

## Dreams of Freebirth

**Author:** Baker, Jeannine Parvati

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**Full Text:** A call from a frightened pregnant woman is answered by exploring a dream of birth. The voice says she is calling from Rhode Island but I hear New York in her accent. She is excited-a mix of fear and suppressed sexual passion I often hear in pregnant women's voices. "I had a dream about giving birth," the woman said, "and I told Nancy Wainer Cohen<sup>1</sup> who said that I must tell you." The fear of birth as an animalistic, dirty, or disgusting event is reframed to include the animal-body wisdom within the mother's soul rather as an ally. The disturbing dream becomes an opportunity for the mother, who had suffered three previous miscarriages, to build her trust in pregnancy and birth as a healthy, natural process. The birthmother remembers that if she can conceive naturally, that she can birth naturally. She hears for herself within the dream a directive to re-earth, to connect with the natural world through a common herb. When she actualizes her inner prescription by going to find the herb from her dream in the dayworld, her knowing is validated in that the dream-herb corresponds to the botanic. The mother eventually gives birth to a healthy boy, by her own power. The hypothesis is that the more natural the setting for birth, the more that the mother would connect with birth as a natural transition from pregnancy. The medicalization of the pre and perinatal period is deconstructed to further the reclamation of birth out of the hands of the experts, back into the lap of the mother and father. For over a generation, I have been a midwife for my community. The babies I helped to be born are now having babies, having apprenticed directly to birth itself I have cultivated a way of reminding women becoming mothers that they already know how to give birth even if they've temporarily forgotten. Dreamtime is integral to this remembering for it is at night that most babies are conceived-and if left to choose on their own, also born. Dreams can be healing, as well as alarming. In actuality, it is the frightening dreams in pregnancy that I have found most promising for healing. It seems to me that dreams invite us to be more of who we really are, without the dayworld ego censoring and claiming phenomena largely for its own purposes. Dreams show us fuller pictures of our soul, especially ones which in pregnancy are multi-dimensional. As a midwife, any way I can support the imaginal bodies of the family in transition, I find brings greater inner wisdom to laboring, birth and caring for the whole holy newborn. Pat, as I will name the pregnant caller, already had three miscarriages she handled at home with her mate. Now that she was pregnant again she was feeling anxiety about the impending fourth pregnancy and had a dream which brought her fear home. In her dream, Pat tells me that she is "in labor, too early and all alone." It's awful until I do a disgusting thing-I eat some hay or straw, and immediately the pain stops and I . . . I know what to do. I birth the baby but when I leave the place of birth I don't have a baby with me. Upon further dialog, Pat tells me that when she eats the straw she connects with her animal-self. I ask what disgusting is all about the old story of the work of birth being animalistic, and therefore sub-human, is retold. Through our conversation, Pat remembers that birth is a woman's unique, creative work and indeed, the animal within is our ally for spontaneous delivery. The hay, or straw is of importance for several reasons-Ayena sativa commonly called Oatstraw, evokes an entire archetype, among which is the symbol, the totem of the horse. Horse medicine is power-and indeed in Pat's dream, eating Oatstraw empowered her to give birth naturally. The horse carries us two-leggeds only after we have domesticated-or tamed-the wild animal. Such is the condition for the animal body wisdom of women today. We have also been domesticated to carry the culture's misogyny on our backs to the point that almost all women of technocratic culture have forgotten how to give birth. The wild mother in dominator cultures has been tamed into the siliconic housewife, shrouded in her high-tech man's idea of what is feminine, often deeply estranged from the fullness of female sexuality. Giving birth and breast-feeding are mature female sexual

