

TRANSITIONS

Birthing infers the emergence of a new being - images of large bellies, expectant happiness, imminent congratulations and vastly cute new-borns, full of the promise of unlimited horizons come to mind. Their existence allowing us to be more open, more unconditional and more present, just for them, as they seem to accept all we are without judgement, being as near to the concept of perfect that we can imagine in this here and now.

Yet to be born, there is a death from somewhere else – an ending in order for the rush we see as 'birth' - to appear in the 'here', in this 'now' that is all we appear to be conscious of. We are focused, and in fact rooted in dense form, so we do see the arrival of the baby's body as a birth. Yet is it really the beginning of life for the being that is within the baby?

As I write this, my mother lies dying.

I say this to many to explain the absences from my usual routine. I say it as though it were a small fact. So much that I am asked to repeat it – then am looked at as though I were perhaps joking. How can I look so calm- detached even? If it were their mother . . . maybe to them it means that I am . . .

Had I the world-view of the listeners, maybe I would be shocked and traumatised. I however see her impending death as a welcome release-it is the promise of a new start elsewhere. We all live seeing, experiencing and thus interpreting through our own personal set of lenses and filters. For me, the imminent death of the physical being that birthed this one, the social identity that initially programmed this social person ('me'), is a leaving of this 'here', to a birth beyond. A cause for celebration and rejoicing as she makes a transition to another plane of existence. Where she may be clearer, freed from the self imposed shackles that have had her trussed up in a cage of intense misery and loneliness as she has tried, in her own way, to match her personal inner rules with those of the outer world.

As in dying she is birthing is a new self.

In one of my life roles as a birth attendant/mother's midwife, I witness the new mother birthing herself as the journey from maiden to mother occurs. She, pregnant, must change to let the baby come through. For my mother, in this moment, she, dying, must relinquish the hold on physicality, to pass through without the shell that allowed her to be seen as 'here' in this 'now'.

Without our entry ticket, a body, we are not considered to exist, as we are not tangible enough to be perceived through the senses we value, and have taken to be universal. So shaped is the birthing mother in the process of bringing forth another being - a new one physically as the baby, and the other – herself as a newer version, we forget the letting go of the previous one. Often we are so focused on the baby's arrival, the woman's transition is not fully acknowledged.

Perhaps we could honour all transitions in this birthing process. The death of the life and of identity the new mother saw herself as being. For the newly born, a death of carefree independence from the physical realities of survival – leaving the possible free state of fetal existence to roam in and out of form. The fetus loses its 'life' to become a 'baby'.

Just as the being to be conceived into matter, the spark that was to animate the fetal form had to undergo a death from elsewhere to become embryo. Perhaps if we stepped outside the board game that we call 'life', bordered by our current culture's perceptions of 'reality', we may understand this continual cycle we chose to turn upon. We seem to ride a roundabout - birth/death transition from one 'here' to another 'here'.

My mother's body, and hence her persona will leave this 'here' soon.

A state of change. A part of what we call 'life' – the end of a cycle of being in form – the final flush of the life force within the dense portion we call a 'body'. With its departure, the termination of the apparent existence of the one we thought we knew to be. But did we ever really touch her essence? Did we ever see the pure spark of love she could have been? Beyond the hurt reactions to protect herself, did we ever feel and touch the vulnerable heart crying out for affection, acknowledgement and inclusion? Were we ever really there for her?

Were we so still bound in the web of 'daughter'/child that she was never allowed out of the corresponding 'mother' prison? Did we ever see her beyond the physical bond of shared DNA and apparently shared memories? Are these the hard questions that lie under the veneer of dutiful filial obligations? And how do we in this culture mark the end of 'a life'? Those enmeshed within the religious leanings of the Christian church may make assumptions based on their understandings of what makes them feel personally at peace, within the cage of their current beliefs. Those who have a different knowing may quietly keep their own counsel, as in this culture, at this time, the balance of credibility in mainstream acceptance hangs with those who profess to be in "God's" care.

And what is 'grief'? Was there weeping and wailing when she left where she was prior to 'here'? Was there soul-searching on how the ones left behind would fare coming here themselves in their own time?

Is it that within this temporary disruption of our normal daily routines that we recognise the lost opportunities? Do we stop to question, and reflect past getting the washing in and the kids fed and ferried? In this ripple of time, do we wonder about the unsaid and the undone? Do we regret the loss of the tomorrows we will not have with her?

