

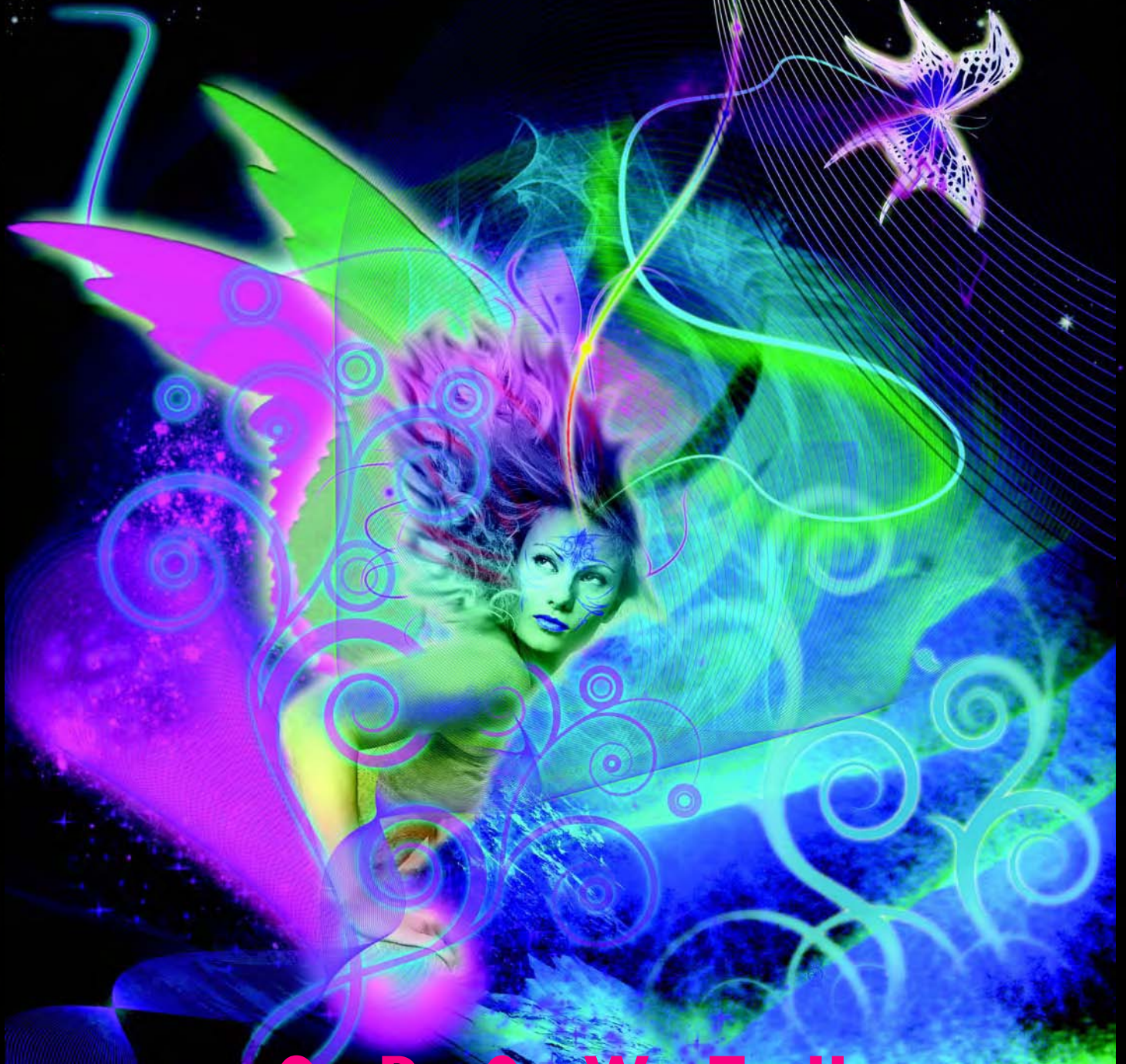
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# THE JOURNEY

