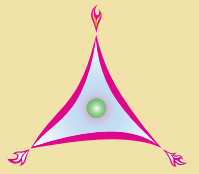
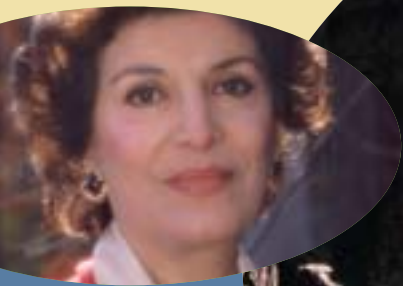


femminza

Magazine



Spring
2007



Translation
of the Future

The Universe
of Listening

A Cohesive
Shared Vision

International Women's Day

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| Content |



The Universe

*Hearing is something the human does before
the eyes can see. We can make sounds
but we need to learn how to talk. We can feel and
touch, but need to learn by trial and error what is
safe to put our hand on and what is not,
what is safe to put in our mouth or not safe.
But like seeing, hearing grows and develops
without our needing to contribute any effort.
There is a difference between hearing and listening.
As the dictionary enlightens us, hearing is
to perceive sound with the ear; one could
say it is automatic. And unlike the senses of sight
or taste, we can't so easily close off our hearing;
it just keeps happening. The dictionary explains that
to listen is to make effort to hear something,
to hear with attention, to seek,
to wait alertly.*

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Listening: To be able to be really quiet to perceive what is being said, not only the words, but also the meaning behind the words. It might be a very important ingredient for the human race at this time to listen to what is going on inside them to listen to what is needed and who has the intelligence about the next step to take. It could be that it is not the person making the most noise... How would it be if fifty percent more listening went on in the world? What would it be like? Maybe more (inner) stillness? More caring? More understanding?

This writing explores some first steps in what, indeed, is a universe unto itself, waiting to be developed and opened up, maybe even listened to.

Listen or thy tongue will keep thee deaf

This is a Native American proverb; and how true it is. How often do we talk and thus not hear? Silence can seem to promote insecurity and provoke the question, in listening how can we impress someone with our capabilities? So many impressions go in, life is so fast and speaking is a way of exhausting what we have taken in. Of course speaking is necessary, but at times it can also prevent listening.

In the early days of the formation of the land that later became known as the Netherlands different tribal chiefs came together once every few years to discuss communal issues and the law. They called themselves Het Ding (The Thing — how beautifully neutral). The only agreement they had was that someone would only speak if they

of Listening

By Marion Verweij,
the Netherlands

had something to say. Could it be that the equivalent of the current saying, "Engage brain before opening mouth" was for them, "Listen to the whole of yourself before actually saying something"?

Listening as a service to another

How often is a conversation a series of associations according to what we think we hear? "I know you believe you understand what you think I said, but I'm not sure you realise that what you heard is not what I meant" is a truism attributed to Robert McCloskey, an American author and illustrator. How often do we understand what someone is saying without colouring it with our own ideas?

Really listening to someone can be a great gift. By being truly listened to, a person can find out what is in them by speaking it out and listening to themselves.

Associated with the art of listening is the art of knowing when to speak, because talking to someone who doesn't utter a word isn't very encouraging. So the listener might make a confirming comment, or ask a question, which can be an expression of the quality of listening; it might help the speaker identify the reaction caused or it might help them speak from a place of deep contemplation. It might take them into self-pity or spiritual musings. So then the listener becomes the promoter.

So, listening is a whole art to explore, both in being able to receive, and also in the promotion of another, to be able to help them explore what is in them. Then there is also the art of listening beyond what is being said. For example, when someone complains about something, are they actually talking about that or are they trying to say that they feel powerless to change their situation? For example, a person may complain about their boss not giving them enough responsibility, whereas their real issue is that they feel the need to develop new skills but are afraid of making mistakes. Unless really listening with more than just one's ears, the listener might only hear the complaint and not hear what is not being said because the speaker doesn't know it themselves yet.

The Sixth sense

The little people we share the planet with, the animals, demonstrate a greater sense of hearing which we often call a sixth sense, such as the well known example of the dog which howls at the death of his master whilst he cannot "know" that his master is dead.

One event that brought into our awareness many examples of this is the 2004 tsunami. As the National Geographic reported, according to eyewitness accounts the following events happened:

- Elephants screamed and ran for higher ground.
- Dogs refused to go outdoors.
- Flamingos abandoned their low-lying breeding areas.
- Zoo animals rushed into their shelters and could not be enticed to come back out.

Evidence shows that whilst more than 150,000 people were killed, relatively few animals were reported dead. Along India's Cuddalore coast, where thousands of people perished, the Indo-Asian News service reported that buffaloes, goats, and dogs were found unharmed. About an hour before the tsunami hit, at Yala National Park it was observed that three elephants ran away from the Patanangala beach. Countless stories tell us of animals feeling the tsunami in time.

Do humans have a sixth or seventh sense?

Scientist Robert Sheldrake has produced much fascinating scientific research into what is generally called the sixth sense of animals and has also explored what he calls our seventh sense. In his latest book, *The Sense of Being Stared At*, he explores the intricacies of the mind and proves that our perceptive abilities are stronger than many of us could have imagined. Exploring premonitions and aspects of telepathy, such as knowing who is on the other end of the line when the phone rings, he compiled a database of 4,000 case histories, 2,000 questionnaires and 1,500 telephone interviews. He rejects the label that has been given to ➤



Editorial

During the week of International Women's Day, 8th March, we were musing about the importance of this celebration, where it stands today, and what our position might be about it. In turning on the radio, its validity was brought again to mind, by the news of Iranian women protesting outside the courthouse in Tehran. They were showing their solidarity with five women on trial for organising a protest last June against laws that discriminate against women. They held up banners saying: "We have the right to hold peaceful protests." The women aim to draw attention to discriminatory Islamic laws on polygamy and child custody that often cause great suffering to women. What struck us about this was the great spirit of courage in these women, the indomitable drive to see things right.

In history many times women have risen to protest against injustice, often needing similar courage to match great resistance. Reputedly, the first recorded event of this nature was when women from clothing and textile factories staged a protest on 8th March 1857 in New York City. The garment workers were protesting what they saw as very poor working conditions and low wages. The protesters were attacked and dispersed by the police, but these women established their first labour union in the same month two years later.

Often when women work together towards a shared purpose they manage to cause change. They frequently carry the long term view and a strong endurance and persistence to see it through. Examples of this can be found in the conversation with Mahnaz Afshkani or the reviews in which we touch on the courageous lives of Shirin Ebadi, Alice Paul and Lucy Burns.

The first principle of Feminenza postulates:

'Feminenza believes that the existence of the two genders implies a partnership to something better. Their union is designed to create something that is a step forward for humanity.' And so courageous women comprise only half of the equation. In this issue Brian Granger and Mark Stolk describe the different ways they have found to support courageous women or girls, and in an interview with Maryam Zare and Afshin Amirirad we meet the courage of an Iranian man facing the legacy of his upbringing.

The strength of union, bound in purpose, is enormous – being willing to listen to each other, networking, supporting and helping each other for the benefit of our brothers and sisters may well be essential ways of going on that we need more of in our world today. They may be termed 'feminine qualities,' although they can be embodied by both men and women. However, it might be true to say that in these times, women have much to offer in finding ways of being that work together, on a global scale, as we have become increasingly one large global family. Consequences of our actions are felt elsewhere, and we are becoming more aware of this fact, as it is increasingly being registered by our consciousness and feelings.

So, yes, International Women's Day is a good moment to stand still and take stock of where we are and where we want to move to next, with mindfulness and respect – both men and women, from all creeds, nationalities and religions – and to decide to implement the power and responsibility that every human has, for the future and the benefit of all.

Marion Verweij and Monique Weber
Chief Editors

this seventh sense, the word "paranormal," and shows how these psychic occurrences are a normal part of human nature.

Is the art of telepathy and ESP not simply us listening to our conglomerate of many parts that we really are, such as our senses, body, feelings, soul, instinct etc. and that it is for our brain to learn to listen to these to really understand what is going on?

We might need to gather evidence, to outweigh our upbringing which says that nothing is true unless we have hard evidence. How can I listen to the unheard sounds of the planet, my brain will ask. And my mind will recall as a response a vivid experience of timelessness that I had in Africa, when staring into the eyes of an elephant. Locked in its eyes I saw the cleanliness, the openness, the "as was meant to be," and felt our great Mother Earth and its ancient history. I could feel the elephant's throughout connection with herself and with the planet, and I knew. But my brain still wants evidence. Curious beings, we humans.

Of course we can find evidence of human ability that goes beyond a "normal" level of listening, like, for example, with native American and Australian tribes. A friend of mine told me a story about the time when he was working in Australia. A down to earth, no nonsense person, he was very puzzled by the following event. He was in a remote village in the Australian outback when an aborigine man was taken sick. Being the only one with a car, he set off along with one of the sick man's relatives for the nearest town some hours away. Suddenly the man in the car said, "We're too late, we can turn back, he's already dead." My friend doubted this statement and drove on, but he did record the time on his watch. Sure enough, when he got back to the village with the doctor, the man was dead, and he had died at exactly the time his relative had told him so. What is that sort of listening? What did a Native American tracker listen to that his modern day city-dwelling counterpart could not hear? What about the ability to listen to the sound of the leaves of a bush to know if someone has recently passed by?

Silent, stil-en

It can't be coincidence that the word listen anagrams to 'silent' and the root of the word listen is 'list', which by anagram indicates that being stil(l) might be an important part of listening. How often do inner noises colour or even prevent what we are able to hear? To not be full of self and one's next response, but to be silent and still and intact to listen to what might want to communicate to you and then to listen to what your whole self is telling you is a fitting response. To be silent and still inside to be able to truly listen.

List-en

Again looking at the root of the word listen I wondered about its origin and delved into the Oxford English Etymology to read about the origins of the word listen from the word list. The five origins showing the development of its usage and how it entered the English language fascinated me, and suggested to me a natural ordering to the word. So I created for myself a grid for developing the art of listening, which I offer here in case it inspires anyone else. The italic is the etymology definition, the rest are my own thoughts.

1 A border, edging, boundary, barrier enclosing space for tilting

Work on knowing what you don't want to listen to, what you will and won't have, what you will not listen to. What you hear you can block, what you listen to goes in and might not be healthy for you and by listening you might promulgate it further.

