



LEADING WOMEN

Bringing together some of the powerful women in the world along with those who look up to them for inspiration, the International Women's Conference by the International Association for Human Values will be spearheaded by Bhanumathi Narasimhan the Chairperson of the organisation who speaks to us about her endeavour.

L'OFFICIEL: What was your vision when you started the International Women's Conference in 2005? How was the idea born?

BHANUMATHI NARASIMHAN: Actually, a few of us in the *ashram* were sitting together and sharing experiences of our projects and how it has helped women everywhere. The sharing highlighted the positive transformation that women power can have. So we thought: Why not have a coming together of women who want to make a difference, share ideas and join hands—and the conference was born!

The theme of the upcoming conference is 'Light of Leadership: Integrating Global Perspectives'? According to you, what qualities define a woman leader?

H. H. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar says, "Women can glue the differences and bring people of diverse nature together." According to me, this quality is inherent in her and makes it easier for her to create and maintain team spirit.

A leader must have trust and also be trustworthy. Only then can she delegate successfully and also get the work done on time. A leader must have foresight. The lady of the house plans everything from the daily needs of the house to saving money for her daughter's wedding. Budgeting and managing finances is in her blood. A leader must have equanimous and an unbiased vision. As a mother, a woman places the needs of every member of the family before her own and she cares for all with equal love.

A leader must seek the truth in every situation. Her impact ranges from the family to the whole society. Her decisions must be a combination of intelligence and her intuition. A woman naturally relates to the heart level which is realm of intuition. A calm state of mind can contribute to the intuitive factor while it can be strengthened by spiritual practices like meditation and yoga.

A leader must also have faith in the universal intelligence that nourishes the whole creation. Faith is a very powerful quality and can connect to the heart of the people.

We can see that all these qualities are innate in us as women. However as a teacher of meditation, I can say for sure that these qualities blossom to their full potential when you meditate. Spirituality really makes the difference in your quality of consciousness, quality of enjoyment and quality of appreciation of life.

In 2005, the conference supported houses for homeless women. In 2007, the cause was education for 500 girl children. Besides providing homes and education, what does women empowerment mean to you, personally?

We normally think that women empowerment is for the monetarily less fortunate. I would say, this is not the case. They are equally less fortunate who are impoverished emotionally, who are spiritually poor. There are many educated and monetarily independent women facing emotional challenges, who cannot handle their life or stressful situations. Often, suicides are a result of these emotional imbalances. This is common especially among the educated and affluent society. When we are emotionally weak, we catch on to negativity more easily. So, to nourish one's soul, one needs to turn to spirituality. Meditation alone can put you in a space that is unshakable and you can view life from a balanced angle.

Having met so many women leaders, who is your role model? What quality in her impressed you?

For me, my mother is my role model. She was a symbol of strength for me. With the guidance of my master, I then perceived her as a symbol of love as well. When there is a combination of strength and love in life that is the stepping stone for blossoming. Strength (strength of mind) in our dealings in the world and love for the inner self—then life is a celebration.