The Ecology of Childbirth

by Robin Sale

"A baby is like the beginning of all things- wonder, hope, a dream of possibilities. In a world that is cutting down trees and building highways, losing it's earth to concrete, babies are a link to the world of living things from which we spring." - Eda J. Leshan

In the Talmud, the ancient Hebrew text, there is a saying that with the birth of each child a wave passes through the universe. Certainly we see this in the realm of human relationships; a woman becomes a mother, a mother becomes a grandmother, a man becomes a father, a girl - a sister, a boy- a brother and so on. Further, each child has the potential to impact the world in ways we can not foresee.

The idea that the birth of a child has repercussions that ripple infinitely outwards points to the idea of interconnectedness, the cornerstone principle of ecological thinking. As modern life has brought us further and further from understanding our place in the natural world, much to the detriment of the earth, it has also had a tremendous impact on women giving birth. Moving indoors and away from the night sky, the cooking fire, the seasonal cycles of the earth and each other, we've also moved away from the belief in a woman's innate ability to bring life into the world. Our technological advances in medicine have saved and improved the quality of many lives and yet, in the arena of birth there may be a cost. In our attempts to control and perfect the outcome of labor and delivery, we have undermined women's confidence in the natural process of birth. The resulting fear and distrust that accompanies so many women into the labor room creates the very complications that necessitate the technological interventions.

In the domain of social relations, our evolution away from interconnectedness toward independence may be especially isolating for pregnant women. Especially here, in the Bay Area, pregnant women often go on with their career at a harried pace as if their whole life and their very identity isn't changing before their eyes. Rarely do work environments support or understand the needs of pregnant women. Isolation has been identified as a contributing factor of difficult pregnancy and birth outcomes. In the actual birth arena, multiple studies have shown that one on one support by a woman who

believes in and is knowledgeable about birth greatly shortens the length of labor and reduces the necessity for pain medication and other interventions.

Recently, more and more women are taking steps to overcome the isolation of pregnancy and learn to trust in their body's own wisdom. Prenatal yoga and exercise classes bring women together for mutual support- sharing resources, ideas and experiences. Connecting with other pregnant women, with her body and her baby in this way brings greater enjoyment to this unique and magical time. Yoga also assists a woman to bring awareness into her body in ways that greatly enhance her comfort in pregnancy, her confidence and her readiness to give birth.

Spending a little time each day quietly observing nature is another way to deepen one's sense of interconnectedness. Whether it is simply to notice the clouds while stopped in a traffic jam, the wind in the trees out the window, to listen to the songs of the birds before rising in the morning or to sit in the garden and notice what's growing. Remembering her place in the natural world, a pregnant woman may be able to settle into a sense of trust in the unfolding process of life. Rain falls, the sun shines, flowers open and babies are born. It's an event taking place every minute of the day and yet, each time it's a miracle.

Above all, pregnant women might benefit to know that there was a time when they were revered and honored on all continents as the manifestation of the Goddess herself. Indeed, she holds the promise of the future in her womb.

Robin Sale, CHT, CMT, MOM, is the creator of Whole Birth Yoga. She teaches prenatal and postpartum yoga and support classes at Community Hospital of Los Gatos and Dominican Santa Cruz Hospitals and is a counselor for the pregnancy, birth and parenting.

©1997, Robin Sale, Whole Birth Resources