What would the transition into motherhood be like if women were encouraged to build their own inner strength throughout pregnancy? What if a woman knew she already held her own answers, and that all she had to do was to trust her intuition? How would the transition into motherhood be different if we created strong foundations within ourselves before our babies were born?

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Where in our culture is the emotional and intuitive side to birth and parenthood preparation? A
few years ago, I had a vision to create a women's group that would help prepare women from the beginning of their pregnancies through birth. It would be a time to share one's experiences with other pregnant women while making friends and building support. Pregnancy is a time when women are undergoing the biggest transformations of their lives. These emotional and physical changes provide wonderful opportunities for women to learn about themselves and grow.

The Missing Peace

Throughout my first pregnancy, I continuously felt as though something was missing in my preparation for becoming a mother. I took a birth class, I went to yoga, I bought the books. I interviewed doctors and midwives, and asked the “right” questions about episiotomies and cesarean rates. I bought my sling, painted the baby's room, and did my Kegels. But there was something missing. It was as if there was something deeper, tugging hard at my sleeve, needing to be acknowledged.

I remember feeling the enormous importance of becoming a mother. I continuously questioned my own ability to have and take care of this child. Thinking about the pain in labor and the potential of sleepless nights made me wonder about my own strength and resilience. I also wondered about the strength of my relationship with my husband. What kind of a partner would I be once I was a mother? Where could I go to talk about the grief of letting my old life go and the joys of bringing in my new one? Were there other women who felt like I did? Why was I unable to find any class or group that touched on the deeper realms of it all? There had to be something out there that could help me prepare in here, on a deeper level. I wanted to find other women on the brink of motherhood who also wanted to dig deep and explore themselves. I felt like a squirrel, scurrying around before winter, collecting information like nuts I would store in my hollow tree. But what if my tree was not hollow, but already abundantly full, running over with more wisdom than I could ever imagine?

I could feel my inner world changing. Physically, I was undergoing a huge metamorphosis, and emotionally and spiritually I felt my life starting to shift, as well. A dramatic life change is often coupled with fear and mixed feelings about what lay ahead. How helpful it would have been to have a community of women with whom to share these feelings, which often feel taboo when we are preparing for the most beautiful change in our lives. Talking about the good and the not-so-good feelings only makes us more real and vivid within ourselves. Acknowledging and honoring the wide range of feelings helps us prepare for the ups and downs of life as a mother.
Pregnant with my second child, I was more aware of the importance of preparing my inner self. I understood that there was more to motherhood than playing house and singing sweet lullabies. We are encouraged to prepare our external worlds for our baby—new nursery, new car seat—the list can be endless. But how are we encouraged to prepare from the inside? I understood my life was going to change even more with my next child. Examining my own expectations and concerns brought clarity to my transition into a mother of two. In order to build our reserves of strength to carry us into motherhood, we must connect with ourselves on a deeper level to get to know who we really are. In doing so, we create deep wells within ourselves that are available for us to dip into when we really need them.

We yearn to acquire information before our baby arrives, which helps us feel more prepared as parents. I remember devouring books, and drinking in my birth class trying to quench some inner thirst. But looking back, I realize that when I dropped into labor's deep cavern, the facts and figures all went with the wind. We are led to believe that if we take the classes and read the books, we will be more ready. However, this information is held in our left brain, the intellectual brain. The left brain is often thought of as our “new” brain, the hemisphere of our brain that is linear, rational and objective. Our left brain does not necessarily help us in labor or in motherhood. In fact, there are many times when it can hold us back.

Accessing the Ancient Brain

Pregnancy and motherhood is deeply rooted in our instincts, our intuition, our feelings—our right brain. The right brain is our primal brain, our “old brain.” It is the side of our brain that governs our emotions, our creativity, and our intuition. It is in the present moment. We are in our right brain when we birth, when we make love, when we are mothering and bonding with our infants. This part of our brain connects us with all of our ancestors—our mothers, grandmothers, great-grandmothers. I wanted to know how preparing from the right brain, our intuitive side, could impact the journey to motherhood. I wanted to create a space to support women to prepare for parenthood from the inside out.

We created a Pregnancy Circle to meet in the comfort of our local birthing center. Women arrive to candlelight and an opportunity to unwind. Pregnant mamas are given the opportunity to build a community of mothers who can grow together and lean on each other after their babies are born. Women in our group come together to focus on what we already know—the wisdom within—and we create an atmosphere to allow it to spill forth. It is also a place to not know. It is a place to acknowledge fear, sadness or uncertainty. As a result of women being supported to be with what is, I have seen that women are stronger and freer to be open to what life has to
offer.

