

Exhale: Surrender To Shadow Goddesses & Dwell In Places Of Discomfort

[By Amanda Fiorino](#)

“The initiatory journey to the Great Goddess requires that we undergo a period of deconstructing and dismemberment. This is the time when we come apart at the seams. The splits happen along natural fault lines, like the weak, stressed areas in a piece of ceramic. The initiation into the mysteries of creativity often begins with a compelling necessity for the deconstructing process.”

– Patricia Reis, *Through the Goddess: A Woman’s Way of Healing*

Take a deep inhale through the nose, and exhale out anything that does not serve you.

These words are a frequent encounter in mainstream yoga classroom settings. Birthed by the transcendent terrain of Upper world consciousness, these words carry cultural and social implications. In many cases, what has come to be understood of Upper world consciousness is in fact a perversion of its original substance and form.

Moving in a biased, and often imbalanced direction, letting go has come to be the equivalent of escapism. Dissociation from what one is feeling as direct and subjective information gathered via the body substitutes a healthy distancing from one’s experiences. A distancing that allows for a clearer perception of what is happening underneath the surface of our being. An understanding that, ideally, helps us to descend further inward toward the realm of the Soul – the Underworld; that place of individuation.

Coming into contact with those infinite stretches of our finite existence is the long inhale the Universe took before its birth. Our receptivity of that inhale requires a different kind of an exhale.

When I hear the words “exhale out anything that does not serve you,” I feel the tug and pull of Rainer Maria Rilke’s words from his body of work “Letters to a Young Poet.” He asks the reader, “why do you want to shut out of your life any uneasiness, any misery, any depression, since after all you do not know what work these conditions are doing inside you?” Indeed, why do you?

Western culture is one guided by an emotional philosophy that is both fragmented and underdeveloped. Retreat and escape are sought in the “lighter” emotions, such as joy and happiness, where emotions such as sorrow, grief, anger, guilt and shame are cast into the shadow. Relegated to the dominion of the unconscious, these “dark emotions” breathe in the lightless air like a flame devouring oxygen. They grow, and swell, and seek opportunities to be heard and expressed. Stewarding the process of integration and reconciliation, the dark emotions, these “conditions,” must first be allowed to pull us apart.

Though one could remain contented for the remainder of their life, embodying the cultural notion of ignorance as bliss, to avoid the dark emotions is to cut oneself off from the potential for a deep revolution. More to the point, if one hopes to experience the depths of joy and happiness, one must also experience the depths of sorrow and grief. As two halves of the same face, both, in the healthy human, serve one another. They lend themselves to each other as lovers do, invoking an exposed and willing heart to the mysteries of the cosmos.

These emotional forces can be likened to what Patricia Reis refers to in [Through the Goddess: A Woman’s Way of Healing](#), as “the Shadow Goddesses who act as guardians of the threshold.”

As Shadow Goddesses, the dark emotions are those that grip us and work us like a piece of clay. The neatly constructed identity built by the ego is deconstructed by their hands. Unapologetically dismembered, one's sense of Self experiences a wintering over.

Leaves that hold beliefs, intra- and interrelationships, personal myths and more are shed. Settling at the base of our being, they become compost enriching the soil that surrounds our roots. Ready ourselves for the deep hibernation, our energy descends into the dark womb of the Earth. The realm of the unconscious.

In the Underworld where Shadow Goddesses await, we become a dream within a dream. Here, in this place of liminality, is where all of the deconstructed pieces of the Self are capable of being held.

Arriving in this land of betwixt-between, we are met by the fiery and fearsome love of that which we might have otherwise attempted to exile via the exhale. A love that guides the Shadow Goddesses desire to help us transform. Such exhalations are an illusory dismissal that temporarily soothes the wounded child of our psyches. Indeed, sometimes this strategy is necessary as a coping mechanism if we do not feel ready to engage these forces. But, for such a mechanism to truly be of service, a mindful application is necessary.

We must first be aware of our reasons for disengaging the Shadow Goddesses, and then seek out resources that would allow us to re-engage. Resources that would equip us for the journey downward.

"...I would like to beg you dear Sir, as well as I can, to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you

would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer."

~Rainer Maria Rilke, [Letters to a Young Poet](#)

Descending requires both sacrifice and surrender. The former self is offered up to the hungry Shadow Goddesses, who task themselves with the sacred act of destruction; angels of death sweeping across an aging land, offering the frightening medicine of letting go. A letting go that suspends control of one's life, and requires complete trust in the unknown and unknowable. This is the kind of letting go that demonstrates the ancient relationship held between Upper- and Underworld where both were once in service to one another.

Surrendering to the uneasiness, the misery, the depression, becomes the key necessary in unlocking the doorway to deeper dimensions of transformation. A transformation that is assisted by the work of the Shadow Goddesses. Death becomes a birthing portal as the great womb of darkness cracks itself open, exposing the eye of the Goddess – the vulva of regeneration.

Drawn into a uroboric journey of birth, death and rebirth, the breath becomes a mirrored image of our seasonal shifting. The inhale is the spring of us. The pause at the top of the in-breath is our summer. The exhale is the autumnal decay. And the pause at the bottom of the out-breath is our winter.

Re-visioning the words that we began with – take a deep inhale through the nose, and exhale out anything that does not serve you – the exhale becomes an agent for change.

Rather than a mantra of escapism, the out-breath could, if we allow it, take with it our resistance of the Shadow Goddesses; the dark emotions that ask us to willingly dwell in spaces of discomfort and pain.

*Our exhale, in this way, becomes a mighty and courageous yes!
to a life lived fully; a life lived from Soul.*



Image: "Hekate" by Victoria Francés

#EXHALE

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