2 Be pleasing, desire. Became lust and listless without zest or spirit

Having built number 1 in yourself you are free to listen, so now it is important to keep inspired and motivated. If you don't know what's in it for you, you will soon lose interest and get bored and dispirited. As a friend once said: "I used to think if only people would say more interesting things I could listen better. But now I see that it's the other way round. If I am really interested I listen better."

3 Listen

Research the art of listening towards having a constant, personally motivated love for what listening can cause and allow. Keep deepening your motivation.

4 Catalogue of names

Work to be impersonal, don't superimpose your opinion, past experience or views upon what you listen to. Allow all your systems to listen and not just your brains or emotions for example. Be witness, make mindful notation, have cognisance and be diagnostic.

5 Inclination of a ship to one side

Always check your own balances, your own bias first. It might be that today your listening tells you to be alone and to rebalance. It might be that circumstance doesn't allow for that, so then have the constant awareness that your listening might well be biased by your state of imbalance.

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Listen

Be still and listen

to what the voice inside has to say.

Listen to the sounds you don't hear.

Listen to the sounds that aren't yet here.

Be still and listen to the place

where knowing and peace abound.

Listen to where today would have you be

and tomorrow beacons you towards.

Listen to the stillness of thyself

where the fountains of the future wash you from the past.

Listen to know the impossible can be made possible,

to the knowing that it will be right.

Listen.

We seem to live at a time in history when many challenges and waves of change are coming together, when ways of looking at things need updating, when answers are not readily available and we get regularly shocked by the news of violent events. At the same time there is a persistent network of people growing in the world, who are looking for constructive ways forward and who manage to make changes in their environment for the greater good. Many of these are outstanding and speak of the possibility of long lasting change and a future based on true human values.

On a stormy Thursday in January, I spoke with Mahnaz Afkhami, who visited the Netherlands to give a talk about women in leadership and who is one of the women who finds herself right in the middle of this constructive wave of change. Her story is one of continuous search for ways of leadership that will allow a progressive development, for both men and women, although a lot of her work has been to specifically show women that they have choices, that they have a vital contribution to make in the world, where they can make a difference, now more than ever. We thought that our readers might be interested in sharing some of the particular experiences and insights distilled by her over recent decades.

Mahnaz, today Founder and President of Women's Learning Partnership (WLP), was born in Kerman, Iran. Her father was a farmer who grew pistachio nuts, and the family was quite well off. In her early teens a radical change took place in her life when her mother decided to get a divorce and leave Iran in order to complete her education and live as an independent woman. She settled in San Francisco with her daughter Mahnaz and worked in a cannery to support the two of them while she attended college. It was in the USA that Mahnaz had her first experience with activism, supporting her way through university by working as a sales girl. One day she was fired prior to a holiday and found herself rehired afterwards. She was told by a co-worker that her employment was interrupted only so that she would not have to be paid for the holiday period and encouraged her to seek help from the labour union. Mahnaz's first contact with workers' unions was successful. It helped her to get paid for the vacation she had earned. But more importantly, it taught her that "working together and building support for each other could bring results that an individual could never achieve alone."

After completing her graduate degree, she went back to Iran and started to teach literature. Discussions in the classroom became broader than the simple analysis of novels and poems. Students kept asking how they could apply the stories in the novels to their own lives. "I tended to talk about a lot more than just literature. We discussed the status of women and how we could gain our rights while retaining our cultural roots. Discussion on topics such as the relationship between tradition and modernity and rights and responsibilities made me realise the need for organising a group which would dialogue and make an analysis of these issues. In 1969, together with other professors and students, we created the Association of University Women."

The seeding of experience

Alongside her work as a teacher, she immersed herself in the work of the Association. Her contacts with other women's groups in Iran expanded. The focus of their work was to find ways for women to become more emancipated contributors to society and to take up leadership roles and impact the decisions that affected their lives. These activities led her to the leadership of the National Organization for Women; she helped build a network of 400 chapters and training centres throughout the country, every year providing training for thousands of women in literacy, vocational training and advocacy. Mahnaz tells about this experience, "We took stock of our situation and we looked at how we could work together to make it possible for women to participate in a greater way at all levels of society. This meant establishing dialogue, networking, and encouraging women to believe that they are agents of change in their own lives and the life of their community, and society."

"A wonderful synergy was created that moved the organisation forward at a great pace. In the seven to eight years of this process the family laws were revised to give greater rights to women, childcare centres were set up in factories and offices to allow women to work while ensuring proper care for children, vocational training and skills enhancement was provided for thousands of women, but above all, women's status became a central concern and topic of debate in the country and many women felt empowered."

"In 1975 I became the first Minister of Women Affairs in Iran and the second woman to hold this position in the world. Now there are almost 100 women that hold this type of position across the world. No one knew what the position meant and how it would fit within the governmental structure. In a sense, this was fortunate because it gave us a chance to define the duties and responsibilities of the position as we went along."

Working towards a

*By Monique Weber,
the Netherlands*

Cohesive Shared

"Soon the duties of my office were expanded to include analysis of gender impact on legislation, as well as serving as the secretariat for a council of 12 ministers, including education, labour, justice, and health among others, to coordinate projects related to the advancement of women — a successful model of a process that years later came to be known in the international community as 'gender mainstreaming.'"

A dramatic change

While she was visiting the United Nations in the USA in 1979 to sign a document creating the UN International Center for Research and Training for Women, the revolutionary Islamic movement overthrew the Shah, bringing to power Ayatollah Khomeini and creating the only theocracy in the modern world. Her son was with her in the USA, but her husband and the rest of the family were still in Iran. It took a year before her husband, who was hiding in Iran, was smuggled across the Turkish border and arrived safely in the US.

"All of a sudden everything changed. We no longer had a home, a job, or a country to go back to. This was quite a traumatic experience. We had to reinvent our lives and recreate a new identity. One thing that helped me a great deal was my connection with a network of international women activists, among whom were many women who, like myself, were forced into exile. I decided to learn about and write the stories of 12 women who had ended up in exile from several places in the world including Russia, China, Chile, Palestine, Vietnam, and Cambodia. It was good to meet with women who were in the same situation as me. It gave me emotional support, but also provided me with a new perspective. I was not alone. We were all going through a similar process in spite of the diversity of our backgrounds and situation. Writing the book helped me understand the condition of exile and taught me how to cope with it."

At this time Mahnaz was asked to contribute to a book about the Women's Movement called "Sisterhood Is Global: An Anthology of the International Women's Movement" that chronicled the status of women in 80 countries. Once the book was finished, the writers created The Sisterhood Is Global Institute. She served as executive director and then was elected president for a five-year

term. This organisation consisted of a network of women who fulfilled important roles all over the world. Among them were such well known personalities as Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo, the first socialist Prime Minister of Portugal, Fatima Mernissi, the Moroccan philosopher and writer, and Simone de Beauvoir, the French feminist. The goal of the network was to exchange experience and learn from each other and bring forward the emancipation of women worldwide. During this time she gained a lot of experience about intercultural communication and best practices, and helped build a global network of women activists.

The start of the Women's Learning Partnership

It was when her term as president of the Sisterhood Is Global Institute ended in 2000 that along with the help and encouragement of a group of international women leaders she founded the Women's Learning Partnership (WLP) as an organic follow on from her former experience.

"We started with a small group of leaders from grassroots organisations in Nigeria, Palestine, Morocco, and Afghanistan and a staff of three. Although we grew through the years to encompass 18 partner organisations across four regions, we have kept the WLP staff small. Our international staff consists of only six people. We decided that the first step to bringing about change in the status of women is to help them realise their own potential power and agency to shape their lives and the lives of their families and communities. Having more women in positions of leadership is



important, but it is even more important to help them exercise a new style of leadership. Together we created a concept of leadership that is participatory, interactive and dialogue based. We produced a curriculum that uses real stories of women from around the world in situations that require leadership decisions. Grassroots workshops in our partner countries provide learning environments where women discuss the stories and through participatory exercises learn to communicate, to build consensus, to create a shared vision, to negotiate together, and to learn to accept diversity.

"Initially the plan was that the prototype English manual called *Leading to Choices: A Leadership Training Manual for Women* would be adapted to various languages and that local and national stories and narratives would replace the international ones we had collected. But most of the partner organisations decided to keep the international stories and add in a number of relevant local ones because they felt that seeing how women in various cultures and contexts shared some common challenges and strategies helped build a sense of solidarity with the movement and with each other.

"Soon quite an amazing momentum developed that inspired many women across the world and caused them to want to join us. In a very short period of time our initial four partner countries grew and our prototype manual was adapted in 17 culture and language specific versions. Our network of 18 grassroots organisations became closely knit and our process of sharing and exchange of experience grew more smooth and efficient."

About women in leadership

I asked Mahnaz about women in leadership, something she has been encouraging for decades. She replied, "I believe that the feminine gender has a particular gift to offer to the world. Women's historical experience has involved nurturing, multi tasking, and good communication and networking. This makes women exceptionally well suited to bring a way of interacting and relating to others that provides the basis for a new concept of leadership. In my experience over the years, I have often seen that if you give women space to make choices and to be self reliant, they make a substantial difference for themselves and for those around them.

"I was encouraged by my grandmother and mother, both strong women, who made difficult decisions in their lives but these decisions led to a better future for themselves and their families.

"I am very optimistic about the future. I believe that the human race is learning some valuable lessons about how not to approach the problems we are facing today. The patriarchal way, which involves hierarchical, competitive, aggressive inter-relationship, is not successful in creating a just social order. If we are to transform institutions it is important to embrace a more organic way of change — one that is embedded in women's experience but is applicable to all. It means starting from where we are and to constructively build bridges to where we want to be, step by step, by talking things through, networking, hearing each person, and supporting each other.

"In this process I find that many lessons I learned early on in Iran still hold true today. Change is happening everywhere and we need to have the opportunity to integrate change into our lives in ways that are related to our cultural context. Social justice as well as equality for women requires change. However, the change has to be implemented with the participation of the grassroots and in ways that are culture friendly. The focal point is for each individual to feel that she or he has choices and that in shaping their lives the most important factor is their own agency and volition. I feel what is emerging now is a heightened

consciousness at the global level. It is important for all human beings today to see that they have a choice and that they can be an agent in their own life, wherever they are. Every person, in every society needs this, so we are in this together."