Providing each mama with time to slow down allows her to reflect and be in the moment with her heart, body and baby. It is a time to be still. Stillness in mind and body can often reveal what goes unnoticed. We hear a constant hum of busyness in pregnancy: preparing, buying, celebrating, talking, comparing. How often do we make the space to check in with ourselves? When we take the time to be still and notice what we are thinking and how we are feeling, we can learn a lot about who we are as well as who we want to become.

It’s essential to learn the art of stillness and listening during pregnancy. If we learn to listen to our bodies, minds and hearts throughout pregnancy, and pay attention to what we are hearing, we will be more accustomed to doing so as we birth our babies and care for them as mothers. Listening to our inner wisdom enables us to understand ourselves on a deeper level and relate to our babies in a soulful way. It also empowers us to respond to situations from an authentic and loving place, rather than from a place of fear and mistrust. In doing so, we are able to truly hear what our intuition, bodies and babies are saying, allowing us to tune out negative distractions. From this place we can genuinely live from the heart and move forward, embracing all that we already know.

In our group, we utilize many experiential media, like art, yoga and meditation, to connect with this creative side of ourselves, making it a more familiar place to be. Being imaginative and creative requires us to listen within, allowing our subconscious to talk and our intuition and heart to take center stage. Creativity requires openness to stretch beyond our comfort zones, being open to new possibilities about life and our role within it. When we do this regularly, creativity becomes a part of us and how we live. It is invaluable to get in touch with this part of ourselves in pregnancy, for we will access this intuitive place so often when we are with our children. This is the place that we will go with our children on our journey through motherhood.

Finding Silence

Meditating is a practice we do in group to bring us into the moment, to connect us with our thoughts and feelings. I like incorporating quiet time into group, whether we are creating art or meditating. We place emphasis on our breathing, and notice our thoughts. The more clarity we have around our thoughts, the more self-awareness we can create, leading to more freedom from stress and anxiety. This can become a part of a new mother’s daily life, whether she is
sitting on a meditation cushion, watching her breath as she does the dishes, or rocking back and forth with a fussy baby.

Meditation helps cultivate self-awareness, which can really help when we are pushed out of our comfort zones. Self-awareness supports us to parent from a place of clarity. A mama may notice that she has tightness in her stomach every time her baby cries. With some awareness, she may notice that the tightness is coupled with shortness of breath. This may make her less patient and not as able to respond clearly to what she and her baby need at that moment. Having self-awareness doesn’t make everything perfect, but it helps us respond to life from a more grounded place.

Mothers find a comfortable spot, as they sit with their backs straight, focusing on the rise and fall of their bellies. At times I provide a visualization to help each mother ease into the rhythm of her breath. Perhaps it is focusing on the sensation of the breath as it enters and leaves the body. Perhaps it is visualizing a color or other imagery that lets her bring focus to the moment and cultivate a sense of peace. Some meditations end with art, journaling or a dialogue. Each helps to bring what has been revealed to the surface.

There have been many mothers in our group who have had a hard time sitting still. Some find it frustrating; some find it downright annoying. And that frustration provides a great opportunity to acknowledge the inner struggle we all feel from time to time. In group, the struggle may be around meditation; in life it may be around our children or our parenting. When we are able to acknowledge our own frustrations, we are then able to figure out the best way to find acceptance and create solutions. For some, meditation may work. For others, it may be long walks, hot baths, yoga, artwork or singing. In the quiet of all of these outlets, clarity can be found.

Meditation isn’t about making our thoughts disappear; it is about noticing our thoughts and understanding how they can influence and create our emotional state. So, if mamas get used to watching how they are thinking, they are more likely to notice when they are being hard on themselves, and when they are stressed out. From there, they can talk to themselves with more compassion and kindness. This, when practiced, can be helpful in labor and with our children. Finding the calm within ourselves, regardless of what is occurring in our external world, is invaluable.

Our creative sides are always waiting for an opportunity to be invited to come out and play.
Opening up the creative and intuitive parts of ourselves will complement many of the qualities that are present throughout pregnancy and motherhood. We listen from within, allowing our subconscious to talk, and our intuition and heart to lead the way. So often in our culture, this inner wisdom is undervalued. Here, in our circle of women, it is our greatest gift.

Someday, women will be told that we already hold all of our own answers. We will approach childbirth and motherhood from a place of fullness and abundance, rather than from a place of need and want. We will gather in circles of women to bathe in our own innate wisdom while celebrating the gifts that our children will bring. Our transitions into motherhood will be supported, honored and held with great consciousness.

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