activities but young women in our society are taught a home economic based on corporate consumerism rather than on how to be the embodied fount of nourishment themselves. The message carried by the change of symbol over the course of "western civilization" suggests a distancing from the mother's body. First was Artemis Britomaris, with many breasts adorning her, then midwife was given the apron as her symbol, then the nurse a stethoscope. From nurturing with our breasts, to serving food, to the machine to listen to heartbeats-the wild woman, mother, midwife and healer has undergone a profound change. The stethoscope is a major tool for access to the inner experience of pregnancy in the technocratic paradigm. Yet dreams, in this author's experience, are another way to listen to the hearts of our children, and can be revelatory in multiple dimensions of reality, not only the so-called physical realm, but a reality grounded in the ensouled body. At the very least, the fantasy of the mother about her baby coming is expressed in dreams of giving birth-if not in messages from the baby herself. Returning to Pat, the mother who phoned me about her dream, the animal which appears is an ally in revealing another level of this dream. The horse is an animal which, though diurnal, gives birth at night away from the herd. The horse therefore has more wisdom than two-leggeds-it recognizes that members of its own species are at best a distraction, if not dangerous, during birth. By talking with Pat about her fear, we transform it into power. First, accept the fear and then ask how it serves. In this case, fear of hospital and doctor isn't always paranoia-it is often dangerous to give birth over to the hands of the experts. Hospitals are the least likely places to give spontaneous birth, though women are inventive and strong, and despite the often disempowering rituals of obstetrics, we can give birth anywhere. (Including during an earthquake, bombing attack, mid-air in a parachute, in an elevator or a taxi, etc.) Comparatively, a hospital maternity ward can be still more dangerous, for its covert assault on soul.<sup>2</sup> Pat's fear was not abetted by her mate's. Indeed the baby's father had no conscious fear of birth. Pat's husband wanted them to birth their baby at home together. He said it would be easy-natural. I affirmed this attitude, yet added that it was easy for him to say it would be easy, since it would not be through his body that the baby would be birthed. We agree that indeed labor is work-and not by nature "hard" or "easy," just work, female, sexual and creative expression. And it is no more work than we can lovingly and willingly do-when we are in our power. We bring to birth our whole creative selves-try to leave any part out of the circle, and the process of birth gets bigger than life. Life itself shows us how to give birth, as life did with conception. Yet to make one aspect of the birthing process unauthentic is to make it even more scary. For millennia, women's sexuality expressed in any other way than intercourse with men has been "wrong." The inherent sexuality of birthing is what is being repressed by medical rituals that turns what is a mature female into a "patient" to be "delivered." During the Witchcraze, young girls saw their mothers tortured and so learned to fear their own sexuality and power for healing. In effect, so has it been with birth. In a few generations, in the Western World at least, the knowledge has been lost-the embodied gnosis of mothers eradicated. Women have forgotten how to give birth. We become passive patients to be rescued from the most primal and natural expression of our heterosexuality. In dreamtime, this raw, primal power is remembered-the power within to give birth. Like Oatstraw, an aphrodisiac rich in hormonal precursors to carry life's message, dreams can tell us stories which carry us beyond our ego, self-imposed limitations. Like plants, mothers know how to turn light into matter. Eating of the dream plant "re-earthed" this mother in her inherent power to give birth. There are as many dream theories as there are dream therapists. I can tell you only this-pregnant women reclaim soul at an astonishing rate, in pace with the more obvious growth of belly. Pat's dream is rich with meaningful symbol in this, her fourth pregnancy, straw-into-gold and alchemy are all constellated upon a night sky to be explored and appreciated. By honoring dreams as messages to the personal soul, we enlarge our capacity to be conscious of the probable, larger than personal connections, to life itself. When women carry new life under our hearts, we also gestate dreams of importance for all our relations. Pondering the image of birth, I am reminded of the event horizon of astrophysics. When partners of energy dance about the rim of a black hole, sometimes one escapes transformation (annihilation). Multitudes of women who become pregnant and put the baby up for adoption, or miscarry, or abort, are living Pat's dream. I see as a sign of desperation that women's rights to our bodies, our