Mahnaz gave an example of how people in her network learn from each other and share best practices. "One of our partners in the Maghreb region (North Africa) put together a comprehensive document, *Guide to Equality in the Family in the Maghreb* that describes the process by which 50 women's organisations in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco worked together to create a document that provides the basis for the reform of laws related to women and the family. These laws determine every aspect of a woman's life from minimum age of marriage to conditions for divorce, women's right to work and to a choice of residence and guardianship of children. The document relates meaningful social change to women's capability to make deliberate and thoughtful choices. The Guide presents the current state of family law in each of the three countries and then proposes religious, human rights, sociological and domestic legal arguments for reform, well-supported by relevant data and research. The reader is not told what to do, but is informed about the available options and from there can make a decision to make her own choice. We published an English translation of the Guide. Now our partners in Malaysia are creating an Asian network using the same methodology to work for legal reform in that region."

She continued by describing another aspect of WLP's work that involves intergenerational cooperation and dialogue. "We have just started a network of young women leaders called YWLP. The idea is not mentoring of the younger generation by more experienced women. It is more a concept of learning from each other and exchanging expertise, ideas, and knowledge. We need to be willing to learn from each other. I am now in my early sixties and I learn a lot from the Executive Director of WLP, who is in her early thirties.

Building connections

In addition to her function as President and CEO of WLP, Mahnaz now serves on the boards and steering committees of quite a number of international organisations, such as The Global Fund for Women, Women Leaders Intercultural Forum, World Movement for Democracy and the Women's Rights Division of the Human Rights Watch. And the list goes on... I was quite amazed at how she manages all this. She explained that although the organisations are diverse, they have been carefully selected to reinforce the connections and networks that need to work together to bring about change in the status of women.

"For example, human rights and democracy activists are not always focused on women's rights. It is important to

relate to social justice organisations and to encourage sensitivity to each other's goals and strategies. That's why, for example, I serve on the steering committee of the World Movement for Democracy. Another idea is to connect the grassroots and 'grasstops'. Our partnership is made up of grassroots organisations. It is important to connect these organisations with powerful women who have visibility on the world stage who may not feel necessarily connected to the feminist movement. This has led me and a number of our partners to join the Women Leaders Intercultural Forum co-chaired by Mary Robinson, former president of Ireland, Thoraya Obaid, undersecretary general of the UN and Executive Director of UNFPA, Lisa Anderson of Columbia University and myself. The goal here is to have powerful women speak in one voice on global issues related to the condition of women.

"At the core of our work," says Mahnaz, "we have our ongoing, dynamic contact with our partners. Strengthening our network is like growing a plant. To grow, a plant needs sunshine and water regularly. Relationships, whether among individuals or among organisations, are the same. We have to nurture and nourish each other constantly. In this way we keep each other up-to-date, learn from each other and deepen our partnership."

Although there was a lot more to talk about, Mahnaz had to go and prepare for her other engagements of the day. As I was gathering my belongings together my eye fell on the leaflet about WLP that Mahnaz left behind and I was struck by the responses quoted from two workshop participants. The first being from a Zimbabwean: "Nothing in the world is impossible if we work together" and the other from a Jordanian: "Leadership is the ability to implement dreams."

I felt these statements to be universal and it caused me to think about the fact that at core, most human beings feel the same about the things that concern us all. Everyone wants the freedom to grow and develop as they choose, and most don't want to do that alone, but would rather work together in a constructive way, realising their dreams for a better world. ▲

Book Review

Iran Awakening

by Marion Verweij,
the Netherlands

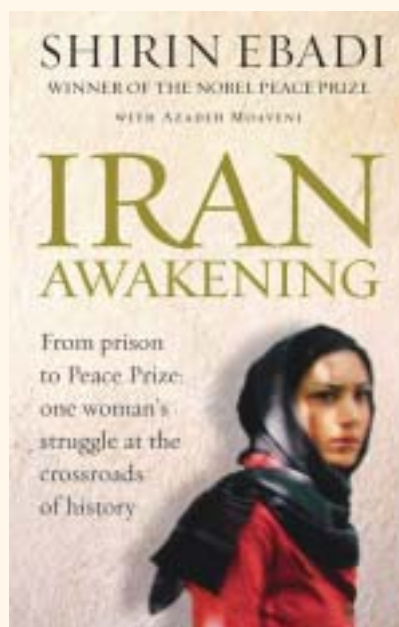
From prison to Peace Prize: one woman's struggle at the crossroads of history

Written by Shirin Ebadi and Azadeh Moaveni

The story of one woman's awakening to her own humanity; Iran Awakening is the story of Iranian Shirin Ebadi's journey from birth until she received the Nobel Prize for Peace. It is a book that champions the strength of the human spirit. It champions the core of the human, its humanity, in spite of adversity.

Whilst it speaks of some of the horrors of what humans can do to each other in the name of religion, it shows that however dark the darkness may be, love for justice, freedom and deep personal religion can prevail.

One of the things that radiates from this book throughout is an encouragement that you can be like this too. Born into the Iran of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh, she was a young girl when the Americans placed the Shah in power. Shirin grew up little involved in politics and with not much awareness of the state. Motivated by a love of justice she attended university and went on to become a successful judge before supporting the revolution. There is a great humility in how she describes her naiveté. She does not claim to have grand motivations as a child and young woman; she was just like many of us, her humanity grew on her as she was forced to make choices in life. It offers encouragement that one doesn't have to be special to be humane; one simply needs to be in touch with the humanity that is accessible to anyone, should they so choose.



The book carries the modesty of an ordinary woman in extraordinary circumstances, as Shirin describes herself: "...I also realised for the first time that I had become what you might call famous. Prominence is something that accrues gradually. You work and speak, write articles and lecture, meet with clients and defend them, day after day, night after night, and then you wake up one day and notice that there is a long trail behind you that constitutes a reputation. That's how it was for me, anyway. How unimportant it was to me as a person, but how useful it became to my work." ➤

Reading about women under a suppressed regime through Western eyes is one thing, but a large step removed from one's own reality. Shirin was born into a free Iran and suddenly found herself being demoted from judge to clerk just because she was a woman. She had to remember to put on a head scarf before leaving the house, finding the equal partnership she had with her husband placed in jeopardy, not through any fault of his, but because the laws had changed to make women second class citizens with few rights.

As the years progressed, and there were areas in which women could operate, Shirin became a lawyer, taking on pro bono cases, which were often risky and high profile cases. Showing immense courage she championed human rights, defending women and children in politically volatile cases. As a lawyer, writer and activist she speaks out against a regime which is unjust and suppresses the individual. Being harassed, receiving death threats and suffering imprisonment have not managed to suppress this indomitable spirit. It is a book that manages to provoke the reader in a non-judgmental way to ask what you might have done in the circumstances.

As hard-line fundamentalists made living in Iran intolerable for many, a number of Shirin's friends left to live in countries offering a greater freedom. Shirin tries to explain how her life felt too tied up with Iran to leave the country she loves. She believes passionately in change from within, peaceful change by the awakening of the many to shake off the shackles that bind them. As the book cover says, this book is "....the inspiring memoir of a remarkable woman and her battle for the soul of a nation...."

In this book, Shirin and Azadeh handle many loaded issues in a clean and clear way. The language and style is easy to read, telling Shirin's story with modesty and the story of Iran without bigotry. Knowing that living in Iran means care needs to be taken about what is said, it nevertheless gives the reader a good picture of Iran's recent history. It talks of the weaknesses of Iran's regime without emotional loading; it talks in a balanced way of America's interference in the 1950's in Iran, which led to such disastrous consequences, and of the strengths and weaknesses of the Iranian people. As a strongly religious Moslem, Shirin gives food for thought about ways of interpreting Islam. Devoted to her religion, her country, her family, she is pulled in many directions, but keeps her eyes always on her vision of a better Iran.

Iran Awakening is written specifically for the English-speaking audience. Shirin wanted to ".... write a book that would help correct Western stereotypes of Islam, especially the image of Muslim women as docile, forlorn creatures... .. I felt my experience could make a contribution to the accelerated debate about Islam and the West, and reach a wide audience. Beyond helping shade the debate about Islamic civilisation and its encounter with modern America, I felt that the cold antagonism between the United States and Iran made communication between the two societies more urgent than ever." Imagine her shock when she found that as an Iranian it was virtually impossible to publish a book in America. Coming from a regime that gave no freedom of expression, Shirin explained it was "....incomprehensible to me that the U.S. government, the self-proclaimed protector of a free way of life, would seek to regulate what Americans could or could not read, a practice that is called censorship when enacted by authoritarian regimes. What was the difference between the censorship in Iran and this censorship in the United States?"

Having been awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace Shirin knew the American government would probably be able to award a special license to publish her book. But typical of her nature, as she says herself "as a lifetime defender of free expression, I could not countenance the thought of applying for a government license to publish my book. I wished for no special treatment because of my unique celebrity, and for me the case swiftly turned into one of broader principles: the right to freedom of speech, and the right and responsibility of the American public to hear from voices around the world." She found the lack of honest discourse between Iran and America very dangerous. Her principles, and her wish to see a greater understanding between nations caused her to make a case against the American Treasury Department and won. It might be a modest step, but it is a step.

Throughout the book you meet Shirin's belief that Iran should be transformed peacefully. As she says, the price to be paid for that "... is sacrifice of the highest order. It is simply a reality that people like myself or the dissidents I represent will be lost along the way. We know this only too well, for countless of our colleagues and acquaintances have been killed over these long years. The threats against my own life have stepped up since I received the Nobel Prize, and the Iranian government has appointed twenty-four-hour bodyguards for my protection."

She is willing to make that sacrifice rather than surrender to a system which she knows to be wrong. "I had repeated one refrain: an interpretation of Islam that is in harmony with equality and democracy is an authentic expression of faith. It is not religion that binds women, but the selective dictates of those who wish them cloistered. That belief, along with the conviction that changes in Iran must come peacefully and from within, has underpinned my work."

Shirin was in Paris when she heard that she had been awarded the Nobel Prize and upon arriving back in Iran was amazed to find a crowd gathered to greet her, a crowd as big as the one that had gathered to greet Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979. Only this time the head scarves showed how many thousands of women had come to greet her. The roads had become blocked so they had walked, some many miles, to greet the woman who offered them hope. And she herself felt hope when they began to sing a folk song that has become the anthem of young pro-democracy organisers and came to the line, "Whose hands but mine and yours can pull back these curtains?"

