

THE INTERNAL DANCE

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As a teacher of creative dance, I often meet mothers and children for the first time and observe the relationships that have developed over a period of months, even years. This relationship is danced out over and over again as the sessions progress. It is an external dance of the union. However, it is my view that the relationship between mother and child really begins at conception. In my classes for the expectant mother, the mother and developing baby are offered an early opportunity to make an internal journey of discovery. This is both a creative and a therapeutic experience.

The expectant mother of a first child recognises that the pregnancy signifies the point of no return. It is the end of an independent single unit and the beginning of the unalterable and irrevocable mother-child relationship (Pines, 1972: 333-343).

Dinora Pines suggests that the first trimester is a time of rapid mood swing and revival of anxiety. Some women feel supremely fulfilled and there is an increase in passivity and turning inward. Some feel mildly depressed and increase their activity in an effort to deny the newly felt passivity. The changing body shape, even a regression to the oral phase, is indicated by nausea, vomiting and cravings.

In the second trimester the mother-to-be begins to 'face reality' as the baby starts to move. The baby is seen more and more as a separate being even though it is dwelling within the mother's body. Most women start to withdraw into their inner world, a world full of strong fantasies. Coupled with this is the worry caused by any small alterations in well-being.

The third trimester is marked by further bodily discomfort and increased fatigue. Dinora Pines explains there are mood swings from pleasure at the prospect of the baby becoming a reality, to the conscious and unconscious anxiety of every pregnant woman that she might die in labour or that her child may be abnormal or damaged. There is also the drive to accomplish the task of bearing the baby.

With these stages and accompanying issues in mind, I invite the mother-to-be to attend the classes as early in the pregnancy as possible. These classes are not simply physical preparation for labour. Each session operates on a number of levels, touching the physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual life of every participant. The room is inviting and aesthetically pleasing. Coloured blankets and velvet cushions are laid out on a carpeted floor. Fresh flowers are ever-present, candles lit and blinds drawn at night. The space is transformed into a 'womb-like' atmosphere. Each session lasts an hour. It begins with a deep relaxation lasting about twenty minutes, where the mothers are invited to lie down. Music usually accompanies the relaxation and is carefully selected; for instance Gregorian chants encourage the women to go deeply inside whilst Gluck's *Dance of the Blessed Spirits* lightens the being. The relaxation softens the body and quiets the mind. I encourage the women to focus on their breathing. The relaxation is a natural entry towards experiencing deep states of consciousness, stopping the incessant internal chatter and surrendering to the moment.

Relaxation is most importantly a time when unconscious thoughts, fantasies, hopes and fears rise to the surface. It is my task to intuitively pick up the mood or tone of the group and offer an 'interpretation' without any verbal response from the women. I must read the group and speak about issues universal to women. It is vital to acknowledge the emotional changes during pregnancy by speaking to their innermost being. Ambivalences are acknowledged, unspoken feelings verbalised. I attempt to sensitively address issues such as idealisation of pregnancy without destroying their hope and potential for the future. Condon emphasises that the life changes which may be regarded as losses are transformed into sacrifices and challenges (1985: 77-81).

The relaxation time is followed by yoga postures specifically suited to pregnancy. Janet Balaskas (1989) has discovered an instinctive potential for childbirth and mothering; these yoga postures help the women to learn to understand their bodies and discover their instincts.

The practice of yoga is a time to nourish the being and enhance the connection with the new life inside. Yoga heightens intuition and increases confidence in decision-making. Tension and tightness in muscles, joints and nerves are released. A sense of being grounded and connected to the earth is developed and the body is encouraged to live in harmony with gravity. The feeling of 'centredness' which yoga develops moves into the labour and birth experience, eliminating the use of techniques for pain control.

Massage is another way of releasing tension and soothing the spirit. The women generously give and are grateful to receive what Balaskas (1989) calls 'intuitive' massage. Using surface stroking, deep stroking, deep pressure and kneading on the neck, shoulders, back and arms, this loving, sensitive touch relieves physical and emotional ache. Pregnancy is a time when intuition is high and the mother-to-be is open to inspiration and guidance.

Sometimes dance is introduced into the session. If the women are receptive to this medium it becomes a joyful expression of their whole being and enlivens the spirit. It is often an appropriate way to overcome feeling cumbersome and weary.

Beyond the physical and emotional preparation is the 'lessons for life' notion. The process that occurs during the classes can be taken away and applied to life. Therefore I consider myself to

be always working on two levels of awareness. The preparation for birth leads to a greater self-understanding. Labour and delivery may be the immediate goal, self-awareness the ultimate goal.



Pines (1972) concludes that for many women the outcome of pregnancy and delivery may be a tremendous shift towards greater maturity and an increase in self-esteem. The essential adaptation in this move towards growing is the achievement of a stable balance between unconscious fantasies, daydreams and hopes and the reality of her relationship to herself, her partner and her child.

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References

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