Anatomy of a Witch

a Map to the Magical Body

Laura Tempest Zakroff

author of *WEAVE THE LIMINAL*

Foreword by Christopher Penczak

The Ecstasy of Dance

Dance is a topic that makes a lot of people uncomfortable. Most of us danced easily as children—as well as painted, sang, and explored ourselves freely. Then we learned to feel shame, to be self-conscious of ourselves and concerned with being ridiculed because we had expressed and essentially exposed ourselves. When we let those feelings and ideas overpower us, we lose our ability to find joy and freedom in dance.

Whether we find dance acceptable or not tends to have much to do with our upbringing and larger culture. The majority of disconnection from dance likely spawned from the numerous religious sects that have considered dance sinful. All too often in these doctrines, we find the body is scorned and beaten as a means to subject people and control them. When society restricts the body, our power and spirit become limited and bound. When the body is free, the spirit is empowered and we are reminded of our connection with the world around us. Dance doesn't separate us from the divine, it connects us.

I love how Maria-Gabriele Wosien describes dance as ritual: "The dance is total surrender. In this way, the body, in the whole range of its experience, is the instrument for the transcendent power, and this power is encountered in the dance directly, instantly and without intermediaries."[20]

Even if you have trouble connecting dance to the divine, consider the basic mechanics of movement. As we age, the less we move as adults, the more difficult we find our bodies to be. There's that old adage "move it or lose it." We don't have to be doing aerobics or running a mile daily to get our bodies moving. Throughout the day you should be getting away from your desk or current position to shake things up a bit. It could be fun and refreshing to give yourself a dance break, midday or when you get home. You'll find your mood lightened and perspective shifted enough to help you focus.

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Finding True Self-Expression with Nature's Elements

If we only say what others want to hear, we lose connection to our thoughts and feelings.

GABRIELA BLANDY

MAR 06, 2024

> *“Nature holds us in the way we might have lacked as children when we became afraid of expressing ourselves. It doesn’t tell us off, it sings to us, it bathes us in sunlight so our truth can germinate.”*

For some years, I’ve been exploring my relationship to the wind as part of my Shamanic practice. There was a time when a particularly gusty day would provoke a fierce mania within me, and I’d want to stomp or run in circles. Out walking – especially if exposed on a hilltop – I’d feel the need to scream if a strong gale pounded at me.

Back then, I shoved these reactions down.

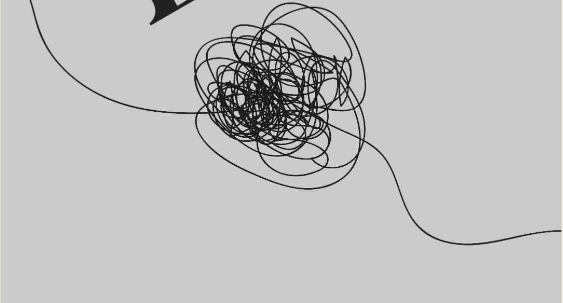
I held back from yelling. I resisted pounding my feet.

I certainly didn't fling my backpack to the ground and flail my arms and howl.

And then, one day, I did!

I gave in to these inner urges and ended up lying on my back, wailing, feet stamping on the earth.

It felt incredible as I surrendered to the way nature's 'voice' had stirred up my own self-expression. I burst through a membrane that had kept me sealed for a long time: I was no longer behaving according to unnatural conventions, I was fully collaborating with nature and *my* nature.



Have you ever found yourself struggling to express your thoughts or feelings, torn between enticing creative urges and the fear of rejection if you were to go all in on them? And have you dismissed this struggle as simply the way things are, or the way YOU are?

It's a common experience – wanting to reveal something and then sensing a growing discomfort at the thought of doing so. We might put this down to a lack of confidence, or decide it’s because people don’t or won’t understand, but where does that leave us?

It leaves us in the same place as a seed who supresses its urges to grow – unfulfilled, ungerminated, unaware of the true shape and magnitude of ourselves.

Nature's elements can help nurse our inner desires, enabling us to sprout through the membranes that keep us in a seedlike form so our true creative potential can grow tall.

For many, self-expression is difficult. Having spent so long saying only what others want to hear, we can lose connection to our own thoughts.

If, for much of our life, feelings weren’t welcomed – perhaps even sneered at – we become numb to the small, vital flutters within.

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines self-expression as ‘saying or showing one’s thoughts or feelings’, but then gives the following example: he has a hard time expressing himself.

