

# Do we need to look forward for a “redemptive birth”?

I want women to know that they don't have to wish for a “redemptive” birth in the future to heal a difficult one from the past, they can redeem the value of it now.

Suppose a woman who had a shocking birth experience does not have another baby or she has another challenging birth in the future, where does that leave her? If she really wished the next birth would be a “healing” one then does she become stuck with what happened and how she feels about herself? Not necessarily. If she can take time to validate her upset and explore what she learned from her experience, there can be such value found in the darkness. Thankfully, emotions are fluid and can evolve so she doesn't have to feel the same as she used to forever.

Not all births are traumatic and not all physically traumatic births are traumatising but even a ‘normal’ birth can be a shock to the woman's system. A person's birth experience does not define them: it may challenge them or even utterly disappoint them but it doesn't define who they really are. Only the woman decides, her mind is purely hers. We all have a choice before and after an event to make the meaning about it.

Women who have had insufficient or even damaging care during birth, often and understandably, want an apology. Official and even personal apologies are sometimes hard to receive and so if this isn't attainable, a person may need to grieve the lack of one. If a woman can ignore seeking ‘redemption’ outside of birth and look to what's possible within her, then she can reflect on what she truly would have liked that she didn't get. If she can say to herself clearly and slowly, “I wish that had been different” – just hearing it can be so important and healing.

In my last article I explored birth as a Hero's Journey which holds an initiatory experience within it (the Ordeal) but what makes the experience an initiatory one is the intent to set out on this developmental journey in the first place. This is known as hearing - *and answering* -“The Call”.

## **A call to what?**

Many myths and fairy tales illustrate this calling part as the turning point to self-realisation – knowing more about who we are. Who we really are under all the conditioning, emotional wounds, projections, negative self-beliefs, some of which have been created to help us belong in our world.

The call can come, encouraging a person to re-frame where they are in life. A “wake-up call”. Think back in life when there might have been a voice or felt a sign that something needed to change: leaving a job or a relationship, returning to study, moving home or starting a new business idea. All of these calls are about finding out where a person can evolve and therefore feel and be more themselves.

For the sake of this article, I will focus when there may be a call, a quickening beneath a person to attend to:

- Redeem an unresolved part of a birth or postpartum experience
- Challenge the narrative around birth to gain a new perspective
- Face and find out what's beneath any worries or fear around an upcoming birth

“The call” can move us in all directions. Like January’s namesake, Janus the Roman god of transition looks both forwards and backwards to sense which way to go. The message here is that we can answer a call to make sense of something that has already happened – like a challenging birth experience.

### **Who's calling?**

Ultimately, it's from us, well part of us. Some may believe it is from the soul. It can be both logical and spiritual. It can come from the head, heart or gut. For some, it might be another name for intuition and with intuition comes a choice to hear and follow, or to doubt and disregard.

Sometimes the call is a very gentle nudge so it's easy to ignore or deny but sooner or later, it can be so strong that it's no longer possible to push it away.

Sometimes the call doesn't land for years as we are good at avoidance and procrastination and our culture practically supports this. Yet the unconscious mind doesn't care about time, it will keep pushing, sending messages both psychological and physical. And these messages will only get stronger and more essential until there is no choice but to take action.

A person may choose to grow physically by increasing movement, emotionally by attending therapy, community circles or creative pursuits. All in all, the calling question asks; is something still bothering you? And if so, is your life worth more than the compromise? Writer Caroline Myss has a clear message, she says,

“Responsibility becomes your task on earth” (1)

Her straight-talking messages in most of her books are that, if something is bothering you still, it's your soul talking to you. You have a choice but it's down to you.

When I was about 7 months pregnant for the second time, I heard *my call*. I wasn't sure what I needed to do straight away but I felt compelled to change up my birth preparation. I turned off the nightly positive podcasts and went inwards. I couldn't be any more informed intellectually, I knew I needed to go deeper and challenge something beyond my thinking mind. It was like someone shoved a spade into my hands and said, “you know nothing, start digging!”

That preparation using Birth Story Medicine prenatal work was life-changing and a good job too as the way my birth unfolded was hugely unexpected. Yet, because I was ready for any outcome, I made peace with the unknown and trusted the personal teachings to come. They still come daily.

### **Prenatal Birth Story Medicine**

In Prenatal Birth Story Medicine, a woman can answer a call to action by entering into inner preparation before a birth which gives her golden insight on how she is judging certain behaviours and experiences that may unfold.

The session invites a guided visualisation – using imagination is the bridge from the conscious mind to the unconscious mind. Having the chance to approach this bridge slowly allows a woman to see herself in labour from a meaning-making perspective, something impossible in the disorientation of real-time labour. She has time and space to see herself in a situation she is hoping to avoid and pause to uncover what she might need if this were to happen.

### **Tame and re-frame fears**

Having some fear about childbirth is normal and healthy. A person facing an unpredictable event and even confident people can have something they wish to avoid. Birth opens us up in many ways - it turns us inside out. It's not just a metaphor, your cervix, vagina, uterus or abdomen will have to literally open. Coping with this reality- be it a contraction, surgery or even being an attendant at a birth - requires a deep search for ways of coping with this unimaginable physical and emotional transition. If a person can explore this *before* birth, it's such a gift to find those ways of coping that they didn't think they had.

In prenatal Birth Story Medicine a person may want to . . .

- Explore limiting family birth beliefs and stories
- Get down-to-earth preparation to meet the uncertainty and intensity of labour
- Heal a broken heart, or shattered dream from a previous birth
- Face any fears that the birthing person or attendant (doulas/midwives/partners) may not want to bring into the birth space

### **Postpartum Birth Story Medicine**

Birth has nothing to do with being proud, otherwise it invites the opposite which is being ashamed. Birth and motherhood is humbling. What calls a woman to examine her birth or motherhood's difficulties is an internal call. This inner work has its own intention aside from dealing with the modern culture around birth or the maternity services' struggles.

The Birth Story Medicine approach is for the postpartum period and can help:

- gain new insights around the way a woman's difficult birth unfolded
- shift feelings like blame, anger, sadness and disappointment
- Approach the birth story with curiosity rather than judgement to transform shame into worth

- Challenge and uncover new meanings around one's values and strengths
- Reveal more compassion for oneself and others, including those working in the maternity system

### **The value of answering the call**

When a person truly answers this call, they have no more questions, the “why’s” and “what-ifs” dissolve and all that is left is a deeper understanding along with self-respect and self-love.

One client came to a postpartum session with a long complaint letter to the hospital and left with a sense of where she was going to find her empowerment – *but it wasn't by sending the letter*. My point is that this woman may have still proceeded with her complaint but she found another layer of responsibility to herself and regained self-trust.

This called action is not just about healing a difficult birth experience; it is far greater than that. It is an opportunity for becoming more of who we are. A gathering-up of what's real about us, flaws 'n' all - think of a person as a mosaic: there are bound to be darker pieces. And we need the darkness to discern the light.

References: (1) 'Archetypes' - Caroline Myss Pd.D. Hay House UK. 2013.

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She offers one to one sessions online for women who have had difficulties during pregnancy, birth and postpartum. And prenatal sessions for women or birth attendants anxious about an upcoming birth. Rosie was trained by Pam England's 'Birth Story Medicine School' [www.birthstorymedicine.com](http://www.birthstorymedicine.com)

Rosie is dedicated to helping women and therefore their children discover that the inner map of birth initiation is something that belongs to them and no one else.

Request a free Welcome Guide at [www.birthingyourstory.co.uk](http://www.birthingyourstory.co.uk)