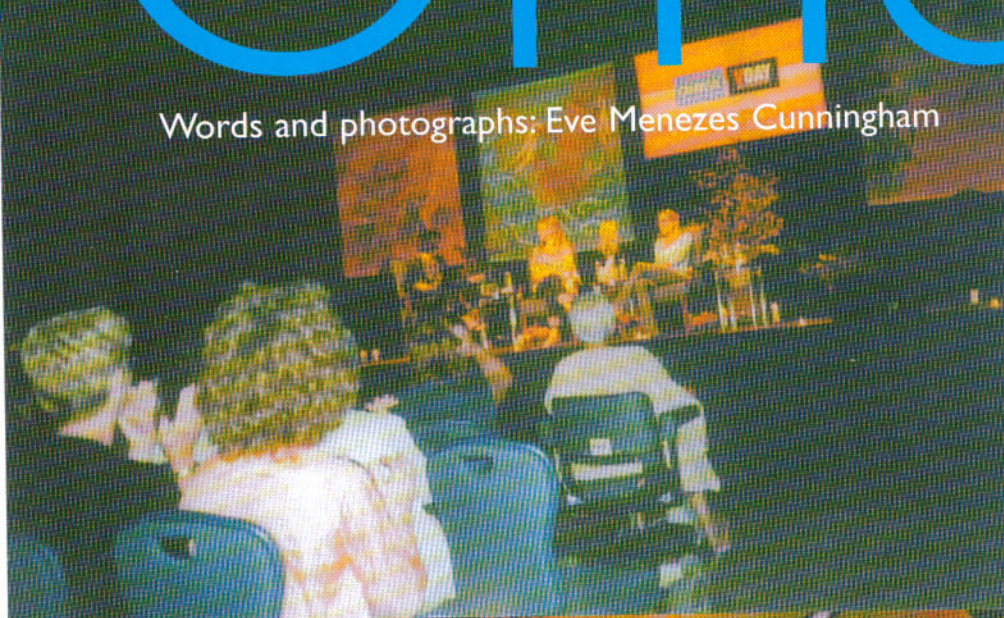


Omega, America's largest holistic healthcare provider, works with yoga, meditation, transformational psychology, bodywork, spirituality and art, to awaken the best in the human spirit. They recently joined with V-Day, a global movement to end violence against women and girls, to examine the nature of power in the world today. Jane Fonda, Gloria Steinem, Julia Stiles, Sally Field and

# Omega

Words and photographs: Eve Menezes Cunningham



many others spoke about how they have learned to step into their own power as they strive to make the world a better place while making peace with their bodies, relationships and selves.

Omega's Elizabeth Lesser spoke about how power and everything in the world comes down to relationships. Not relating to each other results in war, poverty and injustice. Elizabeth said, "We need to change the very definition of power so we don't have to sell our souls to get it. We need to become fearless awakeners and teachers. Model the way we want the world to be. Be the change."

V-Day grew out of Eve Ensler's hit play, *The Vagina Monologues*. Eve said, "We're very afraid to hold power as it currently exists [but] this new world power would be to lift up, to inspire, power in the service of. It would be clear that you cannot bomb people into peace. After 9/11, had we grieved, it would have meant a different outcome. I think we're seeing a real shift in consciousness. Women actually hold the new paradigm in our bodies. I believe it will manifest itself over the next five years."



She believes that many men are also holding this paradigm.

Eve leads writing workshops in Bedford Hills prison and said that the women she works with, “started out as fifteen killers but they became fifteen women. Then they became representatives. I’m accountable for what they did. I am responsible for what they did. The desecration of the earth is fundamentally linked with the desecration of women. We are all one, inter-related and integrated on this planet. My sister in Afghanistan’s suffering is my suffering.”

Introducing Yanar Mohammed, founder of The Organisation for Women’s Freedom in Iraq; Malalai Joya, an elected representa-

to keep a man. I knew that if I wasn’t perfect, I wouldn’t be loved. One of the things we have to do is to help our girls get angry at the paradigm that does this to us. To learn that good enough is good enough.” Known to millions as an actress, activist and workout queen, Jane struggled for 35 years with anorexia and bulimia. “I lived on willpower. I have tremendous willpower.”

Like many who practice yoga, Jane realised, “If I was going to become an active agent for change, I had some healing to do. Nothing can really happen that matters until you’re inside yourself,” then things outside change. “The biggest damage done to

# women

tive to Afghanistan’s Loya Jirga convention; Zoya, a member of the Revolutionary Association of Women in Afghanistan; and Hibaaq Osmann, founder and president of the Centre for the Strategic Initiatives of Women, Eve said, “I am with women who have taught me how to be a human being.”

Two-time Oscar winner (for *Klute* in 1971 and *Coming Home* in 1978) and activist Jane Fonda said, “Everything was created with a divine balance. All we are talking about is bringing it back into balance. We [women] don’t have our masculinity to prove so we’re doing it.”

In the current paradigm, “It’s when girls reach puberty that the damage begins. The damage is done to boys aged five, when they enter formal schooling. They’re entering the world and being told, ‘Don’t be a sissy, don’t cry...’ To allow our boys to come up and be worthy of our daughters, we must see them and hold them in our hearts. Every human has both masculine and feminine qualities. The danger is when it gets out of kilter and the masculine rises to the denigration of the feminine. Our task is to bring back the balance.”

Jane’s eyes welled up a little as she paraphrased from the Gnostic Gospels, “Eve was life and consciousness. She is dropped down and quickens the body of Adam. We didn’t cause the downfall of man, we weren’t an afterthought, we quickened man!”