It’s an uncanny illustration of the relationship we have with self-expression; that something instinctive and natural, has become distorted.

I’d like to see us evolve to a place where we’re able to let our true thoughts and emotions flow with awareness and without inhibition, much in the way the wind flows freely and creates sound as it moves.

TRUE Self-Expression

Through my work as a coach, I’ve come to understand we can either express our truth, or our trauma.

There’s no ‘right or wrong’ here – the wind can both crackle through a pile of dried leaves, as well as bring a tree crashing to the ground. It’s more about becoming *aware*. For example, can you tell when you’re venting pent up emotion, which is the result of an upbringing that left you unable to reveal your feelings, so they can only emerge explosively after weeks of trying to contain them?

Nature is a model for how we can find our way back to true self-expression.

She teaches us how natural her sounds are: your own emotions can be as genuine as birdsong; a sigh released on an exhale is as pure as the wind giving voice to leafy boughs.

Chirping, splashing, plipping, plopping.

Creaking, cracking, barking, growling.

Rumbling thunder, gushing rivers, fizzling fires, and shrieking hyenas.

The more we LISTEN to nature's artless, relaxed, innate voice, the more we learn to relate to our own sounds of expression.

Nature's elements can also help repair the traumas that impair our self-expression. These are the upsetting shocks we experienced as children when we were told to be quiet, not cry, stop being selfish, grow up, shut up, and more. All of which cause us to lock the seed of our true self in a drawer.

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Our healing journey to true self-expression starts with the earth

Unless we're grounded, we have nothing to contain or hold our feelings for long enough that we can witness and then communicate them. Instead, we detect something, but not enough to give it words, and so our self-expression is muddled, confused.

In such muddled self-expression, I might sense a person who learnt to fear their emotions or ideas. Fear is very much connected to our relationship with the earth because without physical containment, we feel afraid, exposed, vulnerable, unprotected.

In last month’s workshop, I referred to our inner earth as a bowl in our pelvis that holds the waters of our emotions. Earthed, we ARE a container. This gives us the ability to hold our experiences and then journey through them to truth.

When I explore this with clients, we often discover their body feels uncomfortable, or uneasy at the thought of expressing something. They might say they’re nervous about offending a loved one and notice how their body tenses as they imagine revealing certain opinions to them.

In the face of uncomfortable physical sensations, we desperately seek to make the body feel calm once more. This can lead us to shift our attention ‘out there’ because we’ve learnt that pleasing or appeasing others removes our discomfort. But it also means we remain a seed, forever sacrificing our growth into magnificence.

The uneasy feeling comes from our nervous system moving into a state of fight or flight. For many of us, sitting down to write can trigger this state.

We have an idea but, as we imagine expressing it, we feel stressed because the outcome is scary, we might get it wrong, we could be rejected, people will judge us. Because of this, our nervous system sends signals to our brain, which then releases hormones like adrenaline. Our heart beats faster, our muscles tense up, and we become more alert. This is our body's way of helping us survive the ‘tough situation’ of our thoughts!

This is why writing, or expressing ourselves, can suddenly feel like something we don’t want to do. Instead, we click open a web browser, grab our phone, head to the kitchen for a snack. We’re literally running from the threat, using up the adrenaline pumping into our body, trying to find a way to soothe the way we feel.

Walking in nature can sooth in a way that’s not only more beneficial than scrolling, but also allows for long term healing. As we walk, we employ the excess adrenaline in a healthy way, and our nervous system calms as it attunes to the peaceful atmosphere of the natural world around us.

Nature holds us in the way we might have lacked as children when we became afraid of expressing ourselves. It doesn't tell us off, it sings to us, it coaxes us out of that drawer, bathing us in sunlight so our truth can germinate.

Nature also helps to realign our elements within – earth, water, fire, air, sound, light, and ether – so that we're connected to what we want to express.

Now, we're relating to the earth within us – that bowl – and able to hold the waters of our feelings. Our inner fire, centred at our solar plexus, can warm those waters to the point they create steam. Air is now moving through us, which is connected to our heart and therefore our ability to give and to receive. This opens our heart, teaches us the balance of making an offering and then being still to receive. The air flows and powers our voice so that we make a sound that’s utterly natural to us.

We heal the emotional wound of being told the sound we’re making is not appropriate, not wanted, not right, because when we’re relating to the elements within us, we experience how the expression of our true self is the most exquisitely natural thing there is.

You can rewatch last month's workshop (where we explored all seven elements) using the links in my offerings section. This month, we're going to be diving into the first element of earth in detail, which you can find out more about below.

