

CELLULAR RESONANCE AND  
THE SACRED FEMININE:  
MARION WOODMAN'S STORY

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Body work is soul work. Imagination is the  
bridge between body and soul.

—Marion Woodman

*Background and Contributions*

My first contact with Marion Woodman's work was in 1981, when I read *The Owl Was a Baker's Daughter: Obesity, Anorexia Nervosa, and the Repressed Feminine*, which, like a good deal of Marion's writing, draws its title from classical literature. Eight years later, I met Marion in person at a workshop she was leading through the San Francisco Jung Institute. Since then I have studied with her as often as possible, participating in the BodySoul Rhythms intensive retreats she leads for women. This article grew out of my

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This article was published originally in *Somatics: Journal of the Bodily Arts & Sciences XIII*(1) (2000-1, Fall/Winter), 4-11 & 51-54.

dissertation research, in which I interviewed Marion and other leaders in the field about their personal experiences and work with women in transformative movement practices.

Marion's early writings were followed by many other books, tracing the development of her work and ideas: *Addiction to Perfection: The Still Unravished Bride*; *The Pregnant Virgin: A Process of Psychological Transformation*; *The Ravaged Bridegroom: Masculinity in Women*; *Conscious Femininity*; *Bone: Dying into Life*; and five co-authored books: *Leaving My Father's House*; *Dancing in the Flames*; *Coming Home to Myself*; *The Forsaken Garden*; and *The Maiden King*, co-authored with poet and men's movement leader Robert Bly. A Jungian analyst and internationally acclaimed author, lecturer, and workshop leader, Marion recently retired from her private practice in Toronto, Canada in order to focus on her health, writing, and teaching.

Marion's work with the body is rooted in her own healing journey. A gifted high school English and drama teacher for 24 years, she struggled with anorexia and the kidney failure that ensued, a struggle that eventually led her to study analytic psychology at the C. G. Jung Institute in Zurich, Switzerland. There she analyzed her dreams with her analyst and continued her healing process by exploring experiential work at home. She had had a dream instructing her to place healing images from her dreams into afflicted areas of her body. There in her own room, she would stretch, breathe, and warm up her body, and then lie down on the floor. After taking time to open her body through relaxation, she would place healing images from her dreams into ailing parts of her body, allowing the images to move and change as they flowed naturally in the tissue and in the expressive movements that unfolded. Working alone, with herself as witness, she tape-recorded the stream of images, feelings, and associations that surfaced, working with them later through writing, drawing, dancing, and analysis.

These experiences provided the seed for her BodySoul Rhythms approach, which integrates analytical psychology, dreamwork, art, mask-making, voice, bodywork, structured dance explorations, inner-sourced movement, and improvisation. Assisted by colleagues with whom she has worked for decades, dancer and educator Mary Hamilton and vocal coach and mask maker Ann Skinner, she presents these explorations internationally in women's intensive retreats. Each is a *temenos* (sacred, protected space) in a natural setting.

At the heart of Marion's work is the development of "conscious femininity." The daughter of a minister, she sought her soul through dance. Marion's approach supports women in bringing conscious feminine energy into relationship with the Holy Spirit. Her lectures and experiential work bring consciousness to and activate healing in the body/psyche/soul split suffered by most modern women who have grown up in the context of "a cultural one-sidedness that favors patriarchal values—productivity, goal orientation, intellectual excellence, and spiritual perfection."<sup>1</sup> Marion values the earthy interpersonal values traditionally recognized as the heart of the feminine, and the inner spiritual light. The balance of matter and spirit is at the core of her work.

In her late seventies, Marion has a presence of casual elegance. Tall, with thick, rich, wavy, graying brown hair and sparkling blue eyes, she is energetic, vibrant, and articulate, packs a surprisingly wry sense of humor, and loves to dance. Marion's tone is informative, direct, forceful, dramatic, and warm, taking care to engage the audience—even in enormous lecture halls—in something experiential that will assist them in connecting with their bodies, and then drawing them out in relationship to the material she is presenting. Though the majority of her writing and teaching addresses women's experience, she is also sensitive to the wounded inner feminine in men. A true crone—experienced, unsentimental, forgiving, and conscious of life's many paradoxes<sup>2</sup>—she embodies androgynous qualities, weaving rigorous theoretical material with experiential work that awakens deep feeling, body awareness, and creativity. She speaks passionately about the sacredness of matter and sacredness of soul in Sophia (the feminine face of God), the relationship between the feminine individuation journey and bodily experience, and the value of dreams and intuition in guiding one's life from the depths of one's being.

Marion lives in London, Canada, with Ross, her husband of forty-two years, who is an author and professor of the Romantic poets. Now retired, he sometimes accompanies Marion in her work, providing a warm and concentrated presence in the background. While we women are working in the studio, Ross is walking in nature and writing, later joining us for meals and offering a guest lecture on poetry that illuminates areas we are exploring. His humor, intelligence, and love for his subject are palpable and his presence brings the masculine principle alive in our gatherings.

*Personal Background*

Marion grew up in a small town in Southwestern Ontario, Canada, the only girl in the family, with two younger brothers. Her father and mother met when he was giving his ordination sermon and she was a soloist in the choir. Both placed a high value on their Christian beliefs and on a life of service. An important element in the transformative movement work is the concept of being able to contact the unconscious and move freely, bringing feelings, images, bodily sensations, and memories to consciousness in a safe container, in the presence of a nonjudgmental “witness.” When I asked Marion about her mother as her first “witness,” wondering how her influence may have informed Marion’s life and work, she replied:

“She was a suffragette who was very much ahead of her time in conservative London. She drove her own car. She had very lovely clothes. She had a job, and she had her hair bobbed before anybody else in 1926. That was big in her life because she had magnificent hair, and she decided to have it bobbed. That was more than her family could deal with. I’ve still got her magnificent braid that was cut off. But she was not in her body. She was very proud of her body and she was a very good-looking woman, but she had no sense of herself as a woman, in terms of loving her menstrual cycle, or loving being a woman. She didn’t like being a woman. Life would have been much easier for her in a man’s body. I think that was one of the biggest things she had to deal with all her life: how to get along in a woman’s body.

“In her day, she definitely suffered from being a woman. She was a very bright business woman—extremely clever. But because she was a woman, she had to fight her way. Then she married my father and moved to a village church. You can imagine a business woman marrying a minister. She was really put into a cage. The people of the church could not deal with this kind of person, especially since my father was the beloved of every girl in the congregation! And he went to the city and married a city girl and that did not sit well. By the time my mother arrived they were already against her. And so it was into that atmosphere that I was born.”

