

Stressing Out and Reaching In

By Margery Miller

Sometimes it seems like we won't ever get back to an even keel—not financially, not personally. This has been one of the most difficult periods any of us has experienced as adults. Not only do we feel pressured financially, but we have the added challenge of not knowing whether we can count on the national security we have taken for granted. Plus, the institutions we thought were stable are crumbling before our eyes. What's to do?

Are men having any easier time than women? No, I don't think so. They are just handling it differently. They are working harder, nose to the grindstone, discussing business strategies, still getting a release from watching sports, talking politics, not really sharing their deepest feelings, the usual. What are women doing that is so different?

We are shifting back to the rituals we have practiced for centuries: gathering in groups, big and small, and comforting each other. Sometimes the group is on email, all sharing our ideas about handling a problem, and sometimes we are phoning back and forth. And if we can work out our schedules, we meet for lunch, dinner, coffee or drinks.

It is a form of reaching in—to each other and to ourselves. This is a very soulful approach to stress, one that has been around for ages. In times past, we had extended families all living near each other. Mostly women were focused on the home, and shared similar values and experiences, spending time together. With the advent of our modern working women, we spent many years feeling isolated and pressured to be superwomen, handling everything and doing it well.

We are emerging from that separateness today, seeking each other out, learning how to be there for each other and in the process, finding our own inner resources. We have deepened our focus on our spiritual lives, finding a path that suits us. This takes many forms, from greater commitment to church to the study of quantum physics and metaphysics—whatever way we choose, the fact is we are making those choices not from family pressure or cultural expectations, but from our hearts.

We are more flexible, and yet make fewer compromises. We aren't willing to sacrifice our values to succeed. We know now that too much is at stake, and we aren't ready to pay the price of selflessness for a business culture that has become so unstable, unreliable and unfulfilling at the same time.

That doesn't mean we aren't still interested in the business world. We are—more than ever. We just don't want our working lives to be our only lives, and we are

figuring out how to juggle things differently, making sure we don't sell our souls in the process.

Businesses have started to notice how important this feminine approach is—by organizing everything from team building sessions to offering retreats to enable people to integrate their work life and home life better. I predict that the fabric of business will continue to reflect this shift, and over the next decade companies will be much more open and interesting places to work.

My teacher, Dr. John Demartini says that stress is a result of minimizing or exaggerating what is. How many times do we make more of something than is necessary—or less of something that turns out to be really important? Can you see that would create stress?

I believe that we have all these challenges to make us grow—and the moment we become complacent or think we can take it easy, the universe equilibrates us by presenting us with problems. In that way, I can see that our nation is being served by the difficulties we are facing right now. In the few months after September 11, I watched many commentators say that it was time we became more aware of our precarious position as a “power” in the world, because there are many other people and countries who do not particularly appreciate or agree with the role we have played over the last fifty years.

In the same way, we can look at today's stresses as opportunities to stop, look and listen—to our hearts, to each other—and decide what is really important, and pay attention to that. This is the time for us to be asking the quality questions that determine the quality of our lives.

Are we living and relating to people we really love? Are we doing work that is fulfilling and challenging at the same time? Are we living out our own dreams, or those of our parents, society or cultural expectations? Are we authentic, or acting out a part we think is acceptable?

Let's not exaggerate our challenges, but appreciate them. And at the same time, let's not minimize their importance. They are the fuel to help us make a quantum leap to the next level of awareness, fulfillment and self-actualization.

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