If Shirin Ebadi is a typical example of Iranian humanity, one wonders what it would be like if a religion of dominance were replaced by a religion of humanity, where all people would be free. The book provokes many thoughts about what freedom actually is. ▲

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By Joanna Francis,
USA

My Art feeds my Understanding of Psychology

Interview with Ellen Langer

Dr. Ellen Langer is a Professor of Psychology at Harvard University. Her books written for general and academic readers include "Mindfulness," "The Power of Mindful Learning," and "On Becoming an Artist." Dr. Langer has described her work on the illusion of control, aging, decision-making, and mindfulness theory in over 200 research articles and six academic books.



An experiment described in her book "Mindfulness" is the subject of a new film titled "Counter Clockwise," which is being written by Paul Bernbaum and produced by Grant Scharbo, Dina Matthews and Jennifer Aniston. The experiment, conducted in the 70s, consisted of recruiting two groups of older men (over 70): an experimental group and a control group. Both groups spent five days at an isolated retreat center surrounded with paraphernalia, magazines and props from the 50s. The experimental group spoke about the fifties in the present tense and were not allowed to speak of anything that had happened in the ensuing 20 years; the control group were also talking about the fifties, but in the past tense and they were permitted to speak about more recent events. Both groups did remarkably well and their signs of aging diminished and even reversed; however, the experimental group did better than the control group.

I was keen to speak with Dr. Langer about her research and to find out more about the idea of mindfulness and its influence on the process of aging and our wellbeing in general.

JF: I see you are both a psychologist and an artist. Which came first?

EL: I just started to paint about seven years ago and I've been at Harvard for 30 years so I've been a psychologist for many more years than an artist. My art feeds my understanding of psychology; I would get an idea and do an experiment to see if it was true for more than just myself, and then go back and paint and so on. The two are very much integrated; in fact, the new book, "On Becoming an Artist," integrates my two lives. It came out in 2005.

JF: The idea of mindfulness seems to be a theme that runs through all of your work.

EL: I think you're right, I think it's virtually all of it because no matter what you are doing, you do it either mindfully or mindlessly and the ramifications of being in one state of mind or the other are enormous for health and wellbeing, so it would be hard for me to study anything for which it wasn't relevant.

JF: I would say that I am also studying mindfulness, but from a slightly different angle. You are more of a scientist, whereas I come at it more from the spiritual angle.

EL: It's interesting because I think that mindfulness is the essence of spirituality.

JF: I totally agree.

EL: It doesn't matter how you get there.



JF: How would you define mindfulness?

EL: My mindfulness is very, very simple: just actively noticing new things. When you actively notice new things you become sensitive to contact and perspective, you're aware that there is a novelty and that things don't stay the same, they are constantly changing, which keeps you alert; your behavior becomes rule-guided, rather than rule-governed, the way we are when we are like automatons, and phenomenologically, it's the experience of engagement. And it's all very simple; that's what is so nice about it. I found that many of the people I knew who had trouble sitting still for five minutes once a day, once they learned to meditate twenty minutes twice a day — meditation — no matter which form of meditation, produces post meditative mindfulness. So after you've meditated, you are basically in the same state that I've been studying without meditation.

JF: My next question is about that amazing experiment you did in the 70s. Do you think it would have been different with women?

EL: I don't think the findings would have been any different. I think it would have been more complicated with both men and women. It could have been either, but for some reason it felt like it would have been easier with just men. Men tend to be (though they shouldn't be) a little less protective. I think that women, when they are older, are stronger — that's why they live longer. So I think it was a matter of convenience and I don't recall what the issue was that made it more convenient. It wasn't principled. There is no reason to believe that the findings wouldn't be as strong — and possibly even stronger — for women.

JF: I find it really interesting when you wrote in your book that perhaps the results of that experiment might have been just as effective if the people

taking part were given more control and could make more decisions and were challenged more intellectually, not necessarily having to talk in the present about the 50s. In other words, being mindful is a key to keeping younger longer.

EL: I think that there are several ways of getting to the same place. I don't know which would be stronger. I know that a lot of people when they reach their late stage in life, begin to feel very helpless and so instilling them a sense of efficacy and control is not easy. So when we say, perhaps we could have done it another way, I don't think it would have been easier, but it might have been as successful. I don't know. When they were younger, they felt more efficacious, more powerful, and so it is a chicken and egg sort of thing (does youth cause efficacy or efficacy cause a person to feel and become mentally and physiologically younger — ed.). I think that was based on how well the control group did. The control group that was just reminiscing didn't do as well as the experimental group, but they still improved in lots of ways and that was because what we did was make them empowered. All of a sudden they were away from their family taking care of them; they were on their own and they had to do things that they probably hadn't done for several years prior to this study.

JF: It must have been a challenge! I think you had a lot of courage to take that on.

EL: I don't know if I said this in the book, but some of these people were brought to the retreat by their adult children and they looked like they were virtually on their last legs. And that's when I said maybe this was not a good idea, because people didn't seem strong enough. It was a very enormous undertaking and I hadn't realized that when I started. Apart from being there with them, I had to arrange for everything. It was one thing to decorate the retreat to bring it back twenty years; it was also taking care of food, entertainment and everything people need; it was like running a hotel.

JF: Can we talk about the forthcoming movie about the experiment? How did that come about?

EL: It was actually very funny. I had gotten a call from Grant Scharbo. Grant is a screenwriter and he told me his mother had recommended my book to him. He thought it was wonderful and that the study at the retreat would make a marvelous movie. He said, without skipping a beat, "I know a lot of people are asking you to do it; let me tell you why you should do it with me" and then he went on to modestly tell me all the wonderful things that he had done (Grant Scharbo was screenwriter for the movies 'The Wishing Tree' and 'Summer's End' — ed.), and when he had finished, I said "Nobody is knocking down my door, but if you would like to do it, that's fine, it sounds like fun." And that's how it began. His soon to be wife — Dina Matthews — was a producer who had produced many big movies. She was one of the producers of the movie "What Women Want" with Helen Hunt. Once I told him that it was fine with me for him to do it, then he went ahead and started the writing and asked me more questions, and Dina Matthews was interested in producing this and then eventually they got in touch with Jennifer Aniston and her business partner, and they were interested in producing it along with him.

JF: In your book you talk about mindfulness in relation to change and obviously they are very much related. I love the way you write about charisma — that a person with charisma is someone who adapts to change.

EL: You'll enjoy my new book, which I highly recommend. We did a study that was related to charisma that I think was astounding in some ways, if I may say so. What we did was, we had dolphin trainers and we were going to train them to be mindful or mindless (I'll explain that in a moment) and the dolphin would be released and we would see how fast they would swim to the trainer. It was done

individually in the water — when they were to be mindless, they were told to think about all the things they were sure of, that they knew to be true about dolphins, and just talk to themselves about these certainties. The mindful group was told to think about how this dolphin that they were going to interact with was different from all the other dolphins and how that dolphin was different on that day from how it was the last time they interacted, which is a very present orientation. Then the dolphin was released and we found that it would swim faster and stay longer with the mindful trainer.

JF: It makes you wonder about human interactions, too.

EL: I think the essence is the same. The people you trust and those that you think are charismatic are those who are mindful. If you are watching a ballet or chorus line or figure skating, whatever your bent is, it is clear from the position of the different performers who is considered technically the best — it's the person in the middle of the chorus line. But very often your eye will just go off to somebody else and it's because I think at that time that person is on. And we have expressions that convey it; people say "there's a light on, but nobody's home." So if we know when no one is home, then obviously we can also know when they are fully there.

JF: Would you say that you apply these ideas in your own life and if so, could you give me an example how?

EL: I think in everything I do I try to be mindful. My books are a reflection of what matters to me. I discuss this in my new book, that something makes sense from an observer's perspective or else a person wouldn't do it. That means that anything that is devalued or judgmental is mindless. Whenever I find myself saying, when someone cuts me off on the road, "you idiot," then I stop and realize that from their perspective there must have been something that they saw that made that seem a reasonable thing to do. Art also opened up a lot of it. It's very hard to get into something new, especially when you have no reason to believe that you have any talent. So then I question the notion of talent and even something like going into an art store and you see 100 different kinds of paint-brushes, which is very overwhelming. Which do I use? You don't want to buy it and then not use it. And then you might just realize that it was other people at other times that were playing around with different brushes, to find ones that other people would enjoy. So that for myself if I have painted and I didn't clean the brush properly, so that the bristles are now stuck together, then I take the scissors and I shape it differently and then it does interesting things on the canvas — I am sure if I was interested, I could then package it and sell it. So working backwards, the point is that anything you see is just something that somebody else created and that tends to make it less intimidating.

JF: And of course we are living in times of many, many changes, probably more than ever before.

EL: I don't think so. When people ask me to describe mindlessness, I often say that what we do is to confuse the stability of our mindset with the stability of the underlying phenomena. Things are always changing; they always have been changing and they always will be changing, but we hold them still in our head. If you had called me a half hour later than when you called me, you would be meeting a different me in many ways. I would have been either a half hour more tired or a half hour more alert if I had exercised or it would be different if I had just eaten. All these things would have influenced what would come to mind in my response to you and so on. So the stability is in the mindset, no matter what it is. What we see around us is changing people. For example, someone notices that they have gained ten pounds. They didn't gain ten pounds over night; they just didn't wake up to it until it was a large change. First the change is an ounce, then another ounce. We can tune in at any time, or always be tuned in.

JF: It's like growth: you don't see a child grow and then you stand them against the measurement on the door frame and

suddenly you say, "Oh, it's two inches."

EL: What my work on mindfulness is all about is to get people to learn how to exploit the power in this uncertainty, rather than be afraid of it.

JF: Those are the people who become successful and tend to become leaders.

EL: Exactly. People should realize about the ideas that we are talking about that as we get older there are many more women around. The experience will be very different as a result of that. I think that women are predisposed to be more mindful because as a group we are apt to deal with mundane realities, with not knowing, whereas if you are trained to deal with the world on the level of the abstract, life can be neater. It's like the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, and that's true on the level of abstraction, but if you leave your house and you try to get to the bank, probably you are not going to be able to go in a straight line.

JF: Do you find that your readers are mostly women?

EL: I don't know. I think I am probably writing basically for women, but I certainly am not going to ask a man who goes to buy the book to return it.

JF: I think it would do them a lot of good if they did read it!

EL: I hope so.

JF: We need a lot of mindful men as well as women. Dr. Langer, thank you so much.