Marion’s independent-spirited mother felt sorry for Marion being a girl. In addition, these were Depression years, and she was aware of the added limitations that Marion that would face. The family depended

on farmers to bring them food. Her mother tried to provide for people who were coming in off the road hungry, and she couldn’t afford to buy Marion even the simplest pretty clothes.

Then, when Marion was three years old, her mother became seriously ill and was, for the most part, bed-ridden for several years. While pregnant with her last child, she contracted tuberculosis of the glands through contaminated milk from the town dairy. With no one to look after her at home, Marion had to accompany her father on his ministerial rounds. Relegated to the parlors of parishioners while her father performed his duties, Marion made blankets out of doilies, playing in the world of her imagination and “pretty things.” “My mother was the organizer in our household, and my father was my witness,” Marion reflected. Marion spent very little time with her mother during her mother’s illness, and “didn’t see much joy in the female body” during that time. “My mother hadn’t been all that happy in her [female] body, and the illness took away what joy there was,” she said sadly.

Marion’s own body “shut down” during those years as she took on adult responsibilities that her mother wasn’t able to fulfill. “All the spontaneous playfulness of a child was curbed by my feeling that I had to be quiet. I had to take responsibility beyond my years,” she recalled. And this, she says, was a potent force behind her later putting on a great deal of weight, regardless of the number of calories she actually consumed. “The inner archetypal image was of the maternal body carrying the responsibilities,” she said, and “matter follows image.”

At the same time, Marion experienced her father as a friend. He would often say, “Leave the child to me,” when she got into difficulties with other adults. Once they were in private, he would hear her out and empathize with her experience of the event. Reflecting on her development, Marion said, “I’m cut equally from the cloth of both parents.” True enough, her mother’s down-to-earth, Irish-Canadian pragmatism and humor is reflected in Marion’s sense of irony, which moves easily from speaking of matters of the spirit to the direct and practical experience of the body. Her father’s dedication and sense of ministry have always been important to her, as has his profound connection with nature. Having grown up in the “bush,” on land cleared by his Scottish parents, he was a natural gardener and a lover of animals. He took Marion fishing and hay-baling with him. The

inner feminine was more accessible to him than it was to Marion's mother, who strove to overcome being a woman and all that womanhood meant in her day. As a man and minister, Marion's father was sensitive to the feelings of the people in his parish and concerned for the welfare of the Native Americans on the nearby reservation, who were always ready to offer him a chair at their table whenever he came around.

Marion's father began teaching her to read at a young age. By the time she was six, she was looking forward to going to school, expecting to be able to immerse herself further in books. Instead, "public school was a horror for me," she said. The teacher had the children continually making "windmills," an activity Marion hated, and she told the teacher so. The teacher developed a "negative thing" for Marion, told her father she was rude, and hit her fingers with the pointer. Marion survived through the power of her will, deciding to sit at the back of the classroom, as far away from the teacher as possible, or perched atop a ladder, cleaning the blinds, in the home economics class. "I was out of my body by the age of six because of my anguish at school, though paradoxically I was never more aware of my body," she said. The life of the body was cut off again when she went to university, where she spent hour after hour looking into a microscope. "Again a paradox," she said, "as I was mesmerized in the biology lab."

Books and their authors were her constant companions during those difficult school years, as they continue to be now: Emily Dickinson, Shakespeare, the Bible, C. G. Jung, T. S. Eliot, William Blake, Marie-Louise von Franz, Rilke, Berdyaev, and others. Her brothers, too, offered support. As "the preacher's kids" they didn't fit into any of the social cliques, but were in a different category, with other children cleaning up their language around them.

As a little girl, Marion talked to God continually. She also carried a picture of the courageous young Joan of Arc in her apron pocket as a source of companionship—not the soldier Joan, but the girl in a simple mauve dress with bare feet, surrounded by the angel choir to whom she talked. "Wherever I went, I would put this picture down, put two stones on it, and she would take care of me. As long as she was there, I was safe," Marion recalled.

Marion, too, saw angels as a child. "Because my father was a minister I was with death all the time, and tried to tell my mother about the angels that I was watching when my father would be at a

funeral and I was waiting for the soul to take off through the sky. I would sit at the window and explain to her what I was seeing, and she would come over and say, 'Marion, I tell you there are no angels.'"

Though her mother encouraged her to be more down-to-earth and practical, Marion's belief in angels was fine with her father. But it was her faith in God that ultimately made it possible for her to carry on. "I would not say that it was faith in myself," she reflected. "I thought that God gave me the angels, and God told me to follow the images in my dreams." Here, God functioned as her ultimate, larger witness and her father as her personal witness. Marion's mother possessed a no-nonsense, practical style, a tough love that came from a "huge heart that refused to be sentimental." She was concerned that Marion did not have a strong enough hold on reality and gave her a grounding in this world, for which Marion now feels grateful, though it was difficult at the time. Not only was her mother a good business woman, but she was a wonderful cook as well. Marion remembers how, as a small girl, she would put on an apron and join her mother in the kitchen, standing on a chair to roll cookies on the counter. At the same time, her mother clearly conveyed the message, "I'm not raising a crybaby." Marion soon learned to hide her tears under her blankets when she encountered a heart-breaking experience, such as hearing the story of "The Little Match Girl." Though her mother was capable of projecting a public persona of practicality and strength in a crisis—wrapping the gangrenous legs of poor parishioners in newspaper, for example—she could experience feelings of vulnerability only in private.

At twenty-two, Marion became anorexic, believing that she "had to be thin to *live*," as dictated by the images of women at that time. She remembers feeling "beautiful and extremely feminine" during her years of anorexia. Being able to "touch my hip bones gave me a sense of security"; their presence "assured me that I was the 'right size.'" She had always been admired for her scholarship, yet nobody had ever said she was beautiful or attractive. Suddenly she found herself in a situation where "nobody cared a hoot about what was in my head." How "high" she felt dancing, and how "out of prison," allowing herself to enter into "a paradisaal state" as she "disappeared into the music"! Riveting energy accompanied her then, so much so that on one occasion, at the end of a polka, the man she was dancing with asked her politely, "Marion, would you mind putting me down?"

