

Milestones on the way to dignity

In the course of history, especially throughout the last century, women have fought for equality and recognition and experienced that no one would roll out a red carpet for them.

If, indeed, we wish our men partners to recognize our dignity, one requirement has to be met – that of discovering, nourishing and valuing this dignity within ourselves.

This means that it is important to grant dignity first to myself and to be free of any doubt concerning it. Dignity is an immanent nature, an innate character of humans, independent from any other characteristics such as age, intelligence, abilities and sex.

How does this dignity manifest itself within us?
How can we find a way of relating to our dignity?
We can accompany each other and set some milestones as orientation.

Exercise: Finding our inner 'Queen dignity'

May I ask all of you to stand, please?

Place your right hand on your chest and breathe in deeply. Whilst doing this, you can feel how you grow. Make yourself big, look straight ahead, upright. Then, calmly, breathe out again but remain as big. Repeat this exercise three times and listen to your inner being. Feel how, within you, your inner queen, your dignity, is awakening and continuing to grow. Please sit down.

This inner Queen dignity I discovered after a back-operation. All I was allowed to do for two months was to stand and walk. My corset forced me to go straight. I was only allowed to take small steps in order not to strain my back. At the same time, I had to ensure that the muscles around the lumbar region were kept tense at all times.

Why do I call the dignity within us 'Queen'? After my operation, a friend visited me and was enthusiastic about my new style of walking. She called it 'striding', like a queen.

1.) Recognize our mask

It took me a lot of willpower to do this. I was forced to remove my mask. Ordinarily, I would have made myself smaller, would rather have walked hunched-over with rounded shoulders.

Our masks in daily life have become a protective mechanism which we use to avoid being hurt. Are you aware of this mask? Are you making yourselves bigger or smaller? Are you always nice and friendly and ready to help or, rather distant? Do you pretend to have competence and self-confidence or do you pretend to be more helpless than you actually are? Do we wish to satisfy and please everybody around us? Everyone is different; however, many of our different types of behaviour are only masks and not the real me. Sometimes, our

real 'me' is hidden so deeply beneath the mask that we ourselves are not able to recognize it any more.

Today I invite you to start and to move towards the discovery of the true 'me' and thus to the encounter with your inner Queen dignity.

Surely this discovery of the true 'me' behind our mask will be a very different kind of process and experience from one individual to the other. Surely, this will not be possible to complete in just one weekend. Nonetheless, we can surely all discover something new..

2.) Becoming aware of our specific feminine qualities

Feminism has freed us in the fields of education and career. However, we have all simultaneously been thrown into an identity crisis involving tensions between holding down a job, having a career and being a woman. Women have often seen the difference between themselves and men as a hindrance. However, this also leads to a reduction in the value of the very qualities which are special in women, both in the biological field and the mental/spiritual field. These qualities must be rediscovered and consciously implemented in our lives.

Now is the time to learn to cherish ourselves, to realise that we possess special values, capabilities and talents which our society so desperately needs. The world today is seeking for feminine values and this is shown even in politics, where more and more women are elected or appointed to represent their people.

Becoming aware of our specific feminine qualities will strengthen our self-respect and understanding, that without us women, respectively feminine qualities also in men, there can be no peace and no further development in the society and the world.

I want to mention some qualities which I would consider feminine.

- sensitivity to the needs of others
- To stand up for people in need
- ability to transcend racial, religious, national barriers
- To discover the connecting aspects(in religion, philosophy, ideology)
- compassion
- mutual responsibility
- treating others as one would like to be treated
- creativity
- oneness with the source of life
- patience
- empathy
- forgiveness
- understanding the process of growth

- capacity to take another person's perspective
- ability to perceive all aspects of a situation
- a perspective which includes all the senses
- avoidance of power struggles
- the desire for efficient teamwork and networking
- looking for a common basis as foundation for decision making
- harmony balance
- courage
- perseverance

In this respect I would like to cite Chris Griscom, an American author and healer:

"The feminine tries to find and unite the common factor in all ideas, in the creative force, through discovering opportunities in resistance and finding solutions through combining various ideologies and philosophies. Which point of view provides the better way to research, create and realize the possibilities of peace? Who would be better to achieve peace and to educate the next generation to live in peace?"

