva as a Symbol
in the Female Psyche**

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What does it mean for a woman to dream of vulvas? What might activate vulva-dreams in a woman? What might such images constellate within her psyche? In her life? What are the possibilities for a woman who dreams of vulvas?

Such spontaneous movement within the dreamer's psyche issues a call to a path of individuation which we as a culture have long abandoned. Just as archaeological artifacts reveal values and practices of past civilizations, images from the deep recesses of our unconscious disclose aspects of ourselves that have been lost through repression or neglect. Over time, the meaning symbolized by such images becomes inaccessible to our conscious understanding and a source of vital energy escapes us.

The vulva is one representation of the archetypal feminine. Qualities associated with the feminine principle cluster around the physical characteristics of the female body: the breasts, belly, vulva, vagina, womb and ovaries. Ancient depictions of the goddess celebrate her feminine functions: her ability to receive and conceive, to gestate, to give birth, to nourish life. She is connected with blood, milk, sex and the mysteries of life and death. Associations rising specifically out of the male's experience of the female sex organs also determine human perceptions of the goddess. She is seen as devouring, death-dealing, engulfing, terrifying and terrible as well as the gateway to life and sexual pleasures.

Rooted in Latin, the term "vulva" is related to integument, "something that covers or encloses, especially an enveloping layer." Common usage of the word sometimes refers to a woman's entire reproductive system. The focus of this paper is limited to the more or less visible, outer sexual organ.

While Western cultures describe the vulva in clinical terms, identifying seven parts and three kinds of glands, ancient traditions and present-day Eastern societies venerate the vulva with poetic terms. A Sanskrit word refers to a duct in the vulva (probably the vulvovaginal glands) as being filled with the “juice of love.” Ancient Greek cultures called the labia majora “lips of myrtle.” Rufus of first-century Ephesus named the labia minora *nymphae* after the water goddesses—perhaps in reference to female ejaculation. He also coined the expression “fruit of the myrtle” for the smaller inner lips of the vulva. In the Chinese language, the labia minora are known as “red pearls”, and the area just below the clitoral crown as “lute strings.” Chinese words for the clitoris mean “golden tongue,” “seat of pleasure” and “jade terrace.” A Japanese Tantric sect extols the clitoris as the “magic jewel of the dharma.” Such symbolic language moves the vulva beyond its physical function and imbues it with beauty and life. The vulva, or “yoni” in Hindu terminology, becomes a symbol of the life-affirming essence of Woman.

In differentiating between a sign—which has a fixed meaning and stands for something known—and a symbol, Carl Jung describes the symbol as unknowable, yet expressing something that is inexpressible. It brings to the dreamer a numinous experience and a religious attitude that can provide nourishment which lies outside and beyond words or rational understanding. Each visit of the symbol awakens within the person an energy that sheds light on the past and draws the individual into the future. For me—a dreamer of vulvas and a woman who grew up within the patriarchy of Christianity and the mind-valuing constructs of North American culture—the vulva-image beckons me toward something I have too-seldom experienced: the feminine matrix. The word

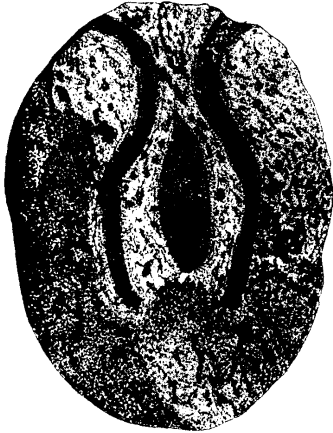
matrix has its source in the Greek word of two meanings: archaic and uterus. The dictionary defines matrix as “the intercellular substance of a tissue; something within which something else originates or takes form or develops, the natural material in which a fossil, metal, gem or crystal is embedded.”