As always, wishing you creative contentment.

Gabriela, tree goddess

Thank you for reading Wild Muse. This post is public so feel free to share it.

Share

OFFERINGS

1. Watch my recent interview with Breathwork Facilitator Pablo Castro where we dive into self-expression and the power of warm water breathwork to heal the wounds that are

impacting our creativity.

2. Join this month’s Journaling, Breathwork and Nature Healing Workshop. This month we'll be exploring the element of Earth. When we're balanced in this element, relating to the Earth within us, we're able to trust and feel safe. We enjoy the relationship we have with our body, and feel energised, healthy and strong.
    - If you subscribed to the community this month you should have received your discount code for a **free spot** in your welcome email.
    - Regular members can grab 20% off with the

code **Wild01** at checkout.

3. Watch the recording of last month's workshop. (You'll want to set aside 90 minutes to complete both parts.)
   - Watch PART ONE:
     In the first part of this session we set our intention and explore breathwork practices and journaling prompts connected to the elements of earth, water, fire, air, sound, light and ether.
   - Watch PART TWO:
     In this section of the workshop, we dive deeper into Nature Healing bringing

visualisation into the practice as we explore all seven elements.

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Spiritual Awakening Process

PREPARING FOR AWAKENING

Finding Your Voice

BY JIM TOLLES - NOVEMBER 4, 2010 - 7 MINS READ

It’s time to talk about finding your voice. Even if you’re mute, we live in an amazing world with so many ways for self-expression that vocalization isn’t totally necessary. Especially at the beginning of cultivating spirituality in your life, finding your voice means finding a way to express yourself that feels true to who you are. At later points, we'll talk about moving out of the comfort zone to expand your voice as well as all other aspects of yourself. For now, let's look at some simple forms of expression.

Journaling

"Oh, God. Not with the journaling thing again!" I know. I'm kind of a broken record on this topic. I've already talked about it as one of the top spiritual tools to use. It really is great though. When you write for yourself, the only person who ever has to see it is you. You can make all the grammatical mistakes you want. You can say the wildest, craziest things you want. You can say the most mean spirited and awful things about anyone. It’s all fair game. And that’s important. To really look at yourself and to start to be able to express yourself, you need a place in life where you can put all the cards on the table. If you have a super amazing friend who can hear everything down to your deepest darkest secrets, then that’s great. But even with super amazing friends, there always seems to be that one thing that we don’t want to admit even to them. So for now, I really recommend buying a notepad and a pack of Bic pens and let things flow. (Obviously writing on the computer is fine too. Just get started!)

Talking

Of course, talking about your feelings and your experiences is important. Western culture is pretty verbal. We talk all the time. If you're someone who always has to be talking, however, it's probably time to talk less. Start to pay attention to what you're saying and how much you're repeating the same thing over and over. A lot of times, we don't really say that much, and a lot of people talk because they're afraid of silence. If this is you, you probably would benefit from a silent meditation retreat. The retreat is helpful to break your cycle of perpetual gabbing. It then can help you pay attention to the perpetual gabbing and storytelling that's going on inside you.

If you aren't much of a talker, then opening up more will really help you. Find a close friend or a spiritual community where you can start to talk. Remember, you don't have to be perfect. Just let the words start to find their way out. You'll find a lot of blocks and issues to your voice by what topics you suddenly pull back from talking about. It will become a roadmap to where your spiritual growth will go. Each block is like a dam in front of the river of energy in you. In my own experiences, clearing out a lot of blockages has given me so much confidence in my voice. And especially in regards to the spiritual path, talk about your spiritual experiences. That helps to manifest your higher knowledge and to bring it more fully into your being.

Singing and Chanting

Maybe your words don't come readily to you, so use someone else's. Church choirs, kirtan chanting, and all kinds of other toning and sound-making are wonderful ways to open up your voice. Find a group that you like and let 'er rip.

Seriously.

You don't have to be any good. If you've ever sung hymnals at a church, you know how bad some people are at singing. So don't join the choir if you're nervous. You can also stand in the back row, pick up a hymnal book, and blare it out. Clear it all out. You probably won't be the worst one singing, and even if you are, you're coming with the intent to open your voice. If a church is nothing else spiritual for you, let it be a place where you practice opening your voice. God will understand what you're doing.