As soon as we deeply engraft these and other wonderful feminine abilities in our consciousness, we will find our dignity.

3.) To be authentic

From our birth, our Queen dignity is within us, our authentic self. As a child, and as a girl, we still had relatively free access to it, until we were faced with more and more demands from our environment, pressurizing us into adjusting. We adopted any attitude that would make us appear more kind from the viewpoint of society around us. Through this, we have given up at least a part of our self.

There lies the difference between self-denial, and full dedication of our self. With self-denial, which means giving up our own personality, abandoning ourselves, we lose our own self, our inner Queen, our dignity.

With full dedication of the self, we offer from ourselves, from the inner wealth of our queen; we remain who we are and thus, the self-dedication becomes the foundation of true love. Look at Mother Teresa, whom we all know. She has fully dedicated herself to the task she wanted to accomplish and has always been a woman with a shining dignity.

To be ourselves is what makes us more amiable and endearing to others, because it is authentic. Only then will we be recognized as a fully fledged person in her own right, respected, loved and trustworthy and what can one lose by living in a genuine way? Maybe someone will reject us because we don't correspond to their concept of womanhood. However, we have ourselves, we are honest and our life becomes valuable and dignified.

3.) Let go of our fear and sally forth (start)

I invited you to sally forth to discover your true self, to meet your Queen Dignity, to let go of your mask and be authentic. That needs courage. Sometimes we don't have this courage. Sometimes we are afraid to discover new aspects in us.

Fear is an inner alarm, a mechanism to protect us from possible injuries, dangers and the unknown. Often we are trapped in an environment that seems safe but puts a limit to our development.

To be brave is not the same as not to be afraid. We are only really courageous, when we feel our fear and despite this dare to start off (sally forth) to the unknown, the new. When we leave the safe shore, we can let go of our fear and open up to our longing for life and fulfilment.

We can try to understand and clarify which fears we have to let go. Perhaps it is the fear not to live up to others liking, to disappoint them, the fear to be judged, the fear to fail, not to be loved anymore or the fear to lose control.

Instead we can open ourselves to the decision to be authentic, to the awareness of our beauty, our competence, for clear decisions, to the courage to face life and to self-confidence.

4.) Keep our sense of dignity

No matter, how others treat us, we should never feel we are a victim. Our universal, God-given dignity is much stronger than any evaluation that anyone else may give us. In general, women have the tendency to be dependant on the compliment from others. Often we observe that women or girls let themselves be misused by men, hoping to get love in return. They forgive their drunken husbands again and again, being smitten and humiliated, hoping for the situation to change for the best! Men will also be helped, when we strongly insist in our dignity and seek assistance from the family advisory service. Endurance alone is not the answer. We do not need to be ashamed; it is our right to be appreciated as a woman. We can learn to become independent of the judgement of others, by constantly affirming ourselves that we are created as God's image with eternal value. To lose control of our emotions, accusing or judging others bereaves us of our sense of dignity.

Always remind yourself of your divinity

Most of us know the words of the apostle Paul, Corinthians 3:16: "Don't you know that you are God's temple and God's spirit lives within you?"

Dignity as feature is, what in the anthropology of the Holy Scriptures of the Abraham religions is stated as the image of God, thus differentiating mankind from the rest of creation.

This means nothing else but that man is godly in his original being. Erich Fromm calls this divinity in man "primal blessing". However often we do not recognize our divine image. It seems to be buried under the rubble of our imperfection, our lack of self control and faultiness.