My journey to the creative ground of the archetypal feminine moves forward only as I walk back into the past, both our collective past and my personal past. A number of myths, such as “The Grail Legend” or the story of the Immaculate Conception, could be used to amplify the symbolic meaning of the vulva. However, the older, pre-Christian images of the Great Goddess resonate most with me. I have chosen to take one traumatic event from my childhood and juxtapose it with pre-Christian representations of the sacred vulva, using two short portions of poetry written by Enheduanna, high priestess of Inanna, and half a dozen pre-historic art pieces featuring the vulva. This process highlights the distortion of modern-day attitudes toward both the archetypal vulva and the personal vulva. It also sheds light on the primacy of my need to shift the support of my female self from the patriarchy to the archetypal feminine. Several dreams show the activation of such a transfer within my psyche. The paper concludes with a section on the tasks and possibilities that accompany a relationship with the sacred vulva.

As an aspect of the archetypal feminine, the vulva behooves me to rely less on Logos than I’m accustomed to doing. In honor of the archetypal feminine and her sacred vulva, I follow the “red thread” of feeling in this paper, giving expression to my imagination. Devoted to my own healing, I dedicate this paper to my six-year-old self.

Forward into the Past

The earliest representations of the female divinity took the form of vulvas engraved on rocks some 30,000 years BCE. Abstract and schematic, the carvings show a semicircle,



triangle or bell shape with a dash or dot to indicate the vaginal opening. Figurine art from later epochs makes it clear that these were not merely an expression of physiology but rather symbolize the vulva and womb of the goddess. From Upper Paleolithic times, the vulva is portrayed in three compositions. One is a supernatural triangle associated with aquatic symbolism, depicting the cosmic womb of the goddess, the source of the waters of life.

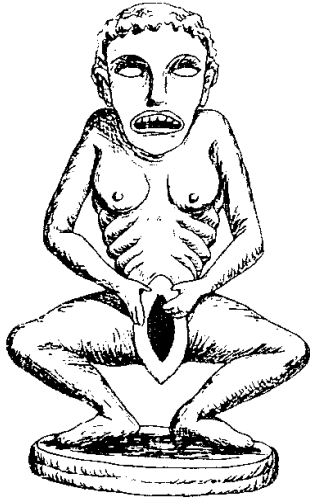
The second form, seeds and sprouts, illustrates the sprouting of life. A third category exhibits an oval vulva swollen in preparation for delivery, conveying the birthing aspect of the goddess. (Figure: stone carving, Yugoslavia, 6000 BCE, Gimbutas, p. 101)



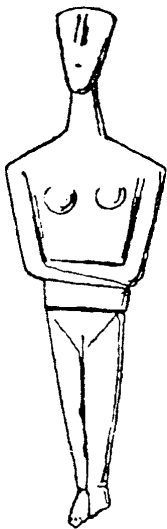
Hieroglyphs from around 3,200 BCE tell us that Isis was one of the most important divinities in Egypt. She represents female fertility. The story of her recovering the pieces of her slain husband and restoring him to life shows the regenerating aspect of the feminine. In a terra cotta image unearthed by archaeologists, Isis sits on a boar, her legs spread wide in the posture many animals assume as they bring forth new life. Women's ability to create human life evoked a sense of numinous mystery among ancient peoples. The

mythical apperception of early humankind imbued anything that touched their emotions with symbolism. The Great Goddess, in Her completeness, represented creative life. The

parts of her body were not physical organs but numinous symbolic centers of whole spheres of life. For this reason, the goddess' display of her breasts, belly, vulva or entire naked body amounted to a form of divine epiphany. (Figure: Neumann, p. 140)



A Celtic goddess, Sheila-na-gig, squats and exposes herself, her hands clutching the sides of her vulva and spreading it wide. Her gaunt body speaks of death and her gaping vulva serves as a reminder of our cosmic origins. Her form constellates a religious attitude, a mixture of fear and awe. Set near the doorway of churches in Ireland, she guards the entrances to sacred spaces. The vulvas of some sheilas are worn smooth by the touch of reverent, supplicating hands as worshipers enter the churches. Defacement obliterates the facial features and vulvic contours of other sheilas. The term *Sheila-na-gig* puzzles etymologists, for it appears to be unrelated to any of the languages ever spoken in the British Isles. At the temple in Erech in Mesopotamia, the term *nu-gug* designated priestesses who held the offices of sacred prostitute. It means “the pure and immaculate ones.” (Figure: drawing from Walker)