sexuality, have focused on abortion rights. That women think controlling our bodies means aborting is the irony of this century. If we can control our "bodies" through abortion-controlling our minds is not so easy, for abortion is denial of female sexuality at its core-mothering as female sexual expression. Controlling birth, managing labor, monitoring pregnancy and technocratic contra-or con-ception are all ways through which women seek to control our bodies, our fertility. But dreams cannot be MANaged (which is why you don't often find practitioners paying attention to them!) But beware of turning dreamtime into a cybernetic selfsurveillance effort by only taking dreams literally. It is vital that the dreamer find direct revelation rather than have a dream interpreted. Indeed, only the dreamer knows what the dream means-and the meaning will deepen and change as more soul is revealed. As midwife, I hope this sharing will evoke insight and that many metaphors will reveal which myths claim the birthing mother's soul. Better now to clear the road to birth of erroneous beliefs which limit the capacity to give spontaneous birth. With *Avena sativa* as guide, the dreamer can connect with a natural knowing, rooted deeply in the common, the wild-and like her, of nature itself. In the dream Pat left the baby behind, for what purpose, we are not yet told. Perhaps when the Oatstraw is no longer disgusting, will the baby come with her out of birth as full partner. Both will dance about the event horizon, and instead of succumbing to the black hole of managed birth, mother and child will become the white hole where something new comes into creation, the point of origin for stars. For indeed, it will be a new experience for this part of the galaxy when partners, women and men, give freebirth, trailing clouds of glory. It seems appropriate to conclude with two letters from Pat, who wrote to me at the middle of her pregnancy and then again in her early postpartum: Dear Jeannine, Thank you for talking with me. I recently went to the herb farm. But first I located your book, *Hygieia: A Woman's Herbal* and read up on Oatstraw. Amazing! When I went to the bottled herbs Oatstraw was exactly what I had eaten in my dream! It was a wonderful feeling. An inner knowing turning outward!! Plus an eerie feeling-there's no way I consciously knew that information. Somehow our conversation has made me aware of how much I want to be home to birth . . . I have fewer reservations than before about it. I did/had all my miscarriages (3) at home. Everyone thought I was crazy but my body worked {and} I realize that I need to find or accept the animal in me to birth, as with birthing in the barn and eating hay {in the dream}. When Pat sent me her final letter with the date of her baby's birth, I looked at my own dream journal to see what my soul was saying. As Pat was giving birth, that night in my own dream, a woman and man were dying together. As she realized their transition, she shouted to her husband, "Oh the Light, the Light-go to the Light !" In my dream, I then became both the man and the woman and was immersed in a tremendous rapture of love. What this dream tells me is that my own, and possibly Pat's experience of giving conscious birth, is like dying unto the old self. When we "go to the Light" coming in and going out, what is present is pure love. Pat did give birth, by her own power, with her husband's help and exultantly wrote to me: I had a wonderful birth experience! . . . I did it, Jeannine! I pushed him out in 23 minutes with No drugs. No episiotomy. No forceps. No vacuum suction!!! It was fabulous to do/be (imitate) the Goddess by birthing. I did scream because it hurt. But it was worth it to say, "I pushed him out!" It really was a great time! A gentle birthing. Thank you for all your love and support. As I look at my child, he reminds me of my victory. The journey into our catastrophic fears in pregnancy, when supported psychologically, may bring us into the light of love. For a pregnant woman, with two hearts, her own and her baby's, what is possible is a doubling of courage for their victorious deliverance. Our allies in the journey of birth are the elemental aspects of our psyche, of which the essential animality of the human soul is paramount. If myths are to a culture what a dream is to the individual, may ours at the edge of the millennium embrace new dreams of freebirth. Footnote 1 I have had the honor of facilitating a workshop with Nancy Wainer Cohen the author of *The Silent Knife and Open Season*. Nancy knows of my work with dreams in pregnancy-hence the referral. 2 Baker, J. P. (1992). *The Shamanic Dimensions of Childbirth*. *Pre and Perinatal Psychology Journal* 7(1). AuthorAffiliation Jeannine Parvati Baker\* AuthorAffiliation Jeannine Parvati Baker is an author and mother of six children. Currently living in central Utah with her partner Fredrick Baker, co-author of *Conscious Conception Elemental Journey Through the Labyrinth of Sexuality* where a fuller treatment of dreams in the psychology of fertility and the perinatal

period is given. Founder of Hygieia College, a Mystery School in Womancraft and Lay Midwifery, Jeannine Parvati Baker is internationally known for her contributions to women's medicine. \* With gratitude to Dr. Robbie E. Davis Floyd for editorial assistance.

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