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VOL. 18 NO.1 / FEB - MAR 2018





RISING sisters

Around the world, thousands of women are gathering in circles to connect, uplift and transform together. KRISTINA IOANNOU explores why sisterhood circles are becoming increasingly popular and how you can host your own.

Sisterhood circles and their perfunctory charms are trending in a big way. The world is seeing a steady rise in women coming together to unite and dive deep into their well of inner knowing through a supportive, encouraging and nourishing place of compassion, love and acceptance.

"They are an opportunity to have genuine conversations, share experiences, learnings and challenges authentically with each other," says Sammie Fleming, a life coach and women's circle facilitator (sammiefleming.com). "They are a safe space to be welcomed exactly as you are, and perhaps partake in some ritual or do something like set intentions for the future."

Interestingly, circles stem from ancient times where they were an honoured part of womanhood and society. In modern times, you can do a quick search on Google or Facebook and you'll be met with endless events promoting full moon ceremonies, divine feminine group meditations, collective soul retrievals and more.

Teacher and facilitator Lauren Burns (soulcode.me) believes that this upwards trajectory is no coincidence. "We too often see the highlight reels of other women's lives and a sense of emotional disenfranchisement is

a total epidemic. Ironically, we are disconnected through technology rather than connected by it, and sisterhood circles are a way to make real, in-person connections that work on a physiological level," says Burns. "Sitting in the physical presence of other women actually creates oxytocin – a de-stress hormone – in the body to create a sense of ease and connection."

INNER CIRCLE

According to Burns, sisterhood circles are a sacred space to share in and be witnessed in the experience of life as a woman. Some circles may focus on womb work or address moon cycles and so forth, whereas others may be more of an exploration around common challenges and experiences. "On the whole, it's a chance to pause, connect deeply, and to come into a sacred space to share wisdom, experiences and insights with other like-minded women. We sit in a circle, and often start and end with a guided meditation, maybe some breath work, or simple rituals such as sharing vocal intentions. There may also be journalling work, chanting or singing or activities set by the facilitator – no circle is the same," explains Burns.

A range of emotions may be experienced after a circle – often you

will leave feeling lighter, more connected and in touch with what you have been dealing with in day-to-day life on a more symbolic level. "The key to a circle is around conscious communication and conversation, and to be fully witnessed in the sharing of life's experiences and insights. In this witnessing a huge energetic shift can be felt," says Burns.

According to lightworker and shaman Olivia Gynell (oliviagynell.com), sisterhood circles are relevant for all ages, depending on the focus of the group. "There are some really sweet ones run for young girls and teens, with a focus on manifesting, learning about crystals and age-appropriate rituals. I also know of men who host their own circles; [they're] guys who are interested in spirituality, living more holistically and consciously, and those who are interested in healing and supporting each other," says Gynell.

"Women enjoy getting together for the sense of community, understanding, inspiration and togetherness; especially if they are interested in becoming more present, living a more spiritual and intentional life."

The positives about attending a circle are endless: you may experience a sense of support, shared wisdom, and the comfort of an elder or person of experience to go to for advice

and learning. “It’s a safe space to set intentions, celebrate and be ceremonial and spiritual,” says Gynell.

Sometimes, however, it’s not all love and light. Gynell warns that vulnerable people can be misguided by those who do not have pure intentions. “Some people can become negative and like to dwell on the past rather than move forward positively into the future. There may also be a clash of personalities – egos can often get in the way when it comes to spirituality and healing.” She recommends doing your research and visiting the host beforehand to get to know them as well as chatting to other attendees.

WANT TO FIND A CIRCLE NEAR YOU?

Check out Facebook, Eventbrite or ask your local yoga and health studio if they know of any.

“Having refined facilitation skills is crucial to ensure that each person of the circle experiences a feeling of safety to share deep stories.”

HOSTING YOUR OWN

Contrary to popular belief, sisterhood circles aren’t just for the esoteric or yogic warriors among us – anyone can be a hostess. To create your own, Burns stresses the importance of setting a very clear intention as to why you want to hold the space, and what it will elicit, and to be prepared to hold it with total reverence and respect for all.