“There was a huge creativity in that space,” she noted as she pointed out the discrepancy in her life then: she felt happy staying up much of the night dancing—waltzes, polkas, and ethnic dances with the Croatians, Finns, and Swedes in Northern Ontario—and then, though exhausted, turning around and doing a good job teaching at 9 o’clock the next morning. Determined to be thin and closer to spirit, she starved her body. “But I was on a straight rampage and I was being driven by forces that were killing my femininity. I had to change,” she said. There came a day when she could no longer keep both worlds going: she collapsed on the floor while teaching. Unable to sustain her hectic lifestyle, she left for London, England, her “spiritual home,” where she felt “free of the old images of responsibility for being a ‘good upstanding citizen’ in a ‘good conservative town.’” There she danced “wonderful nights of intricate Scottish toe dancing!”

When the time came to head back home to her teaching job, Marion found that “the old heavy images of responsibility and perfection were still waiting” for her. This time she stayed, however, and married Ross Woodman. After recovering from a near-fatal car accident ten years later, she traveled to India in 1968. It was there that surrender began to play a significant role in her life, something that later profoundly informed her practice and teaching of inner-sourced movement. A severe case of dysentery led her to an out-of-body experience (described below). Summing up her experiences, Marion said, “That was the thing that broke my relationship with the school. I did go back to the school, but I knew after I came back from India that there was a new life ahead somewhere.” It was also in India that Marion discovered Sophia, the feminine face of God. She had gone there fed up with being a good “father’s daughter” (a woman whose sense of identity is more closely affiliated with the father than with the mother), needing to “find out who I was when all my support systems were taken away.” She describes walking home alone through the snow in Canada one night, lacking the courage, without her husband, to summon up the strength to stretch out her arm and hail a cab. It was at that moment that her inner rumblings grew into a volcano.

“I knew I would buy a ticket to India and I hoped I might encounter God in an ashram in Pondicherry. Six months later I arrived in New Delhi. God was with me all right, but His ideas were somewhat different from mine. ‘He’ turned out to be ‘She’ in India, a She that I

never imagined existed in the narrow confines of my Protestant Christian tradition, a She that reached out to me not in the protective walls of an ashram, but in the streets seething with poverty, disease and love.”<sup>3</sup>

There, Marion underwent a number of transformative experiences that changed her life.

#### *Personal Transformative Experiences India*

During her severe bout with dysentery in India, Marion had an experience that turned her life around. Too weak to stand, she fell on the tile floor of her bathroom.

“How long I was there I do not know. I came to consciousness on the ceiling, my spirit looking down at my body caked in dry vomit and excrement. I saw it lying there helpless, still, and then I saw it take in a breath. ‘Poor dummy,’ I thought. ‘Don’t you know you’re dead?’ And mentally gave it a kick. Suddenly I remembered my little Cairn terrier. ‘I wouldn’t treat Gyronne that way,’ I thought. [In fact, she’d saved his life not long before by doing CPR on him all night to revive him after he’d been hit by a car.] ‘I wouldn’t treat a dog the way I’m treating my own body. I wonder what will become of it if I leave it here? Will they burn it? Will they send it home?’”<sup>4</sup>

She wondered why her body wouldn’t stop breathing, why her spirit was not taking advantage of this opportunity to finally free itself: “I’ve been wanting to get out all my life. And here I’m out. All I have to do is take off,” she thought.

“Paralyzed by the immensity of my decision—either to leave my body there or go back into it—I saw it take another breath. I was overcome with compassion for this dear creature lying on the floor faithfully waiting for me to return, faithfully taking in one breath after another, confident that I would not forsake it, more faithful to me than I to it.

“All my life I had hated my body. It was not beautiful enough. It was not thin enough. I had driven it, starved it, stuffed it, cursed it, and even now kicked it, and there it still was, trying to breathe, convinced that I would come back and take it with me, too dumb to die. And I knew the choice was mine. Most of my life I had lived outside my body, my energy disconnected from my feelings, except when I danced. Now it was my choice—either to move into my body and live

my life as a human being, or to move out into what I imagined would be freedom. I also thought of what a blow it would be to Ross, not to know what had happened to me, and did not want my body to be burned on the ghats in India. A profound shift took place: an overwhelming sweetness and love came into me for this poor thing on the floor.

“I saw it take another breath and there was something so infinitely innocent and trusting, so exquisitely familiar, in that movement that I chose to come down from the ceiling and move in. Together we dragged ourselves to the little bed. I did my best to take care of it. It was as if I could hear it whispering, ‘Rest, perturbed spirit, rest.’ For days, perhaps nine days, I stayed in the womb of the Ashoka [Hotel].”<sup>5</sup>

Through this experience Marion was able to see her body as “separate” but not as a thing to be controlled. She forged a new awareness of her body/psyche connection, and, for the first time, was filled with good feelings and love toward her body. “She seemed so sweet,” she said, recollecting the image of her body on the floor, “and like my beloved dog who was so loyal and dependent on me, I felt a loyalty in this creature. And I felt I didn’t really know her at all, but I wanted to get to know her.” Two weeks later she was still too weak to leave her hotel and negotiate the chaos of the streets of India. Providentially, one of the guests at the hotel sensed her weakened state and sent his wife to help her.

“I was sitting at the end of the couch, writing my letter, frightened to death, because I had to go back out on the street again. Then I realized that I was terrified because now I wanted to live. Before I was able to go around because I did not care as much. But this woman came and pushed her way right up against me. And she had this fat arm, soft, black, black. And she pushed right up against me so I couldn’t really read or write. Every time I moved, she moved. She knew her purpose, and we eventually got down to the other end of the couch. She knew no English at all and just kept smiling at me. But she was warm and I can remember relaxing *into* her a little. And that went on for a whole week.

“And one day her husband came and said, ‘You’re all right now.’ ‘What do you mean?’ I asked, startled at his intimacy. ‘You were dying,’ he said. ‘You had the aloneness of the dying. I sent my wife to sit with you. I knew the warmth of her body would bring you back to life. She won’t need to come again.’ I thanked him. I thanked her. They

disappeared through the door—two total strangers who intuitively heard my soul when I was unable to reach out my arms. Their love brought me back into the world. Having claimed my body and at the same time having surrendered myself to my destiny, I was undergoing both the joy and the pain of experiencing life in the flesh. ... I was no longer the victim, however. I no longer felt physically raped or in danger of death. I was participating in life with an open heart, ravished by the sights and sounds and smells of that extraordinarily paradoxical world. ... I knew something was being burned away that had to be burned away if I was going to live my life. I knew the pain was my pain. I had no idea what it meant, but I knew it had to be. I knew I was living my destiny.”<sup>6</sup>

Upon returning to Canada, Marion taught at the university for two years and then took a sabbatical in England with her husband. There she began working on her dreams with Dr. Bennet, a wise old Irishman and Jungian analyst, whose compassion and directness helped her to get started on the task of identifying her true feelings and setting a direction for life.

