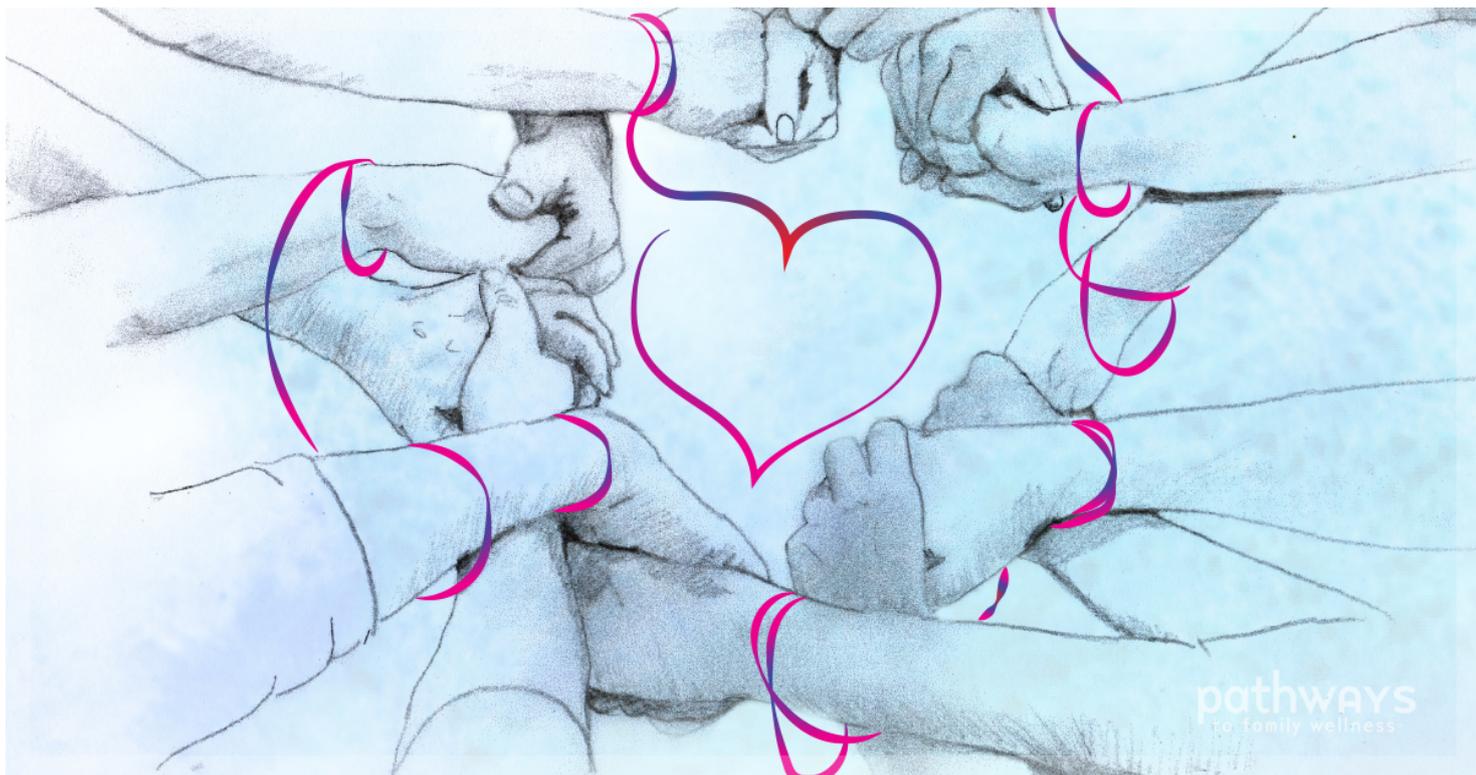


Honoring Mother

Written by Jeannine Parvati Baker

Thursday, 01 March 2018 00:00 - Last Updated Friday, 04 January 2019 08:29

The BlessingWay Ceremony, ancient yet still practiced today, is an organized tour through the mysteries of transition and of great psychological import. It is the traditional Navajo way to honor a young woman entering fertility, a pregnant woman about to give birth, or for some other related celebration.



