



Arizona choices

PRICELESS— Take One
December 2005/January 2006

Southern Arizona's Journal of Health, Wellness and the Environment

Including a
directory of health
wellness and
environmental
resources
plus
Dancing on the Path:
local news, events
and tidbits

- **The Pleasures of Childbirth**
by Ina May Gaskin, CPM
- **Why We Are Born**
by Paul Reeder
- **Getting (Earthen) Plastered**
by Mollie Curry

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About This Issue 12/05

From Bruce Silvey, publisher of Arizona Choices and the producer of the Arizona Choices Exposition and CAMCON 2005:

Thanks to all of you who participated in or attended our Arizona Choices Expo and CAMCON. All of the attendees and most vendors have encouraged us to do another Expo in 2006, and the national Presenters have pledged their help in co-creating our next events. We have learned much from the events and you, and we will be incorporating what we have learned in our next events. Please let us know your thoughts, so that together we may make future shows even better.

With heartfelt thanks and blessings to you and yours for the holiday season,

Bruce

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The Birth of Hope

During the season of the winter solstice, we in North America associate the shortened days with cold nights and bare trees. But we are also headed toward the birth of spring, toward the perennial resurgence of life. In this issue, renowned midwife Ida May Gaskin speaks of a little-known phenomenon – the pleasures of childbirth. In her article she tells the story of a birth in which the mother refused chloroform, where the midwife says, “It didn’t hurt. It wasn’t meant to, was it, doctor?” Perhaps Paul Reeder’s article on “Why We are Born” is really meant to address this question when he concludes, “Thus it is progress on the path, progress in developing wholeness, and service to ourselves and others that fulfills the reason we are born and produces joy and happiness in life.” Pain is not a requirement of birth – nor of living in harmony with Mother Earth and providing service to our brothers and sisters no matter what color their skin, how many legs they have or with what voices they speak.

In the coming year, let us all look forward to the birth of peace, and the possibility of happiness, fulfillment and abundance for all. Happy New Year from Arizona Choices!

Bob Peizer, Editor

The Pleasures of Childbirth

By Ina May Gaskin, MA, CPM

Ina May Gaskin, MA, CPM, is founder and director of the Farm Midwifery Center, located near Summertown, Tennessee. Founded in 1971, by 1996, the Farm Midwifery Center had handled more than 2200 births, with remarkably good outcomes. Ms. Gaskin herself has attended more than 1200 births. She is author of *Spiritual Midwifery*, now in its fourth edition.



Ina May Gaskin

Is childbirth always painful? While at first thought it might seem easy to answer this straightforward question with a loud and unequivocal yes, the truth is less simple. It is true that many women who have given birth more than once answer in the affirmative. But I have given birth four times without pain or medication, so my answer is not always—there are exceptions, and from them we can gain important insights about labor and birth.

I am far from being alone in saying that birth is not

always painful. In fact, under the right circumstances and with good preparation during pregnancy, labor and birth can even be pleasurable for many women. How do I know? I have worked as a midwife for over thirty years, and many of the women I have attended have told me so. I have been with them during these ecstatic experiences—virtually all of which occurred in women who took no pain-numbing medication. Just as compelling, my own body has also informed me.

Let's start by looking at some of the written evidence that exists. Numerous reports of painless birth have been gathered over the last couple of centuries by missionaries, travelers, soldiers, and doctors. Ezra Stiles, an early American clergyman and educator, wrote during the period 1755 to 1794: "I have often been told that a pregnant Squaw [sic] will turn aside and deliver herself, & take up the Infant and wash it in a Brook, & walk off" (Vogel in Speert 1980, p.1).

Judith Goldsmith, a modern-day writer, has gathered many reports from European observers of various cultures, among them, the following account of Guyanese women of South America in 1791: "When on the march an Indian is taken with labor, she just steps aside, is delivered, wraps up the baby with the afterbirth and runs in haste after the others. At the first stream that presents itself she washes herself and the infant" (1990, p. 2). Another seemingly painless birth was that noted by a visitor to the island of Alor, near Java, who witnessed six births without seeing a mother show real signs of pain. Sweat and soft groans were noted, but each of the six women gave birth easily. (2) Livingston Jones, a visitor among the Tlingit people of Alaska, remarked: "The vast majority of Tlingit women suffer very little and some not at all, when their children are born. They have been known to give birth while sleeping." (Cited in Goldsmith, 1990, p. 2)

