

The Power of Yin

Women Leading

October 22, 2008

The Power of Yin gatherings are opportunities for women to engage in **conversations that matter**. The questions that framed this meeting included:

- What is women's leadership?
- What do we do as leaders?
- What does it mean to me to be a leader?
- What does it mean to be a woman and be a leader?
- AND/OR other variations on this theme that are meaningful to those present.

Conversation flowing out of these questions coalesced around several themes:

One theme was consideration of the question, "Do you have to have followers to be a leader?" and "What does it mean 'to lead' in an interdependent world?" Those participating in the conversation appreciated Margaret Wheatley's definition of a leader as "anyone who is willing to help." Thus, as each person speaks out, and acts out of her own passion, she is leading – inspiring others, bringing unique perspectives, introducing a new energy into the world. Leading is seen as fluid, not just tied to position, and highlights the importance of valuing and speaking our own truth, nurturing our own **voice**.

The recognition that **relationship** is a strong aspect of women's leadership was a second theme. This is a natural, intuitive competence women bring to the world. However, relationship - developing, nurturing, maintaining relationships is not valued in our culture. Often dismissed as just doing "women's stuff," it is not given credit. It is not considered in economic calculations. Caregiving roles in our society are underpaid. Mothers and fathers who stay at home and care for the children are not paid, though research indicates that a fair wage for a typical stay-at-home parent would be about \$135,000 a year. At the same time, the power of conversation, a key to relationship building, is discounted in favor of power-oriented strategies for resolving differences or developing plans for the future.

The third theme wove around the notion *that "Well-behaved women seldom make history."* The reminder of this quote by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, was one of the "gifts" Glenda brought back when she visited the Women's Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls, New York, the location of the 1848 Women's Rights Convention. How many of you knew there was a Women's Hall of Fame? How many of your friends know about it? (How

many of you know about the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York?)

This led to awareness of how much progress has been made, how much has been accomplished, and yet how women have to be “**outrageous**” in their thinking, their vision and their action in order to bring their gifts. Outrageous acts do not have to be wildly flashy, though that is great, too. They simply must be the expression of what we genuinely feel, or deeply know, the courageous “why not?” or “what do you mean that can’t be done?!”

And this then, led to consideration that as women we often do not “package what we do,” and what we could do about that. “We need to invite women to recognize, uncover, bring to consciousness their leadership,” Glenda challenged us. And she shared some comments from Maria Wilson of The White House Project – that women need to be encouraged, not forever, but for now. Maria urges women to build each other’s authority.

Having just returned from teaching in Taiwan for three years, Abby spoke to us with great passion about the power of creating opportunities for each person to do what they do best, and about the importance of staying engaged through the process of seeing how those various contributions can actually fit together. She spoke from her heart, and from her own experience about the power of knowing you belong, of feeling connected, of creating a sense of community.

We concluded by naming two things we could each do to evoke women’s leadership – for self and others:

- Pay attention to what excites me
- When we introduce other women, share information about them – qualities, activities, interests – as a way of making each other visible, and helping to build one another’s authority.

Looking ahead - - - - at November’s conversation we will explore:

- How do we connect “voice” with who we are?
- How do we support each other in being visible?
- How do we help build one’s another’s authority?
- How do we “package what we do” as women leaders?
- AND/OR other variations on this theme that are meaningful to you?