The great German poet Friedrich Schiller, explains: "Dignity is an expression of resistance which the independent spirit puts up against the natural drive." To live a dignified life means therefore not to let our emotions and drives of any kind freely dominate us. That means also to contain mentally my Ego, which always likes to dominate others. Thus dignified action will bring forth our godly identity. Then our temple will be well cared for and we and others feel comfortable in our temple.

We will be free and steadfast people when the condition of our soul will be independent from all external influences.

Especially for us women it is of great importance to remind ourselves again and again of our original godly identity and thereof gain strength and trust in our interpersonal relationships, our being and our doing in this world.

Our life is a work of art

Have you experienced situations when you reach the limit? Exhaustion, stress, sleeplessness and illness pile up on top of you. Yet, how often do we go beyond these? From my own experience I can say: Too often! Again and again, we just continue, a small break, maybe a painkiller, and off we go again. The show must go on. What has to happen before we will finally listen to our body and say 'no' for once? We women all pay too high a price. Don't we know the feeling that all will collapse if we don't do 'it'? Often, we also feel that we haven't done enough – yes that we have never given enough, no matter how much we gave. However, there will come a moment at which we will only 'do' without any sense of joy. Something essential is missing despite it all – and, more precisely, - exactly because of all the 'self-sacrifice'. Through our activism we shy away, in the end, from our spiritual creativity and our self-development.

The women's inborn gift of absolute dedication is important for the time when our children are young. The temporary symbiotic relationship demands our undivided attention. But we mustn't forget to bring this period to a conclusion when the kids grow older. They will begin to go forward themselves. Only in this way, will they shape their own personality. It is exactly the same with our marriage partners. They too, have their individual courses with which we cannot and must not interfere with. After this period we can dedicate ourselves in a new way. The "motherly" aspect within us then can turn to the necessities of the bigger family, the world, in whatever aspect we decide to invest ourselves in. At the same time we can attend to our own spiritual needs.

We ourselves are the ones to shape our lives, thus be co-creators of our own 'me'. Pico della Mirandola saw the dignity of people in self-determination and free development of their

character. All other creations grow according to laws and only human beings have the option, in other words, the divine commission, to share in creating themselves.

Discovery of our qualities, development of our talents requires our total concentration, our investment and every new day is exciting and stimulating. Our life is our uniquely personal artwork.

Accept ourselves and our life

In Buddhism, the deep sympathy for our own humanity is a high aim which entails redemption at the same time. Jesus said: Love your neighbour as you love yourself. Therein dwells the greatest difficulty – to accept oneself, on a daily basis, with unconditional love: - without placing conditions on oneself, the fulfilment of which only, 'supposedly', would render us amiable. However, to accept myself is the most important prerequisite when aiming for success in treating others with more love.

To accept ourselves, and to be our very own self means especially not to compare oneself with others. Have a look at the beautiful countryside. Discover the great variety of flowers and the special character of each and every one of them. We are like that, each and every one in our own unique way beautiful and special, endowed with value and dignity.

Once we accept ourselves in this way, with all our particularities, we then can begin to accept other people around us with their specialities, without forming images of each other, which only leads to our personal deceptiveness and disappointment.

This again, entails that we love ourselves unconditionally - the way we are, with our anxieties, weaknesses, rage, boredom, sorrow, stress, with the liveliness, the wildness, the strength and the pain. Once we love ourselves as unconditionally as to embrace all of these, then we can love others around us in the same way. For, what I don't need to reject in my own self, I don't need to reject, let alone fight in the other.

Our evaluation of 'my self' and our inability to recognise our uniqueness is the biggest drawback or handicap to letting our Queen Dignity shine.

I would like to share with you a beautiful quotation by Meister Eckehard, Dominican preacher, theologian and mystic in the Middle Ages:

"When you love yourself, you love all other people to the same degree. So long as you love any other person less than yourself you never really and truly loved yourself, - when you don't love all people as much as you love yourself, in one human being all human beings: and this person is God and man (or woman). So, it is right with such a person that loves 'him-or her self' and loves others as much as he or she does, and this is right and good."

