



RECLAIMING MENARCHE

The Red Thread

Spring 2012

Spring is here and its such a beautiful feeling to be really amongst it. The birds are chirping, the blossoms are smelling so sweet and the days are getting longer and warmer....

*This Spring, Red Tent Dreaming, which is a group of graduates and students of The School of Shamanic Midwifery, are hosting the Australian Premiere screenings of the new movie by American Isadora Leidenfrost, called "Things We Don't Talk About, Women's Stories from the Red Tent". These will happen in three capital cities – Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney this September and October. The movie screening will follow an afternoon of **sacred women's space**, where we will create a **Red Tent** experience, including a ceremony to reconnect, heal and reclaim our menarche (first blood). And after the movie there will be a Q+A panel of Women's Mysteries Teachers.*

Reclaiming our menarche is one of the most important things women can do. For most of us, who's menarche was not honoured, our memories of our first blood hold within them information about wounding around the feminine that comes to us from our Mother Line, down the **Red Thread**, and therefore the healing required to stop continuing this. It also holds within it clues to our relationship with feminine power. Our menarche sets up our attitudes toward our experience of menstruation and is the prequel to our next rite of passage – childbirth.

The Altars of Womanhood

As a midwife and in giving my workshops *Pregnancy, The Inner Journey, and Connecting With the Shamanic Dimensions of Pregnancy*, I have seen time and time again the link between our initiation into womanhood at **menarche** and our initiation into motherhood at **childbirth**. And as I myself now loiter around the next rite of peri-menopause, I see the links continue. I call these the **Altars of Womanhood**, and they are signposts and gateways on our journey, our life journey to wholeness. Retrospectively they give us clues to our life journey and life lessons, as well as the Red Thread we are carrying. Prospectively these Altars of Womanhood give us opportunities to heal for ourselves and 'all our relations', as we bring consciousness to how we honour and celebrate these rites for our daughters, be they our own daughters of the daughters of our community.

*Each Spring at **Beltane** (October 31st in the Southern Hemisphere) our community gathers to camp on our home property as a tribe and we celebrate the girls who have experienced their menarche that past year and the boys who have turned 13. Over the last 5 years I have seen a significant shift in the psychology around the pending **menarche** for the girls and the approaching **manhood** for the boys. Its so lovely to hear them welcome this shift, and actually look forward to it. One beautiful young maiden, has been coming to the Beltane camp since she was a little girl of six and has watched the big girls be honoured and celebrated at their Welcome to Womanhood Ceremony, year after year. As she got older she started saying 'maybe next year will be my turn', and now this coming Beltane it is, and she is so excited!*

*When our daughters come to the Altar of Menarche prepared and excited, ready to embrace the next unfolding of themselves, then we have contributed in the **healing of the Red Thread**, the one that carried the ‘curse’ and taught the young women to carry on regardless, to ignore their bodies and to not let anyone know. We know that at her menarche, the experience a girl has, how she is treated, the messages she receives, both subliminal and specific, inform her of her culture’s value of woman and how she is expected to behave and so we are choosing to do this consciously and with deep love and respect for the feminine.*

*And for the boys, our community uses the turning of 13 years as the mark for the boys leaving childhood and entering manhood. The boy’s rite of passage starts with the men taking them into the bush, prepared for possibility of snake bites and getting lost. Their mothers stand at a distance and drum them farewell, each being present with her own deep experience of seeing her ‘baby boy’ go off with the men. In this stage of ‘letting go’ we **bring consciousness** to its literal enactment and feel and share our emotions. I remember, seven years ago, watching my son Jackson going off with the men and thinking, ‘No, I want my baby back!’ But alas, that was never going to happen. He was not a baby anymore! Of course I knew that, but actually going through that process, particularly with the other mothers doing the same, enabled the inevitable letting go of my son’s childhood the recognition and mourning it deserved.*

*The boys are sent off on a follow-the-clues type obstacle course that is a metaphor for life. They need to work together to find and decipher clues to move through the journey. It is a modern day quest filled with mental, physical and emotional challenges. The quest is shrouded in secrecy, men’s secret business. It takes all day. Toward the end, the boys sit with the men of the community in a circle and share what they’ve learned. At sunset the victorious questers, these boys who have passed their **initiation into manhood**, march back to the community camp, blazing flares held high, to light the celebratory bonfire that the women are dancing around, singing and drumming in celebration of the young men’s return. The women celebrate their arrival with drumming, song and dance and then we dance together. The young women who have had their menarche ceremony that day join the young men, and as they dance in the inner circle, their community hoots and cries words of support, love and celebration to them. It’s a joyous occasion, an event they won’t forget.*

It’s wonderful to honour and celebrate our children, not for their achievements in school or sport or whatever, but just **for being themselves**, for being alive and ‘growing up’. In theory, and in practice, they feel their elders revere them, that their value is significant and that they are loved, supported and held by a group—their tribe.