When Marion returned to her teaching job at South Secondary School, but her work took on new life. “I couldn’t stand the fact that the kids were bored with poetry. And I thought if I could just get these images into their bodies we wouldn’t be able to stay in the room with them! And that’s what happened,” she said. Mary Hamilton was teaching there, too, and the two began to collaborate. Marion would take the teenagers from the English Department on the top floor down to the theater on the second floor; Mary would bring them up from the gym.

“Every afternoon at 3:00 we would start the rehearsals. We would do an hour of yoga and then start working with the poetry and imagery. ... They lay on the floor and breathed in the breath of life until their rigid bodies were relaxed. Often we did simple yoga asanas until the energy that was focused in their heads was more balanced throughout their bodies. We did obscene tongue, lip, and jaw exercises until they could open their mouths. Then we brought the ‘m’ and ‘n’ sounds resonating into their skulls, and the ‘o’ and ‘a’ vowels resonating into whatever dark corners opened.

“[Mary] encouraged them to concentrate inside, to breathe into their solar plexus, and allow the emotions to connect with the breath until the frozen organs felt the vibration of the genuine feeling, and

then in its own time, to allow that emotion, always connected to the breath, to express itself wherever it moved in the body. Over a period of weeks, rigid, mechanical movements became fluid expression of whatever feelings wanted to be expressed through movement. When the joy and suffering in those young bodies was unfettered, the release of energy through their dance was almost uncontrollable.

“... Mary and I began to understand what we were, in fact, activating. Her dance training gave me insight into the unconscious blocks in the body and how to breathe and move in order to release them. My understanding of metaphor and sound and the release of energy through implanting an image in the body brought new insights to her. Body and soul came together in the programs that we and the students created in that space mid-way between the gym and the top floor.”<sup>7</sup>

“And you know I’m going to go back to that, Tina, because I’m convinced now that if we did microbiology tests on people that we would be able to scientifically test how the cells of the body change when they read poetry. ... I know from my own experience that poetry can change the metabolism of the cells,” she said.

It was during this time that Marion also perceived more clearly the power of the “witness.” Through careful attending, she noticed that when her attention wavered during rehearsals, “... something went wrong on the floor. The energy became lax, muffled, attenuated, an edge of fear crept in, the courageous spontaneity was lost. I suddenly understood that perceiver and perceived were one: my perception of a block in a body influenced the energy in the perceived block without one word spoken. Similarly, my lack of perception (while I thought about softening the spotlight) resulted in unconscious whorls on the stage. ...

“However chaotic the theater became as the students dropped into their musculature to discover who was there, the witness was one hundred percent concentrated on what was happening, holding the conscious container. Sometimes the students witnessed each other; always [Mary or I was] witnessing the group.”<sup>8</sup>

Eventually, Marion developed a severe kidney disorder. After 24 years of teaching English literature and directing theater productions in high school, her body once again forced her to reexamine her life. Since there were no Jungian analysts in Canada at the time, and Dr. Bennet was getting very old, he advised her to go to Zurich to work

with an analyst there. Her conscious work in integrating imagery and movement with Mary and the students, following on the heels of her dreamwork with Dr. Bennet, prepared her for the deep transformative work that she would later undergo on her own.

*Partnering: Body and Analysis*

Hoping to find healing, Marion moved to Zurich. Now she wanted to live, but NOT on a dialysis machine for the rest of her life. She studied depth psychology and dreams at the C. G. Jung Institute in Zurich, and eventually became an analyst.

“When I arrived, there was nobody doing body work at the time. But my dream told me to take the images from my dreams and put them in my body, saying, ‘Don’t ask any questions, because it won’t make any sense!’ So many weekends I spent, maybe ten hours Saturday and Sunday, lying on the floor on a woolen blanket with another woolen blanket over me. I was in a womb, and I worked with the imagery from the dream and allowed the energy of the dream to go into my body. Over the period of four years a very severe kidney condition was healed.

“[Yes,] I was in analysis, but my analyst was outraged at the thought of body movement. So he didn’t want to know anything about what was going on. His attitude was, ‘If you can’t transform through your dreams there’s something wrong with the way you’re handling your dreams.’ I knew that I could have a wonderful time with my dreams because I had been through two years of that, but it didn’t change my body. In fact, I got higher and higher into spirit, so my body became more and more exhausted.

“[But] there was a great pact between me and God doing this work. It’s like the container in analysis. ... If it’s held absolutely sealed, it’s much stronger than if there’s a leak. So ... I had no leaks, because I didn’t have anyone to talk to. I didn’t have anybody that was remotely interested in what I was doing. But my relationship with Sophia and God was sufficiently deep that I didn’t have any fear. I trusted the dreams and I believed that the dreams were given by God. And I simply did what the dreams told me to do. And, of course, I was studying, so I was able to work with my studies, further amplifying and integrating my experience.”

When I reflected back to Marion how amazed I felt at her ability to persevere under the circumstances, without a human witness and with so little support, she responded, “It was fear, Tina. I had to heal that kidney! I didn’t go to Zurich to be an analyst. I went to Zurich to try to get this terrible problem healed. So I was profoundly faithful, simply because I wanted to live.” Thus, her healing commenced through a profoundly integrative and transformative process, which was eventually to become her life’s work.

### *The Development of Marion’s Work*

Marion has had to contend with several life-and-death struggles through the course of her life: with her anorexia, her severe kidney condition in Zurich, her illness and out-of-body experience in India, and her ongoing healing from the cancer diagnosis and treatment she received more recently. Marion described the importance of a lot of “good mothering” in the transformative process, and the paradox inherent in the inner-sourced movement and analytic work: in the process one must build up the strength and flexibility of the body ego, while simultaneously dismantling the defenses.

“[Women] have to be patient and build their ego until they are strong enough to dialogue with the unconscious energies that are pushing them into new territory. The ego is the filter between conscious and unconscious. The sorting process goes on in the ego. If the ego is not strong enough to dialogue with the unconscious, then it collapses under the power of complexes and addictions.”