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A Mind, Body and Soul Connection



## G R O W T H

Psalm Isadora at the 2010 Journey Mind, Body & Soul Expo  
Interview Inside

## The Creation and Growth of a True Tantrica



**By Rishi**

Photo: Jasper Johal

Psalm Isadora has become an inspirational yoga teacher based out of Santa Monica, California. She has found her purpose in sharing her passion of Tantra Yoga. I caught up with Psalm recently at a heavenly space in Pacific Palisades, California called the Lake Shrine. This space is one of Paramahansa Yogananda of the Self Realization Fellowships mystical gardens open to the public for meditation and peace. A Garden of Eden. What better place to learn about the spiritual genealogy and spiritual growth of a beautiful Tantra Yoga teacher?

*Rishi: Psalm let's start at the beginning, where you are from and bit about your immediate family.*

Psalm: I was born in Mendocino, in Northern California, and lived on a Christian commune called The Lords Land. I have two younger brothers. It was an interesting childhood. We had a lot of ecstatic practices. Singing, chanting, talking in tongues, rattlesnake handlers and what they called laying of hands. Using all these rituals and techniques to get people worked up into an altered state to connect to what they were calling the Holy Spirit. People came from all over the world for tent revival meetings. There was a lot of freedom with those things, yet with that freedom there comes a lot of dogma...It was like a crazy train, but there was this common belief in Jesus being the one and only path to the Father. Not to stray from that path. Stay away from anything that would tempt you. Even yoga or Eastern philosophies. Yoga was considered demonic because with meditation you would empty your mind and evil spirits would come to fill the emptiness.

**'The world looked one way – like it was perfect - and then I realized almost everything had been a lie.'**

So it was interesting growing up with that. I did feel a deep connection to God. Dreaming at night about Jesus and Angels. Feeling very protected and safe because of them. I would call Jesus my boyfriend.

*Rishi: Did the families all live together?*

Psalm: Single women lived in a large building together as did single men. Families had their own separate cabins. We had no indoor plumbing or electricity. We cooked on a wood burning stove. I wore long dresses and a bonnet. A bit different then most kids growing up in California in the 1980s. The area was beautiful. It was close to the coast. The water was very turbulent, crashing into the coastline. Not like Southern California where you have a lot of beaches with people playing volleyball and surfing. It was majestic and fear inspiring. Even though it was incredibly beautiful, it's not containable, it clearly has its own purpose and power.

*Rishi: Sounds like the ocean fit the energy of the commune, very wild.*

Psalm: Exactly.

*Rishi: How long were you at the commune?*

Psalm: Until I was 10. I was told at the time we were leaving because my parents wanted to open a restaurant. I found out differently two years later when my parents separated and my mother told me we were forced to leave because my father had been sexually abusing children.

*Rishi: How did you react?*

Psalm: I was shocked. The world looked one way – like it was perfect – and then I realized almost everything had been a lie. I was stressed out, yet my mother was even more so. It brought up a lot of anger in my mother and she became physically abusive to me and my younger brothers. I tried to keep it together to help take care of my brothers. Hiding my pain. But after a few years it caught up to me. I didn't care anymore. At 15 I started to act out – drinking, using drugs and all the craziness that goes with it.

*Rishi: What about your relationship with your father?*

Psalm: I never talked to him about it. I was afraid. There was this code of silence because everyone was afraid of what would happen if he went to prison for what he did. He was working with my mom so we saw him a lot. They would get in a fight occasionally and it would be brought up in anger. Them shouting at each other. But other than that it was never talked about. The few times I tried to, it was followed by huge fits of anger and beatings from my mother. No one ever went to therapy. It was like the purple elephant in the middle of the living room that was never talked about.