Reclaiming Feminine Wisdom

*During the beautiful gathering I hold for pre-menarche girls and their Mums, called “**Mothers and Maidens Moonson**”, we have a circle where the mums share with the girls what they were told before they started their periods, what they’ve learned over their years of menstruation and what they wish they were told. I love this part, its like each mum has this five minute opportunity to speak to her daughter, and all the daughters, with the knowing that she will be heard. The girls sit there, wide eyed and all ears, and the wisdom flows. And so do the stories from the mums of starting their periods not knowing anything, not having been told a thing about what was going to happen. Many say they thought they dying! The wisdom of their experience flows forth too. How the years and years of menstruation teach us about our bodies, about the effects of different life style choices and how to best be with ourselves when we are bleeding. Each one of these circles holds the **feminine wisdom** we need to reclaim and each one also exposes the wounds that resulted from not honouring our cycles.*

How Does This Serve?

As midwife, a big part of helping women come to peace with an unexpected birth outcome is to help them ask themselves the question “how does this serve?” In asking this they move past the details and find what

it was that they learned about themselves from the experience. Often in long labours that result in intervention, women learn about their stamina, their conviction, their passion. Many women realise that they found an inner resource that helped them be with what was happening in a way that enabled them to stay present and focussed. My feeling about what women learn about themselves from their births is that, that piece, that quality or strength or whatever it is, is what they need to call on, bring forth, in their mothering of this baby. It's as if the mother with this new learned piece about herself is the mamma this baby has come for, the mamma that has been born through this birth.

And so it is with the menarche, reclaiming our menarche, which means revisiting it, asking what did it teach me about being a woman and how did that serve me, is part of the healing of the wounded feminine of our time. At the movie screenings of "Things We Don't Talk About" in the afternoon of Red Tent-ness, we are going to do a ceremony to continue this healing or set it in motion. The process will involve recalling our menarche experience and asking the question of what did it teach me about being a woman, then to see how this played out in the years of menstruation that followed and in our experience of giving birth (if indeed we have given birth). Once we can see a **recurring theme or pattern**, once we bring awareness to it, we bring choice. This choice can be exercised in how we care for ourselves and how we honour our cycle. This is huge! An undoing of a tangle of misinformed assumptions about womanhood. I always say in my workshops, if ever you hear something negative about women or the feminine, the reverse is probably true.

And we can reclaim our menarche, each next period could be treated as your first, honoured and celebrated. In the ceremony in our Red Tent space we will do a **shamanic drum journey** to meet with our own Inner Goddess to ask Her for a ritual to do with our next blood, or for those who's blood has finished to do with the next dark moon.

*Sequoia Krop has developed a **first blood ritual** for when a woman's cycle returns after birth or breastfeeding. It's a beautiful and magical ritual that you can conduct in the tradition of the Blessingway. Contact [Sequoia](#) for more details.*

Listening To Our Bodies

Putting my midwife (now former) hat back on, one of my missions through my work is to **decrease unnecessary intervention**, and doing this through education and informing women of the full story, not just the fear based medical story of birth.

To my mind, a major contributing factor to where we are at as a culture, why home birth and just plain vaginal birth are threatened, is because the majority of women come to the birth altar **unprepared**, unknowing and unconvinced of the power and point of **natural birth**, and why is this so? Because they have been led to believe through their experiences of being a woman so far, through their menarche and their menstruation, that the female body is essentially **flawed**, that medical science and technology will enable them to control the wayward unpredictable processes they must endure in the female body and that the fertility cycle of a woman is fraught with danger, blood, mess, pain, mood swings and inconvenience, which will interfere with a woman's productivity and contribution on a day to day basis.

Childbirth is not an isolated experience in a woman's life, it is the expression of her life story thus far, the culmination of her beliefs, attitudes and fears at that point in time on her life journey.

We have the births we need to have to teach us what we need to know about ourselves, to take us to the next place on our life journey, our journey to wholeness.

So way back at puberty most of us were taught to disregard the **messages from our bodies**, to deny the wonderful transformation into womanhood as anything other than a necessary, unfortunate inconvenience

and just get on with it. Through those attitudes and the ways of being with that, we disconnected from our bodies, following our mothers and grandmothers and great grandmothers, staying in line with the patriarchal way that had the body disconnection well cemented back in the days of Descartes, with his famous one liner “*I think therefore I am*”, back at the time called the Age of Reason, about the same time as the witch burnings.

Is it any wonder that women who have been medicating themselves every bloodtime so that they can **carry on regardless** also choose epidurals, pethidine and gas in labour? The bloodtime was preparation for birth, the time to learn to go within, to feel where the pain takes you and how it dissipates when you do that.....

Healing The Wounded Feminine

Each of us needs to heal the wounded feminine within and without, when we heal within we heal without, all individual healing work in turn heals others, we do the healing work **for all our relations**.

And healing will happen, firstly ‘awareness in curative’ so all we need to do to start the healing is notice the situation. We have an inbuilt healing mechanism, a predilection to find balance, and in terms of the wounding around the feminine, which shows up as pathology in women’s health, especially with the menstrual cycle, childbirth and menopause, the first steps are **reclaiming** the spiritual practice of menstruation and gathering in women’s circles, sharing our stories, listening to each other and offering the loving support that sisters can. This is how we can **reconnect with out bodies** and reconnect with each other as women. Divide and conquer works, reconnecting and standing united works.

Blessed be and Blessed Do