EL: You're welcome. ▲

*"Doubt yourself
and you doubt
everything you see.
Judge yourself
and you see judges
everywhere.
But if you listen
to the sound of
your own voice,
you can rise
above judgement.
And you can see forever."*

Nancy Kerrigan

Side by Side in Purpose

by Marion Verweij,
the Netherlands

As Iran is featured in this issue of Feminenza magazine, we thought it would be interesting to speak with Maryam Zare and Afshin Amirad who came from Shiraz in southern Iran to the Netherlands as refugees in 1999. There are three Iranian women involved in Feminenza in the Netherlands, one of them being Maryam and over the five years of knowing them and some of their Iranian men friends I have heard something of how Feminenza work affects Iranians, and specifically Maryam and her husband Afshin. Definitely a story worth telling.

As we sat drinking tea Maryam explained how the first thing that caught her attention when she joined Feminenza was the question: "What do you want?" which caused quite a shock. "From my religious and cultural upbringing I never thought about what I wanted, only what my family or my husband wanted. It was so confronting to be asked what do I want! It was a shock and a relief at the same time as it caused me to research to understand life better."

Afshin and Maryam have been together as a couple for 15 years, married for 11, but as Maryam's mother is Afshin's mother's niece, they have known each other since they were children. It therefore caused quite some ripples in their relationship when Maryam started to ask herself questions for the first time about what she wanted in life.

Maryam: "After we were married I always asked what life is about, should I be a good

mother, a good wife? I was studying at university but couldn't decide what life was about. I was always longing to think about it, but didn't really allow myself to because of my upbringing. Then within Feminenza, questions started to cause me to think. Gradually I decided to go for it and really find out what I wanted in life. But after some months I got into trouble with Afshin, because the pattern of our life was changing.

"Even though I didn't yet know what I wanted, I wanted to be able to search for it, but I also didn't want that search to upset Afshin. I knew my husband was a good person but he did not know better at that time because of his upbringing and he had blind spots that he just couldn't see. I didn't want to ruin the life we had, but I wanted to be able to change, to be able to develop."

This caused quite a dilemma for Maryam which went on for many months. It all came to a head over a pair of trousers. "It wasn't the trousers that were important," she explained, "I wanted to take a position to decide for my life what I wanted, and I wanted to experience my life, even if it was to decide how I want to dress, because in Iran men are very dominant as to how women may dress. So I got a pair of fashionable trousers which Afshin did not like. So we got into quite a quarrel."

Afshin was into a research about freedom and what real freedom is. Somehow that seemed to help because suddenly he saw how little freedom he was giving Maryam: "It was a really big argument," Afshin explained. "It happened on a Saturday night and we didn't speak to each other for four days. Maryam wanted to decide things for her own life and wouldn't budge from that principle. That confronted me about what I was doing to Maryam's life. On the fourth day it was like glass shattering inside me and I realised that I'd got fed up with spending so much energy on matters which are not important; she is a free human to experience her life as she wants, not as I would want. I want to put my energy to good purposes. I realised what she meant when I was telling her that if I put restriction on how she dresses it is because I love her and I want to protect her from being looked at by other men, and she always had the reply, 'what kind of love is it that puts me in prison?'"

"I remember that moment so well," Maryam said. "Afshin explained that it's like a new born child. Naturally you hold it carefully, but if you hold it too tight it will automatically want to escape. Hold the baby secure but not too tight and they will love being with you. It's not natural to try and imprison another person."

"After that our relationship changed and freedom became very important. Because I saw how I put Afshin in prison also. For example, in Iran men influence women to dress in a way that does not reveal their bodies, but women influence men to dress tidily and smart. So I also wasn't giving him freedom. This led us to open up more and more about how we imprison each other, not deliberately, but because of our upbringing."

"I realise I cannot change my husband and I don't have permission to do so. He will change if he discovers something in himself he wants to change. If I try to get him to change when he's not ready to, I can only cause an allergy and that can become more of a problem than a help. Everyone has their own timing to change things in themselves. I can reflect from care or respect, but I cannot expect to change him."

Over the years Afshin became more and more interested in the work of Feminenza himself and whenever there were events which men could join he went along, each time deepening his research into the different natures of men and women. "I can see for example that a man can often see the bigger picture but misses the details; a woman sees things the other way

round. So if we drive from Leiden to Amsterdam, I can tell you exactly the route, but Maryam will be able to tell you the shops on the way, where the garage was etc. but will have no idea how we got there. It's just an example, but I see that men and women have their own character and they need the freedom to develop that naturally.

"When Maryam stood up for her life it was a mirror to me about what I'm doing with my life and what I want it to become. I was scared for the first year but now I can see I can rely on Maryam in a way I couldn't before. Like you can rely on a chair, it has strength and character, so you can sit on it. It was a revelation, a relief, a freedom. Imagine 24 hours a day living with 'what if'. As a man from the East we are terrified of our wife leaving us. The fear is because everything a man has is given to his wife and family so they have nothing themselves, so if they lose their wife, they lose everything. By Maryam taking this position I had to think about my own life.

"Then I understood I can come home and cook for myself and I can clean the house and I can earn a living, and so could Maryam. These things should not be a reason to live together, we should look at what we can mean to each other as a man and as a woman, what we can support in each other. She has her life and I have mine, and we need to have honesty, care, respect, honour between each other, but we shouldn't interfere with each other's freedom. If we have a rule that she needs to cook and I need to earn the living then there is no freedom for either of us to be ourselves.

"In a Feminenza meeting with both men and women I was asked the question: 'what in the other gender that you appreciate can you support?' And I did not want to come to an appreciation that was based on what it is that they support me with, because then it would be about ME rather than about what it is that I appreciate about THEM. Later the understanding came



to me that during these last years there have been some qualities established between Maryam and me like love, respect, freedom, understanding, and how these could be not just between Maryam and me, but between me and other humans as well. After some years of thinking about this, I understood that it is possible when I take these qualities on board with the principles of my life then I can support all humans for what they are.

"Take the example of you and my stomach (Ed: at this point Afshin was referring to the interviewer). My upbringing stopped me being able to kiss women in greeting, but here in Holland women and men kiss each other in greeting and it can be very warm and endearing. I wanted to be able to do it as well, but was inhibited by my upbringing. Understanding this you made a joke of it every time we met and would gently punch me in the stomach saying you didn't know how else to greet me. It was a way of showing respect through humour for my different background and gave me time to come to the freedom of kissing women in greeting myself. So I see how men and women can help each other in all sorts of ways.

"This led me to try to understand not just women, but to want to understand my own gender better. All these struggles have put me in a state that makes me more secure, and more secure with Maryam. So I want to offer that opportunity to anyone else who wants it and so I'm offering workshops under the umbrella of Feminenza about what it means to be



masculine at this time. I believe the core of society is the family, man and woman, but it can also be one of the biggest conflicts in the world. So I do this from the first principle of Feminenza:

"Feminenza believes that the existence of the two genders implies a partnership to something better. Their union is designed to create something that is a step forward for humanity."

Maryam also wants to share Feminenza with others: "Being in Feminenza has helped me start to value myself as a person and to have self-respect, because I understood that I can only value others if I value myself, and I can only know others if I know myself. And it gave me a great settlement and it helped me give myself freedom and space, and I know that by giving myself freedom and space I give it to others. Instead of looking outside I need to search inside. For me that is very important, and I feel this is so important to make available to other people as well. Before I joined Feminenza I had no real purpose in my life; I wanted to live for God and be religious, but I couldn't find the truth of life. The reasons for my life were all outside of me, associated solely with my husband and my family, but I have my life back now."

"For example," explains Afshin, "I told my parents about some of the understandings I have received from Feminenza. Then my father asked me to stop because it was tearing the family apart 'because your mother thinks she is equal to me.' And I thought about it and saw that he has provided for and supported the family for 44 years and he never got anything back, so I started to find a value for that in myself and started expressing it to him and now he asks me to help him get more understanding about masculinity. He's 65 years old and is a strong Moslem so I find this really significant."

Maryam ended the conversation with a strong statement with Afshin nodding in the background: "Afshin is not my purpose. My purpose is to be here for what a human is here to do. Instead of standing opposite to my husband facing him we stand as an adjacency side by side in purpose. So there is more freedom and our relationship has deepened and we stand adjacent towards the purpose of life." ▲

Art for Heart's Sake

Friend of Feminenza and artist Mark Stolk instigated the distribution of 50,000 GO-cards in 600 different places around the city of Copenhagen in support of Feminenza's 'Give a Girl a Chance' project.

We asked him to tell us more about what happened and what motivated him.

First something about GO-cards: a GO-card is postcard size that people can pick up for free from public places like cinemas, libraries, cafés and restaurants. The company that makes GO-cards takes orders from other organisations or companies that want more publicity, but they also make traditional artistic-cards. They produce a new series of GO-cards every two weeks and then distribute them in different places. Every single GO-card is produced in quantities of 25,000 or more.

Since the Feminenza conference on Humanity and Gender in Nairobi in January 2006 I have kept in contact with some Kenyan people, especially a man called Oscar from the NGO Agents for Change, having had very special conversations with him during the conference. In one of his e-mails he mentioned that he was ill, which worried me, and he told me he had to go to hospital and it would cost him a lot of money that he didn't have. I promised that I would try to help him, not knowing exactly how, not having much money myself at the time. I told him I was partaking in a big exhibition in Copenhagen with 120 artists to which some 10,000 visitors would come and that I had made a painting with the theme of Africa in it. I promised that if it sold I would give him 50% of the profit to help pay for his hospital costs.

On the first day of the exhibition a friend phoned and told me that my painting had been published in full colour on the front cover of a Danish newspaper. This was quite amazing. When I went to the exhibition many people wanted to buy



Go-Card in support of 'Give a Girl a Chance' project

the painting. One woman even cried when she saw it and I sold the painting to her. She felt very moved by it and I guess that she felt somehow a connection to everything that had gone on with Feminenza in Africa that had found expression through me into the painting. Something happened between us through the painting and we still are in contact.

During the exhibition I was also approached by a lady from the company that produces GO-cards called Nicoline. She wanted to make a GO-card of the painting and also wanted to buy it. Because it had already been sold, I promised her to make a new one. When this one was finished, she came with her parents to have a look at it. As she couldn't afford it herself, her father had agreed to pay for it, but he didn't like it and found the message in the painting too confronting to be put on the wall. But I could see she really liked it, so I phoned her later with the suggestion that she could have the painting for free, if she could help out by printing free GO-cards for the Feminenza project Give a Girl a Chance. She agreed and as I write this, 50,000 Go-cards are being distributed around the city.