“... This kind of aligning is an essential part of the healing process in which the movement from the psychic pole to the somatic pole is met by a countermovement from the somatic to the psychic. The body comes forward to meet the psychic process on the assumption that no matter how much work is done on the psyche, the body cannot absorb it unless it has been prepared.”<sup>10</sup>

Marion describes how the work can transform the effects of the negative mother complex—the Medusa whose gaze turns the life impulse to stone—which afflicts a majority of women (and men) in patriarchal culture.

“The head recognizes; the body experiences ... [and] nature presents her bill if we do not obey our instincts. ... Whereas Medusa

wants everything permanent and perfect, engraved in stone, Sophia wants things moving, breathing, creating.

“Once the body is relaxed and [following breathwork] the creative spirit is flowing between head and body, our workshops concentrate on the symbols that have been given in the dreams. Individuals work with their own energy circuits, attempting to recognize where the body is conscious and where it is unconscious, differentiating between habitual reactions and conscious body responses. Where a woman finds the body is ‘black’—that is, the energy refuses to move into that area—she experiments by taking a positive healing symbol from one of her own dreams, putting it into that area and concentrating until the energy begins to move and transform. This is a very different process from concretizing the symbol, for the symbol brings together body, mind and soul, through the creative imagination, constantly transforming.”<sup>11</sup>

“Here, too, is the real mystery of the body in movement. Each instant of movement is the instant of creation. To touch that instant is to bring consciousness into that movement, is to strike home to the very core of Being and to know it simultaneously in a gesture that is Being itself. Being resonates with YES to the Goddess.”<sup>12</sup>

“The work is to let the ego go and *become* the music. So that you are *being* danced. Many people can’t sustain that kind of surrender. Their ego becomes inflated with the archetype; they begin to identify with the archetypal energy. The result is an inflated ego, functioning out of will-power. Instead of surrendering their ego to the Self, they cling to their will-power in their own ego. It’s a failed spiritual journey. We can do all we want to try to change something with our will, but Jung says it’s the archetypal energy that heals, and anything else is Band-Aid. In my experience that is true. It is the essence of the feminine experience. It’s the secret of great lovemaking.”

### *Body Integrity and Surrender*

For Marion, each important experience of being touched by spirit, or “broken open,” has been accompanied by some kind of trauma to her body that has profoundly changed her relationship to it.

Marion acknowledges the importance of strength and the integrity of the woman’s body structure as a ground for opening to consciousness, agreeing that some background in dance and/or other body disciplines can be of help with this. In fact, she feels that if it had not been for her



“Scotch-peasant body” her story would have ended in tragedy. “It kept me walking on the ground, humble, and compassionate,” she said. Marion realized in her own early crisis that the path to healing lay in surrender to what she “had no will power over”—in this case, her body weight. Paradoxically, this surrender was exactly what she needed in order to grow. At that point she had lost all faith in God and her will to live. “It was in the breaking of my health that the transcendent came through from the other side,” she said. “And because of the anguish in my own soul I have been totally in communication with the anguish in others.” She pointed out that this is where the love comes in: “Until your heart breaks open, you don’t know what love is about.” Marion reminded me that it is the archetypal energy that heals. Since the turning point with the car accident and the brush with death in India, her life path has been one of “deeper and deeper surrender.”

As Marion spoke with me during our interviews, paradox was ever-present in many of her life’s transformative experiences. For example, during her anorexic years she felt, on the one hand, that she was living life “with the intensity, and the joy, and the rapture” that she had never had before, while at the same time “there was a death wish at the center of it” that she had not yet brought to consciousness. “I didn’t care if I lived or died, so long as I was ‘happy,’” she remarked with irony.

#### *Loved Body: Living Body*

Given the negative, distorted, limiting images that have been passed down in the projections of the patriarchy through the mother and father lines, learning to love our bodies plays an important role in Marion’s work. Body image is a mysterious phenomenon about which we still have much to learn. However, in listening to Marion, I began to have a sense that body parts that are loved and valued in early life often continue to carry their aliveness into adulthood. For example, though Marion’s mother felt sorry for Marion for being a girl, she was nevertheless able to “witness” her daughter’s hair, skin, and hands, parts of Marion’s body that are still vibrant and expressive today. Marion’s mother was adept with her hands. “The consciousness that I have developed in my hands came through from a very early age,” says Marion. Since those were the days of the Depression, when Marion’s

mother could not afford to buy her daughter even the most basic skirts and sweaters, she “didn’t know what to do.”

“But she knew how to fix my hair. . . . As far as she was concerned, I had a head and hands. And if you know how I teach, and you do, I have a head and hands. I know when the kids used to parody me in high school, whoever was playing me would put on a long gown, which simply covered the body, and this extremely beautiful dance would go on with the head and the hands.”

#### *Creating the Container*

Marion passes this “good mothering” and body witnessing down to her workshop participants in an evening partner exercise (modeled with Mary Hamilton) in which mother (Marion) cradles and rocks her daughter (Mary), singing and telling her stories as she brushes her hair. In this way the daughter feels held, nurtured, and accepted in the cells of her feminine body, and is able to release any excess bodily tension to this containing feminine presence. Marion also guides participants in giving each other hand and foot massages, loving the skin and easing the muscular constrictions that accompany a “lifetime of holding oneself up, holding oneself together.” Marion feels strongly that even women who have never had that loving touch or sense of being contained—“and many have not”—can “experience in their body the loving arms around them, which, in turn, gradually helps them to experience their own female body as a loving container for the soul.” Working in pairs also helps women experience inner “self-holding” and relaxation, in contrast to the “drivenness” that characterizes most “father’s daughters.” This facilitates an opening up to the vulnerability of the wounded inner child, in place of the compensatory stance that many women adopt with the use of various guises—tough Amazon, helpless little girl, seductress—or with the anesthetizing effect of various addictions, strategies that further alienate them from the source of their pain and thus from the potential for healing.<sup>13</sup> In the process, women begin to learn to soften their defenses, trusting that their bodies, inner life, and the firm container created within the workshop can hold them.

Marion not works to create the container not only at a physical and interpersonal level, but at an archetypal level as well, using ritual elements throughout her workshops.

