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NB: This article been translated solely for the interviewee (the subject of the interview), as an overview of its content and information. It therefore contains some slightly "round-about" translations and certain terms / titles that have been left in bold, since I'm quite sure they are not correct. In some cases I have left two possible expressions to better reflect the Estonian. This article has NOT been translated for publication in English. / Riina Kindlam, the translator

Daring to be yourself

In searching for your true self, a woman must first be honest with herself, yet at a most critical time, this can prove difficult.

Text: Ülle Hõbemägi

Photo: Corbis/Scanpix, personal collection

Psychologist and international educator Sandy Levey-Lunden paid a visit to Estonia. With a masters degree in special education, she has successfully taught inner-city children in New York with behavioural problems and learning disabilities. In addition to this, she is one of a long line of **healers** in her family. Sandy is one of those people who is able to see situations and connections in life in a much deeper way and as part of a bigger picture (than most) -- countless people all over the world have found (a deeper connection with) themselves and other people at her **spiritual education seminars**.

Do people (often) begin studying psychology in a search to solve their own problems?

Naturally. We all wish to discover who we are at our most basic level and what goes on in the depths of our senses/being. I began studying psychology in order to understand my family and the people around me and to help heal myself and others suffering from a state of unhappiness. At the age of seventeen I told my Mother that I thought the people around me seemed sad, that there was no joy in their faces. At that age I already wanted to find answers to questions such as why we are on this earth, what are we doing here and what is the meaning of life. I finally found the right solution at age thirty: I realised that all people come into this world to **perform / put on** their own story. By observing people I realised (the extent of) the lack at honesty and fairness that exists around us.

People mistakenly believe that there are "others" and "me" in this world. In fact, all others around us are an expression of ourselves. My family is not simply my family, they are simultaneously also "others". I do not categorise people according to their problems as is generally the aim in psychology. No one can be considered ill due to their senses / being or mental capabilities and everyone can achieve progress on the road to health.

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You opened up your practice in the 1980s. What kind of attitude existed amongst women at that time?

I was the sales director for the popular organization Women's Success Team for two years in the US. It was the start of the women's rights movement when women started to suddenly leave their spouses and making their own decisions in life. Women started to suddenly want to leave a mark of themselves in the world, yet not knowing how to go about it. They wanted to find a new passion alongside the role of being a mother. Until that point they had been completely dependent on their husbands and did not know how to manage money.

A lot of women from that group went into politics. We helped them become successful and to see their dreams come true.

In a lot of cases, many (women) must not be able to imagine what to do with their lives?

The most difficult case is when you are not able to see yourself as anybody. In order to gain an understanding of yourself so that your true personality comes forth, you must cleanse your ego of misguided attitudes and influences from the past. This is an intense, deep experience and can be experienced at my seminars.

A woman has been created to be a woman, not to act like a man. That is the first thing one must understand. The question is how to link being a woman with family and the rest of the world, in order to be happy.

You must always ask yourself: did I do, or am I doing something that is important to me only. A lot of women judge themselves, thinking that they are not good enough. The influences of their mothers, grandmothers and society are fixed in their sense of ego, shadowing their own unique talents. Whatever you are able to imagine, you can also make happen. Create a vision of what you would like to do and you thereby have the opportunity to act accordingly. We often are able to achieve much more than we can imagine: you wish your dream and you create it by your desire.

You teach others about the essence of a holy relationship and speak of eternal love, yet you yourself are divorced / separated.

Much of the wisdom that I now pass on to couples has come from my experience of marriage and separation -- that was a important chapter in my own life lesson. I continue to be friends with my ex-husband. I have never had a relationship with anyone, where a connection to the person has ended. Relationships last forever, their form is simply in transition.

I don't believe in separation / divorce, for me the word does not exist. Change how you interact, accept changes. We learn about ourselves within a relationship, because each change means understanding a new aspect within yourself. Some lessons are very hard to bear, through them we discover the darker side of our being / spirit. Sometimes our own behaviour in a relationship can be quite frightening.

A lot of people are not able to handle their relationships. Every relationship must have a

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goal. If you have a vision, you can manage working together or separately -- that is the basis for a relationship that is holy. The goal of a holy relationship is to free the person from their negative past, restricting beliefs and wrongful thoughts. In a holy relationship there must be the opportunity to open up the other persons spirit / soul and to become united in spirit and goal.

People must learn opposite thinking: if people usually think that the other person did that to me, then in fact that situation is created by the person's own beliefs, thinking and feelings. My thoughts become my feelings, which in turn become my beliefs. Everything in this life I do to myself.