Pre-Mycenaean clay figurines present the goddess standing or sitting with her legs together, the slit of her vulva showing between her legs. The frontal position of an ancient figure indicates a mysterious power that suggests the presence of the divine, symbolizing an object of worship. To the primitive mind, a woman's yoni endowed her with the mysterious and sacred ability to endlessly create new life. (Figure: Neumann, p. 113)



Syrian cylinder seals show a goddess assisting a god in a religious rite involving a human worshiper. The goddess displays her vulva in various ways—lifting the ends of her robe or thrusting her skirt back to expose herself. In one scene, her mantle drapes over one leg, accentuating her yoni. In another, a naked girl stands beside the fully-clothed goddess; in the last frame, two clothed girls stand near the nude goddess. Portraying the fruitful nature of the goddess, these seals also demonstrate the flow of feminine energy from mother to daughter. (Figure: Babylon & Syria, 15th Century BCE, Neumann, Plate 54)



Obscenity typifies Baubo, a goddess from ancient Greece. Known as “she who speaks from between her legs,” Baubo was a magical dancing female who had no head. Her nipples were her eyes and her vulva was her mouth. The most common story about her tells how she drew Demeter, the powerful Mother Earth Goddess, out of deep grief over the abduction of her daughter by telling stories from “between the legs.” Laughter at these stories returned Demeter to herself, enabling her to continue the search for her daughter. With the reunion of mother and daughter, the world, the land, and the bellies of women thrived again. (Figure: terra cotta, Asia Minor, 5th century BCE, Neumann Plate 48)

Writing My Story

All of the women I knew as a child grew up in a male-imagined culture, which separated them from their innate feminine natures. All the men I knew lacked an understanding of

the essential feminine power hidden within their own psyches. Disconnected from sacred images of the archetypal feminine and socialized to devalue everything associated with females, both genders betrayed the goddess through their actions in the following story. A commentary on the images considered above precedes each section of my story, revealing the results of the rupture in our cultural psyche on a personal level.



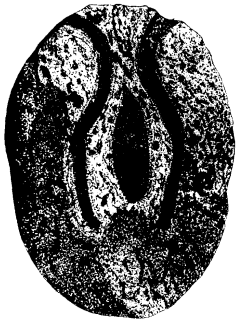
Isis sits on a pig, her legs spread wide in ritual baring. This primitive stone carving represents a religious fascination toward the childbearing principle embodied by the female. Some male interpretations treat goddess art as pornographic, implying that the vulva exists only for the pleasure or enticement of the male. Such literal views lead to male authority over the female body.

Personal flashback: I am six years old and my feet are tied into the stirrups of an examining table in a doctor's office. I am naked, and shivering on the cold metal table. The stirrups are too far apart for my young legs; I feel like the wishbone of a chicken being slowly pulled to the cracking point.



Sheila-na-gig crouches and grimaces, her giant open vulva seen by some as a lewd invitation to sexual license. Though she still hunkers beside the doors of many churches in Ireland, her role as protectress of sacred spaces disintegrated as vandalizing hands scraped her face and vulva into oblivion.

Personal flashback: the doctor is drunk, and he stitches me up without anything to numb the pain. The needle pierces and enters my tender flesh, my body convulses, I scream. The hot overhead lights spin. Nurses hold me down and tell me to be quiet. Sweat oozes from my pores. The needle slides out and the thread is yanked tight. My mother faints and is carried away. Again, the stinging needle penetrates, searing a trail of blood and fear. I scream, the lights spin, my body jerks. Again. And again...



The vulva is said to have a slightly fishy smell. In Greek, the word *delphos* means both womb and fish. Many cross-cultural associations between goddess

and fish exist. As Christianity overpowered ancient religions, it incorporated the sign of the goddess into its symbolism. Mandorla-halos surround images of holy persons in artwork. Early Christians lay the goddess' upright almond shape on its side, using it as a secret sign to identify themselves to each other. Today the fish emblem is

sometimes filled with the letters *ichthys*, which is the Greek word for fish, and an acronym for "Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior."

