

Soul 

Connections

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BIRTH AS A SOUL EXPERIENCE

**By
Benig Mauger**

**"Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you
Before you came to birth I consecrated you"
(Old Testament Jeremiah cp. 1 verse 5)**

It is easy to think of birth as purely a physical experience. Huge changes happen in the mother's body during pregnancy so that physically she changes shape. Hospitals and the medical system also tend to view childbirth as purely a physical event to be managed by doctors. But any woman who has given birth knows that this is only half the story. Not only does her body change shape so does her soul. Any woman who has carried a child inside her knows, especially if she has listened to her inner self, that birth is a soul experience. It is as much a soul experience for the mother giving birth as it is for her child about to come into the world. The words of the Old Testament give us a sense of this. *'Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you'*. Many of us call our babies to us, but most often I think it is our babies unborn souls that call to us from some place between the earth and the sky when they decide to incarnate through us. *'Before you came to birth I consecrated you'*. Babies come straight from God. You can see soul in a newborn baby's eyes. A newborn has not long left the spirit world and so he or she still carries the Divine as a recent memory. Everything I have ever learnt about soul has been through my work with babies both in utero and outside. Once born the new soul has incarnated and must begin its chosen journey in the world. Birth is a soul experience that is why I named my book 'Songs from the Womb' (published in the USA as Reclaiming the Spirituality of Birth).

As a mother, therapist and prenatal teacher working in London in the 1980's, I became very aware of much mothers and babies were disempowered by the birth experience when it 'went wrong', usually in hospitals where the labour was medically managed. Women were emerging from modern birth rooms where technology had replaced nature, very badly hurt and even damaged. Their babies were hurt too because if the birth experience is a shattering or traumatic one for the mother then it will be for her baby. Remember that I am not talking about physical wounds I am talking about soul wounds. At that time I founded and ran a Holistic Birth Centre where pregnant women and couples came to prepare for the birth of their babies. Very often, despite great awareness and preparation, I saw mothers return hurt and disillusioned after the birth. Many felt



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demeaned and disempowered by a medical system that appeared largely ignorant of the soul needs of the woman and her baby. Often she was not allowed to follow the dictates of her body and so had to endure a technological birth very different from what she had imagined. Fear and the suspicion of nature meant that violent and invasive birth practices were common. They still are. Often it took years of therapy to heal the birth wounds of my clients. I knew about birth wounds because at that time I was in Jungian analysis in a quest to heal my own soul. I learnt that I too had a birth wound and that it was this that enabled me to help others in the birthing world. I was born very premature and by caesarean section and experienced no bonding with my mother who developed postnatal depression. Due to my small size (I had only been in the womb for seven months), my survival was unsure and so I remained in an incubator for two months. The seeds of my book were planted then and later at the (instrumental) birth of my own son. I felt compelled to write a book that would address the 'loss of soul' encountered by many in childbirth and also to highlight the psychological and spiritual side of birth, hitherto unacknowledged.

Birth as initiation and transformation

Birth is an experience that is deeply engraved in our souls, leaving traces that permeate our lives. My training in Jungian depth psychology helped me come to this conclusion, along with my studies in pre-and perinatal psychology and my own growing spiritual awareness. Jungian psychology establishes giving birth and being born as archetypal experiences of profound emotional and spiritual significance. Pre-and perinatal psychology, which is the study of prenatal and perinatal life and its importance in later life, demonstrates clearly that birth and life in the womb are formative experiences that create patterns we carry with us into future life. Birth is seen as a formative experience for both mother and child. For the mother, pregnancy and childbirth represents a time of transformation, an initiatory experience. A woman changes forever, she changes from daughter to mother. She creates life, transforming essence into matter like an alchemist. She will never be the same again. Symbolically speaking, she is transformed in the process of bringing to birth her child. Jung talked about archetypes as primordial images that inform our psyches, our souls. An archetypal experience is a primal experience, universal in nature and origin. If a woman has a bad or difficult birthing experience it permeates her soul, it means her transition to motherhood is thus marked. Similarly, being born, coming into the world is a unique initiation. How a child comes into the world will affect all future initiations in the life of that child. Here it is useful to take the actual physical experience of being born and see it as the initiation that it is. It is a struggle, a struggle that all of nature mirrors. Even a flower has to push up through the earth in order to come to life, sprouting from the earth that created and nurtured it. In my book I talk about all the different types of initiations, caesarean section for example. A baby born by caesarean will have a very



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different experience. It will not have the same internal sense of a successful struggle to come to birth. There are many case studies that indicate that this remains in the child as a pattern, emerging usually when a life experience triggers it.

The Nature of Life in the Womb.