Whoever you meet during your lifetime -- you are destined to learn from them and to teach them. Our teachers can be anyone: mother, father, best friend, partner or enemy. Such meetings are not by chance, but part of our destiny. You can learn from a situation, a mere moment, or a lifetime spent with someone.

Why don't women take advantage of all that they are capable of?

The reasons behind this are irrational as well as true fears, which they have faced. The mere thought encountering fear limits the will to act.

Women also stop themselves from living to their full potention out of the fear of not having men's approval. A man can leave them if they suddenly become successful or desire a new kind of life. In addition, you run the risk of not being liked by old friends as the "new you".

We must ask ourselves the right, open / (deep-reaching) questions, in order to get ahead in life with the help of the right answers. Everyone's life journey is unique and complete. The journey itself is just as important as the goal.

What happens in life is not as important as how a person interprets what has happened.

EXCERPTS IN BOLD, MID COLUMN: Whatever you are able to imagine, you can make happen. Create a vision of what you would like to do and you thereby have the opportunity to act on it.

We learn about ourselves within a relationship, because each change means understanding a new aspect within yourself. Some lessons are very hard to bear, through them we discover the darker side of our being / spirit. Sometimes our own behaviour in a relationship can be quite frightening.

According to Sandy, every woman should know how to:

... fall in love without losing yourself,

... leave their job,

... let go of a loved one,

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... tell a friend the truth without ruining the friendship,
... live alone, even if they don't like it.

Every woman should know that...

... she cannot change the length of her legs, the size of her hips or her parents' nature,

... her childhood may not have been perfect, but it's over now.

Every woman should know...

... who she can trust and who she cannot and all the reasons why to not take it personally,

... what she will and what she will definitely not do for love,

... where to go when her spirit needs peace, whether it be a best friend's kitchen or cozy cabin in the woods,

... what she can accomplish in a day, a month and a year.

Every woman should feel that she is in charge of her own destiny / is the master of her fate.

Experience

Unconditional love

Kadri Riives, took part in Sandy Levey's seminar "**There is Life Power in Femininity**" (?)

Seven years ago I suddenly lost the opportunity to have a child (again?) and it was a severe blow to my identity and sexuality. For many years I grappled with the question: what kind of a woman am I any more? I went to Sandy's seminar to search for validation and support in being a woman.

Nothing in our lives happens by chance -- every following moment is a part of the last, one thing leads to another.

Sandy reminded me that I am forever a complete and holy being, within which both a feminine and masculine side exists. Femininity and masculinity are not things that can be attached or taken away -- they simply exist in every one of us in different ways and to a different degree. Everyone makes their own decision regarding how these (facets) are expressed.

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Women in crisis simply need to be reminded that their power, strength and joy come from within themselves and is not dependent on the approval of others. The courage to be yourself and unconditional love towards yourself are what give you the power to live life to the fullest. A man who is able to accept a woman's love notices that certain something that makes a woman a woman (in every woman). This also works in the reverse -- women are able to bring out masculinity in men or diminish it.

Sandy helped me to understand and distinguish between large and small truths -- ones which are eternal and others that are temporary and based on ego. She taught me how to connect deeds and feelings stemming from the ego with a greater truth. Instead of sitting with one leg dangling over the other, we should place both feet firmly on Mother Earth and look each other in the eye.

EXCERPT: Women in crisis simply need to be reminded that their power, strength and joy come from within themselves and is not dependent on the approval of others.

Free of Familial Patterns

Marika Tomberg, "liberated/free breathing" therapist, breathing seminars organizer

If a mother does not feel like, or value herself as a true woman, this effects her children as well.

If a mother does not value/treasure the father of her children, this effects her daughter's relationships with men. An ineffective/faulty family pattern/example is naturally discovered upon reaching adulthood, when one's own relationships are not working. In order to unravel these questions, one should begin a journey towards a deeper understanding of one's feelings.

Sandy shares very personal experiences with participants of the seminar, which have (might?) never have been discussed (even) with one's parents. The assignment is to begin placing value on that which has not come from family. You must consciously work on you femininity, trust your instincts, analyze your relationships with men (do you socialize with a man as an asexual being, or as a man?) and also your relationship to your body. By relating positively to your appearance, you value yourself more.

It is extremely important to have the courage to live according to your inner desire and to create positive energy around you. In waiting for great things to happen, we assume that someone else will take responsibility and do something. You yourself must take responsibility, you must create and acknowledge your role as a creator of joy and success and keep those thoughts at a sustainable level.

Expressing femininity brings true joy, happiness and energy into a woman's life. At every stage of life a woman is able to discover and open up her femininity, to find motivation and shine at a new level, accepting of changes. Everything that does not work should be left by the wayside, in order to move in a direction supported by your inner voice.