



SHAMANIC WOMANCRAFT

What is it?

Menstruation, conception, pregnancy, birth and menopause are **shamanic experiences**. These monumental life experiences are served well by this understanding. Shamanic Womancraft is the practice of **facilitating this journey**.

So, “what’s Shamanic Womancraft” I shall explain shamanic and womancraft which is basically what the original meaning of the term midwifery is.

Midwifery & The Maieutic Method

Midwifery is the practice, art and science of being a midwife. Midwife means ‘**with woman**’ and the usual role today for a midwife is to be ‘with woman’ during and around her childbearing, however the original role of the midwife was to be ‘with woman’ from ‘womb to tomb’.

To midwife is to facilitate, to assist someone’s learning through **the Maieutic method** (later called the Socratic method), this means to help and to guide the person to discover their own inner knowing through asking questions and ‘**holding the space**’ for them to travel within to do this.

Midwifery is based on a belief that a **woman’s body knows** how to menstruate, how to give birth (and a baby knows how to be born, and birth is a normal function of the female body and a useful way to help a woman during her pregnancy to prepare for her birth is to help her find and deal with her fears), how to create, how to negotiate menopause, etc. And because I have been ordered by the government to not use the term midwifery to describe this work, I will use womancraft.

The Shamanic Perspective

Shamanic describes the **inner and outer, multi dimensional** space that exists within and around us, the places that the shaman journeys to and within. The worlds or realms of the shaman are both actual and metaphoric and are accessible by everyone.

Menarche, menstruation and menopause are all **shamanic journeys**. The woman meets her heights and depths in the cycles of life. More on these in other blogs. For here I will focus on pregnancy and birth.

Pregnancy and birth are shamanic journeys

The pregnant woman travels deeply into her inner world that reflects the landscape of the shamanic realms. She meets her fears, her obstacles and her **deep inner knowing** in her lower world, she plays out different scenarios in her middle world and she meets her extraordinary strength, wisdom and available guidance in her upper world.

These inner and outer worlds aren't something that some people have, we all have them and all travel within and around them all the time. Shamanic womancraft **brings consciousness** to this process using it as a tool for pregnant women to best prepare them for birth and motherhood.

The shamanic craftswoman must be comfortable and experienced with the landscapes and possibilities of the shamanic journey in order to be 'with the woman' in her inner and outer worlds.

Healing The Wounded Feminine

In our high-tech world where maternity care is highly interventionist and based on fear and risk, the inner world of a woman is usually not taken into consideration and much wounding results from that. The shamanic craftswoman can best facilitate a woman's journey through pregnancy, birth and onward into mothering holding her intact, seeing her as a whole complex being on her life journey, and helping her to do the same. This perspective and practice will participate in healing the wounded feminine, **healing birth** and **healing the Earth**.

So, to explain the process of pregnancy and birth from the perspective of shamanism....

During pregnancy, and before that, even to make love and especially to conceive, a woman needs to open herself to outer energies. To recognise that there are energies other than your own, the influence they have, and the information they contain is the beginning of seeing this process from a shamanic perspective. Bringing awareness to this she can be in this space in a conscious way and it can serve her bringing up **what needs healing** and also giving her a great sense of purpose and depth in her life.

Shamanic Practice

Contemporary shamanic practice is an easy practice to learn, and its about tapping into intuition or spirit and the world around you, both in Nature and your day to day living, for **information, guidance and healing**. The information and guidance can be helpful in addressing challenges and resolving issues. The healing is at a spiritual level and usually has profound positive effects with people becoming more self-confident, alive, and physically healthy. Perfect for pregnancy, birth and mothering.

Shamanic practice is the practice of deliberately **connecting with "non-ordinary reality"** for guidance, power, and healing. Non-ordinary reality is present in the same time and space as ordinary reality in which we are now, but we are usually not consciously aware of it. It touches us through our intuitive hunches, like when we know who is calling on the phone, when we feel strongly we should take another route and so miss a car accident by doing so, we probably experience it in some of our dreams, it may be our own **imagination** or **subconscious**, or **Jung's collective unconscious**, it is what some call the **"spirit world,"** others the **"dreamtime."**

Someone who can work with non-ordinary reality to provide guidance and healing for others, is called a **shaman** (a word from the Siberian Tungus tribe). Regardless of our beliefs, religious or otherwise, about non-ordinary reality, it is a realm which we can access to make our ordinary reality lives richer, more fulfilling and meaningful. When we can consciously move in and out of this realm, we have access to resources that can **transform our lives**.