**'I broke up with Jesus and gave up on the God I was taught about. I wasn't afraid I would go to hell anymore. I was pretty much in it.'**

*Rishi: So when you were about 15 you started rebelling?*

Psalm: I didn't talk to anyone about what was going on inside me, the confusion. I started changing how I dressed, wearing short shorts and tank tops to show off my boobs. I went from being this nerdy introvert to wanting attention in unhealthy ways. The drinking and drugs became a coping mechanism for me, a way to hide my pain. I kept getting in trouble and I was put in a boarding school.

*Rishi: So when you were acting out, did you break up with Jesus?*

Psalm: I don't think I broke up with Jesus for awhile. I was very angry with God but I think I was afraid of going to hell. I would pray to get out of trouble. Kind of like how you don't find an atheist in a fox hole. In my early 20s, I let go of my beliefs of Jesus and God. I made a decision to put it all down and risk going to hell until I had a God I understood. I wanted a God I could love because it felt good and I wanted



to, rather than because I was afraid of him. I don't even know how to describe it. It was like a very invisible movement inside of myself. I let go of the insurance policy.

*Rishi: Let's go back to the boarding school. How long were you there?*

Psalm: I was there for about a year and a half and then ran away with a boyfriend. We went back to the town he was from in Southern California. We slept in people's garages. We tried to get by like that for a while. I got pregnant. Actually, I wanted to, because I wanted to feel love. I thought a child would give me that feeling. My boyfriend and I were very young and not ready for a family. After my son was born I went back to my mom's, because that was my best option at the time.

*Rishi: Did you stop acting out?*

Psalm: For a couple of years. Then I started up again. I guess you could say this is where I went into a path of deconstruction. I broke up with Jesus and gave up on the God I was taught about. I wasn't afraid I would go to hell anymore. I was pretty much in it. I had thoughts of suicide and having my son was the only thing that kept me alive. I was not happy in a world with so much pain and suffering. He gave me a reason for living.

**'I didn't care anymore. I let go of all the rules. To the point where I had let go of God, as I knew God. By that time I was in this kind of Godless world. Yet I was lonely for that feeling of God.'**

*Rishi: Was there a time that you thought maybe it would help to get therapy for yourself?*

Psalm: I got to the point where I couldn't sleep at night. I was exhausted during the day, trying to take care of my son. I was pretty messed up. Finally, I had a suicide episode and came to a place that maybe he would be better off with-

out me. I almost didn't make it through the night. I felt like this circle of pain. It was like there was my father's pain and my mother's pain and they were both probably abused. Then there was my pain from abuse and I was afraid of passing it on to my son. It prompted me to go to the Mental Health Department and seek help. They diagnosed me bi-polar and started me on medication. That worked for me at the time. I thought, "Fine tell me I have some brain malfunction and give me some pills and it will make it all better." The problem was my underlying issues were so deep that the medication was like a dirty Band-Aid over an open wound. I wasn't going to heal from the medication. I'm not saying nobody should take medication, but for me the pills weren't going to fix it. The pills numbed me out during the day and I was taking sleeping pills at night because I still couldn't sleep. Being numbed out and so confused I couldn't even make a living. We were staying at friends' houses, not really having a place of our own. I figured I could do speed and it would give me energy to function. You know, they're medicating me and I'll medicate me. So I took that walk for a while.

*Rishi: How did that change?*

Psalm: A few years before all that I was having some back issues and a friend told me about yoga possibly being

good for it. I went to a class and didn't really like it. But it always stuck with me. I would occasionally think maybe I should go to another class but always came up with excuses not to. I went to one yoga class and just felt like crying the whole time. It was like I was too raw to even be in the room with people. So I was also embarrassed to go back. Yet there was something that kept bringing it into my mind.

This was about eight years ago. Then I hit a bottom and I realized nobody or nothing was going to change my life but me. I was caught up in self destructive behavior. I ended up in a hospital emergency room. I thought my life was screwed up again because of how I was raised and abused. That I never had a chance. My parents were to blame.