Pre and perinatal psychology involves research and observational studies, which without a doubt establish both life in the womb and the birth experience as formative. Not so long ago it used to be thought that life in the womb did not count. It did not count because mental life began at or after birth. Unborn babies did not feel, hear, or think. It was thought that there were no consequences for painful or tortuous experiences in the womb and even at birth. This is simply not true. Recent research and observational studies tells us that the fetus and the unborn baby is not merely a developing biological organism but a sophisticated evolving human being of immense sensitivity and capability. The child in the womb has been shown to be capable of learning, memorising, dreaming and even socialising! There are many books now written about the 'secret life of the unborn child' (Verney, 1982). 'Songs from the Womb' contains references and case examples. It has been found that unborn babies have innate personalities and likes and dislikes and that there is continuity of behaviour in postnatal life. Mothers know this, we know this, but because of an innate cultural climate which makes us doubt what we know or forget what we know, we lose our way. How often do we hear stories about mothers who tell the birth attendants their baby is about to be born only to be told 'no you can't possibly be ready yet' by the birth attendant. In our culture which honours thinking and doing rather than being and intuition, it's easy to lose your way. Then we feel soul loss. We feel soul loss every time we deny our inner truth.

The Stone Mother

Jungian psychology uses mythology to illustrate modern psychological states. I like to use the Stone Mother to symbolise a particular wound in modern society. It is that of the Wounded Mother, which could be described as the repression of feminine consciousness, or soul. The feminine, like the masculine is an archetypal force that exists in both men and women, it is not gender related. Feminine consciousness is feeling, intuition and the values of nurturing and being rather than thinking and doing. Childbirth is very much part of this. Giving birth is a time when we are pulled deeply into our ancient instinctual natures. If we mistrust this aspect of ourselves then we may find it hard to feel that we have the inner resources necessary to give birth. In Greek mythology, Demeter, goddess of the Grain, the most giving and bountiful of the Deities, became the Death Mother when she refused to let anything on earth grow and would have allowed hundreds to die of famine. When she lost her daughter Persephone, she grieved and her heart and compassion had turned to



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stone. She had become the 'Stone Mother'. No longer nurturing and giving she became the opposite, the Death Mother.

Demeter, the Stone Mother is an example of what can happen if we do not honour soul in childbirth. The theme of the Stone mother can be witnessed today. It exists somewhere in general consciousness and is given expression every time a mother experiences pain relating to her birth experience and it is not acknowledged. It can be witnessed every time a baby is born without due regard to the manner in which he is born. It exists inside us every time we close our hearts and shut the door on our feelings. It exists in us when our inner critic takes control and we turn our backs on ourselves. In childbirth we see the Stone Mother in a particular way. Over time fear and the suspicion of nature has led not only to the subtle devaluation of motherhood, but to violent and invasive birth practices. The dehumanisation of childbirth has consequences. The links between drugs, alcohol, difficult births and the incidence of both learning and emotional disorders is already well documented. Postnatal and other forms of depression as well as attachment disorders in children can be directly linked to the mother's own experience of birth. It has been said that violence in adult males can be linked to violent births. The list goes on. It is enough for us to know that if a mother is hurt, she will find it hard to love. If she is not nurtured she will find it difficult to nurture her child. Similarly if a child is not loved it dies. Either it dies physically or psychologically. We need love in order to grow; it is in our nature.

Restoring Soul to Childbirth

How can we restore soul to childbirth? We can restore soul to childbirth by acknowledging the profound spiritual significance of the birth experience. We can begin to honour soul in our lives by reconnecting with nature and our spiritual selves. Our nature is God, we are beings of light and a baby is very close to this place. If babies are not received in love and do not feel their love accepted, then they will distrust and begin to forget who they are. The experience of soul loss is very painful. We can restore soul to childbirth by listening to what mothers, fathers and babies are telling us about how they experience life in our modern birth rooms where technology has replaced nature. We can restore soul to childbirth by returning birth to parents where it belongs. A shift from dependence on technology in the birth room to harnessing the energies of nature in the labour and birth process is a necessary part of that change.

"Health and healing involves co-operation between healer and healed, or doctor and patient and a new model of pregnancy care should involve not only professionals, but the pregnant mother, her partner and the entire family. Pregnancy and birth care should focus on empowering the pregnant woman and her family rather than on disabling them. I believe



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that it goes further than this and that whilst the power remains with the medical profession rather than with the woman giving birth, real change is impossible" (Songs from the Womb, Mauger, p198)

Respecting soul means reinstating the lost feminine, it means healing the wounded mother archetype. I believe that deep in the heart and soul of all women and more particularly so with wounded mothers, there is a yearning to experience birth as a natural expression of infinite love and creativity. Despite our technological advances, the call of nature is very strong. If we learn to respect this aspect of nature and the Divine in ourselves, we can begin to look at childbirth with new eyes and conceive of a more holistic model of pregnancy and birth care. We can begin to heal the Wounded Mother and restore Soul to childbirth. The new Millennium will be the time of Soul, and Millennium Babies will be Soul Children, ready to lead us into a higher dimension, where we will connect with God and our Divine natures.

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