Everything is interconnected

Pregnancy and birth are transformative events and clearly the more consciousness one brings to such times the more one grows and develops to their potential. The perspective of shamanism is that everything is interconnected and healing can occur when accessing that connection and flowing with and **tapping into**

the energies, the wisdom and knowledge that come to us from the interconnectedness and from the non-material realms.

During pregnancy and birth a woman is **more open to these realms** and so has access to this wisdom. In our modern world pregnant and birthing women are discouraged from accessing their inner wisdom and the wisdom in the other realms to which they are very open, they are instead encouraged to have many tests, to hand over their trust to the doctors and the hospital and see where they fit in the risk categories that will in turn define their treatment. Very rarely are women encouraged to tune into their baby's to look for what's right or to access their **inner knowing**, their **intuition** or the **wisdom passed down** to them from the women before them.

The shamanic perspective of pregnancy and birth holds that this wisdom is not only ever present it is the key to the process unfolding to its potential and for the highest good of all. Tuning in from a shamanic perspective is an **empowering experience** for the mother and she can see the **deeper meaning** of the things that she experiences in her life. An example of this comes from a story of a midwifery (now former midwifery) client, pregnant with her fourth baby, planning her fourth homebirth.

She wondered what she needed to learn this time around, wondered what she had forgotten, wondered where she should put her focus on preparing for this next birth. She began to doubt what she'd known, surely there was more information, new developments that she needed to know about. This was a bit unsettling for her.

Noticing The Signs

Then she noticed the owls that were visiting her, unusual visits in unusual places and times and often. **Owl** had always been a favorite of hers and the companion of her favorite **Goddess Athene**. What was owl trying to tell her? Owls represent wisdom and this was the message and the gift for her to realise, and know fully, that as a mother of three, pregnant with her fourth, that she knew what she needed to know, she had gained the wisdom, in fact her stories were inspirational for other mothers.

By noticing what was going on around her, by hearing the message of the owl, she was reminded that the **wisdom was within her** or flying close by! And this realisation enabled her to settle into a joyful pregnancy, knowing she knew what she needed to know and if there were new things they would come to her.

What often happens in life is that we miss the little signs along the way and then have to **take the big detours**, that we can't not see, to keep us out of danger. During pregnancy as a woman opens up on the inside for the baby to grow she is inundated with, even overwhelmed if she's not ready for it, the 'stuff' on her inside that she has not dealt with yet, or that she has dealt with and needs review, or new things that she hasn't even been with yet. This 'stuff' manifests in her relationships, in her fears and worries and in her health. It brings up all manner of emotions, feelings, reactions and fears.

For many women this is all new and it **helps to have a map**. The shamanic perspective gives her and those who care for her a map. What arises, what comes up **emotionally, physically and spiritually** are the tips of the icebergs of the issues that it's time to deal with.

Recognition & Healing

Sometimes during pregnancy, when contemplating one's fears about the pending birth, a woman may feel **familiar issues arise**. "*Will he (her partner) really be there for me?*" is a common one that probably has its roots in a childhood situation with her parents and them not being available to her at a particularly important time to her.

This 'iceberg' shows up again, floating through her waters, her emotional inner world, with the chance for recognition and healing. Her opportunity is to recognise the 'tip', as the incident that is current, and which reveals a deeper body of feeling that she can now be with for **healing and learning more about herself**. With shamanic tools she can look deeper into herself for information that will aid this process.

Everything that she has ever experienced in her whole life (and perhaps her past lives), is available to her at any time. Of course this is the case for all people but something happens when you're pregnant that creates the space for healing, for evolution, for enlightenment.

The mother not only grows a baby inside her, she grows herself too, to be the mother, this baby has come for, her potential.

So seeing pregnancy and birth as part of a woman's life journey shines a compassionate light on all that occurs. Her fears are simply her fears and they indicate to her an opportunity to go within and check to see if the beliefs that fund the fears are actually what she really believes. She gets to review her previous birth experiences if she has had any, including miscarriages and abortions, as parts of her life journey and she gets to look at them and find what they taught her, what they represented in her life, what they showed her she needs to deal with etc.

Each previous experience from the perspective of Shamanic Womancraft is a part of the journey, a sign post of where the woman was at in her life journey, her beliefs etc at that point.

Life is a **journey to wholeness** and major experiences such as childbirth are **key gateways** along the way that show where you've come from and determine where you're headed.

Shamanic Womancraft is the **compassionate practice of listening**, of accessing wisdom from the world around us via dreams, intuitions, connection with Mother Nature, the Goddess. Shamanic Womancraft works with plant and animal allies and the drum.

The shamanic craftswoman helps the woman **navigate her inner journey** of pregnancy, birth and mothering. This then enables the woman to more fully engage with her experience, to 'own' it and to understand each situation for what it is and what it represents on her life journey.