



## HOW DO YOU CHANGE A PARADIGM?

### *Early Winter Musings*

*Winter 2011*

I sat with a room full of women, educators, doulas, and midwives, attending the Capers workshop day with Michel Odent and Sara Wickham. Michel Odent said that in the history of childbirth, right now, the current situation is, that childbirth is at the bottom of the abyss. That at the level of the planet, the number of women **birthing** their babies and their placentas **due to their own hormones**, is approaching zero. That recent data examining all styles of care and all places of birth, suggests that **modern birth is more and more difficult**. Even with planned homebirths and midwifery care, transfer rates and **intervention** are increasing.

### **What's Going Wrong?**

Michel Odent says that the reason birth is getting harder in our modern culture is because women are **disturbed in their process**. Disturbed such that the involuntary process of birth is hindered and even halted. Disturbance happens with any stimulation that lifts a woman's **consciousness** into her **neocortex**, the thinking part of her brain. Questions, touch, sounds, even light does this. And even if its well meaning disturbance, it's still disturbance.

As Michel Odent said:

“Childbirth is an involuntary process of the body, you can't help an involuntary process but you can hinder it.”

Involuntary processes are run by our **reptilian brain**, and they include digestion, breathing, blood circulation etc, the functions of our body's, the processes that our lives depend on. If you think about how hard it is to breathe, then sure enough it will become hard to breathe, likewise with birth, **you think about how hard it is**, long it is, painful it is etc, **then that's what it will be**. Thinking needs to be left out of the story. Perhaps the modern woman thinks too much. And all she'd need to do is think the **dominant thoughts** that are held about childbirth – it's dangerous, risky, painful etc etc and that would explain the high rates of intervention which show us that childbirth is harder now.

But of course childbirth is the same its always been, **an involuntary process of the body that works**, for proof look at the population of the planet! It's the modern woman that's changed, she's believing what the dominant culture tells her.

And what the modern woman is thinking, disturbing herself with is, is fear. Fear is catchy, **fear is the great**

**controller.** Women are told over and over if you don't do this, that or the other, your baby will die. It takes a lot to stand up to that and as has happened time and time again, women who do are reported to DOC's, the Authority, because clearly they can't be allowed to care for their child if they choose behaviours that threaten it.

Sad, ridiculous, but true.

## The Imprint Of The Dominant Culture

And since birth is a rite of passage, and **rites of passage** are what **create community and culture**, then we see the dominant culture imprint taking a tighter hold. As more and more women give birth within a fear based paradigm it simply multiplies. And the people in power who define what is appropriate care are fearful.

The man with the power in the provision of Australian maternity care services, the president of the AMA, Dr Andrew Pesce, said about the practice of obstetrics in the SMH on May 22.

*"Some people might call it treating pregnancy as a disease, other people say it's being very alert for potential problems and being pro-active in the management of them."*

And for most people this sounds very sensible. When intervention is necessary, it's necessary, when it's not, it's not.

It only looks 'wrong' from outside the circle that these dominant practices create. From inside the circle, it looks right, safe, sensible, life saving in fact. From outside that circle it looks like a **controlled 'service'** based on **fear** of death and litigation, **enforced** on everyone. All based on a patriarchal perspective that those in power need to take responsibility for everyone else, because they cannot be **trusted** to take **responsibility** for themselves.

Many, but still a minority, would prefer to take responsibility for themselves, however this is not **encouraged**, particularly in the realm of birth.

## The Spiral Path of Evolution

*What would happen if more people took responsibility for themselves?*

The power based structures of our culture would shift, things would change. And when noticed with an Eagle Eye, a big picture perspective, we can see where we're headed – **evolution**.

Evolution works the shape of a **spiral**, and what is seen at the shift from one level to the next are the lessons of the previous round, often showing up as the worst of it.

A very useful map for understanding this, is the work of Don Beck and Chris Cowan called Spiral Dynamics. **Spiral Dynamics** presents a **map** that shows the **evolutionary steps** that people and cultures make as they move further away from needing to be fixed on survival. It's a bit like Maslow's hierarchy of needs for cultures.