Personal flashback: I am taken home to sit alone in a darkened corner of the living room on the chair that wounded me. I had stepped from a window seat across the back of the chair. On each side of the lean, a spiked support rose above the back. When I straddled the back of the chair, the sole of my patent shoe slipped on the wooden seat, and one of the spikes impaled me. In my devout Christian family, the place of my injury is shameful. I am not allowed to join the family at mealtimes. My father averts his eyes,

avoids contact with me. No one asks me how I'm doing because my injury occurred in The Unspeakable Place—the part of my body that declares me female.



Baubo's stories come through her vulva, and are meant to remind Demeter-mother of her creative power. Her capacity to bring life into life resides in her by virtue of her female genitalia. Puritan values prevent many modern women from enjoying "between-the-legs" stories. Worse yet, women sometimes scorn their own femaleness and actively disparage its functions.

Personal flashback: I'm eleven or twelve years old and haven't yet had my first menstrual period. For several years, I've had nosebleeds every day, often severe. I overhear my mother joke to my aunt. "Maybe Peggy has her periods through her nose. Her injury might have messed her up, you know. Maybe she'll have to get pregnant through her nose too." They both laugh.

Forward Into the Past

Neither my community nor my mother nor I had a female divinity in our lives. All of us were Protestant. Mary, the Mother of Jesus, gave up her last drop of blood in birthing the Christ-child. After that, she was all light and purity. Unearthly and unearthly. And absent. We could have used a story about Inanna, who not only had a vulva, but also *related* to her vulva.

One day she put her crown on her head and went to visit her father, Enki. At the beginning of her journey, we are told that

She leaned back against the apple tree.
When she leaned against the apple tree,
her vulva was wondrous to behold.
Rejoicing at her wondrous vulva,
the young woman Inanna applauded herself. (Wolkstein, p. 12)

Many mythological journeys of the hero begin with the baring or brandishing of a manly weapon. In similar manner, Inanna, as she is about to set out on a journey, exults in her feminine powers—her wondrous vulva. Inanna equipped herself with her engendered strength, then traveled on to her father's house. Enki welcomed her, and decreed that she be treated as an equal. Together, father and daughter drank and visited far into the night. In his drunken state, Enki gave her the *me*—the ordering powers of civilization. She loaded them into her boat and sailed for home. Her father, in the meantime, sobered up and reneged on his gift. Inanna exercised one of the *me*—the gift of decision-making—and refused to return what he had given her. When she arrived home, she unloaded her inheritances and added her own powers to the *me*. These powers belong to the women: “the placing of the garment on the ground...allure...the art of women...the perfect execution of the *me*...drums... tambourines...” (Wolkstein, p. 26)

Inanna portrays the feminine as innovative, assertive and self-valuing, exercising her own authority and cognizant of what she brings to humankind. The list of powers belonging specifically to women indicate what Woman carries within her by virtue of her visionary nature and spiritual sensitivity: beauty, morality, celebration/ritual, attention to quality of life, and relatedness to all forms and matters of life including justice, natural

cycles, suffering and death. Feminine sensibilities naturally speak to these issues. The archetypal feminine matrix is, after all, the font of instinct—the recognition of what is right, or needed, in the moment.

Classical psychology likens feminine nature to a receptive vessel, which passively receives what others deposit in it. But the archetypal feminine demands that a woman embody a massive and fundamental receptivity toward her own wisdom that rises from within, through her intuition. Marked by immediate access and profound depth, Woman's knowing reaches to her very bones. It is like a presence that goes before her and reports back to her what it has found ahead. It tells her to go here, stay away from that, not now, wait, do this. Heeding such knowing is counter-cultural and unreasonable, but it is the speaking of the vulva. A woman's natural vigor flows toward relatedness, irrational intelligence, and the organic cycles of birthing, preserving and destroying. When a woman receives herself, in all her feminine power and vitality, she releases the magnetic energy of the goddess. This dynamism actively provides for and nourishes both her as an individual and the larger group, for it is the life force itself.