“Having refined facilitation skills is crucial to ensure that each person of the circle experiences a feeling of safety to share deep stories,” says Burns. Starting small by inviting women you resonate with is one way to go. “Esteemed healers such as shamans may hold a group or be open to starting one in your area, so search them out if you need guidance and assistance,” says Gynell.

If you are used to holding space for



others, Burns advises to trust that ability, find a suitable venue to host and invite the group to open. They can be held anywhere that privacy and a sense of total safety can be upheld. Fleming suggests creating a beautiful space with flowers, candles and crystals as a centrepiece or ‘altar’ in the middle of the circle. You may also choose to share delicious food together, hold your circle under the light of the full moon and make a flower mandala in the centre of circle.

“I often use tools such as white sage or palo santo to energetically clear the space. There are usually oracle cards in the centre of the room, too, for women

to pull if they want to. The options are truly endless and it can be such a fun and loving way to spend time with the women in your life,” says Fleming. “Being seen for the amazing woman that you are, in a space like this, is really special and you get to see yourself as others see you – absolutely enough, exactly as you are.”

So, what’s it really like to attend a women’s circle? Kristina Ioannou and *Natural Health* editor Danae Dimitropoulou tried it out. Here, they share their unique experiences and the realisations they made along the way.

THE TOOLKIT

A great launching pad for women to share the magic of a sisterhood circle, this beautiful box is brimming with what you need to create your own sacred circle. There’s everything from crystals for the circle’s mandala centrepiece, ritual items and a hosting guide that covers everything you need to know from start to finish and all the magic in between. \$185, sistersandthesea.com



EDITOR'S REVIEW:

Divine Feminine Urban Goddess Morning with Sian Pascale

thelightcollective.yoga

I awoke at dusk on a Sunday morning, engulfed by the pitch black sky. The night was still and the sun was yet to rise, but I willed my tired body to get out of bed, get ready and attend a divine feminine goddess morning led by Sian Pascale, a breath, meditation and yoga teacher.

Soon enough, I arrived at the venue in St Kilda, Melbourne, where the retreat was to take place. I made my way up a staircase that was littered with the flickering light of tea candles. I could smell the wafting aroma of burning sage – an ancient tradition for energetic cleansing – and I was soon cleansed from head to toe.

As I entered the room, I was taken aback with the expansive, floor-to-ceiling

view of the beach. The sun had started to rise and the water's waves crashed over the sand. I placed my mat on the floor as I scanned the room and noticed women of all ages, from 16 to 60, who had gathered to share, connect and delve into ancient feminine wisdom. I was soon greeted by Sian who opened her arms, engulfed me in a warm hug and thanked me for attending. Instantly, I felt a burst of energy and my tiredness subsided.

Sian soon took her seat before an altar that had been constructed from a mandala print and decorated with incense,

roses, candles, crystals and a statue of Ganesh – the Hindu god of prosperity. She sat in silence, and when the surrounding voices subsided, she began speaking about the idea of the sacred feminine through the myths of the goddess Saraswati, who represents grace, flow and the highest form of creativity. Sian meditated on how we can develop a connection to the divine through meditation, chanting, yoga, creativity and being in nature, before leading

us through the mantra for Saraswati: *aum aing*

Saraswati-ya namaha.

We moved into a guided, hour-long flow of *asanas*, or physical yoga postures. After, we formed a large circle as platters of fresh fruit, chia seed puddings, vibrant rice paper rolls and smoothies were placed in front of us. Since ancient

times, food has been viewed as an integral part of spiritual life and the yogis believed that the energy we emit during mealtimes affects our digestion. Sian guided us through a blessing extracted from the *Bhagavad Gita* that is said to purify our food and connect us with the spiritual experience of nourishment.

After we consumed our breakfast, we gathered in our circle and paired off for a one-on-one exchange with the woman next to us. We ended the morning with a final group chant, prayer and a long 20-minute *savasana*. There was an impossible stillness that infiltrated the room, as each woman was left to ruminate on the morning's teachings.

As I left the retreat, I felt a deep sense of calm and serenity. Sian welcomed us to hold a sacred space to delve deeply into the notion of the divine feminine. She showed us how to open our minds and hearts and tap into the uninterrupted creative flow that's at the core of us all. ■



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