Spiritual Reading

Continuing on the theme of using someone else's words, find a spiritual text you like, and read it out loud. Yes. The work to finding your voice can be that simple. My words have often been inspired when I read (not necessarily out loud) other people with some amazing message or something that resonates with me. I could try to list all the great spiritual writers and poets, but Hafiz and Rumi are the too that immediately come to mind. Khalil Gibran is another good one. Herman Hesse’s book Siddhartha has also sorts of wisdom although it isn’t so poetic.

But it doesn’t mean. The poetry of the soul doesn’t need a particular rhyme or rhythm, and in this instance, it’s simply a means to opening your voice and getting used to that wonderful feel of spiritual truth coming from you. See what really resonates, and then let yourself write or talk about that topic.

Paint, Sculpt, Dance, Explore

If you feel really blocked around words, painting, sculpting, dancing, and other creative activities can help you find a non-verbal level of expression. I consider these helpers to start to allow you to express yourself. Especially if there’s trauma or abuse for which you don’t have words, creative activities can allow your body and your imagination to explore what’s happened and begin to surface the pain. If you simply haven’t ever explored your voice, this type of creativity can be the start of energizing your voice, but you will need to put it into words at some point.

Speaking is an important part of embodying the spiritual truth, and you’ll probably run up against all kinds of excuses about why you can’t talk or why you shouldn’t talk. Pain speaks in many ways, so of which will attempt to sound quite rational. As you continue to deepen your spiritual awareness, you will need to get better and better at discerning these inner excuses and ego games. This in turn will likely mean you feel that same deep initial insecurity as you open up your voice further. Don't worry. If you've already done it once, you can do it again.

Share It All With the World...Later

Most of this blog and the series I'm working through is about building a spiritual foundation. This is the stage where you may be in the space of a seedling. Strong protective walls let you start to develop these fragile shoots, find what works, and develop your deeper core that's rooted in love, strength, and faith. A part of you will start to want to share your findings with the whole world. Wait. Let it all develop. There is a time for these things. There is a time to go on a speaking tour or to start a public blog. During the initial and transitory parts of spiritual path building and/or spiritual awakening (if it has manifested for you), you need to keep that growing energy within you. Share your findings with close friends and a safe spiritual community, but otherwise, let this new world grow within you. In time, you will be able to shout it all from the mountaintops with confidence, ease, and kindness.

Next blog: The Art of Listening

FINDING YOUR VOICE
JIM TOLLES
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING BLOG
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING TALK
SPIRITUAL HEALING VOICE
SPIRITUAL TEACHER
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Jim Tolles

I'm a spiritual teacher who helps people find freedom from suffering.

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- 4 MINS READ

NEXT POST

The Art of Listening

- 6 MINS READ

4 Comments

crzylady

REPLY

16 YEARS AGO

silence... that's s tough one.

Ashton

REPLY

14 YEARS AGO

Funny you should advise to keep silent at times because I often feel an overwhelming sensation come over me when I share my thoughts and ideas and theories. It is a feeling of energetic power that comes with the words. It is like I KNOW these thoughts to be true, but I have difficulty expressing them. Not in a sense of me not finding the right ways of expression, but a lot of the time I'll get interrupted by a number of different situations. It is almost as if these interruptions happen because I am not yet ready to voice something so deep at that moment. I find others interject their thoughts, but completely miss the point I am trying to convey.

In writing this comment, I came to the realization that it is time to discover a new method of using my voice. I have journaled all of my life. The farther I travel on my path, the more I am learning to turn my writings from surface issues to taking those surface issues and diving deeper into them.

I had such a beautiful experience the other day. Had some music playing amd just decided to improv dance in my living room while home alone. It reminded me how much I miss being in dance class and performing again. I always viewed dance as an outlet to express my emotions amd let them go. So begins my quest of finding a community thar I can relate to. (:

Namasté

Jim Tolles ↰ REPLY

14 YEARS AGO

Thanks for sharing Ashton. See what happens when you share with others and no longer need for them to agree, disagree, or even listen. I totally agree with you about finding a spiritual community to relate to though. The deeper we go on this path, the less it matters how people do or don't respond to the words we share. However, it certainly is nice to have company and a little recognition from time to time. 🙂 Smiles to you on this beautiful day (at least it's beautiful here in CA today).

---

missyleigh13 ↰ REPLY

14 YEARS AGO

Ashton! Let's team up and start a community. It can be an online community right? I am from the South and speaking about my experiences to anyone around here would land me right in a looney bin. They just don't get it yet but I do and I know you do and we both know Jim does. I'm open to talking to anyone who needs a friend! My email is stereobzz@gmail.com

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