The good news is that, along with another friend here in Denmark, I managed to raise enough money for Oscar's hospital fees helped by the fact that the doctor reduced his fee. He has now recovered completely and is back to work and continues to be very active within Agents for Change, the NGO (non-governmental organization) he is a member of.



Painting by Mark Stolk: 'This Perfect World.' This thought provoking and disturbing picture graphically depicts one of the major world problems, starvation, but for many different reasons. We hope that this painting will inspire discussion and consideration about the world's starvation problem, be it manifesting as anorexia and role model portrayal or caused by circumstantial and ecological problems, as well as a search for solutions. In Professor Wangari Maathai's book 'Unbowed' she explores the process she uses to examine personal and government responsibility and the possible solutions for tackling this problem.

In supporting his fees I also supported the work he does as Agents for Change really contribute a great deal. Last year he was awarded the Agents for Vision award, which is aimed to acknowledge and appreciate an outstanding agent for excellent performance, contribution and achievements to society and youth. With the award came really useful prizes, such as a water pump for his tree nursery, assorted tree seeds for the nursery, and an Ox – Plough, which was donated by Hon. Gor Sunguh the MP for Kisumu Town Constituency.

At one such activity he spoke about the environment, health and the future to 3000 children plus school staff and other invited guests at a school's festival. Agents for Change received a lot of recognition for the work they do to help improve health standards in these schools, e.g. waste and garbage collection, sanitation, soil conservation, mosquito control etc. The guest of honour, the mayor of Kisumu City, requested Oscar represent the youth in the country leadership, so that he will compete for the post in the coming general election.

Thanks to Mark, Nicoline, GO-cards and Pernille, the lady who bought the first painting. ▲

To find out more about the 'Give a Girl a Chance' project please go to www.giveagirlachance.org

The Translation of the Future in Real Time

by Brian Granger,
the Netherlands

*The company Spectrum Translation,
based in the Netherlands, collaborates with women and men
throughout the world, on almost every continent.
Owner and project manager Brian Granger,
an American, has lived for the past three years
in Leiden, where the company was founded.
As a Friend of Feminenza,
he has discovered a growing inspiration engendered
by the work and determination of its members.*

Brian's daily dialogue with the many people he works with the majority of whom are women — about not just translation projects or even the state of the world (which are common e-mail topics), but also the situation of women, has also fuelled a vision of change sorely needed in the world. Feminenza, he believes, is one of the main remedies and easements into the future.

In the quieter — actually in some of the busiest and most hectic, too — moments of his workdays, Brian has asked some of Spectrum's translators to put a couple of the core writings of Feminenza, and in a few instances an entire correspondence course, into their native languages. We now have Feminenza's Unison Principles, its Mission Statement and 'The Seven Expressions of Humanity', whose version in Mandarin Chinese inaugurated the project, in around 35 languages.

Something appears to be catching on around the world, an incandescence of the people working from home in Argentina, Brazil, China and Japan, in Slovakia and Ukraine... lighting up people's lives.

So you too may soon find the words of your native language on these pages in a future issue or on the website, if English isn't your first language.

A day in Brian's life consists of communicating with dozens of the world's countries; literally hundreds of people from Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas are represented in the company's projects. His is an expanding world, adding countries and occasionally languages by the week, and strengthening old bonds while making new ones. He builds friendships over the Internet with his translators, often having 'distance chats' about the things that are moving in their lives.

"Eighty percent of my translators are women," Brian explains. "I've known Feminenza and some of its members since it began. I've seen it have a tremendous effect on some of these women's lives. The simple, yet profound, understandings it can give to people who otherwise may have no 'road map' or guide, other than what the world around them or the glossy magazines may have to offer, or even their teachers or parents, even with the best of intentions... these understandings can change the world. I think they are doing so already."

He believes that small changes of choice can change the world and though difficult to do alone, that ideas, education and email are bringing people together to be there for one another, no matter how far apart we may be physically, geographically, or even culturally.

"From the conversations with my 'colleagues'," and with this Brian hesitates for a moment, for they are obviously more than colleagues, "the women write also about themselves, their families, their daughter in Malaysia or grandmother in Taiwan, their new child born in the Czech Republic or the struggles of just being women in some situations, which is a serious matter for instance in the former Yugoslavia. This is so different from my previous work experience. "How did I get into this position?" I don't know. Some are purely business. Others appear to be searching for something more... they seem to know it's out there, but they don't know where to look, or where it is located and most are not in the situation of being able to afford the luxury of an air ticket and travel to London or New York or wherever to look for it. They are not the main contributors to global warming and yet the effects are often in full force where they live. Their concerns that they share are often reflected in some very harsh circumstances and yet their problems and concerns I find we can all relate to and sometimes share and they are very human problems.

"I have noticed very different responses in people when asked to give their time for this project and this has led me to question what are the real values that drive us and what is real poverty. Why, in Scandinavia for example, where the most social of social countries are and where 'human values' are championed as a success by the rest of the world, it is almost impossible to find a translator who has enough spare time to participate. Whereas in India, which is racked by such lingering, chronic problems by our Western standards, a man and his wife can spend a total of twenty hours listening to Indian classical music, without any special remuneration, to be able to add just the right 'musical touch' to their translations into Hindi for Feminenza. It blows one's mind at times...

"In working with people and women in particular, I got to thinking: Why should geography be such a determining factor? Why should that lady in Malaysia, with her daughter who reads her Chinese, or the lady in Portugal who was treated badly by her boyfriend (these e-mails do come through), or the lady in a French village who



Brian Granger : "Something seems to be catching on around the world..."

outwardly seems to be doing so well — why should they be there alone in fact? There's no magic wand that I know of to cure all these ills, but maybe in some small way my meditations may help, but to what extent....?

"I can't really pack up and go to all these places, or join the Peace Corps; there must be other ways ... Thus went my line of thinking. I would always try to slip in little bits of help or things I thought I glimpsed, without being too missionary about it; and then, one day, a friend of mine, Gill Huyton, who is a member of Feminenza in England, asked whether I might be able to put something into Chinese for them... Might I be able? Well, yes... and it went from there.

"We did Mandarin Chinese, the Beijing dialect, of course. Then came the Southeast Asian languages, as at that time I had been working intensively with that part of the world. I must say, it is the ladies in Southeast Asia who perhaps encouraged me the most in the beginning — their attitudes are simply impeccable. Not perfect, I mean, but just willing to help in every way, and seeing the value in Feminenza and writings

such as The Seven Expressions of Humanity. In the middle of the great mudflows in East Java, there was a lady and man working on the Feminenza translations. The mudflows were just 50 km from their home, destroying everything in their wake. Yet we now, a few months later, have Javanese, Bahasa Indonesia (the official language of Indonesia), Thai, Malay and Tagalog ...all from weather-plagued areas of the world of late... and Vietnamese may also be coming soon."

Each translator, whether she (in some cases he) be in Costa Rica, or China, or Brazil, receives a 'starter package' with the writings to be translated and a file with instructions and general guidelines to the project. Each also receives an electronic version of the most recent issue of Feminenza Magazine, as 'background material' to the project, as well as the link to the Feminenza website.

Some had been corresponding with Brian for almost two years; then, one bright morning, or afternoon as the case may be, something new appeared on their screen. Reactions were mixed at first, some wondering "what this new thing was" coming from their colleague and project manager. Some opened it, handily packed in a zip file, and wondered, often aloud in writing to Brian, "Now what is this you're into? What is the project number again?"

No project number... just have a look at it, was often sent in response.

Despite the unusualness of the project, the person involved often found herself translating, and in many cases, donating her work.

Some countries — South Africa, France, Japan and Portugal are prime examples — have found their languages joining the Feminenza oeuvre through work which is entirely voluntary. Many other countries are receiving translations for prices reduced to as little as 10% of the normal rate.



As Laure Claesen, the translator in France, writes:

"In fact, this 'project' is of enormous significance to me on a personal level. It 'rings bells' with so many things commenced and not carried through in my life. That's why I think I'm taking my time, probing, and digesting the impact of this incredible, unexpected new thing..."

Over time Brian found himself in an ever-increasing dialogue with women about issues that caught them about the work, and about the importance they felt it had for women in their country and for their culture. Ljiljana Ili of Serbia writes:

"I think that it is not a bad idea to try to help all women in Serbia with trying to wake up their perception about their position in Serbian society... Maybe you didn't know, but in our country a woman doesn't have the opportunity to live like women in other countries. Unfortunately, we are always in some kind of man's shadow. And the excuse for that kind of treatment is the most known Serbian phrase 'This is Balkan!' Just to understand me perfectly, if somebody becomes a father and has a boy, he will say 'I got a son,' but if a girl is born, he will say 'I got a child'! Do you understand now?"

"So, my opinion is that this project maybe can help all women in Serbia. Maybe it will help some woman in Serbia to start to think about her life."

And apart from discussions with Brian, translators would talk with their friends and family, as Dilek Senurkmez-Wollnik from Turkey explains:

"My friends and I enjoyed reading and discussing the texts... By the way, we were dragged into a discussion about what is needed to be done for the women in Turkey (a lot), what do the local women's organisations do, whether to work only on women or on the whole of the society and whether it would be possible to make people think of the future of humanity, before their basic needs like food, shelter, security are satisfied? Well, it's a big topic. It has been exciting to work on the translations."

Krisztina Kótai, in Szentendre, Hungary, shared the project with her mother and sister:

"I have really enjoyed working on this project, maybe I can also do a little bit for humanity in the world."

"I have tried to collect a lot of information on the subject. I have registered at the Feminenza homepage as well. Since I speak German, I have also read the German website. I study sociology at the university as a postgraduate course, including gender studies. Here we have heard a lot about the problems that women have to face. Of course many times I also experience it myself, as a

woman with two small children, for instance I face a lot of problems on the labour market.

"I find Feminenza to be a great initiative. Will there be also a Feminenza organisation established in Hungary or in other Central European countries? I have shared the writings with my mother and sister, they were happy to hear that there is an organisation like Feminenza, that cares about the future of women."