Then I had a moment of clarity. I realized as long as I continued with that thought process I would continue to lead that life. I had to think differently. It was like the thought came for me to do one step at a time. And one of those steps was to do yoga every day. I had no money, but yoga was something I could do because there was a donation-only studio in Santa Monica. At first I was embarrassed about going and not having money to donate, but I got real clear right away that my life was going to get better by going.

*Psalm Isadora...Continued on page 44*



Photo: Amir Magal

**'Tantra is understanding that life works on a principle of opposites and the opposites create the oneness and the oneness creates opposites. You are going to expand and contract and the contraction feels uncomfortable.'**

**Psalm Isadora..Continued from page 10**

*Rishi: Earlier you shared that you were instructed at a very young age to stay away from yoga and meditation. Did you ever feel guilty and think you should go back to Church or Jesus?*

Psalm: No. I had let all that go. I didn't care anymore. I let go of all the rules – to the point where I had let go of God as I knew God. By that time I was in this kind of Godless world. Yet I was lonely for that feeling of God.

It was interesting, because when I first started practicing yoga every day, I had these strong feelings of Jesus being with me just like when I was younger. I was safe and had a feeling of ecstasy. I would remember scripture. At first I resisted it because I thought this isn't good because of all the hypocrisy that had surrounded it. You know the Bible was used to beat me down. I was thinking, "This isn't good and I have to stop thinking these thoughts." Then I realized that it was OK to feel good – like I could take those scriptures and the Bible the way I wanted to. Take what worked for me and leave the rest. Let go of the parts that were used to hurt me and keep and stay with the beauty. Because the beauty was very real.

*Rishi: So when did you decide you wanted to teach?*

Psalm: Right away. I was suffering from chronic fatigue and depression and my body was so messed up from all the drugs, so there were some days I couldn't make it to class. The connection between my body and my spirit was really disjointed. I would just lie in bed all day and think about getting to the next class. I just knew it was my path.

*Rishi: When did you get off the drugs?*

Psalm: I got off the meds and street drugs after about a year. In that year I just tapered off until I was off them all together. As I increased my practice I was able to decrease my reliance on drugs. Remember though, this is how it worked for me. I am not advocating it will work that way for anyone else.

*Rishi: Did you do anything besides the physical practice? Any pranayama (breath work) or meditation?*

Psalm: For me, they were never separate. I took primarily power yoga classes and we were instructed to breathe deeply and I was having very transcendental experiences. I felt a portal opened to God. Not that every day was this total revelation, but every day I felt a connection to goodness and God. I found life was worth living.

*Rishi: Did you go back to work?*

Psalm: I actually got married and was able to devote time to my practice and my son. My husband, at the time, supported what I was doing. I knew I was going to teach and I viewed going to classes as a part of the process. I took to it with the zealotry of a missionary. Yoga saved my life and it makes the world a better place and I was going to share it.

*Rishi: When did you start teaching?*

Psalm: I took my first teacher's training after about a year. Even before I was done with the training I was able to teach at-risk youth. I was so ecstatic to get that teaching job; I went running in jumping up and down to tell the per-

son I was taking the training from. He just sat there and smiled and let me bliss out.

*Rishi: Was it difficult to teach at-risk youth? A lot of them come from a place of abuse. Did it bring some of your stuff back up?*

Psalm: Not really. I was so excited about teaching and sharing the practice. It took several years of teaching those types of classes and not until I went to India that I kind of was taken apart and deconstructed again. You have to build up some layers of stability before you can go deeper. Teaching gave me those layers. Plus I ended up doing another teachers training at a studio I was taking classes at. The studio owner told me he appreciated my dedication to my practice and said he would take me on as a student for teacher's training. It wasn't a conventional teacher's training. I did everything from answering the phones to scrubbing the toilets; I made the fliers. He gave me classes to teach and I could go to him one-on-one afterwards and ask questions on how to deal with certain aspects of teaching. I hung on his every word. He started giving me private classes for yoga therapy to teach. I was there every day for almost a year.