Wikipedia has a good explanation, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spiral\\_Dynamics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spiral_Dynamics). Spiral Dynamics have a website, [www.spiraldynamics.org/](http://www.spiraldynamics.org/) and at the *School of Shamanic Womancraft Family Camp* this Summer past, Paul, my husband, gave a bush presentation of the concept that was really easy to understand.

We've got that as an audio file if you're interested.

## Let Love Set The Course

To cut a long story short, and using Michel Odent's perspective of childbirth being at the bottom of the abyss, there's only one way out of the abyss and that's up! When asked how to do this, Michel Odent said as Gandhi did in his words - "*be the change you want to see in the world*". Michel Odent said to help each woman however you can to have an undisturbed birth, then Nature would play Her part, love would set the course. It's all about the love. Or as Michel Odent would say - "*lurve*".

So the current picture of interference in birth has as its roots in almost all cultures; **3000 years** of rituals of the **patriarchal culture**; that separated newborns and mothers in the moments after birth. For one reason or another, superstitions, claims that colostrum was "*bad*" for the baby, needing a religious man, someone representing God, to see the baby first to deem whether it should survive or not, and then in our modern times, so many different interferences with the mother and newborn time masquerading as safety - suction of the newborn, wrapping, weighing, measuring etc etc, all interfering with the time that **Nature intended** to be the time when the mother would experience an **oxytocin** (the hormone of love) **peak**, like no other time in her whole life (except potentially next time she gives birth).

The mother misses out on this oxytocin peak if she is disturbed, and that includes being photographed. If she misses out on this oxytocin peak it **disturbs the separation and birth** of her placenta and the **level of love** she experiences. The peak of love the mother is designed to experience is to facilitate **bonding** with her baby, and it can only happen in the **first hour after birth** and only if she is undisturbed.

Just think about the rising rates of Post Natal Depression, with the rising rates of caesarean and instrumental deliveries. Birth outcomes that **reflect the fear based paradigm** that justifies them.

Love or fear, we've all heard that before.

[Bruce Lipton](#) explains this as a cellular biologist can. At a cellular level, and everything just builds on that, if a cell is in a state of protection, induced by conditions that threaten its survival, then all its energy, behaviour etc is based on protection and survival and it cannot grow or develop. And so it is for people, for communities and for entire cultures.

## Reclaiming The Birth Process

*So bringing it back to the Birth Altar, how can we best serve the process?*

As women, as mothers, as doulas, as midwives, as educators, methinks we need to do and continue to do, what we've been saying for a long time, **reclaim the birth process** from the fear based medical clutches and return it to a woman centred place where on understanding the science of it, we can **let Nature do Her magic** and **let love prevail**. This involves us, on every level, not thinking we can do better than Mother Nature, and trust in the way of things. But the dominant perspective as Dr Pesce reminds us is very different to that.

*"Good obstetricians always **listen to women**, always **include them in decision making** and that would be considered good practice. I'm sure there are some obstetricians who don't do that as much as they should, but there are a lot of women who come into my rooms telling me about their birth stories from when they were in a midwives clinic where they were allowed to wait far longer without pain relief, without intervention that they actually asked for because somebody arrogantly thought that nature was best and they just had to wait for nature to take its course."*

He is saying from his power seat that Nature can't be trusted, and the really sad thing here, is that most people would read that and agree with him.

## The Wisdom of The Wild Feminine

Ani di Franco, musician, poet, activist, one of my absolute favourites, writes in her Foreword in Ian May Gaskin's new book – "*Birth Matters*" – about her experience of giving birth at home after a long labour. She started her story saying that she believed more in the wisdom of Mother Nature than the wisdom of doctors and how that shaped the childbirth choices she made. Ani writes about pain and how our culture seeks to avoid it by "*masking, subduing and eradicating pain, even emotional pain, from our lives. We are taught to view pain as an enemy, not a teacher. But pain is the right hand of growth and transformation. Pain is in the history of all human wisdom. The pains associated with menstruation and childbirth (even the emotional pain) are the price of having agency with the bloody, pulsing, volcanic divinity of creation, and they lie at the core of feminine wisdom.*"

And she asks the question: "*What if the medical establishment that purports to be saving women from the spectre of pain and danger is instead ejecting them from the seat of their power?*"

Right question.