“I build a container at the altar so that Sophia is present. That’s very important. And in analysis I always say, if you have to [telephone me in-between sessions], do so, so they know that the container has to hold. And they’ve got to take responsibility for holding it because, in my experience, the transcendent will come of its own accord when the container is strong enough. So I’m trying to build it with them so that when the transcendent does arrive, they’ll be ready.”

Marion begins each day of her workshops with a prayer at the altar. This often takes the form of asking for Sophia’s guidance in assisting the group in working through specific emotional issues, as well as acknowledging important related events that are going on in the world at that time, linking inner and outer realities. From the altar, the group moves to experiential work: a group member volunteers to lead a warm-up or guided meditation to open the participants’ bodies, in preparation for the day’s work.

#### *A Student’s Transformative Story*

Here Marion reflects on her experience with a woman in one of her workshops. This example illustrates the importance of the container provided by the feeling in the other group members. Their concentration played an essential role in the healing that was able to occur.

“I’ve been in workshops where the tears run down my face, because I can see pain in somebody’s body. The pain starts to come out in a shriek and I can see how the body is writhing. I’m describing a mask workshop that I was working in. All the members of the workshop were working with their clay to make the masks; they had their eyes shut. I was working with one woman who had broken on the floor. The other women just kept going with their masks. They all knew she had to go through it. Not one of them opened their eyes. They sent their love over to us in the corner—I could feel their love pouring in. And that little body writhed, and pulled, and pushed, and did its best to get born. And did. In that situation love is born in the whole group. There’s positive mother in the group. Nothing else will go through that wall [of the embodied negative mother] but that kind of love. If you confront the wall you come against it, but love melts it. And when you come through the wounding to the suffering, you see what the matter [the body] has endured.”<sup>14</sup>

#### *Integrating the Shadow*

Marion’s work emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and experiencing the energies of the Shadow. “Where perfection is worshipped in consciousness, imperfection is magnetic in the unconscious. Splitting light from dark denies human wholeness,” she says.<sup>15</sup> And “as the struggle for survival intensifies, so do the forces ranged against it.”<sup>16</sup> For this reason, Marion feels it is crucial to keep a creative outlet open in the analytic process.

“[If the woman can be encouraged] to play with the imagery, allowing it to take whatever form it happens to come up with, the energy locked in the Shadow will emerge, bringing with it the buried creative fire. In that new integration, the Self brings healing for the soul and energy for the art. The soul blossoms in the mystery connecting it to the Self.”<sup>17</sup>

Making faces, conscious breathwork, odd sounds, awkward or funny dances, masks that can be gorgeous, terrifying, ugly, or sympathetic—all help to break down the stereotypical body image of perfect beauty that patriarchal culture sets for women. Marion says of this integrative process:

“For me, body work is soul work, and the imagination is the key to connecting both. Most of us keep our breath as shallow as possible because the eruption of feeling is too intense if we inhale deeply. Breathing is very important because it is a matter of receiving, and that is the feminine principle incarnate. [Fear of rejection is related to our breathing.] If, for example, a person has an intense negative mother complex, this often manifests in a plugged throat, plugged nose, sinus trouble, asthma, and all kinds of difficulties.

“Sometimes in body work, the mucus starts to pour out—it oozes out in ropes, out of the eyes, the nose and the mouth—when the complex is releasing! This often signals the end of asthma and related diseases. Such people often cannot give you their chest if you offer to hold them. They will arch. But when they start to trust, their body will begin to free itself and they will be capable of a full embrace.

“However, as you solve these problems, you often encounter new ones. The whole vaginal area is related to the throat and the breath. So if you release something here, you also release energy at the other end. Then you’re dealing with a problem that is sexual.”<sup>18</sup>

*Finding Authentic Voice*

Opening to one's voice is another essential part of Marion's BodySoul intensive, often facilitated by vocal coach Ann Skinner. Marion points out that often a women's voice is pushed up into the higher range by her negative animus, which squeezes her throat with inner criticisms such as, "You're worthless. You don't have anything to say. You don't expect anyone to take you seriously, do you? Who gave you permission to take up space? Anything you have to say has been said much better by somebody else!" Developing the capacity to stand to one's beliefs is another element of this work. Marion tells the story about holding her ground with a man who wanted to borrow money. The tension between them grew so strong between them that the glass in a picture frame snapped spontaneously. "Better that, than your body!" I remarked, marveling at how she was able to develop a body that was strong enough to contain a remarkably high level of energy without snapping or becoming ill (UCSC Intensive, February, 1995).

Movement and vocal exercises are often followed by drawing or painting a "body map," in which women trace each other's bodies and then fill in the tracings of their own bodies with colors and/or other media in response to how they perceive their bodies, and how they are experiencing themselves at the physical, emotional, and energetic levels at that time.

Once the participants' bodies are attuned and alive, Marion guides them in using their dreams to facilitate healing by placing positive dream images in "dark" parts of the body, much as she did to cure her own kidney condition. She allows the image to move and transform as it wishes. She also uses inner-sourced and structured, directive movement work guided by Mary Hamilton, and often refers analysts in her private practice for sensitive and professional touch/bodywork when appropriate. These methods help the body open, release the grip of the complexes, attend to the woman's wounded child, and help the traumatized body catch up with the ego, which otherwise often tries to move ahead too swiftly in the analysis.<sup>19</sup> Working with the unconscious through the use of dreams, active imagination, imagery, dance, art, music, voice, mask-making, and improvisational theater, Marion's work assists women in building stronger, more flexible and feelingful bodies—vessels for feminine consciousness.

*Addictions*

Integrating shadow elements and working through addictions play a large role in Marion's work.

"The trouble is that we lack basic respect for our bodies. There's a complete denial of the sacredness of matter. And that is very much connected to any addiction. That's certainly true of eating in our culture. It's true of workaholics, too, because they don't pay any attention to what they're doing to their bodies so long as they can keep working eighteen, nineteen, twenty hours a day. ... I think many of us cannot face the pain of our lives. So work is an escape, or compulsive relationship is an escape, or eating is an escape, until we weep when we look in a mirror."<sup>20</sup>

In working with addictions, Marion attends to the metaphor in the behaviors, holding a larger frame of reference in helping the addict understand the meaning of the patterns that accompany the illness.

