



The Power of Birth

Empowering Families With Powerful Mothers

by Pat Burrell, RN

These women who have had the joy and pleasure of birthing through their own power have an experience to draw upon for the rest of their lives.

I am always amazed that when we speak of women's health and empowering women that there are rarely references to the "Power of Birth." The focus of many woman-focused seminars, books, articles and research studies would imply that the measure of a woman's power is in becoming equal to men; and like men, we define power through our cooperative jobs and economic and social success. Women should not feel they have to compare themselves to men in order to feel strong. Rather, women should show their strength through actions and deeds that only women can do, such as natural childbirth.

Most Births Could be Natural Births

The simple, though difficult, process of giving birth was recognized for many millennia as the most powerful and important human force on earth. Statues from every corner of the planet support their reverence for pregnant and birthing female bodies. So, my question is when did things change? When did giving birth naturally become something only some women do? Why don't all women give birth naturally? A recent experience with my niece helped provide me with insight into how women today are facing the challenge of deter-

mining whether they should give birth naturally.

Childbirth Education

My niece mentioned a friend of hers who recently had a baby. I met this young lady during her pregnancy and she spoke about her desire to have a natural vaginal, drug-free birth without intervention. She said her obstetrician was well known, very good, and though not experienced in natural birthing, said he would let her do what she wanted. While listening to her it was easy to sense that she might not end up having a natural birth experience.

I suggested that she would need to do a few things to accomplish her goals, such as educating herself through an extensive child birth education class whose purpose is to prepare you for natural birth. Not only do you learn a great deal, you interact with an experienced instructor and other families with similar goals. She needed to prepare her body, mind and spirit, and bring her own trained and experienced doula with her to the hospital. Her obstetrician assured her that she would not need those classes and that there was certainly no need to bring a doula with her to the birth, since that's what the nurses were trained to do.

So, when my niece ran into her recently about eight weeks post birthing, the new mom was talking about her birth and was telling a group of women how wonderful her obstetrician was during her birth. "He told me that I did not have to prove anything to anybody. Why struggle when you don't have to? So, I took the drugs!" The new mom said this with such conviction that it frightened my niece, who had earlier heard her express her desire for natural birth. The new mom was now expressing hostility that she felt the need to defend her action. My niece called, very upset, asking, "Why do these wonderful women feel they have to defend what they do or don't do in birthing?"

In my more than 25 years of helping women during pregnancy and birth, the biggest joy is being present when a woman experiences this power and strength within that she never dreamed she had until that incredible moment she gives birth using the power of her

body, mind and spirit. Many of the moms who had some of the most beautiful, natural and often easy births never talk about them.

Understanding the Power

These women who have had the joy and pleasure of birthing through their own power have an experience to draw upon for the rest of their lives. But husbands and partners have difficulty understanding the need a woman may have for this natural experience of birth. They come to my Wholistic Childbirth Class unable to truly support their wives/partners' birthing dreams. Many are quite able to understand that giving birth is certainly a normal part of life and probably doesn't require the emergency medical attention it receives for normal healthy couples in our culture. But they still don't understand why a woman would fight for her right to have a natural experience during birth or choose discomfort over drugs.

Visualizing the Power

Women are more powerful than they think. Using hypnosis techniques during my birthing classes, I find women can truly understand the power they have to give birth. I use an analogy for moms, and, most importantly, for their partners. I ask them while they are in a deep, relaxed state to remember a time in their lives when they felt most powerful. I encourage them to remember an experience, often one requiring physical strength and or agility, where they truly felt powerful, so powerful that they had a supra-normal experience. Then I ask them to apply this feeling of power to a problem they may be experiencing in their present life. When they have completed this power visualization process, they have wonderful stories to tell. I continue by asking them to see that power multiplied by 100 or 1,000, or 30 million to get an understanding of the feeling of power their birthing partner will experience during the actual birth of their baby. When partners experience the birth of their baby and witness the power of the woman giving birth, they are in awe of their strength. The relationship between a woman and her partner is often empowered with a new level of respect and deeper love.

What I know is that the power a woman experiences in those wonderful moments and hours of working with her body, mind and spirit is the same power she takes with her into her mothering experience. Having a baby is certainly not easy, but the experience is complete in a number of hours. Being a parent is much harder and one needs all the strength one can find to get through the years that will follow. When a woman is supported in having full use of her strength and power during her birth she is able to share that with her family and draw upon this power in every aspect of her life, for the remainder of her life. Women always remember their birth experiences.

Choosing Your Own Path

The difficulty in sharing this power of birth message is that it is not an experience that can be intellectualized or described in a way that it can be truly felt by another. It's very easy for people to not understand, and that's okay. We also know that there are many reasons women choose another path to birth, and that's okay too. This is not about anyone else's birth – it simply can't be. What is important to know is if this is the path you would like for your birth, you must take action on your own behalf. To experience the power of birth, you must prepare yourself. We train and prepare for exams and all other important events in our lives, and must prepare for the birth process as well. Whatever path you choose in the end, you will feel powerful after giving birth. However, if you give birth naturally, I believe you will be even more powerful throughout the rest of your life, truly knowing how much strength you possess.

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