Wild untamed powerful women are feared in our culture, She who won't behave in accordance with the rules of the patriarchal order is **ostracised**. And the provision of maternity care is quite the theatre of that.

Ani di Franco says, "*I have many friends now who have given birth, most of them in hospitals with a myriad of interventions, and a truly shocking number of them by caesarean section. Young, healthy and strong women. It confuses me that I, an educated, privileged woman in twenty-first century America, am surrounded by women who think they need saving and, because they are denied the opportunity to know otherwise, may believe it forevermore. They look at me with wide eyes and say, 'I couldn't have done what you did', and my heart breaks as I think quietly, 'Yes, you could have! In fact, I bet you could have done better!' How could all these otherwise empowered young women go so unquestioningly into the role of damsel in distress when it comes time to have their children? How were they convinced that they 'couldn't do it?'*"

## The Power of Culture

The power of the culture is **strong**, it seeps into your bones and becomes the blood that flows through your veins. And sometime, one day, you wake up and feel uncomfortable on the inside. You either accept that or you don't. Accepting it keeps you on the wheel of 'samsara,' **rising against it awakens the warriorress**, and she is never very popular in the mainstream unless she's dressed up sexy and plays out the dominatrix, otherwise she is **demonised** and the **witch hunt** continues.

The way it's going, homebirth and midwifery care will become so regulated, forcing women and midwives 'underground,' creating further polarity.

An upcoming obstetric conference called the "*3rd Annual Obstetric Malpractice Conference - Prevention, management and defence of obstetric malpractice claims*" is advertising its subjects to be addressed.

Included in them are:

- The Regulation of Midwifery Practice: Moving into the 21st Century **at Last** (!)
- The Role of the Doula in Maternity Hospitals and **How to Best Manage Conflicts that May Arise** (!)

## So, How do We Change A Paradigm?

Choose love over fear.  
Love will keep us together.  
Love will show the way.  
All you need is love.  
You know the story.

So if we miss out on that flood of oxytocin and the increased capacity to feel and express love, and this effects the baby as well as the mother, then we need to create other times when we can experience love to the max. **Gathering together** with **heart centred connection** being the focus, is a way we can feel the love. It is a way that feels good on both sides, for both those listening and those sharing. **Creating community** around this heart centred way of being can help heal the wounds created by fear.

*“Listening is an attitude of the heart, a genuine desire to be with another which both attracts and heals.”*  
J.Isham

Coming from a place of compassion.

“Listening with **the ears of your heart** to the other voices of yourself speaking”.

Feeling the interconnection of all things, including us. Letting go of the fight, the energy of which participates in the creation of it.

*“If you want others to be happy, practice **compassion**. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.”*  
Dalai Lama

*“Be the change you want to see in the world.”*  
Gandhi

## Being The Change You Want To See

Fundamentally it's about consciousness raising. Helping, by being the change you want to see in the world, modelling it, so others will also take responsibility for their lives, and everything that happens in it. And trust that each woman will find her way as she sees that her birth experience reflects back to her what she next needs to learn about herself on her life journey to wholeness.

Wirrloo Minmia of the Wirradjuri nation, said that a baby comes into this world through a column of light, and how bright that light is depends on the mother.

Reclaiming the sacredness of birth is part of the healing of the wounded feminine.

*“Heal the Earth, one birth at a time”*  
Jeannine Parvati Baker

At our recent Vision Quest, Shamanic Craftswoman Talulah said:

*“I was sitting in our final circle at VQ looking at everyone, glowing with **love and acceptance** of each other and our group, and I thought, what if everyone were given this opportunity, to know each others stories and where we have come from, to be **heard and held** in circle, would everyone love each other like we do? Wouldn't that be amazing!”*