

## Spiritual Moments

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**Naomi  
Newhouse, MS, CNM**

**Ms Newhouse:** Growing up in a small rural community, I had the opportunity to watch the lives of many friends and community members unfold over time. I knew why Mrs Jones had horrible headaches and why her daughter was often sick. By watching, I learned that what is wrong with our lives soon becomes what is wrong with our bodies and our minds.

This realization drew me to midwifery and sculpted my practice. The care I provide is patient centered. I ask questions and listen hard. The expert is sitting in my office. Working with thousands of women over the years, I have come to appreciate that the patient is intimately acquainted with her circumstances and knows what will or will not be effective. She ultimately holds the responsibility for any choices made, and she will bear the consequences. This is all about her.

In a culture where we are conditioned to ignore our own voice, my greatest challenge is to create a "sacred space" or "safe space" where a woman can tune in and hear what her heart is trying to tell her. As I regard the value of her voice, she regards the value of the message and moves to make the necessary changes.

By its very nature, birth creates this space for you. New life is

emerging, the lights go down, and the sacred takes center stage. This is the woman's moment. Holding the space without bias or judgment and keeping her and her infant safe is the essence of the work I have come to love.

Each family brings their unique perspective to birth: a perspective affected by culture, religion, and personal experience. Last year, I had the pleasure of working with a family from Afghanistan. When I say family, I mean a family of 12. The entire family had immigrated the year before and took turns supporting the laboring couple. They

prayed continually but would stop as soon as a nurse or other clinician entered the room. When I assumed care, I mentioned how important prayer was in my life and encouraged them to feel comfortable praying in my presence and in the presence of our supportive staff. When the family began to feel more comfortable, I noticed that the mother relaxed considerably. I encouraged the family to become more involved with her direct care, showing them where they could

access supplies to keep her more comfortable and asking them how they felt about her progress. Soon they were sharing their experiences and their concerns. The young mother quickly progressed, and the female members of the family moved with us to the largest delivery room. They stayed with the laboring woman throughout the delivery, praying out loud continually and offering encouragement as the woman worked hard to deliver her first son. The only man present was the father of the baby. Standing off to the side and close to the wall, he smiled occasionally, comfortable with the support his wife received from family members. After I completed the delivery, I felt someone's hand in the back pocket of my scrubs. Quickly taking off my gloves, I turned to see the father of the baby remove his hand from my backside.

I was shocked to discover he'd placed two hundred-dollar bills in my back pocket; and turning to the family, I knew immediately that they were expecting me to accept their gift graciously. The nurse and I exchanged a worried glance, and I began to tell them as carefully as I could that I could not accept their money. They

were completely offended and physically turned away from me. Hours spent making them comfortable had ended in failure. Thinking fast on my feet, I lifted my hands in

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# Special Feature

the air and exclaimed in a loud, plaintive voice that accepting money was against my religion! To my great relief, they quickly turned to face me and graciously nodded their acceptance and understanding.

Birth bears witness to the creative power we all possess. It's a time of transformation, an opportunity to remind a woman how powerful she can be. Many, many times, I have

whispered into the ear of a new mother that she should remember what she did here today. When it gets tough, she should remember how strong she is. Honoring her ability to self-create, to transform her life, plants the suggestion that she can mobilize and realize changes that will benefit her and her family. These women will track me down just to tell me they've fin-

ished their GED, started college, left an abusive partner. For those who will hear their own voice, who will value what is true for them above all else is the gift of vitality and the power that comes with it. What is right about her life will soon be what is right about her body, mind, and spirit. ❖

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## Nurturing Spiritual Growth

Although the act of nurturing another's spiritual growth has the effect of nurturing one's own, a major characteristic of genuine love is that the distinction between oneself and the other is always maintained and preserved.

— *M Scott Peck, b 1936, author, nationally recognized authority on the relation between religion and science*