"I always try to grasp the metaphor at the root of an addiction. That varies. With food, it can be mother; with alcohol, spirit; with cocaine, light; with sex, union. Mother, spirit, light, union—these can be archetypal images of the soul's search for what it needs. If we fail to understand the soul's yearning, then we concretize and become compulsively driven toward an object that cannot satisfy the soul's longing."<sup>21</sup>

Marion feels that it is through contacting this deep soul longing and bringing it to consciousness, rather than simply treating the external symptoms, that our culture may be healed of the addictions that exist on such a massive scale. Her style in working with people is honest, direct, forceful, respectful, humorous, sometimes confrontational, and deeply supportive. Though Marion's mother "had no sense of loving being a woman," and Marion feels sad because she herself had no child, the mother archetype has been generously expressed through her work with thousands of students, workshop participants, and analysts—"un-mothered women" and father's daughters who have benefited a great deal from the healing her work has provided them. Her own struggle with the death wish in anorexia is a testament to the work, which she models for women who wish to recognize and value their feminine being. Marion also models a feminine mode of leadership, working collaboratively with Mary Hamilton and Ann

Skinner. Their styles weave together naturally, as each takes turns leading elements of the work as well as supporting one another in the process, seeming like mother and daughters in one moment, while at other times like sister muses as they integrate their gifts.

#### *Developing the Masculine Principle*

For Marion, masculinity is “the assertive energy, the energy of discretion, discernment, clarity, the clarity that moves toward a goal. And it exists in women as well as in men. Some women call it the ‘feminine yang.’ I don’t care what the words are. But for me, the masculine principle is parodied in the patriarchy as we have it now. It has become a despicable power principle. Our society functions through power—controlling other people, our bodies, nature—for the sake of controlling. I don’t call that masculinity.”<sup>22</sup> Paradoxically, developing a healthier relationship to the masculine principle—what Marion calls the woman’s “inner Bridegroom”—is essential to feminine development.<sup>23</sup>

“[The] covenant to the inner masculine establishes a firm feminine standpoint: outwardly it gives a woman the ego strength to act from her own lunar consciousness grounded in her own feelings and musculature; inwardly, the masculine spirit guides her to cherish the images that alone can reveal to her who she is. Ultimately it is the unifying energy between outer and inner worlds. Her covenant with her inner Bridegroom releases her from unconscious nature, from the natural, incestuous, rigid world of her parental complexes.”<sup>24</sup>

The animus expresses itself not only in projections onto men and in dreams, but on a body level, where it can be worked with directly. Mary Hamilton, who has often been guided in her inner work by Marion, describes the development of her animus during a movement session in which an inner Warrior figure came to her:

“I practice visualizing the Warrior’s spear in my spine. After many careful observations I learn to sense the difference between being supported by the inner masculine as compared to being defeated before I even get started by the fierce negative animus. When the negative animus controls my body, my insecure and performing persona has to hold me up. It is the distinction among three postures: proper alignment with my positive masculine; a collapsed upper body with my negative masculine; an assumed rigid and inflated posture with my persona.”<sup>25</sup>

“So how did the minister’s daughter find dance?” I asked Marion. Smiling, she told me that when she returned from England with Scottish dancing records she was surprised to learn from her father’s sister that she had probably inherited her Scottish Highland dance ability from her father. He had never revealed to her that he had won a number of gold medals before giving up his dancing to join the ministry! True enough, the steps had been easy for her to learn, and she had been in “heaven” on the dance floor.

#### *Cellular Resonance*

Marion described an “overwhelming sense of sweetness and love” that has come over her, sometimes accompanied by the scent of orange blossoms, in moments when Sophia is present. She also spoke of the change in the metabolism of the cells that comes about through metaphor—how when she reads Shakespeare, “the person that starts reading and the person that ends an hour later are two different people in the cells of the body.” A “shimmer” comes in, a higher metabolism, something that she likens to the old feeling she had when she was anorexic, only now she has a ground for it, a “body that is strong enough to take the intensity of what’s coming through. And when the metabolism, the shimmer, gets to a certain stage, the transcendent comes in.”

When I shared with Marion my longing to let go of some of my current work responsibilities, and how at times when my schedule gets too busy my body sometimes feels as if it would burst in the presence of beauty or poetic metaphor (tearful with gratitude, and resonating with energy that feels big enough to burst the tension in my tissues), she urged me to pay attention. “It’s the edge, Tina. The very edge. The bursting is to be touched by God,” she said, “and to deny that is to block energy. Repressed energy can kill. The experience needs to be brought to consciousness, through writing, making a poem.” Here she reflected again on how the bodies had changed in the high school students whom she’d invited to read and embody poetry. “It’s the metaphorical body we’re building. It’s that place between spirit and matter.”

Marion’s current questions are bringing her full circle to her early days as a teacher as she pursues research in psychoneuroimmunology to discover what it is that takes place at the biological level—how *does* poetry change cell structure? Having sensed something of this in my

own experiences in inner-sourced movement, I asked Marion to elaborate further.

“When I read a poem aloud and let it resonate through my body, if I love the poem, if I am really resonating with it, I get a ‘shimmering’ sensation. The resonators are open. They are really working. So that by the end of the poem I feel a real difference—you know, emotion, imagination, intellect, all come together—and it’s as if psyche and body are whole. The only way I could describe that would be as an inner marriage where body and psyche are one.”

“And does your subjective experience of yourself and your world change?” I wondered.

“Well,” she responded, “if I don’t read poetry every day and don’t listen to music, I tend to get mired in mud. I fall into body and feel slow. I put on weight. My eating patterns don’t change, but there’s a slowness in the metabolism and everything is ‘matter.’ Whereas when I read poetry aloud, when I listen to music, especially if I dance to it, my body is alive. Every cell is full of spirit.”

“You’re also really speaking about this as a ‘living,’ daily practice, as a way of life,” I noted. “As, for example, differentiated from other images of ‘enlightenment,’ where people assume an ‘end point’ or something that you achieve—images that seem to be more characteristic of the masculine perspective.”

“That’s right,” said Marion. “I don’t see an end point to that, except death. And I’ve had a pretty good look at that one with this cancer, because with that in the wings you don’t fool around.”

About ten years ago, Marion was diagnosed with cancer at the base of her spine. Since then she has been in a healing process, combining Western medical, homeopathic, and movement and dreamwork practices, outliving all of her doctor’s predictions. Recently, she completed a book articulating her experience living with and recovering from cancer, entitled *Bone: Dying into Life* (2000). Integrating findings from quantum physics and information from current psychoneurological research, she remains passionate in deepening her understanding of the relationship between spirit and matter.

