

♀ The Gift of the Sacred Feminine ♀

**A reflection on the occasion of the
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Feminine and masculine principles are actually indivisible in each of us.

The interaction of these two forces makes up life as we know it and we all carry both of these energies in our bodies. Generally, a female body has more feminine energy and a male body more masculine energy, but this is not always the case and varies from person to person. However, if these masculine and feminine energies are not balanced - when one dominates at the expense of the other - disharmony and disease are the result.

We can find guidance on this interplay from the tantric teachings of Tibetan Buddhism, which equate the feminine principle with space and wisdom and the masculine principle with skilful action and compassion. If we are too caught up in action, we tend to lose space and our minds become small and contracted – we can no longer see things in context and our actions are out of touch with what is needed. On the other hand, if we are not focused enough and lost in space - 'spaced out' so to say - we are unable to act skilfully and cannot accomplish anything in life.

For a balanced and healthy life we need both: the wisdom and space of the feminine principle and the ability to act skilfully and compassionately of the masculine principle. If these two principles work together in harmony, they bring out the best in each other - left to their own devices, they become disconnected and blunt.

I think it is safe to say that masculine energy is dominating our societies and our planet for a very long time now. In the last 5 to 6000 years, masculine energy in the sense of activity, materiality and rational thinking has become over-valued at the expense of the more intangible attributes of the feminine principle.

We can see that in what is happening to our earth and our oceans, the steadily increasing loss of natural habitat and the incredible exploitation of our planet. We urgently need to redefine our priorities and see the links between the oppression of women and the feminine principle in general, and the oppression of nature .

Vandana Shiva, one of today's leading eco-feminists explains this very well in her latest book 'Staying Alive'. She draws a picture of a stream in a forest and says that in our society, this stream is perceived as unproductive, if it is simply there fulfilling the needs for water for families and communities, until engineers come along and tinker with that stream, damming it and using it to generate electricity.

The same is true of the forest. For many, a forest is seen as unproductive, if it is not producing something to export for dollar value. Our society has totally lost sight of the many important functions of natural ecosystems. Everything is seen in terms of resource and commerce. Actually, a forest protects groundwater, generates oxygen, provides fuel, fruit and craft materials, allows habitat for animals and above all, maintains ecological balance - all of which are crucial for our well-being and the well-being of many other species.

The sacred feminine urges us to undergo a radical revision of our unsustainable value systems, which have proved to be dysfunctional and unable to deliver their promises. Today's consumer society can't even take care of the basics: world hunger kills close to ten million lives every year and almost 60 % of the victims are children.

The feminine principle stands for connectedness and inclusion, instead of divisiveness and separation. It stands for cooperation instead of domination, and for heartfelt embodiment instead of cool aloofness. The nurturing and sustaining power of space is a subtle intelligence which makes creation possible, by being the container for it to happen. Just look at the womb of a mother, holding a baby for nine months until it is ready to be born.

These intangible attributes of the feminine principle create great power, nourishment, and magic, and it is vital not to overlook them. There is so much addiction in our world today, precisely because we have lost touch with that which truly nourishes us. The sacred feminine expresses a mother's tender love and inspires in us such qualities as kindness, caring and gentleness - precisely the qualities we have neglected and devalued because of our exclusive focus on goals of the masculine mind set.

An interesting study at UCLA has shown that generally speaking, women tend to react to stress differently than their male counterparts. Instead of the 'fight or flight' reaction of men, women have a 'tend and befriend' response, as a result of an increase in oxytocin, the maternal bonding hormone. While men become more adrenalized and aggressive, women nurture and protect biologically.

Grand gestures may be noticed by everyone, but they are not necessarily where wisdom manifests. If we honour only the grand gestures, the sky scrapers and the space ships, we over-emphasize the masculine principle, the energetic side of action and we lose sight of space. The Earth needs our full attention now. We need to work consciously with Her, instead of treating Her as separate from ourselves - as a warehouse and as a sewer.

So called 'rational' thinking turns out to be rather irrational, once we open to a larger context and see the grave implications of what we have set in motion, by ignoring our profound interdependence with the natural world and the universe at large. This point in time is an opportunity for us to realize, that we are not living on top of a planet, but that we are an integral part of Her

Can we trust the greater intelligence of this mysterious unfolding called universe? We are just one part of this process, which has been unfolding over a very long time, scientists estimate the universe is about 14 billion years old.

We need to make a mature relationship with life right now and face our feelings of fear and helplessness. As we all know from our teacher the Buddha, when we fully face difficult

emotions, the very emotions themselves will become our spiritual teacher, with the potential to make us more wise and compassionate. All we have to do is to be present and wholeheartedly say 'yes' to what is. That's a gateway – a Dhamma door.

How comfortable are we with the dark and not knowing how to respond? Can we hold that space, or do we immediately have to fill it up with activity? Holding space for transformation to occur is the strength of the feminine principle, a confidence in natural processes and in the intelligence of life itself.

My first teacher, Ajahn Buddhadasa, has often said that the laws of nature (*got dhammajat*) will take care of us, if we make an effort to cooperate, instead of working against them. The emphasis here is on the process itself rather than on the product, the 'how' rather than the 'what'. This is yet another strength of the feminine principle.

When we make the space for wisdom to manifest and follow up by acting on what we know to be true, we become truly alive. Our creativity wakes up and the unexpected happens. Crisis holds the potential to generate transformation and innovation, unleashing powerful energies and uniting people to achieve what was previously considered impossible.

We need to start small and bring our insights into our lives - by living and being them - one step at a time, acting on what we know to be true. We need to return to what is basic and simple - what we can't live without. The monastic form is a straight forward container for this, a comparatively simple life style, focused on cultivating our greatest potential.

Simplicity and cutting through complexity is also a powerful feminine quality and we need this quality now more than ever before. We urgently need to wake up to the fact, that we share this planet with 300 million species and that we need to find our appropriate place in this delicate network of life, a network of the small.

This is a humbling insight, but if we each do our little piece, we will become part of the solution. The sacred feminine principle is needed to help us regain balance. She must return in both - men and women, if we are to create a more peaceful and sustainable future.

I would like to end by sharing a 5-point-check-list drawn up by the well known American eco-philosopher Joanna Macy, to keep us all on track with this great work:

- come from gratitude
- don't fear the dark
- dare to vision
- link arms
- act your age (14 billion years)

May we all rise to the challenge with faith and confidence in our own good qualities and in the basic goodness of all that lives.