Righting My Story

The imagined rewriting of my story offers a snapshot of healthy feminine instinct at work. A religious understanding of the ancient goddess symbols enlivens the women's psyches and their actions bear a virgin quality: they do what they do—not out of a desire to help or to please—but because what they do is true. Their responses influence the men and children, bringing the feminine principle of life into the world.



Sitting on an animal-symbol of the archetypal feminine, Isis exposes her vulva in a ceremonial way, bestowing religious meaning on the female genitals.

Flash-instinct: I am six years old. I sit, fully-clothed, on a soft, absorbent pad on the examining table of a doctor's office. A nurse shows me a picture of Isis. "What is that woman doing?" she asks. "Riding on a pig." "Do you think you could ride on a pig?" Head-shake, no. "I don't think so either, but we need you to take your clothes off and then sit like that so we can see your ouchie..."



A Babylonian cylinder seal shows a goddess assisting a god in initiating a human into a sacred ritual. In the last picture, the goddess is naked. Beside her stand two little girls, fully clothed. The presence of the girls points to the continuity of the religious relationship—a connection between mother and daughter goddess.

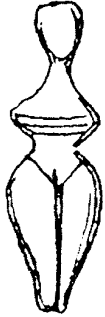
Flash-instinct: my mother holds my hand. I am covered with a pre-warmed blanket, a flannel sheet beneath me. My feet are flat against the table-top; the blanket draped over my bent legs makes a tent.



Sheila-na-gig protects the doorway to the inner sanctum, whether manmade structure or human body. Her intense presence commands an appropriate attitude as one approaches the entrance.. (Figure: Camphausen, p. 60)

Flash-instinct: four nurses gather at the foot-end of my bed. The doctor comes into the room. The nurses smell the booze on him. They form a little semi-circle in front of my feet, facing the doctor. One says, “You go home; you’re drunk. Tell Dr. So-and-so (his partner) to take a look at this little girl.”

houses.



The vulvic slit on ancient clay figurines acknowledges the goddess’ elemental fecunity. Excavators at Hacilar discovered these nude figurines placed near the hearth in private houses.

Flash-instinct: I go home and am enthroned on a pillowed chair just inside the kitchen door—the door through which everyone comes and goes. My father squats down in front of me and asks if I’m comfortable. He carries me to the bathroom when I need to go. At mealtime, my chair is scooted up to the table. My mother explains that I hurt my vulva but I’ll be fine in a few days; until then, everyone is to bring me whatever I need.



Baubo speaks from between her legs. Her energy rights the worlds of women through obscene stories and belly-laughter.

Flash-instinct: I am ten or eleven years old. I overhear my mother tell my aunt, “Peggy has a good comeback for her brothers when they start going on about the wonders of their penises. She tells them that her vulva looks like a walnut, which is far more complicated and interesting than their poor little peanuts!” They both laugh.

Forward into the Past

The particular problem for women who are trying to foster and nourish a wounded girl child is that this child must ultimately be grounded in the feminine instinctual aspects of the Self. In our culture, feminine instinctuality often resides in unsavory places: the witch, the whore, the madwoman. Treated as an unclean organ, the vulva can carry shame that taints a woman's identity, both as a female and as a sexual creature.

Patriarchal attitudes assume that a woman needs a man to introduce her to her sexual self. In non-patriarchal cultures, women have say over their own bodies and sexuality. They learn about female sexuality from other women. They introduce men to the ways of women. A woman's body is hers to share with whomever she chooses, and to withhold when she chooses. Her sexual energy exists to bring vitality to her body and to her life. Such authority over one's sexuality embodies the psychological meaning of "virgin": she who is one unto herself. A woman comes to be complete through intercourse with herself and with others. Exchanges with others—whether the other be man or woman, whether the interchange be sexual, social or spiritual—provides her with differing experiences and points of view. Relating to herself allows her to come to know what she desires, what brings her pleasure, and what serves her well in all avenues of life.

Inanna models virginal behavior. In the following piece of her story, she is filled with feminine power and assurance as she praises her vibrant body and announces her sexual invitation.

