

## THE SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION OF MOTHERHOOD: AN ALCHEMICAL PROCESS

I was recently asked to address a group of new mothers on the topic of “The Spiritual Shift in Becoming A Mother”. I realized, upon reflection, that many women don’t perceive of this new role as one connected with spirit, but attached to more earthly concerns. For many, the transition to motherhood, as in other life passages, may evoke conflicting feelings and the precipitation of old emotional and spiritual issues. While the new mother may have felt that she had previously dealt with and healed these old concerns, now they have been resurrected! This phenomenon is not surprising. In our traditionally patriarchal and religious cultures, spirituality and communion with God have more traditionally been assigned to men, while women have been relegated the material and earthly responsibilities of caretakers. This pattern has been prevalent since the Industrial Revolution and now, as Mother Nature suffers a deep crisis, women are finding empowerment to work towards their personal and planetary healing. I believe that women’s connection with the earth is equally as spiritual and necessary as those “higher” connections assigned to men. It is in the everyday material world that we all, both men and women, can find sacredness. This sacredness is found in our breath, in nature, in new life, and in death.

Consider the act of conception. What is more spiritual than the uniting of two human beings joined in love for the creation of a totally new being? A soul will be birthed in nine months, and in this time, the mother develops an increasing awareness of her symbiosis with this new person. Her pregnancy becomes a spiritual rite of passage. A woman, who may have defined herself as daughter, wife, lover, friend, coworker, and boss, must now make room for a new identity, mother. As she becomes more connected to this new role, all other priorities will shift as well. As the new spirit develops within her, the mother gives of herself that the other may grow and thrive. This shift is not without stress, fears, conflict

and ambivalence. This may be her first true act of heroism! The mother's soul-searching has begun, and will probably continue for the duration of her life. For her, it is a *rebirth*, a birthing of a newly conscious self. Within this process, with the sense of new life growing inside her, the once innocent maiden now recognizes the power of creation inherent in her being. She cannot help but become exquisitely attuned to not only the cycles of life, but to death as well. As she is aware of her power to create, she too becomes aware of other powers to destroy. And so, she feels a deeper, more vulnerable, and yet greater, more authentic connection to the world she inhabits. No longer the disempowered girl, she becomes a WOMAN, in the great fullness of this word's definitions.

The newly created being, resting in the oneness, also develops increasing awareness. Finally, the silent communication between the mother and her baby develops to a new stage and labor begins. Some might not consider childbirth a transcendent experience but, what better example of the Goddess in all her glorious raging power, now aggressively pushing out a new life? In this birthing moment, the paradoxical feelings of power coupled with pain, fear, and loss of control, become the primary issues. This is a spiritual event! Through moans, groans, screams, cries, tissue and blood, the baby emerges. The primordial earth mother has acted! Women, in much later stages of life, who may remember little else, can remember every detail of their childbirth experience. Suddenly, in this one event, women feel the connection to their own mothers, their mother's mothers, and every woman who came before them. Aminah Raheem, my wise teacher, adapted the following vision from Brian Sykes book, The Seven Daughters of Eve.

*"You are on a stage. Before you, in the dim light, all the people who have ever lived are lined up, rank upon rank, stretching far into the distance. They make no sound that you can hear, but they are talking to each other. You have in your hand the end of the thread which connects you to your ancestral mother way at the back. You pull on the thread and one woman's face in every generation,*

*feeling the tug, looks up at you. Their faces stand out from the crowd and they are illuminated by a strange light. These are your ancestors. You may recognize your grandmother in the front row, but in the generations behind her the faces are unfamiliar to you. You look down the line. The women do not all look the same... You may want to ask them each in turn about their lives, their hopes, and their disappointments, their joys and sacrifices. You speak, but they cannot hear you. Yet you feel a strong connection. These are all your mothers who passed this precious messenger from one to another through a thousand births, a thousand screams, a thousand embraces of a thousand newborn babies. The thread becomes an umbilical cord. A thousand rows back stands the ancestral mother of your clan. She pulls on the cord. In the great throng a million ancestors sense the tug in lines that radiate out from the source. You may feel the pull in your own stomach. On the bright stage of the living, you look to right and left and sense that others feel it too. These are the other people in your clan. You look at each other and sense your deep umbilical connection. You are looking at your brothers and sisters. Now you are aware who they are, you feel you have something very deep in common. You feel closer to these people than to the others.” And so, it has begun!*

In this new beginning, the woman establishes a different relationship with her own mother, and all the mothers who preceded her. She develops a sense of the great flow of life, and the love which is the medium for this current. Her own childhood resentments and angers may recede, and a deeper appreciation of life and its gifts is available to her. Now, although at times she may feel quite alone in her responsibilities, she may also tap into the great source from which all life emerges. This is her unique and divine opportunity for spiritual connection and a reaffirmation of personal faith.

The greatest opportunities however, also provide the greatest challenges. The ultimate spiritual test in life is trust, surrender to the greater flow. Motherhood is a total surrender. The mother's life will never be the same! A new type of love has

emerged, one deeper and more selfless than any she has ever known. Suddenly, there is someone for whom she would lay down her very life. Honoré De Balzac, the 19<sup>th</sup> Century French novelist and playwright, described it this way, “*A mother, who is really a mother, is never free.*” When love envelops her in such a way, she is in the realm of spirit. Chinese sage Lao Tse tells us,

*“Giving birth and nourishing,  
having without possessing,  
acting with no expectations,  
leading and not trying to control:  
this is the supreme virtue.”*

The mother’s test lies in rising to this virtue. Will she take advantage of this opportunity to enable her spiritual shift?

The challenges of motherhood are ongoing. What is the state of motherhood if not guilt ridden? Can the mother ever be good enough? Motherhood recalls the worst of her religious, if not spiritual, experiences! So much of our traditional religious life is fraught with guilt. And so, the mother addresses a new challenge in revisiting her earliest religious guilts. It may be of some support to remember that *guilt* may be defined as *love gone awry*. If the mother can maintain in her consciousness the knowledge that the most important element is *love*, then this challenge, too, may be overcome. If the *intention* to love is present, then all mothers are good enough. They may not be perfect, but in the mother’s imperfection lays the child’s ability to grow and learn their own spiritual lessons.

And so, in the course of motherhood, a woman is challenged to evaluate and affirm her own personal faith. What values will she impart to her child? What codes of behaviors and ethics need to be applied? How will she talk about issues of life, death and God to her own child? In seeking answers to these questions, she must revisit and reevaluate these issues for herself. The “good enough” mother is a spiritual warrior, empowered by love to grow, change, and transform

herself. Motherhood becomes the alchemical force that empowers this spiritual shift.

In the final analysis, the words of the poet Kahlil Gibran may provide a framework for understanding the mother's transformation:

*Your children are not your children.*

*They are the sons and daughters of life's longing for itself.*

*They come through you but not from you,*

*And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.*

*You may give them your love but not your thoughts,*

*For they have their own thoughts.*

*You may house their bodies but not their souls,*

*For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.*

*You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.*

*For life goes not backward nor carries with yesterday.*

*You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.*

*The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite, and bends you with might that the arrows may go swift and far.*

*Let your bending in the Archer's hand be for gladness;*

*For even as the Archer loves the arrow that flies, so the Archer also loves the bow that is stable.*

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