*Rishi: When did you go to India the first time?*

Psalm: I went there the first time about five years ago. It was almost a mystical experience. I again couldn't sleep at night so I would stay up and read, look things up and meditate. The books I was reading and the research I was doing made it very clear it was important to have a Guru, that there was a grace that comes from that relationship. Before that I thought I didn't need it because I had God. But it woke up a longing and yearning inside me that I wanted to have that relationship. One day I was in the studio and a woman talked about a man named Amritananda in India and what he was teaching. She had just come back from being with him. I knew he was my Guru because he was willing to teach [not just] a woman ... [but] a lesbian.

That told me he was open and not caught up in all the patriarchal stuff that goes on. So I wrote him e-mails and never got a response. And then again, mystically, I met someone who was a student of his that didn't teach publicly. I started studying with him and he made me go through a bunch of tests. First he only gave me breathing exercises and I had to do that for two months. And then he gave me a mantra for months. He wanted to see if I would stick with it. After six months he asked if I wanted to learn Tantra.

*Rishi: What is Tantra?*

Psalm: We could be here for two lifetimes and not be able to explain it. Tantra is non-linear, so it doesn't lend itself to easy explanation. The form of Tantra I was called to is more of an ancient form of Goddess worship. To see God in the more feminine aspect, which is more about unconditional love. That life is not to avoid feeling good or to enjoy all aspects. That life is not about guilt, shame and repression. But we are here for pleasure. And feeling pleasure is being in a more God-like state.

*Rishi: Such as sex?*

Psalm: Yes, sex is a part of it. When sex is repressed it

tends to be acted out in terrible and abusive ways. I look at what happened with my father at the Christian commune where there was a certain idea of proper sexuality being very strict and dogmatic. It was repressed and he acted out. Look at the priests that are repressed and the horrific stories that are coming out about them. When I got to India and discovered Tantra I found a way to be more awake in a relationship with sexual energy. Not to deny and have it come up in destructive ways. To recognize and unfold it into a spiritual practice. I started learning the practice from him, but was still yearning to go to meet this man in India. My heart physically hurting, wanting to go. So I went without ever getting any response from him.

*Rishi: You went to India to answer the calling of your heart. What happened?*

Psalm: The first time I saw my teacher I went to his ashram in the middle of the jungle. He was sitting on a bench surrounded by about five or six people and even from a distance I knew it was right. There was no big scene around him. None of the gold umbrellas or flower petals around his bench. Just a teacher with his students sharing. I sat down and felt the energy. I felt the love. I knew I wanted to be like him. On that first trip there he initiated me into some of the practices. He directed me to bring them back to the States and teach.

*Rishi: Is he your one and only?*

Psalm: He is my heart. I don't know how to explain it otherwise. I think a lot of people who don't have Gurus believe there is something dis-empowering about it. For me, there is something incredibly special and empowering about

having this relationship with this living person. So in a way he is my one and only. He is a person, who when I spend time with him I feel my heart opening to everyone.

*Rishi: Did you feel that way with Jesus?*

Psalm: Jesus was a feeling. More esoteric. I could never see what Jesus was doing. The great thing about having my living Guru I can see him get tired and grumpy, take a nap and then feel better. I see that it's OK to be human. With Jesus I had this idea that he was perfect and I always fell short of that. I wasn't as loving or compassionate as Jesus. So I would always beat myself up.

With Sri Amritananda teachings I have found it is OK to be human and part of the human condition is to sometimes give up everything and begin again. Tantra is understanding that life works on a principle of opposites and the opposites create the oneness and the oneness creates opposites. You are going to expand and contract and the contraction feels uncomfortable. Just get more comfortable with the times that are uncomfortable. It's OK. It's just part of the growth process of being alive and living in a circle of birth and death.

*Rishi: Thank you Psalm.*

Psalm: Thank you.

*Psalm Isadora will be speaking at the 2010 Journey Mind, Body & Soul Expo at Lakeland Community College September 10, 11 & 12. Visit [www.thejourneymag.com](http://www.thejourneymag.com).*



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