To let go of feelings of guilt

For centuries, feelings of guilt have accompanied us as women. Our search in the religious interpretations of the Holy Scriptures, about the origin of all difficulties of human life, will lead us to the woman being the initiator of the separation from God, the first sinner.

In the Greek Philosophy, too, we find a strong degradation of the woman. Patriarchal education has only reinforced this notion. Therefore, it is obvious that we are always very aware of our mistakes, our guilt and allow this awareness to paralyze us.

Feelings of guilt leave no room for reflection and new cognitions. They restrict us, strangle us, depress and put a burden on us. Guilt is connected with accusations by whoever may be our judge. I like the statement of the American psychologist and Author Dr. Wayne Dyer: "The universe needs nothing to forgive, it accuses nobody."

When we feel guilt we have allowed someone, often only ourselves, to accuse us. Therefore it is important that we let go of this inner accusation.

It is important that we forgive ourselves and do not remain trapped in feelings of guilt. It is healthier to take these supposed mistakes as lessons to learn from.

Recognize our years of activity

A further step is to recognize what we have achieved. All of us are looking back on many years of activity. Furthermore, based on what we have already achieved, can only built on, when we give ourselves the legitimate recognition. This means to leave fake modesty behind us and to stop comparing ourselves with others or to orientate ourselves looking at them. Whatever we 'achieved' or 'didn't achieve' – we didn't fail.

From a universal perspective, we are all on the path of growing and learning and the sum of our experiences constitutes the fruits of our life. Whatever we built up, learned and achieved internally is only known to each one of us. For this, no one apart from me can take account and give recognition.

Time, a gift of creation

Changes take time as does all growth. Time is a part of the creative process. So we are permitted to utilize this time as a gift offered by creation and banish all impatience with ourselves. Rhythms of nature show us that the actual growth often occurs during times of apparent inactivity, at times beginning in darkness only to become visible when the seeds push through the soil. This is preceded by the time of maturing hidden from and invisible to the eye. 'The creator gives from his being, from his femininity he offers the time' says Weinreb who studied the sources of the old Jewish knowledge in his book 'The mother God – the feminine side of God'. Activity at all cost, as demanded by the patriarchal patterns is not as important as the patient waiting for the developments to naturally unfold, as

a process that is inherent to everything that is living.

Articulate the Aim of our soul

Once we have found the way to our inner Queen dignity, all that remains is to discover which strengths, dreams, abilities and desires are within us. I call this the exploration of the aim of our soul. That means to give a deeper meaning to our life, quite apart from the external responsibilities. When embarking on this, it is absolutely essential to take time. We will come to a more intimate acquaintance with our inner Queen.

The difference between what helps us and what, on the other hand, hinders us, can only be found out by each and every one of us individually. In this process, it is important to recognize that even difficult situations can be of help. Something that we might possibly identify as being 'bad' for us might be an important indication towards the need for a change in our concepts, or way of thinking not to impede our growth. Many happenings in our life serve our internal purpose, correspond to it and further it, often without our being aware of it.

Desires and visions

Right at the earliest stages of growth, we women often suffocate our desires and visions with thoughts such as: 'I cannot do this anyway, I don't have time for this, this is not realistic, I am not strong enough for this, nobody would understand this, and nobody would accept this!' Throughout history, women have experienced so many dismissals, have been hurt so frequently that, unconsciously, this became a part of us. How many women are of the opinion that they haven't deserved any better?

This is why we often don't realize the internal aim of our soul. Thus, let us learn to desire. The greatest, internal strength arises out of the strength of a personal vision. Vision, articulate clear ideas and wishes give us courage and help us to overcome any external control. Wish whatever you really desire for yourself.

When you make your first step, you will feel the support of the universe and from a small beginning undreamed results can develop as even changes in our town, protection of the environment, fight against hunger in the world and many more. We can often not even imagine what wonderful surprises life has in store for us. There is so much within you that urges to develop. Your inner Queen Dignity wants to become visible. Visions and desires are like a fire within us. Let us keep it alight and let it burn brightly.