Do we feel guilt or shame for the past that we did/did not live? The person they/we were/were not? Maybe we recognise the finality of this time's experience, and the slow dwindling of our own time here. Do we wake-up now? Do we wonder at the script we unthinkingly live out? Do we move from here? Do we open our hearts to truly be in each moment with each one who shares each new moment? Or do we close down again, to surreptitiously continue as though we did not question the point to it all? – Do we see the message in this chapter being irrevocably closed?

Yet we have this now.

At present, she is still here

A different 'here' than we are used to – the stage and props have changed, yet, besides the insertion of the hospital staff, the players assembled ARE the same. Our roles slowly change. She is lying there, the wounding mother of the damaged daughters-past. She, in this role poses no threat to them in this now, except through the veils of the unshed tears, the lenses of meanings currently ascribed to the yet unexplored, and thus the unaccepted learnings of the apparent hurts that currently run the personality structures that are taken 'here' to be 'the person' . . .

Hence each daughter responds differently – as to each, she is a different person, and as each spends time with her, they can either choose to birth themselves as the whole units that awaits within, or stay safe within the cocoon of unconsciousness. To stay within the pall of 'victim', still awaiting the severance of the ties of this birth mother to that birth daughter.

When she leaves the form of the mother, part of her having been will remain within us.

Will we have processed the transition sufficiently to move through and onward, from sharing this act of this play with her, or will we replay our life continually trapped within the old movie frames as they existed with her physical presence to remind us of our shared unfinished business?

As the time draws nearer, she is physically diminished.

Yet still she may be seen through the eyes of daughter – judgement clouded over and befuddled, as the past sits still intertwined with the now. Judgements of apparent and perceived maternal transgressions blurring this ever-evolving now moment. So hard it was for them in her normal role – can they see that the stage is changed – how is it that they seem to still operate through all the meanings given to the past hurts and hatreds?

The morphine places her beyond reach.

She is on her own spirit quest, fasting, drug induced. One daughter arrives to clear the area, to make it a safe place for her spirit roamings. This one has travelled far to reach inside herself to find the inner spark that can soar beyond the cage of beliefs installed so lovingly by the one who will soon depart her own. The daughters who took refuge in the sanctity and apparent comfort of the God force still bound to the shackles placed in their youth.

The woman lies dying.

Birthing a new consciousness. Coming to new understandings. What holds her still here? Do we as the three daughters need to grant absolution? What would we need to move in our own world-views to do so? Do we follow her lead and move our own inner mountains in response to her gigantic shifts? She heard me say that she was dying-

“Surely not!”

“Mum, you’re here to die, you are not going to get better”,

“That’s not a cheerful subject”

“Mum, it’s not cheerful to be in so much pain; given more drugs that either zonk you right out, or make you really upset.”

“Can’t we talk about this tomorrow?”

“Mum, you may not HAVE tomorrow”.

The gradual dawning,

through the drugged haze, of the loss, the never return to her safe haven, her home of 44 years. Later "Nurse, I'm dying".

Such a huge step. The one who could not stand controversy, arguments, tension, hard decisions . . . and a few minutes later "How long have I got?"

Through the drugs, the pain, the fasting and dehydration – acceptance. Peace. Less pain. Less struggle. In her last days, she may come to where she always was to be. Who are we to judge her journey? Do any of us know the tasks we set for ourselves, the distance we are yet to travel?

And in her dying, she lies there birthing a new self.

She has no conscious memories of having done this before. She may not be aware of the guidance from other realms, the assistance that has been provided in the form of a stunning team of nurses, all of whom feel privileged to have experienced nursing her. Possibly the black and white photo of a youthful Sister Bruce above the bed of the ancient shrivelled one acts as a constant reminder to them of the end of their nursing days – the eventual role reversal back to patient – the circle of life.

She IS stoic.

She has spent a life of expecting the worst, and feeling lucky when it wasn't as bad as she expected. Of putting up with, of giving to herself sparingly, of wanting companionship, and loving touch, yet unable to give it herself freely, unless under conditions. That is how giving was for her – a replication of what she seems to have received herself.

