

Becoming a New Mother: A Doorway for Transformation

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Transitions are profound opportunities for growth and healing. Each time we walk through a portal of transition – whether we’re graduating, moving, getting married, or becoming a mother – we leave behind the familiar and move into the unknown. Transitions, like earthquakes, shake up our foundations. In the midst of the tremors it’s natural to feel scared, sad and out of control, which will cause us to either hang on more tightly to the old, familiar life or, if we allow it, to surrender to the unfamiliar sensations and let go into the new life. It is in this letting go that we say goodbye to the old ways, surrender our illusions of control, grieve what will never be again and then make room for something new to be born: an identity, a way of life, new aspects of ourselves.

Sadly, our culture fails to provide a roadmap for those in transition to help them make sense of these emotional earthquakes. Imagine, for example, if alongside information about how your baby was growing and changing week-by-week, you received updates of *your* emotional development as a new, emerging mother! Imagine if alongside the nutritional recommendations you had a list of questions that you and your partner could be asking yourselves and each other to help you successfully navigate the tricky terrain of becoming parents. Imagine if you had someone guiding you down these new inner roads and saying, “Okay, the first trimester is the time to turn inward as the seeds of your new mother identity are gestating. The second trimester is the time to turn outward and explore your expectations of yourself, your partner and your baby. And during your third trimester you’ll form a cocoon as you disconnect from the outer world and prepare psychologically for labor. You see how you are contracting and expanding emotionally and psychologically to birth your new identity, just as your uterus will contract and your cervix will expand to birth your new baby? Isn’t it extraordinary?!”

Instead, our culture focuses on the more identifiable periods that bookend life’s changes, like the physical components of growing a baby and how to raise a healthy child. We offer pregnant women ultrasound reports and lists of *things* they need to buy without educating them on the spiritual aspects of pregnancy and preparing them for the seismic shifts that occur when the baby arrives. We see transitions as something to *get through* so we can collect the “happily ever after” prize that waits on the other side – i.e. the baby – and then continue on as if nothing has changed.

Not only does our culture fail to provide an emotional roadmap to pregnant women and their partners, it actually encourages women to “go, go, go” and covertly transmits the message that a baby is an inconvenience to the work environment. Where some countries offer new mothers one full year of paid maternity leave, we expect women to “get back on the horse” often within weeks of delivery. This cultural pressure hinders a



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woman's natural instinct to slow down and turn inward as she knows that the values and ethics of the work world are tugging at her to return.

There is a significant downside to this approach: when a woman powers through her pregnancy, refusing to slow down into the natural rhythm that her body is begging her to follow and unwilling to let go of her old way of life and "non-mother" identity – her freedom, her lifestyle, the illusion of control over her life, her marriage, her body – she will be unable to truly embrace motherhood and be fully present for her baby. This is when we see new mothers having difficulty bonding with their babies. This is when we see women seeking the safety and familiarity of work before their maternity leave has ended. The old life and identity weigh her down; the unexplored expectations keep her awake at night; the ungrieved losses wedge a wall between her and her baby.

But it doesn't have to be this way. In fact, when you understand that it's normal to grieve during pregnancy, when you take time each day to address your expectations, explore your natural fears and learn effective tools for managing your anxiety, pregnancy becomes the transformational vessel inside which you prepare to birth your new identity as a mother. Guided by ancient wisdom that teaches that the rebirth of spring can only follow the shedding of autumn, you do the only work that really matters: you grieve the old life so that you can make room for the new. Just as the butterfly cannot emerge until the caterpillar completely relinquishes its old identity, you can only emerge as a beautiful new mother when you let go of the identity as non-mother.

In other words, you are not only growing your baby; you are growing yourself. More important than buying the right car seat or stroller is tilling your inner soil so that your identity as a new mother can take root on a healthy foundation. By taking time each day to turn inward and journal through the questions, fears and expectations that are populating your mind, you give your baby the best chance for a healthy beginning: a prepared mother, ready to embrace her baby with open arms and begin the empowering and lifelong journey of motherhood.

Sheryl Paul, M.A., has counseled thousands of people worldwide via her private practice, her bestselling books and her website <http://conscious-transitions.com>. She has been featured several times on "The Oprah Winfrey Show", as well as on "Good Morning America" and other media around the globe. Her home study course for pregnant women and new mothers, "Birthing a New Mother: A Roadmap from Preconception Through the First Year to Calm Your Anxiety, Prepare Your Marriage and Become the Mother you Want to Be," can be found at <http://birthinganewmother.com>. She lives in Boulder, Colorado with her husband and two sons.

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