"I hope one day that members of Feminenza can go to many of the countries where the translators live and share the ways and means of Feminenza to them in person," says Brian. "I find it really easy to talk to the women in Feminenza. The communication flows, they're in reality, it's not dogmatic, nothing is being thrust down anyone's throat, people can meet it with their own lives naturally. The West has always tended to go out into the world with their own rules, trying to change others along the way (often with disastrous results), but from what I have seen, Feminenza doesn't do that, they somehow don't carry that kind of colonist attitude."

Since leaving America, Brian has noticed a few things about his native land. For example, the kind of isolationism which can set in if a person is not careful, where the next big plan is how to remake one's kitchen, which is fair enough, but society often imposes values that cause us to worry about unimportant things which lead us to reach new heights of unreality, and separate us from those very real realities that affect us and the rest of the world. Since setting up his company, he has begun to get a glimmer of how much bigger the world is: "I love my dealings with people from different parts of the world and I love searching with them for the right translation. It might be that the word for 'female' in Taiwan, for example, just doesn't work in mainland China because it only means 'little girl', so we search together for another word and have a whole process about what the female nature actually is. (Ed: For more information see the box on page 21.)"

"Then you have certain issues with the recordings. Not just ones of quality or 'getting it just right,' but ones which take into account the nature of the language

Some of the people who translated for the Feminenza Project: Petra van Caneghem (Belgium), Tang Yue (China), Ana Victoria (Costa Rica), Eleftheria Zosima (Greece), Kazuko Wakisaka (Japan), Flavia Poggio (Italy) and Ulrika Ljungberg (Sweden)





Much more goes on in the translation work than just translation. For example Maya Gorgoshidze, who worked with her friend Lela Pavliashvili on the Georgian translations became inspired when working out the translation of female, woman and lady, and she was caused to think of a traditional Georgian dance involving three women and representing the three lives of a Georgian 'king' (Tamar, who was a woman). King Tamar was the first woman king in Georgia's history and lived in the 12th and 13th centuries. The trinity idea in the dance, called Samaia, represents King Tamar as a young princess, a wise mother and the powerful king which all unite into one harmonious picture. The simple but soft and graceful movements create an atmosphere of beauty, glory and power that surrounded the King's reign.

itself and what it does or does not allow. As with Georgian, which does not have the consonant 'F' and has no such pronunciation. How does one say 'Feminenza'? The ladies in Tbilisi thought that the most natural pronunciation for Georgian would be something like 'Peminenza', with a 'P', and if you listen to the recordings you will hear this."

Brian has also been asking some of his translators to record the texts in their language and perhaps put music to them which they find fitting. If you get the chance to hear some of the voice recordings, soon to be posted on the Feminenza website, you will also understand that the women's devotion to this work goes beyond just ink and pen or word processor. Each recording is unique, each is individual, yet within itself



it gives some expression to a life lived in the spoken essence of the language one is now reading or hearing as a medium for Feminenza's writings. Some are slow, some are faster – some languages are naturally faster than others – and yet others have music or pauses at different points... The recordings are a rich tapestry of the work of many women united by their individual endeavours in their own countries... and there are certainly many more threads to the weave.

It is a source of great hope to hear how the writings can mean so much to a woman somewhere in the world, in a village or small town, thousands of miles away from any Feminenza group, increasing the sense of sisterhood between women we've never met, with Brian as catalyst. Reading of women wanting to join us, in India, or in China, in Taiwan and Malaysia, helping with the task not just of translating this into the medium of their countries, but into the future itself, are reminders to us all that it is possible, wherever the spark may take.

As Kazuko Wakisaka from Japan writes:

"Thank you very much for giving me the very interesting and significant trial job of translation. I've found their missions really meaningful to us all, and I am fortunate to learn about them through this job... I have actually been helped by working for this Feminenza project! Thank you very much again... I will not neglect my responsibility with you and Feminenza, and I will do what little I can do for the sake of 'our future, and the future of generations yet to be born' through this work."

This is the future, and it's happening now... in real time. ▲

If you would like to know more about this project or offer your help please go to www.feminenza.org or email Brian at info@spectrumtranslation.com or bgranger@planet.nl

© 'The Seven Expressions of Humanity' by Feminenza International

The Three Motivating Lives Within Us

Much of the work of Feminenza is about getting an actual grip on one's life, becoming conscious and being able to respond according to one's self-determined reasons. One of the very important ways to build this in oneself is the living understanding of the three motivating lives within us.

There is the **Female life**, which accompanies us from the moment we are born – our biological self, with all its cycles and growing pains, which also bears most emphatically the printed experiences of the first 12 years of our lives.

The **Woman life**, activated at puberty during the period of exponential growth and development of our brain. The Woman in us develops a much broader view on life than the Female and learns to become skilled in handling the many aspects she now has become aware of (if all goes well).

The **Lady life** is built in us as a third dimension, but is not automatic. Her development depends on what our life is motivated by. She is potentially the life in us that 'can look over the fence', is not bound by the exigency of the day and will look for permanent values, principles and reasons to come out of in her response and actions.

Iron Jawed Angels

Written by Jennifer Friedes; directed by Katja Von Garnier

"They had no vote, no political clout, no equal rights. But what they lacked under the law, they made up for with brains, determination and courage."

The amazingly recent effort of women to acquire the vote is an intriguing and powerful story. Rising to conscious expression worldwide in the mid-19th century, the pressing question was, "Should the vote of only half the population count?" While a clear and obvious answer lay waiting in the wings, it took "brains, determination and courage" to make it a reality. *Iron Jawed Angels*, a remarkable film, brings to life the dramatic account of a second wave of suffragists in America. Hillary Swank, who plays Alice Paul, says about the movie's theme, "It's one of the great, untold American stories."

In 1868 and again in 1878 in America, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton proposed a constitutional amendment guaranteeing women the vote yet were unable to get it passed. Organising the National American Women's Suffrage Association (NAWSA), their efforts laid the foundation for the next stage. In the early 1900s, two valiant (and less well-known) young women come to the foreground to take up the fight. Alice Paul and Lucy Burns (Frances O'Connor), originally meet in England, having joined the Women's Social and Political Union (begun by Christabel Pankhurst, daughter of England's most radical suffragette, Emmeline Pankhurst) whose motto was "deeds, not words." Having taken part in militant protests, arrests, imprisonment and hunger strikes, when the dedicated friends return to America, they arrive with the belief that the more militant strategies utilised in England are crucial to breaking up the lethargy surrounding the issue.

The film begins with Paul's and Burn's appearance on the American scene. They come to Philadelphia in September of 1912 to meet with Carrie Chapman Catt (Angelica Huston) and Rev. Anna Shaw (Lois Smith), who, heading up the NAWSA, have been continuing the work of the earlier suffragists. Catt is told that Paul, "a bright girl, from Swathmore with a doctorate from Penn" has returned to America to help women get the vote, after working on suffragist campaigns in England. Catt's comment is "don't bring me any radicals!"

In a tense first meeting, the 'old' and 'new' guards of the American suffragist movement come face to face. The NAWSA has been working long and hard on a state-by-state campaign, believing a federal amendment is impossible but Paul and Burns see it differently. While all are dedicated to the same issue, wanting women to be allowed to vote, it is clear there are dramatic differences in tactic, strategy, and vision. Eventually, it is agreed that the two energetic newcomers will go to Washington, DC and head up the Congressional Committee. Being told they need to raise their own funds, Paul and Burns leave to take up the job. Paul's ambitious plan is to organise a parade, coinciding with President Woodrow Wilson's inauguration.

It is clear the younger women yearn for a new movement, a new image, and new results. Early in the film, they spot a stylish purple hat with a red feather in a store-front window. Flipping a coin, Burns wins, yet Paul later claims the hat, wearing it almost nonstop. Fighting the dated image of a suffragist as 'a stout old maid with facial hair,' they are determined to bring a new feminine energy to the movement. At a Washington fundraising event, Paul meets Inez Milhoulland (Julia Ormond), a successful American lawyer and longtime peace activist. In the lively conversation that ensues, they agree women have always been expected to "nurture the family, rock the baby, serve the dinner, serve society... serving, serving, always..." However, "The new suffragist is single, young, independent, educated, and very very beautiful." Amidst much laughter, the persuasive Paul, intent on the movement gaining visibility, talks Milhoulland into playing a dramatic role in the fundraising parade through Washington.

The next scene is of the beautiful Inez in breathtaking, angelic garb ("a warrior, a herald, Joan-of-Arc with 10,000 women following her"), astride a large white horse at the head of a stunning procession of women, riding on floats, carrying banners and marching through the DC streets. In the middle of the pageantry, a bottle is thrown, and then rocks, followed by an eruption of violence. Angry men yell at the women to go home to their husbands and families. Chaos ensues while police stand by offering little help. The next morning, Paul, Burns, and triumphant team, bruised and exuberant,



'Iron Jawed Angels' protesting at the gates of the White House

ant, are seen talking excitedly to Catt and Shaw about their success in making front-page news! The clear disagreement over tactic and response results in a deeper division between the old guard and these younger women so intent on forcing the issue of a constitutional amendment.

Paul's next strategic move is not an easy one. Having been accused of illegally siphoning the funds gathered into a private pot, she and Burns see no other route except to form their own party. As she publicly declares, the National Women's Party (NWP) is "...dedicated to the passage of the following constitutional amendment: the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States, or any state, on account of sex." The new party also pledges "unceasing opposition to any and all political candidates who refuse to support this amendment." With this move, the lines of battle are pointedly re-drawn, signaling a direct attack against Wilson's policies.

While President Wilson is embroiled in problems regarding trade and foreign policy leading up to an inevitable entry into WWI, the women of this newly formed party are asking, "What will you do for woman suffrage?" Milholland, one of the party's key inspirational speakers, challenges Wilson repeatedly: "How long must women wait for liberty? We declare our faith in the principles of self-government, that woman, irrespective of her race, was made first for her own happiness with the absolute right to herself, and to all opportunities life affords... We ask justice, we ask equality, we ask that all civil and political rights of citizens of the United States be guaranteed to us and our daughters... forever." It is in the middle of this speech that an exhausted Milholland collapses and soon after tragically dies of pernicious anemia. A withdrawn and tearful Paul later cries out to Burns, "It's so unfair that anyone should have to die in a fight that shouldn't even have to be a fight."

