

The Awakening

Magic Doorway into the Divine

Devrah Laval

I guess it was my time or, rather, God's time. I was 29 years old. I had a good husband and I was a successful model and dancer. By conventional standards, I had an enviable life and yet I felt somehow empty. Something was haunting me.

Then, during a routine check-up, my doctor told me that my uterus had completely dissolved and I would never menstruate again. I would never have any children. I was devastated by the news and was telling a friend about it when she told me about an upcoming workshop designed to take participants to enlightenment, provided they were willing to apply themselves. I felt a surging force of desire, stronger than anything I had ever known. My simple response was "I must go." We both forgot about my uterus.

Getting myself to the workshop was surprisingly difficult. When I told Jeff, my husband, he said, "You can't go." He had never tried to prevent me from doing anything before, but this time he was not only adamant, but angry. I felt that I was fighting for my life. I told him I was going anyway. The next day I asked my boss if I could take Saturday off, but he refused. Like my husband, he was adamant. I told him I was sorry but I must go. By the time I left for the weekend, I had no idea if I would have a job or a marriage when I returned on Monday. But I felt as if something greater was driving me and I had no control over it.

Sleeping bag in hand, I was dropped off at an old retreat lodge for monks outside the city. Everything was white and austere. No flowers. No colour. There was one tiny closet for everyone's clothes. Each small bedroom had eight hard bunk beds. It was an icy night in November and everything felt harsh, cold and naked. I just wanted to go home, but I also knew I had already crossed the line and there was no returning.

I was ushered downstairs to the workshop room with the other participants where we were welcomed with herbal tea and honey. All of our valuables were collected, packaged and stored away for safekeeping. We were not allowed to wear watches, jewellery, makeup or cologne. Nor were we allowed to drink coffee or eat anything other than the macrobiotic food provided. We were told that during the workshop we would be paired off and face our partners for one-hour intervals in which we would take turns asking each other one question, "Tell me who you are." We would have an uninterrupted period of time to answer and then we'd switch roles. After an hour, we'd change partners and continue. This would go on for 18 hours each day, apart from breaks for meals and to rest.

The first night we did a few exercises to prepare ourselves, to get to know one another and to learn the technique. At the end of the evening, we collapsed into our hard, cold bunks. Nobody slept. We were awakened at 5 AM. It was horribly cold, I got up, stumbled to the bathroom and made my way to the workshop room where I sat across from a half-asleep stranger who said, "Tell me who you are."

I was miserable. I am not a morning person and have a great aversion to talking to anyone without at least a cup of tea first, but then breakfast arrived. I had a chance to shower and returned to the routine. The sun slowly began to shine and I began to feel better. Even my partners became more interesting and alive as they too began to warm to the routine. Alternating every few minutes, we continued with “Tell me who you are.”

I enjoyed baring my soul in this very safe environment, however, the facilitator warned us: “Stay focused on experiencing and communicating the absolute truth of who you really are.” Hours went by, lunch came and went, more cleaning, more exercises. The room began to take on a palpable quality of otherworldliness. It was surreal. Day turned to night and I was exhausted. My head began to ache, but I had to keep going. “Who am I? Who am I?” over and over again. “Who am I?” became my mantra.

By bedtime, I was so sick and exhausted I thought I would die. I fell into the bunk and slept a bit. At 5 AM the morning bell rang, announcing the beginning of day two. I couldn’t believe that we could be so tortured. To the bathroom and then down to the workshop room to sit in front of another partner with bad breath saying to me, “Tell me who you are.”

I was getting angry and the pain in my head was getting worse. I thought of running away, but there was no transportation back to the city. Breakfast passed, showering, more partner work, lunch. The pain and frustration were getting worse for all of us. Many had vomit bags next to them. The pain in my head was unbearable; I felt as though it was about to explode. Finally, at about 4 PM, every cell in my body felt like it was being crushed. I couldn’t bear it anymore. My partner said, “Tell me who you are.”

I looked him straight in the eye and said with the most rage I had ever expressed in my life, “Who the hell do you think I am?” Then with great force, I screamed out, “I am me.” At that moment, I heard a huge cracking sound at the top of my head. Suddenly, I was free of all of my aches, pains and limitations. Perhaps this is how death feels.

I became a very large presence. The facilitator noticed and came rushing over, asking, “Who are you?” I replied, “I am me.” I couldn’t describe in words this all-pervasive experience of freedom and knowing, but the “me” I felt was not my body or personality. “I am God!” I said. Then I pointed to myself and said, “This is God. I am!”

The facilitator laughed heartily. I began to laugh uncontrollably and fell off my chair. I rolled around on the floor in fits of ecstasy, laughing at all of the lifelong beliefs that I was just this body and its desires, hopes and dreams. I wanted to share my joy with some of my other partners, but they just sat there looking at me as if I were insane. They remained in the same great misery that I had just come out of. I realized in that moment that I was having a deep inner experience, not anything visible except for the light that some could see emanating from my body that divine day.

For the rest of that day and night, I was bathed in light and felt love toward everyone and everything. All the things that I had hated the day before were now luminous and beautiful. I

spent three hours weeping as I looked at my hand and arm. I was awestruck at the miracle of the body that I lived in. I felt great reverence for the power that lay behind this magnificent creation, even though I now knew that I was that power. I was experiencing the divine union of my body and soul. Nothing has ever come close to the supreme joy of that state. Every person who sat before me was God. And by the end of the weekend, I knew that I would never be the same again.

When I arrived home, my husband was happy to see me and I still had a job on Monday, at least for a while. Each person I interacted with at work felt divine. Looking deeply into their eyes, I felt tremendous compassion for them as they shared their problems with me. I knew then that God knows everything about us and has infinite patience.

But the most unexpected and shocking change was that I began to menstruate after five years. My doctor was curious and concerned and ordered some tests. A few days later, he called and told me that my uterus was completely whole and perfectly healthy. I knew that a miracle had taken place.

© 2008 Devrah Laval

Vancouver-based Devrah Laval is author of *The Magic Doorway into the Divine*. She has been a spiritual counselor and has facilitated numerous groups and workshops. www.themagicdoorway.com