My vulva, the horn,
The Boat of Heaven,
Is full of eagerness like the young moon.
My untilled land lies fallow.

As for me, Inanna,
Who will plow my vulva?
Who will plow my high field?
Who will plow my wet ground?

Dumuzi (her consort):

Great Lady, the king will plow your vulva.
I, Dumuzi the King, will plow your vulva.

Then plow my vulva, man of my heart!
Plow my vulva! (Wolkstein, p. 37)

Here a strong, sensual and erotic female voice comes through. Inanna embraces her needs and her wishes. Her sexuality requires a partner equal to her in consciousness, ardor and stamina. Considered psychologically, the poem provides an image of the fully-developed feminine principle which can arouse and receive the penetrating, fertilizing masculine principle. Such a union fructifies the individual psyche and generates something new in outer life.

Present-day Dreams

November 22, 2005 In the heart of a very old and thick forest, I come upon a huge, standing, stone vulva. Its folds and crevices have been smoothed by time. A large patch of green-gold, like tarnished bronze, covers the upper right area, and veins of green-gold run throughout the rock.

November 27, 2005 In the dim light of the deep forest, I stand silent before the giant stone vulva. I am very moved by the sight of it. I place my right hand inside it, resting my hand on the floor of its opening.

Hidden deep within the unconscious, this dream image emerges from the silent layers of humanity's experience. It resurrects the ancient wisdom portrayed in the carvings and paintings of pre-historic man on stone. A compelling symbol of the

archetypal feminine, the sacred vulva invites me to realize, in my individual life, the vitality sourced in the feminine matrix—that rich, fertile substance of the psyche that nourishes the embryo of wholeness.

The green-gold of the veins and stain is an expression of the life-spirit, the living quality which the alchemists saw not only in man but also in inorganic nature. Its presence points to the union of spirit and matter. It signifies the Philosopher's Stone—the gold created by suffering the psychological heat of despair, confusion and vulnerability. "Our gold is not common gold...whatever is perfect in the bronze is the greenness... because that greenness...is straightway changed...into our most true gold." (Jung, CW 12,207) Also the color associated with Aphrodite, by virtue of her birth out of sea-foam, green-gold represents sexuality, lovemaking and bodily delights. As the Greek goddess carrying the carnal aspect of Inanna, Aphrodite personifies erotic desire and sensual pleasure.

Placing my hand inside the vulva demonstrates a reverent and humble attitude. In the first dream, I am shown the symbol; in the second dream, I relate to it. A psychic receptivity takes place. About six months later, I dream again of the stone vulva.

May 9, 2006 I'm outside, wearing a long full skirt of dull green and standing barefoot on deep cool moss. I'm standing apart from a group of people dressed in business attire. They asked me to do something. In the process of carrying out their request, I see a new way in which it can be done, and I follow my spontaneous inclination. This causes them to cast me out of the group. I'm not particularly upset by this, but I definitely feel alone. A man dressed in a white shirt, black suit and shiny black shoes leaves the group and comes to me. His back is toward the group as he stands before me. "It's good for all of us that you were true to yourself," he says to me. He nudges my left foot with the toe of his shoe. I look down and see a shining gold key lying on the moss between my feet. The sight is surprising...unexpected. I hear a faint sound of water. I turn to look behind me and see the stone vulva on the edge of a grove of trees. Its green-gold stains glisten

with water trickling over the top edge of the vulva and sliding down, moistening the entire stone.

Here the stone vulva has moved to the borderland between the unconscious and consciousness. I am barefoot—connected to the earth—and dressed in a natural and feminine way. A man fills the role of messenger, psychopomp, ritual figure. He draws my attention to the gold key lying between my feet, opening my perception to the sound of water behind me. I turn and see that an aspect of my shadow—a sensual, virginal experience of myself which lies latent in my psyche—is coming to life. Water runs over the stone, imitating the dynamic quality of the archetypal feminine and enlivening the impulse toward wholeness. The dream shows something that is happening within me, something sacred that is beyond me and for me.