*Personal Practices: Integration into Daily Life*

Marion reflects that it took her sixteen years “to understand why I went to India” and to integrate the transformative

experiences that she had there. When I point out that I rarely hear about the integrative aspects of the transformative process—it’s usually the “peak experiences”<sup>26</sup> that people focus on—Marion underscores how essential this is, and how “useless it is if you leave it [the transformative experience] alone.”

“How do you integrate these experiences into your daily life?” I asked her, to which she responded, “It’s challenging to live in the body, and all of the things I do now—dancing, drawing, holding people, writing—are all part of my effort to continue to integrate and live this.”

Though she has become much more receptive to her body sensations and “allows intuition to flow through her body,” she states that she still has to discipline her body, since “periodically it’s like a wild race horse. There’s still a teenager in me. That energy [which would have her up dancing all night long, and then teaching school at 9 a.m.] is still in me periodically, but now my body and I are friends,” she said. One of her daily personal practices is to put on music and “lie on the floor and spend half an hour letting my body do anything it wants to do.” In this safe and free space, she often speaks as she moves, tape recording the movement patterns and images that emerge, or journaling following her movement experience to understand better what was going on, “because I believe that you have to bring [the material] to consciousness.” Over years of this practice Marion has developed a sensitive and refined “inner witness,” capable of maintaining a conscious awareness as she allows herself to be moved by unconscious material.

After moving, she often draws the images that have come to her, working with them in the same way that she would analyze a dream, tracking the sequence of images “to see where the energy wants to go,” as the imagery “has the transformation right in it.” During this integrative phase of the work she first brings her own personal associations to the images, and then uses a dictionary of imagery and symbols and other relevant texts to amplify them further, historically and mythologically.

Marion also takes daily hour-long walks to the river in London, Ontario, keeps a daily journal, carries on research for her books, listens to music, and shares long conversations with Ross. The two work on their dreams together, as well. “I lost my daily six hours of imagery

when I retired from my teaching job because I didn't sit down and read Shakespeare every day!" Now that she's realized how deep her need for poetry is—"it's food for the soul"—she and Ross read poetry aloud to each other. "The older you get, the more you understand it," she said, again describing the "shimmer" that runs through her when she reads Shakespeare, a shimmer that found a pathway through her work with inner-directed movement.

Now when she dances, her body comes alive. "Every cell fills with spirit, so that I no longer feel weighted down and mired in the mud of matter." Having come to know the sacredness in matter, Marion takes time to "tune her body/instrument, as if preparing for Mozart." Her senses are now considerably more heightened and intensified, and she experiences the same electric "shimmer" when she sees beauty in nature, such as the red tulips that create a "little epiphany" that stays with her. After decades of work with the body, Marion finds that her intuition has also grown keener as she picks up things going on with other people at greater distances. "When you've got more ground, the intuition can fly higher or more broadly," she said, referring to her psychic experiences. Marion's teaching combines a practical, grounded, sensation-specific use of language with profoundly metaphoric, symbolic, aesthetic, and spiritual images, grounding the latter with the former in daily life. The effect is often surprising, humorous, and powerfully integrative.

#### *Sophia's Perfume*

As our conversations came to a close, Marion reflected on another transformative experience she'd had, which, like the others, engaged her directly at a body level. In this instance, she had been driven nearly crazy by the tinnitus that had been ringing loudly in her ear ever since her car accident, "to the point where I nearly didn't care if I lived or died," she said.

"But the tinnitus in my ear was the opening to Sophia, because I had a dream, filled with the scent of an orange blossom bush, in which I heard a clear voice ask, "How does it feel on the eve of becoming everything you've fought against all your life?" And I thought, "For heaven's sake, what does that mean?" Well, I found out, in a vision that immediately followed. I'd fought the feminine all my life, but I didn't know it. And, again, it was the love that healed me ... this

overwhelming sense of love, and the perfume ... I could feel it, just cell by cell by cell. [Marion vibrated her fingers to demonstrate the shimmering sensation that grew from the ground up, traveling up her legs and through her whole body.] My body became limp with the beauty of the perfume. And I'd never known this kind of love before—pure, transcendent—feminine transcendence from below."

"How did you identify it as 'feminine' energy?" I asked. "Remember the song you sang at the end of that workshop, Tina, with the words that were given to you from your dream? How did that go?"

Recalling the lyrics, still fresh in me, I sang to the tune of "Motherless Child":

*I used to feel like a  
mother-less child,  
Now I know that I'm  
really wild,  
Right now I'm finding my  
personal style,  
Deep, down  
in my bones.  
Last night I dreamed of  
dance and perfume,  
Crazies and red wine filled the  
upstairs rooms.  
Downstairs the choir sang,  
"Sophia blooms!"  
Deep, down  
in my bones.  
There, I'm not alone.  
She gives us our Home.*

"What a beautiful expression of feminine energy, Tina!" Marion responded. "And I want to connect this with your story. The love I experienced was soft. It was warm ... like the lady in India. I could relax into it like those little Japanese dolls ... they can hardly hold their heads up. It was sinuous, it was flexible, it was total surrender. One hundred percent surrender. Yet I was totally immersed. And the healing would not have happened without that—I became totally concentrated on *being* the orange bush. The energy leapt beyond simile, 'like an orange bush'; it *became* the orange bush. That's metaphor.

“This is the secret of the transformation: when I see an orange bush in my meditation, I *become* the orange bush. I become the perfume. So the ego is not present, ... there is union. My being is permeated; it is total intercourse with the Divine. And it feels like an orgasm, yes, it does. ... And there’s nothing new about that.”

Movement created an opening, India cradled the initiate, and Sophia responded. Of her experience she said:

“Vulnerable and alone, infinitely at the mercy of whatever was to happen, I knew it was not my will, not my love, but Her will, Her love, that there was some meaning to my life infinitely beyond anything I had ever imagined, and that my delicate body—in all its ugliness and all its beauty—was the temple through which I had come to know Her on this earth.”<sup>27</sup>

Years of work with body and psyche, integrating dreams and inner-sourced movement, have provided a tremendous healing and guide for Marion. Today, she invites women she works with to find the discipline and surrender that can allow them to open to Sophia’s gifts.

The feminine  
has slower rhythms  
meanders,  
moves in spirals,  
turns back on herself,  
finds what is meaningful to her,  
and plays.  
This is your body,  
your greatest gift,  
pregnant with wisdom you  
do not hear,  
grief you thought was forgotten,  
and joy you have never known.<sup>28</sup>

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