

We are Goddesses

Connecting to other women and the feminine within can be nourishing and empowering for the self and everyone around.

By Jeanne Tan

The women laughed. Their eyes shone gleefully and their whispers spoke of happy conspiracy. Eight of them were transforming Priya's (name changed) homey living room into a celebratory cave of scents and festivity.

It didn't matter that some of them were meeting each other for the first time. It also didn't matter that their ages bridged three decades. They were intent on preparing for celebration. As they worked, they wove a seamless rhythm—each performing their task. Someone lit burners scenting the room with perfumed oils and flowers. Others strew the marbled floor with petals of reds, purples, yellows and whites. Two whispered in the corner about music for the afternoon. These women had one thing in common—each was a dear friend, women who had lived, laughed and loved well. They had come together because of me—to help celebrate and mark a rite of passage, my womanhood.

Then the women turned to transforming themselves and me. They eyed and fingered colourful batik bundles, chattered on the merits of each design. One of them, a dear friend and co-worker led me into the also flowered bathroom for a cleansing and to change. Soon, we were all wrapped in sarongs and the celebration began.

We sat on the floor among the petals, lit by the dimming sun; our faces softened by candle light. The women spoke of themselves—so that others would know them and how they knew me. From their hearts each spoke of their appreciation of me, of the role I had played in their own lives and presented me not only their carefully-chosen gifts, but also the gift of wisdom. They each told me stories from the book of their lives so that I could create my own map of womanhood.

Does this sound frou-frou to you? Or does a whole bunch of women getting together like this seem silly or even frightening? **Yet an increasing number of women are finding such scenes are exactly what they need to nurture their soul. For a small movement of women, numbering in the hundreds, this is a tangible sign of an internal transformation that's taking place. Women are finding it okay to enjoy being feminine again. Apart from going to these groups, some of them are also working on themselves intensely to rediscover their feminine strength.**

The Feminine Principle

Women in Singapore have for the past two to three decades found economic and professional success by cultivating toughness and upwardly mobile go-gettedness. But more recently some women with tough veneers are melting their hard shell and rediscovering and embracing their femininity—their soft and long-buried, yet powerful core. This is what some would call their "Goddess" self—the woman beyond all the masks and the roles they play.

The feminine principle embodies qualities of nurturing, relationship building, co-operation, receptivity, acceptance, softness, flow, birth and beauty. It also governs creation and emotions. These are said to be universal ideas, primordial



images or archetypes, according to psychologist Carl Jung. Jung believed that archetypes are "as much feeling as thoughts" embedded deeply in our collective unconscious, in our psyche waiting to be brought to light. Even Asian philosophy and cosmology are full of these ideas of the feminine. These are the energies of yin in the Tao Te Ching and Shakti in Hindu thought.

Women who have embraced the feminine say they have found new acquaintance with emotions, paradoxically greater strength while being able to exercise compassion, pride in themselves as women and improved relationships. More specifically, it stilled the suicidal thoughts of Saleemah Ismail, a business development manager and brought more balance to Shirley Leow, a general manager's career and relationships and saved her marriage.

Gathering the Circle

An important part of embracing the feminine is the gathering of women to mark rites of passage, speak their innermost thoughts and fears and offer their wisdom for the benefit of other women. "I find that it is very safe to open up...I really gathered a lot of strength (from the circle) because when you are among women, you can speak out your very experience—anything you want. No one judges you, no one gives you advice on what you must and must not do. All everyone did was to ask questions to make you arrive at your own decisions," says Saleemah who has been going to a monthly circle for a year.

Some women gather circles at important junctures of their lives—like the one gathered to celebrate my passage into womanhood. When another friend was about to give birth. She did not have a regular baby shower but gathered a woman's circle. The handful of us hand made gifts to present her and her baby. We also invoked love through meditation and each spoke our blessings for her and the baby. This simple celebration then closed with song, eating and drinking.

Another friend gathered a circle in her pain. She was going through a divorce and was grieving for herself and her husband and she wanted the support of friends to plot the next stage of her life.

Yet others turn to more regular groups to get in touch with their feminine side. There's a holistic women's circle where women share and explore natural healing and the Goddess Within workshops which helps women to recover and delve into their feminine strength. Once a month, they also gather in what they call the Sacred Women's Circle.

Women's circles are considered sacred because none of the women's experiences and stories leave the circle. Safety for women to speak their minds and hearts is paramount says Saleemah.

In my own experience, the circle is seen as sacred because there is a sense of respect for all women and all life in these circles. Each and everyone is seen as part of the divine.