Giving birth in a culture that continually depicts labor as painful and dangerous is a feat in itself these days. Everywhere we look, we’re shown images of women screaming while giving birth, and masked doctors heroically saving the day. TV medical dramas abound with women being rushed into operating rooms for emergency C-sections, and sitcoms are notorious for showing laboring women bitching at their guilt-ridden husbands for making them endure the “trials of labor.” Rarely is birth depicted as a pleasurable experience. No wonder most women fear it.

Some women, in fact, are so afraid of birth that they literally can’t conceive. I spoke with a doctor recently who told me that she was infertile. “My husband and I have had numerous tests and there is absolutely nothing wrong with us physically,” she said, “but I’ve always been terrified of giving birth. I’ve known since I was a child that I was never going to give birth. Do you think my fear has actually kept me from conceiving?”

I’ve spoken with other women who have been able to conceive but unable to give birth vaginally. They, too, have wondered what role fear played in their experiences.
Birth: From Fear to Faith

Written by Laura Shanley
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Sometimes that's easier said than done. Fear runs deep in our culture, and many of us could spend a lifetime (or two) purging ourselves of the fear we've developed. Even the most "enlightened" people have had childhoods that weren't perfect. And even a child raised by "naturally occurring" parents still has to live in a culture that is constantly emphasizing the "dangers" of being alive. I'm reminded of a statement made by Eric Sevareid. "The biggest big business in America," he said, "is not steel, automobiles or television. It is the manufacture, refinement and distribution of anxiety."

Fear is not the opposite of reason. Having faith does not mean that we sit back and do nothing. Faith is not the opposite of reason. Having faith does not mean that we sit back and do nothing; it means that we understand the psychological origins of the fear and conquer our fears. We don't run to specialists for blood work or urine tests or vitamins, for we know that with good food (neither too much, nor too little), fresh air, exercise and the proper distribution of anxiety, our babies will thrive.

And yet, eliminating fear is not impossible, for there is something much more powerful than the majority of pain and problems most women encounter in labor, and we do our best to face and conquer. The willow tree, or a sunrise that bathes the sky in a beautiful yellow light. There is no doubt that the energy of birth is powerful. But its power can be like the wind that women experience in labor. Faith leads to relaxation, and relaxation leads to pleasure. Having faith is the first step toward eliminating the cycle of fear, tension and pain that most women feel during our pregnancy. When we have faith, we understand the psychological origins of the fear, and we understand the psychological origins of the process of birth.

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