The Possible Future

A woman who dreams of vulvas is being alerted to something that's absent in her ego-awareness. If that image becomes a symbol—if it carries fascination and obtrudes upon her consciousness so that she cannot ignore it or forget it—then it acts as the representative of an unknown truth. While its meaning can be only partly grasped by consciousness, the symbol invites the woman to peel back its layers and drink the revitalizing juice offered by each new stratum.

Jung associates the yoni with creative mana, fertility and the power of healing, describing it as “extraordinarily potent” (CW16,340) and “the birthplace of the gods” (CW5,210n). The symbol of the vulva is a needed compensation for a masculine-adapted woman. Excessive conformity to the patriarchal view of women and/or a

rational way of living can constellate such dreams. These visitations beckon the dreamer to begin the long journey back to the matrix of ancestral female orientation.

Contact with the goddess can be made through the woman's emotions, which requires a sacrifice on the part of a woman who has adopted a reasonable, goal-setting and task-focused way of being in the world. The archetypal feminine occupies the heart, the center of the body universally regarded as the seat of emotions. As feelings come unfrozen, spontaneous laughter, flares of anger, weeping in the presence of beauty and other impulses introduce the woman into the realm of instinct. She begins to attend to the dynamic movements of her interior life. Learning to live according to her rhythms is much like jumping rope. The rhythm already exists; the girl wanting to enter the rhythm sways back and forth until she copies it, and then jumps in. When a woman reorders her priorities to allow her feeling-values to direct her, she becomes one with her jump-rope of natural inner timing. As she permits her ideas to gestate and develop before acting on them, her well-honed masculine skills change their allegiance from activity for the sake of activity to serving the woman's feminine creativity.

A daughter of the patriarchy may also find that the goddess wants her tongue. As her facile animus-adapted tongue goes silent, she can no longer chatter away. Her speech becomes halting while she gropes for her new woman-language. Her awareness deepens and attends to her bodily experiences of the world around her. Over time, she acquires the ability to remain attuned to her inner world as she goes forth into the outer.

An overly spiritualized approach to life, or a profane view of her body as nothing more than the plaything of men, can also activate vulva-images within a woman's psyche.

Such images nudge a “spiritual” woman to inhabit her body and experience herself as a sexual creature. They invite a sexualized woman to get in touch with the spiritual aspect of sex and her female body. A woman who takes such dreams seriously and works with them, allowing the images to infiltrate her, may become infused with a fierce, primordial love of femaleness and the possibility for the integration of all her female powers. She may find herself intensely attracted to other women, or dream of making love to a woman. Falling in love with her inner feminine heightens sexual pleasures for her.

Vulva-energy challenges a woman’s rejection of her feminine roundness. If she has bought into the Western ideal of female beauty, she may find herself gaining weight or filling out as she embodies the energy of the feminine, for the goddess brings substance. A new attitude of softness toward her body occurs, accompanied by greater acceptance of her natural shape, her physical needs and her particular limitations. When the woman realizes that her body is both the temple in which she worships and the manifestation of that worship, tending her body with sensuous care becomes a religious ritual.

Expression of her sexuality wakes up, or transforms, depending on whether she has neglected or misused her sexuality. The sexual act has the potential to become holy and her body sacred. A woman may give herself to a stranger who attracts her—handing herself over not to the man/woman with whom she makes love but rather to her own instinct, thereby remaining one-in-herself after the coming-together is over. She might discover that she needs to sleep alone for a period of time—or on a regular basis—in order to connect with her sexual libido and maintain her integrity with it. Claiming her

sexual energy for herself and experiencing it as her own life force bolsters a woman's confidence in her power of personal choice in whatever life brings to her.

The woman who hears and embraces the call of the sacred vulva embarks on a profound journey that shakes her foundations, destroys predictability and reorients her point of reference. If she dives deep enough and is granted grace along the way, she will locate her ground—the underlying structure upon which she stands—in the archetypal feminine. She will feel supported from within herself. From there, her female ego can act out of her instinctual knowing. Guided by her unique intelligence, she establishes a reputation of wisdom and authenticity, both with herself and with others. If she's lucky, she will find her life work, and bring her own feminine fruitfulness into the world through her connection with her female Self.

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