



**The Divine
Feminine**



Women of Wisdom

with Kris Steinnes

by Julia Griffin

Through her leadership of an important women's organization, Kris Steinnes has been in a unique position to "take the pulse" of changes in women over the past decade.

We spoke with her to learn about the transformation that is happening in female energy — what healing changes women are experiencing, and how these changes are affecting men, other women, and our culture.

Julia: What is the format and purpose of Women of Wisdom?

Kris: We are basically a conference that happens each year in Seattle, Washington. There also are other activities,

including weekend workshops.

The first Women of Wisdom Conference happened in 1993 and featured twenty-four workshops or lectures with local leaders and nationally known authors. Now there are as many as ninety events each year.

Our mission is to empower the hopes and dreams of woman. The focus is the spirituality of women — a huge topic!

Julia: What kinds of results do women achieve from attending these conferences?

Kris: One thing women express about the Conference is gratitude because they no longer feel alone.

Also, women say they feel the Conference helps give them permission to do what they want. Coming out of this experience, they find that they can make decisions and changes they could not handle before.

For example, the Conference experience may empower a woman to change her name, change jobs, leave a negative relationship, or go back to school. Many things begin to happen in women's lives as they move away from a self-image of neediness.

Julia: There is a Goddess aspect related to the workshops and conference. What can you tell me about this?

Kris: Let me make it clear that we are not a "Goddess" group. Our concept is to experience the divine feminine that is within each one of us.

But of course when women come together, the Goddess energy is definitely there. And at the Conference, that aspect is visible, because women do like to dress up in fun ways that are not necessarily acceptable in the corporate world. There is an element of play in the clothes and jewelry women wear at the Conference, and a sense of excitement

and fun.

Most importantly, participating in a large group that honors the Divine Feminine is a really different experience for most women, since we have all been brought up in a society that worships a male God.

We're not excluding the male God; we are simply putting forward the idea of a female divinity so that it can become known. We are trying to look at the dual nature of the Universe in a different light, acknowledging that the feminine is just as powerful and divine as the male side.

Julia: Can we talk a little about women's self-image and bodies? This seems to be an issue for most women.

Kris: Of course the subject of self-image is extremely important for most women. Women's self-esteem can be pretty low, and we tend not to like our bodies. Even most women who have beautiful bodies still have issues about them. We all need to see that we can love our bodies regardless of what shape or size they are.

One thing we see is that this criticism of our bodies is a way of hiding. Self-criticism enables us not to share what we truly are underneath. I see a lot of changes in this aspect when women consort with other women. That is one of the reasons the Conferences are so powerful.

Julia: The female nature has a duality of warrior and nurturer. What have you learned about the warrior aspects of female consciousness?

Kris: I know we need the warrior consciousness, but it's not about "going to war." Instead, it is about inner strength and not being willing to allow things that are wrong to continue.

We learn balance — when to be fierce, to be out there shouting "Stop war," and when to be passive. Everything stems from energy, and a balance has to be created.

The stance of the female warrior has nothing to do with anger. Exploding with anger is not what it's about. Explosive anger is just the result of a lack of inner nurturing. Instead, the female warrior has the energy of calm firmness.

Julia: How can women access the positive aspect of the female warrior?

Kris: One way we teach women about the warrior is through the archetype of the Amazon. Also, we have movement workshops and other forms of body work. Getting into the body is part of healing. It helps us to release the emotions that are underneath.

We also teach women how to express themselves through projecting their voices physically so they can be heard, or through speaking up — learning to say no or, "This isn't my truth," and being able to say those things in a calm way.

It is mainly when we don't speak up that anger comes out, and angry behavior is not true to the inner warrior. Anger is a kind of self-righteousness that comes up out of the fear of not being heard or not being accepted, and it's important that we move past these things.

Julia: And what about the other side of the duality of female consciousness — not the warrior, but the nurturer?

Kris: These days, women tend to nurture others rather than themselves. They rush around through the many different aspects of their lives caring for the husband, the children, the house, and the job, but not themselves. The side of the nurturer needs to be developed in learning to nurture ourselves. Only from this place can we truly help others.

In this regard, for the past five years, Women of Wisdom has been offering weekends for women to learn to pamper and nurture themselves. We bring together women healers and professionals in our community who offer 15- and 30-minute appointments in a lot of different modalities. This gives many women the opportunity to experience things

they wouldn't normally spend the money to try — acupuncture, massage, reflexology, facials, and so on — there are so many new methodologies right now.

Those who do not opt for hands-on treatment can still watch and see what they think. Just being open to these forms of healing is important for women.

Julia: How do you think women in our society are developing and changing?

Kris: Women are stepping into their power and into roles of leadership. They have more clarity about what they want in life. Since our conferences began, I see how women have begun to adapt their levels of awareness, deepening their interest in women's roles and participation.

A common thread is that there is a desire to go more deeply into women's issues and into the subject matter of the workshops. They all say, "We want to go deeper."

The area of the "woman entrepreneur" is one that is truly growing. And women are now working more from home.

Also, women are creating balance in their lives. Instead of just rushing around from one activity to the other, attending to children, home, work, and job, women are looking to make room for rest, friends, and inner development.

Julia: Where do you think these trends are leading us?

Kris: I see women choosing in the future to spend more time with like-minded women who really support them. This extends from individuals to organizations. For example, Women of Wisdom is beginning to work with other groups of like-minded women. And when we do, everyone sees that change is really happening. There is less of the helpless feeling that comes with working alone.

Working together also emphasizes the element of sharing and cooperation rather than competition. When we share

and cooperate, we're creating a structure that empowers all of the women who are involved. So in the future I see more of this happening, where women are not competing but are cooperating with each other.

I also see changes in women's leadership roles. This is happening in our conferences. We are really focused on qualities of leadership and on recognizing that women need to be in places of power. We need spiritual and political support groups of women leaders who understand the spiritual perspective. It's important to create this type of community, and I see this happening.

Culturally, I see a new openness and softness in men. Men will be welcoming women in places of leadership. Men are starting to recognize that they need women in their world.

Men used to be afraid they were going to lose something, but now they are beginning to see that there is something huge to gain in women's presence — an acceptance, a nurturing, a truth. So I think the future will be about partnership, trust, and cooperation, not just among women, but between men and women. And because a woman's natural way of doing things is through sharing and working together, we will be moving into a new place of cooperative leadership.

All of this points toward an ending of the "war between the sexes." I think this is exciting!

Kris Steinnes founded the Women of Wisdom Foundation in 1992 with the vision of gathering women together to learn from other women and from their stories.

The first Women of Wisdom conference was a week-long event sponsored by the Seattle Unity Church. This was such a spectacular success, with 500 attendees, that it was quickly decided to make the Conference an

annual event. Today, over three thousand women from all across the country benefit from this conference each year.

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The next Women of the Wisdom Conference will take place February 13 – 21, 2004.

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