

Waking Up Together

Global Transformation and Feminine Wisdom

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Essays from Rabia

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The Feminine Principle

We are tumbling through a time of chaotic, disorienting change. Even our most powerful decision makers seem unable to turn our global civilization from its self-destructive course.

I believe these challenging times carry a special call to women. Of course, solutions require women and men working together, but the great turning we are experiencing is a movement toward feminine values. We are witnessing the endgame of a patriarchal value system that has held sway for more than 5,000 years, a period of dominance, control, aggression, hierarchy, and centralization.

It is vital to remember that the patriarchy is not the same as the masculine. The Masculine, like the Feminine, can be understood as a cosmic principle. The patriarchy on the other hand has become a kind of hyper –masculinity that is detrimental to both women and men.

The patriarchy is an historical movement that many think began as humans began to settle and accumulate wealth. In an effort to control this wealth and the ability to pass it off to his offspring, males aggressively moved to the forefront of the culture extending violence and control over treasure, children and fertile women.

Most women, and some men, want to see a new balance of masculine and feminine capacities and power. Women have wanted this for a long time, and many have tried repeatedly throughout history to bring about such an integration. However the resistance from patriarchal institutions such as religion, education, politics and government has, until now, been overwhelming and often brutal.

Today we have a new scientific and spiritual paradigm to support this integration. And even men are calling for women to “step up”. However, in my own experience of “stepping up” for almost a half century, I found that the men in control might be willing to invite a woman to occupy a corner office, but they were rarely prepared for her to bring along behavior and values aligned with the Feminine Principle. The same is true for those men who try to lead by greater consensus, or spend more of their time listening rather than acting quickly. They are not easily recognized as strong leaders. “Men act, women listen”, is a common belief even today.

What is it about the Feminine that is so essential to our collective future at this moment in history, and at the same time feels so threatening to so many boys and men?

Scores of books have been written pointing to the distinctive capacities women developed during humankind's evolutionary history with our unique birthing, child care and sociability.

New writings are drawing attention to how similar this historical women's wisdom is to the talents now sought by corporate recruiters in hiring global leaders to guide today's organizations into an unpredictable, interconnected, future.

The skills needed by today's leaders need to draw from the deep resources of Feminine wisdom and the open, uniting power of the Receptive. And in most cases these resources are still found more easily in women, than in men.

Importance of relationship

For example, women, more easily than men, believe that any activity is more satisfying when it takes place in the context of relationship to other human beings – and even more so when it leads to the enhancement of others. Women know this experience in a way that men do not.

Perhaps the most important scientific “discovery” of the last century is that everything is relationship; nothing is an isolated object. If we want to influence an organization we must understand and participate in the relationships that comprise it. To do this we must, first, quickly notice the relationships between and among people and events. Women are encouraged to do this through the following feminine capacities.

Active receptivity

Women's attributes are often defined as “passive”. Men are wary of such a descriptor, for fear it makes them appear weak. For example, listening to another, taking in, receiving, or accepting from another, are listed by men as passive traits. However, they all generate a response, for one never merely passively receives; one also responds verbally or silently, externally or internally. Thus the Receptive plays its own activating role in co-creating the future action.

Men often feel more pressured to cut short their receptiveness and to rush to put forward an answer or an action. In doing so they often betray the fact that they have not heard much of what the other was communicating. Women, on the other hand, have often heard much more than was overtly stated because of their complex processing of personal information. They are more likely to be attuned to the larger dynamic in play.

Constant change

The very essence of life is growth and change – physical, mental and psychic. Women are more in touch with change, and thus more attuned to facilitating it in a positive way. Women, as family caretakers from early on, are literally forced to keep changing if they are to respond to the alternating demands of those in their care. Thus, in an immediate and day-to-day way, women live change.

Men on the other hand have been taught to resist change. From the earliest age, men are taught to live up to the highest values of their society, which are presumed not to change; they are taught to maintain the status quo.

Serving the Whole

In male-dominated cultures, serving others is a lowest-level priority. In fact, psychoanalytic data suggests that men's lives are organized against such a principle. Yet serving others is the principle around which women's lives are organized. There is a great deal of evidence to support the fact that women have a much greater and more refined ability to sense and respond to other's needs, and to do so with ease.

Women are geared to first recognize others needs, and to believe strongly that they can be served. Women can respond to other's needs without regarding it as a distraction from their own sense of identity.

This is not to say that men do not serve others. They do so, and in many ways. However, the need to serve others, except perhaps as warriors, is not central to a man's self image, and thus can be set aside when other more appealing definitions of leadership dictate.

The above are only four of the numerous ways the differences between men and women might play out in addressing challenges and problems in a family, community, country or global organization.

The Feminine Principle is not just an idea or a symbol. It refers to something real and eternal in the Cosmos, and of something of utmost practicality today.

While women may be more historically hardwired for these Feminine capacities, evidence shows that they can be learned by boys and men if they are promoted and valued by the family, the school and the larger society.

We recognize now, however, that introducing Feminine receptivity as a priority in the lives of girls and boys is not as easy as we may have thought in the 70's. While 50 years ago we would have been surprised and pleased to see a police woman, a female head of a governmental agency or a women president of a Fortune 500 business, these important visible changes in women's status hide a continuing sad secret.

If you talk, in confidence, to almost any woman in a job once held exclusively by men, she will share how much of herself she cannot bring into the workplace, even today. We are more willing than we once were to welcome the female body into a position of power, but the Feminine is still often checked at the door.

I recently was talking with a top business woman about this situation. She put down her glass and smiling said " You have no idea how often I know intuitively what needs to happen for my team to reach our goal. But I have to go home and write out a long boring rational linear set of arguments before my boss is even able to hear my idea".

The abilities to relate, to listen, to change and to hold the well-being of the larger whole are not rocket science, but they are rarely taught or reinforced in our culture. And they are sorely needed if we are to find a new order out of the violence and disorder we have created.