Now 67, Jane said, “I silenced my authentic voice my whole life

women within this patriarchal system is to divorce us from our bodies. If we want to lead, we have to embody the change. We must not lose hope. Women and men all over the world, an army of love, are going to become a tipping point.”

Dr Marion Woodman, a Jungian analyst, said, “Patriarchy has nothing to do with masculinity. It is a power principle that has become a parody of itself.” She also battled with anorexia, “You get high on hunger. Obesity is caused by trying to satiate a spiritual longing with food and never being able to fill the void.” With any kind of illness or symptom, Dr Woodman asks, “What is it that you’re so unconscious of that it has to break out in a symptom?”

Rosario Dawson, star of *Kids, X-Men* and *Sidewalks of New York*, said, “Most people seem to think that using power for evil is OK. It’s time

we start being ourselves and get our voices heard. I’m beginning to find my voice.” She is opening a community centre in New York’s Lower East Side, where she grew up and still lives and said, “It’s about being mentors for those young people” to break the cycle. Still only 25, Rosario said, “I feel my power whatever I’m wearing, whether it’s a dress or sweats.”

Julia Stiles, the 23 year-old star of *Ten Things I Hate About You*, *Save the Last Dance* and *Mona Lisa Smile* said, “I always express my opinion and make my voice heard. We [all] have moments of being really strong and then of being really weak.”

“The desecration of the earth is fundamentally linked with the desecration of women.”

Most of the messages she grew up with were of, “power being brute force and bringing other people down but my mother taught the power of compassion.” Julia enjoys her work and feels most powerful, “when someone responds to me on the street.”

At 71, Gloria Steinem is still the face of feminism for many. She said, “Interdependence is recognising that we are part of nature and rescuing ourselves.” Co-founder of *New York Magazine* and *Ms. Magazine*, Gloria married for the first time when she was in her 60s. Sadly, her husband, David Bale (actor Christian’s father) died last year. She talked about hope after grief and said, “Hope is a form of planning. Racism and sexism need to be uprooted together. Women aren’t less violent than men, we just don’t have our masculinity to prove.” Steinem advised people to access the new paradigm of power by centring themselves and imagining, “your future self on the path ahead of you – your best self can be your mentor.”

Sally Field, who won Oscars for *Norma Rae* in 1979 and *Places in the Heart* in 1984 asked, “Who lives on this planet whose self-worth isn’t constantly threatened? Our task as humans is to befriend all aspects of ourselves, even the negative parts. Adversity made me dig down to rise up. My mother was injured as all mothers are. She did the very best she could do.” But as a baby, Sally didn’t understand this. She would think, “Why do I feel so alone? Why couldn’t I make her [mother] feel better? She held me as a doll, not as a human. My whole task has been to be present for my sons.”

Sally turned 58 in November but still feels, “like I’m always struggling. I’m always feeling like I need to get somewhere, that I’m not quite there yet.” Astonishing her audience, Sally said she still gets stage fright, but that, “Acting, I feel alive and at the centre of humanness. That feels so powerful, to go into the heart of the dragon, to do what frightens you most. Acting was a gift of survival from God to me.”

Lawyer, author and chat show host Iyanla Vanzant said, “I am committed to the universal healing of women. All of us are struggling with something. The reason we struggle is to grow in spirit. There is a part of you that knows how to take the next step to where you need to be” but you need to tap into that spirit to find out what it is. “Too often, woman is willing to give her power away. Someone is waiting to hear exactly what you have to say.”

“Patriarchy has nothing to do with masculinity. It is a power principle that has become a parody of itself.”

African grief ritualist, Sobonfu Some said, “Unless we give voice to loss, we never metabolise it and it shows up later as revenge. We cannot move into the future without dealing with the past. No one is ever taught how to grieve. We are born knowing. We scream, ‘I am alive – can anyone welcome me?’” Traditionally, the Dagara of Burkina Faso, West Africa, other children welcome the new baby by crying “Yes, we are here.”

Sobonfu said, “It takes courage to learn to say, ‘I care. You are important in my life. You don’t need to be a ‘good girl’, you don’t need to suppress [feelings]. By not grieving, we carry toxic energy and end up with cancers and ulcers. To know what love is, we must be willing to let our heart break into a million pieces.”

Singer Tulani Kinard told us that her name means peace but that, in trying to embody peace, she found herself in un-peaceful situations. “Every moment, every second, you need to be in touch with your power and choose peace.”

Therapist Donna LeBlanc said, “It is completely clear that we would not be at war if women were gathering en masse. We are the ocean but we are divided into different drops,” Isolated from each other and our power, we obsess over our weight and spend far too much energy on worrying about what others think of us. Donna said,

“There is no reason to be afraid. Fear is the mechanism forces us to keep up in our small groups. Meditate. Know you are safe.”

Dr Johnetta Cole, Dean of Bennett College, said there are three steps to righting the world. One: know who you are; two: strive to strengthen other women; and three: service to others. Cole said, “I want every person in the world who has ever been the victim of any kind of bigotry to never practice bigotry against others. Each of us has a personal responsibility to work on our own biases that perpetuate the dreaded ‘-isms’ [sexism, racism etc.] Touch your own power, recognise the power of others and work collectively to change things. We need to move into a more sustainable future. One that values peace more than war, people more than profit and hope more than despair.”

These women all hold the new paradigm of power. They are being true to themselves in their work, speech and as they help others to heal. By witnessing their honesty and courage we can all be inspired to access and act on our own power, knowing that it’s nothing to be feared.