Another character, Emily Leighton (Molly Parker), plays an equally significant role as a (fictional) Senator's wife. A devoted wife and mother (with "no head for politics"), she is transformed into a political activist who sees firsthand how crucial the issue is. Her husband, embarrassed by his wife's participation in fundraising efforts and White House protests, takes away her access to a household account and threatens to keep "his" children from her. Leighton's smoldering shock and fierce anger at this unconscionable move are palpable. The confrontation sets her over the edge. Later arrested and imprisoned, she willingly joins the hunger strike, suffering the consequences of prison mistreatment. When her husband visits her and sees the affects on his wife, he is anguished. Her ringing statement makes clear what is at stake: "I am only here for my daughters."

The women begin staging regular protests at the gates of the White House, intent on forcing Wilson's hand, continuing these even after the US entry into the war. Protesting a wartime president is a bold and dangerous move, leading to public outcry, violence against the protestors, and arrest. The trumped-up charge is "obstructing traffic"! Refusing to pay the \$10 fine ("we haven't broken any law"), the women are imprisoned in the Occoquan workhouse in Virginia and immediately declare themselves "political prisoners." The response is brutal. Eventually Paul is arrested, and initiates a hunger strike. Transferred to the "psychopathic ward," the prison psychiatrist, instructed to gather evidence of her insanity, eventually comes to the conclusion Paul is suffering no delusions, that she is in fact mentally competent and fiercely dedicated to a just cause. When the presidential delegation resists his diagnosis, he responds: "for women... courage is often mistaken for insanity".

Continuing her hunger strike, Paul is brutally force-fed a number of times. In a chilling scene, we witness a ferocious assault on her personhood, her dignity, and her cause. Word gets out (with



Alice Paul (personified by Hilary Swank)

the unlikely help of a woman guard and Leighton's husband) of the prison mistreatment, torture, force-feeding and general brutality towards these women who have done nothing wrong (by this time, 218 have been imprisoned). Sentiment turns, as it always eventually must, towards support. The President finally agrees to back a constitutional amendment and congress approves it. On August 18th, 1920 the state count is taken. One superb moment occurs when Senator Burn from Tennessee, about to vote against the amendment, receives an urgent note from his mother, requesting that he change his position! He does so, and the motion carries. On 26th the 19th amendment, giving American women the right to vote, becomes constitutional law.

This blazing story is about endurance, fierceness, love of justice, friendship and teamwork. Towards the end of the film during the proceedings in Congress, Carrie Catt, the elder stateswoman, and Alice Paul, the younger warrior, look at each other and nod. It is clear that what could never have been accomplished by one has been brought to fruition by a multitude of iron-jawed angels, all moving in the same direction. ▲

[Note: Prior to this historic moment in the USA, Australian and New Zealand women had the vote (1893), as did the women of Finland (1906), Norway (1913), Denmark and Iceland (1915), Russia (1917), Austria (1918), Germany (1918), Latvia, Poland, Estonia (1918), Netherlands (1919), Belgium (1919), and Belarus, Luxemburg and Ukraine (1919).]

Feminenza and International Women's Day 2007

Feminenza wins Leiden | *by Vera de Wit, the Netherlands* Soroptimist Prize

Soroptimist is an international volunteer organisation for business and professional women who work to improve the lives of women and girls, in local communities and throughout the world.

Founded in 1921, there are almost 100,000 Soroptimists in about 120 countries and territories. The name, Soroptimist, means 'best for women,' and that's what the organisation strives to achieve.



Marion with the jury and two of the other nominees

Feminenza Netherlands was established in Leiden, a city also home to two Soroptimist groups. Over the years these two Soroptimist groups have raised money for different projects locally and internationally. To celebrate their 75th anniversary they initiated a new prize, which they want to award every five years on International Women's Day to a woman in the Leiden area who 'increases women's place in society in an outstanding way.'

There were 20 nominations for the prize from which the jury selected four. These four were invited to a ceremony on International Women's Day during which the winner was announced. Marion Verweij, who volunteers much of her time towards Feminenza projects, designed to assist women and men in Kenya, was one of the four.

On the evening of 8th of March a group of highly motivated men and women, who in their own way and style believe in a better future for the feminine gender, gathered together for the awarding and celebration of this prize. The Soroptimist organization made it a special event, in which each of the finalists were introduced by a member of the jury for the prize.

When Marion was announced as the winner of the award, a cheer escaped from the public; it appeared that many of the 'Soroptimists' had hoped she would be chosen. The celebration of sisterhood and seeing something better in the world continued throughout dinner during which many new connections of strength were established among all those who were present.

The Soroptimist award came with a gift of € 1,000 which will be used for the further development of Feminenza projects for girls, women and also men in Kenya.

What's New on | *by Odette de Neeling, the Netherlands* Wieringen?

Janny Slagman and myself responded to an invitation

to meet a group of 35 women to give a talk about the 'Give a Girl a Chance project' and Feminenza.

Wieringen is a small community in the north-west of the Netherlands; until 1930 it was a small island, now connected to the mainland by two dikes and a polder. The people living there love this piece of land and form a tight community where everyone knows each other, and in some ways they still think about Wieringen as an island.

But they have an open mind, which is expressed by the motto of the group of ladies that organises the International Women's Day on Wieringen each year, which is: What's new on Wieringen?

I moved to Wieringen a couple of years ago and the local women's group heard about me and Feminenza. They invited me for a meeting to get to know each other and also for me to tell them about Feminenza. When I told them about the Humanity and Gender Conference in Kenya last year they got very inspired and invited me to give a Feminenza presentation on International Women's Day. It was decided that the theme would be 'Give a girl a Chance'. Since the DVD in the card package that people can buy to support girls' education via this project is all in English, one of the ladies offered to help translate the text on the DVD into Dutch. And so with her help it was finished just in time for the event.

So on the evening of 8th March, this event took place. It was wonderfully facilitated by the women who had invited us, with homemade biscuits, flowers, live music, and a genuine interest in the presentation and stories that Janny and myself told; it was an intense happening laced with humanity, spontaneity and warmth.



Before the evening starts the Feminenza Magazine is read with great interest

This gathering inspired a follow-up meeting planned at the end of March, when upon request of the women attending, we will be opening up some aspects of the personal development work of Feminenza, such as insights about the Female, Woman and Lady lives in us (ed. see page 21).

Celebrating Humanity | *by Gill Huyton, UK* on International Women's Day in the UK

The UK Feminenza team organised an all-day event entitled, 'Celebrating Humanity'. About 100 men, women and children came together to explore different expressions of humanity that unite us as people, whilst celebrating individual uniqueness. The day included music, dance, slideshows, mini workshops, discussion forums, display stands, hand massage and talks revolving around the human qualities of dignity, choice, respect, value, warmth, awe and responsibility.

Interspersed throughout the day, Feminenza's 'Seven Expressions of Humanity and Meditations' were read out, followed by live music and a few minutes to spend in quiet contemplation. ➤



Responsibility, one of the roots of the expressions of humanity

Celebrating Humanity |

by Saskia Sandman-de Klijn en Hanna Kerkhof, the Netherlands.

'To enhance the dignity of human existence'

'During the day that the Feminenza team in the South of the Netherlands organised, Feminenza's 'Seven Expressions of Humanity' played an important role, 'to enhance the dignity of human existence'. The organisers particularly wanted to highlight Humanity on International Women's Day because 'it is such an important theme in these changing times. It is important to see the similarities between us and where our differences can be an enrichment. The will to understand and accept each other asks for more than just a conversation; it also asks for self-reflection and self-search, and a day like this can be one of the steps taken in that direction'.

The day started with practical exercises, followed by a presentation by Olga Lemmen, participant to the Humanity and Gender Conference in Kenya, accompanied by the DVD that was made during this occasion.



Saskia Sandman-de Klijn and Lidwina Verweij talk about the expression of humanity 'reaching out to each other' in colour and paint

A lively process ensued, including a moving poem about humanity and gender, written by an Iranian man.

The rest of the day was dedicated to opening up the meaning of the 'Seven Expressions of Humanity,' by the women working in small groups. Each group shared the understandings they had come to in a unique way; one group made little statues of clay, expressing the quality of dignity and another group came to genuinely giving each other compliments as a mark of humanity and another group asked us all the question: "What would we have missed if we had not spent time on this theme today?"

In the knowing that this day had been a natural and genuine expression of humanity for us all, we felt that we were able to carry the essence of it with us, passing it to others, wherever we were going. ▲

White, Purple and Green

The WSPU, which was formed by Emmeline Pankhurst, chose purple, green and white as their colours in 1908 which have since become the official international women's colours. The reason given for these three colours is as follows:

- white for purity in public as well as private life
- purple (sometimes violet) for justice, dignity, self-reverence and self-respect
- green for hope and new life. (If the green is given a hue, it is emerald green.)

The colours unified the women's movement and emphasised the femininity of the suffragettes. The tri-colour of the WSPU soon became a visual cue for the women's movement in other countries. Purple, green and white were worn during international women's events.

It is because of these colours that the iris is often the symbol of the women's movement.

The 4th Expression of Humanity

"There is a powerful humanity in being able to offer something, exactly what it needs, no more, no less."



Women Carrying Water

*Women carrying water – through the jungle
and the plains*

*Women nurturing others and bearing
childbirth pains*

*Women connecting to the Earth and feeling
her silent cry*

*Women upholding dedication so great qualities
will never die.*

*Women carrying water – it nourishes and
revives*

*Women offering healing to unguided and lost
lives*

*Women carrying water – but behold, it's
changed its state*

*It's wine that carries a charge, before it is
too late.*

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In the encouragement of every woman's future; working together for a greater mutuality between the genders.

English

*Յուրաքանչյուր կնոջ ապագայի ի քաջալերում՝
միասին աշխատելով սեռերի միջև ավելի
սերտ հարաբերությունների ստեղծման համար*

Armenian

वि व की प्रत्येक महिला के उज्ज्वल भविष्य की कामना में, साथ ही महिलाओं-पुरुषों के बीच सहकारिता एवं पारस्परिकता की वृद्धि के लिये कार्यरत

Hindi

Em prol do futuro de todas as mulheres, trabalhamos juntos para uma maior reciprocidade entre os gêneros.

Portuguese

Сотрудничество для достижения большей взаимности между мужчинами и женщинами и поддержке будущего каждой женщины.

Georgian

*თითოეული ქალის მომავლობთვის
ხელშეწყობა, ორმხრივი თანახმობით
თანამშრომლობა სქესთა შორის*

Turkish

Kadınları gelecekleri için cesaretlendirme yolunda, kadınlar ve erkekler arasında karşılıklı ilişkilerin artırması için elele çalışarak

Russian