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On October 10, 1998, I was inspired to conduct a modified BlessingWay ceremony to honor the oldest female relative in the family, my mother. With the help of my sister, we gathered the extended family in Sherman Oaks, California, for a different kind of reunion, one in which we all sat in a circle, joined by our stories of love and woven together as One by a ball of yarn wrapped around each wrist.

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But I'm getting ahead of myself. First I must recount where the inspiration came from. Before the actual ceremony could come to be, there had to be a shift, an opening toward healing. Or as the natives say, whatever happens here on Earth must first be dreamed.

I had been talking on the telephone with my sister about our mother. She expressed her hope that something would shift, as my sister was also having physical problems and found it challenging to care for our mother. As we spoke together, I had a vision. I saw our entire family seated together with our caring ties made apparent. We were enveloped in a circle of love, deep blood love, and my mother was hearing those things ordinarily saved for funerals. I thought, why wait to eulogize? Why not hold a ceremony wherein the family could speak their accolades and personal stories to my mother while she is still alive? My sister didn't know about the Navajo BlessingWay format, but she could relate to the intention of the ceremony. So with her support, we invited family members to gather at my cousin's home in California one lovely Saturday afternoon.

For the record, my mother was in stable, if infirm, health. She had suffered heart attacks and a major stroke, and has been in chronic pain with bursitis, arthritis, and a rheumatoid condition. Also, she is almost blind with macular degeneration. So there was no urgency to have this honoring ceremony; just my intuition that said better sooner than later. As it turned out, everyone in the extended family came save one nephew in a convalescent hospital and his mother, my mother's youngest and only living sister.

Four out of six of my wonderful children attended the BlessingWay for their beloved grandmother, and my granddaughter came to celebrate her great-grandmother's BlessingWay. Family came from as far away as Utah and Texas. We wouldn't have missed it for the world! For my youngest three, indeed, it was the idea of honoring Grandma that would drive them from their home after so much traveling this year. We had just returned from Europe then back to the East Coast again a few days before the long drive to California. Our motivation was BlessingWay; the fuel, love for Grandma!

The ceremony itself was introduced as having four parts: 1) Showing Up; 2) Focusing on What Has Heart and Meaning; 3) Telling the Truth; and 4) Being Open Yet Unattached to the Outcome. This was actualized as 1) Song; 2) Wrapping of Yarn/Ritual Grooming; 3) Introductions and Why We Are Here with Gifts; and 4) More Song and Feasting (Potluck).

My mother wanted to sing the lullaby song she used to sing to her babies. I sang it to mine and

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now her great-granddaughter knows it. At the end of the ceremony, it was my mother who again burst into song, this time show tunes with her brother and nephew, wearing the new T-shirt with the photo of her with her daughters taken 30 years ago.

At the beginning of the ceremony, many spoke of their love for my mother, and by the time it was her turn to wrap the “power object”—the ball of yarn around her wrist— she was already weeping in gratitude for all she had heard and felt from our relations. Later my cousin said that this was the most healing day of his life. Indeed, it was over-the-top with love. All found that precious place of gratitude and a way to share it with each other during and after the ceremony. BlessingWay has the tendency to draw out the beauty in people.

My mother said it best: Although everyone brought gifts for her, each one’s presence was “the true gift.” It is the give-away that unites us with love, the ceremony of life. Postscript:

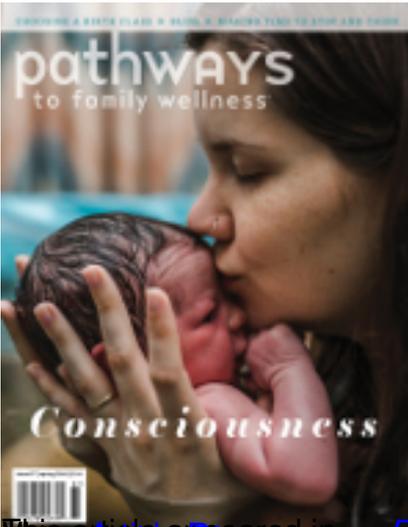
My mother was called in by her doctor to receive the results of her annual medical exam. This week, as I write this, she is 77 years old. Her doctor said that it is rare that he can tell a patient such great news. The hole in her mitral valve has sealed on its own! He is astounded, and doesn’t know how it happened.

Originally published on Birthpsychology.com.

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