Here at the junction, nudging the exit point, she is allowing herself to receive. Can the daughters give? The nurses do not have the history of petty quarrels, emotional account books and retributive mindsets. Before them is a woman who is teetering on the edge of the unknown, here and not here, sometimes lucid, sometimes in great pain, often completely at the mercy of the medication. Now less confusion, as one of the battles is won – she is in acceptance, not denial. Not needing to be in control. This is possibly a lifetime first.

Is she hanging on to give the gift of acceptance to each of her daughters?

Are they able to see in front of them a dying caterpillar, birthing a butterfly? Or is she still the trampler of girlhood dreams? Do they see her in need of their care, just as she did her best to attend to all their baby needs? Are they able to reverse the process, and be there to give whatever she requires, as she readies for the new existence, emerging soon to the light, to fly away from this shell, free . . . ?

Are they able to see that what holds them back from responding as required are the very traps and land-mines interlaced with emotional charges and meanings that stopped her from being truly there for them as they became non babies? As they grew up to become 'difficult', no longer cute and cuddly, but independent people with minds and wills of their own? Just as their own children may soon follow their own paths - can they briefly step outside their own old perceived hurts and see hers?

Pain is resistance to flow.

Have her own inner pains ever been acknowledged? Has she ever been granted a pass out of maternal ties, to be viewed as a person, who was also in the role of mother? So tied up in our own forward linear time, we as the children of our parents whether as precocious teenagers or petulant adults, fail to see how hard it felt for them to give up and to us. We may get to glimpse this as we in turn start down the road of our own children's' parenting.

Would we need to see her as a victim, locked into her own hell, doing the very best at every given moment to the ones entrusted to her, to assist her own undoings? Currently, the daughters locked into their own maternal prisons. Possibly inflicting very similar wounds to their own offspring, the very programmes they may hate their own mother for imparting.

In her dying/birthing we can choose to die and also be renewed./reborn..

We could choose to give up the past ways of seeing her through our own cage bars of expectation. To instead, choose to look back in awe, not anger. Awe of the perfection of the tracks we travelled together. Awe of the beauty of the tangle, leading us always to a new moment when we always have the choice to freely choose to relinquish the apparent hurts, brandings, we needed in this version of life, to come to where we may use the eventual wisdoms gained. These 'hurts'/tragedies really being gifts. Just as the process of her birthing to beyond is a gift for those with open eyes to springboard with her..

Will we choose to reframe our own relationship to the her she was for and to us?

Would it upset our future that much if we let the past behind?

Is our fear of change so strong that we too must wait, as she did, until change is the only option? Why do we not celebrate the past we did have? Is it that we grieve our inner inability to actually be here now? And that this current departure niggles at our own sense of futility in our current lives – the quest for external, rather than inner truth and peaceful acceptance of self and others . . .

Freedom from judgement, acceptance of the perfection of the plan, and with this letting go of the need to ascribe 'good' or 'bad tags, compassion for all, especially ourselves cast within this circle we currently believe to be 'life'.

Another week passes.

Holding in, as she has only ever known, she hangs onto the physical now by a thread - consciousness seemingly taken in the wash of never enough morphine. Is she able to collect herself sufficiently through that filter, just as a birthing mother often must through the pain medications and their remorseless fog? Is she operational enough on other levels to orchestrate this as it appears? The shift of the players – the favourite nurse is back from a few days off – she who was most able to give a sense of connectedness, through her own expression of self – her acknowledgement of that most basic of human requirements – touch.

The dying mother is possibly experiencing in these last days, hours, minutes, breaths, all that she ever craved in life – acceptance, caring, inclusion and recognition of her selfhood.

Finally, the last breath is taken.

Facing the two daughters she most tried to relate with. Supported from behind by the one who she didn't feel the need to try to be anything but herself with. Free. The physical shell well used in the quest to experience acceptance and unconditional support. She just had to be, and

it - all she missed in life – was given freely. Just as when we arrive in this 'here', as new-borns, everything is laid on. Her needs were assessed and provided. No conditions – being is enough to elicit the support required. Why does it take extremes for the veils, the illusions to be lifted? Did it have to come to this before the daughters could just be there for her?

The shell is left

Do we want to help bathe and prepare her?

Does a new Dad get to cut the cord?

We release her from the bonds of mother by giving her her last wash, dressing and eventually swaddling her in her shroud, safety-pinned 'neat and tidy' to pass the nurse's inspection.

We kiss her forehead.

She is free from this here.

Birtherd to beyond.