Feminine Power

Sometimes, we are afraid of this brightly burning, internal fire because we feel how much power it gives to us. We have known power only in negative terms from the masculine side. Until now, power

brought us fear, oppressed us and dominated our lives. The power of femininity has been life spending, conserving, nourishing and protecting from time immemorial.

Since power has become alienated from its original meaning, we women have also lost the connection to it.

To mobilize our feminine qualities for the sake of all, legitimises us to use all our power. That includes striving for integration and association, and also appreciation of all the diversity and variety of characters, opinions and possibilities. The concept of feminine power can, contrary to the controlling power be defined as the power of realization.

Many women are finding, quite independently of their financial situation or relationships, access to a commodity which is becoming ever more valuable: to information. Do you know the saying "Knowledge is power"? We should not forget to continue to educate ourselves and to specialise in our areas of interest if we wish to participate on creating peace and global balance.

The female characters of girls and woman by Astrid Lindgren show often courage, self-reliance and assertion. Astrid Lindgren describes woman, freed of fixed social functions, no matter what task they take on. The value and significance is always their capability to love and the importance of the feminine self-esteem.

A study by Sally Helgesen, journalist and author, with woman in management positions of big companies shows, that woman usually represent values which are fixed in the female soul and that they incorporate these principles in their function and leadership. The authority in the hierarchic, more masculine structures is based on the position at the top of the organisation. Women prefer to work in teams and networks. They represent more the heart than the head of the whole. It doesn't need a subordinate position to emphasize their status. They achieve authority by contact with people in their surroundings not by distance. This encourages the team spirit.

Being successful women point out to the co-responsibility of others.

It is therefore important that we as women declare our power, implementing it with wisdom, exerting positive influence on the world around us.

The position of the woman in the universe
As far as the occupation of our position in the family, society and the universe is concerned, we as women have been given a special, historic burden to carry. In many religions, the sentence: 'the woman reaches God only through the man' has been upheld for centuries. Only the feminist

theology has pointed out that already Jesus especially valued women and elevated feminine values and virtues to a central position. He preached based on the realization that a spiritual evolution through such a new value-system would lead to fundamental changes in society.

In Buddhism, too, it was upheld for a long time that women first had to be embodied as men before being able to attain the state of enlightenment, as women. Whereupon a disciple of Buddha, who today is worshipped as a goddess, the Tara, swore that she would be reborn as a woman for as many times as necessary until reaching enlightenment as a woman. She did succeed, of course.

What this means for us is to follow the example of Tara, to, metaphorically, discover the divinity within us. Our real task is to occupy the position intended for us, only for each one of us. Once we occupy our position and place which corresponds to ourselves and which has been reserved for us, the strength required will begin to flow, the universe will cooperate with us. Once we have taken those first steps, we will notice that it is only becoming easier and less arduous, to be ourselves than to fit into our mask. When we really are ourselves, our eyes will open before the wealth of life, joy and beauty. Then, the task will become full of the joys of life and we become creators of our future. Then, we have discovered within us the dignity as hitherto described by Pico della Mirandola.

Milestones

These are just a few milestones for orientation along the way. Surely every one of us also has their own, personal indicators. I am already looking forward to the round table.

Once our inner Queen Dignity reigns within us, she will appear shining and can be recognised by others. We will be free of inner, self-imposed restraints, apparent necessities and fake rulers. We will finally discover that we are not just dealing with a question of being free 'from' but also to be free 'for which'. We become free for our own way, free for the inner dignity, free for vision, free for power.

The free woman within us, the inner Queen dignity, is a woman who is decisive. We will discover new spheres within ourselves. Joy in doing things and joy in a time of contemplative rest will be in balance in our daily life.

The raising of our awareness and living our dignity are the first steps, the foundation for any further steps. We may as well start here and now.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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