Giving birth while sleeping! How can this be? As unusual as this seems, it can and does occasionally happen. Dr. Alice Stockham describes a Dr. Douglas's account of a birth that took place in 1828:

On his arrival he found the house in the utmost confusion, and was told that the child had been born before the messenger was dispatched for the doctor. From the lady herself he learned that, about half an hour previously, she had been awakened from a natural sleep by the alarm of a daughter about five years old, who slept with her. This alarm was occasioned by the little girl feeling the movements, and hearing the cries of an infant in bed. To the mother's great surprise, she had brought forth her child without any consciousness of the fact. (1890, p. 3)

Stockham's book *Tokology*, published late in the nineteenth century, quoted a world traveler who said, "I know of no country, no tribe, no class, where childbirth is attended with so much pain and trouble as in North America" (1890, p. 11). She believed that the reputed better performance of peasant or indigenous women in birth was largely due to their superior physical vigor from a healthy diet and regular exercise. European-American women could have healthy births, too, she argued, adding:

I attended a neighbour of mine in four different confinements. I never was able to reach her before the birth of the child, although I lived only across the street, and, according to her injunctions, always kept my shoes "laced up." She sent for me, too, at the first indication of labor. There was always one prolonged effort and the child was expelled. (1890, p. 15)

Another lady patron had two children without a particle of pain. With the first she was alone with her nurse. During the evening she remarked that she felt weary and believed that she would lie down. She had been on the bed no more than twenty minutes when she called to her nurse, saying: "How strangely I feel! I wish you would see what is the matter," when to their astonishment the child was already born. (1890, p. 3)

Even though it is possible to find an occasional reference in U. S. medical textbooks of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to women of "civilized" cultures giving birth with little or no apparent pain, such accounts are usually the exception rather than the rule. In general, childbirth pain is viewed to be severe and intrinsic to the process of labor and birth.

Even in texts written during the nineteenth century, when anesthetics and analgesics were not yet a normal feature of care giving, there is little recognition that childbirth pain can vary tremendously according to the position adopted (or required of) by the mother during labor and birth.

In one of the exceptional works, *Labor among Primitive Peoples*, published in 1883, Dr. George Engelmann made a huge contribution by synthesizing knowledge drawn from obstetrics, cultural anthropology, and massage therapy. Renowned as an accomplished biologist, archaeologist, and anthropologist, he corresponded regularly with a long list of scholars and explorers who also studied the medical practices of people who still lived according to "primal" ways. His book supports the general observations about the greater ease of birthing among indigenous women compared with their "civilized" sisters.

To Engelmann, the short, comparatively easy labors of women who lived in cultures untouched by civilization could be explained by several factors. He noted that these women typically led active lives right up to the time they went into labor. But his correspondence with physicians who knew about indigenous ways of giving birth convinced him that it was not just exercise during pregnancy that made birth easier for indigenous women. He thought their behavior in labor was at least as important a factor. Unlike European-American women, who stayed in their beds during the last weeks and months of pregnancy and in labor, indigenous mothers moved about freely and adopted various positions, many of them upright, during the different stages of labor. There was no supposedly superior class of women in these societies to sanction practices and positions that were obstetrically fashionable, and there was no prudery, so they behaved according to instinct. Equally important, the clothing they wore during pregnancy did not hamper free movement or full expansion of the lungs. The comfortable and practical clothes of indigenous women contrasted sharply with the clothing styles of prosperous civilized women of the nineteenth century, a period when corsets with whalebone or steel stays were typically worn laced so tightly that women wearing them sometimes suffered displacement of their kidneys, liver, and other organs. Fainting was common among corset-wearers, since tight lacing kept them from breathing deeply.

To his great credit, Engelmann was one of the few North American doctors who took the view that civilized women had something to learn from women who were more in tune with Nature. He was very frank about his opinion that women whose connection with their instincts had not been altered by civilization were far more able to give birth without complication, protracted labor, or unbearable pain and that physicians, as well as European-American women, had much to learn from them. “The savage mother, the Negress, the Australian or Indian, still governed by her instinct, is far in advance of the ordinary woman of our civilization,” he emphasized (1883, p. xvii).

Nineteenth century feminist philosopher and writer Elizabeth Cady Stanton regarded pregnancy as a natural state rather than an illness, and she knew from her own experience that labor and birth could be painless. Instead of accepting physicians’ advice to stay in bed from the seventh or eighth months of pregnancy until a month after giving birth, she kept on with her usual work until she went into labor with each of her seven children. She felt that confinement (restriction of movement by clothes or social custom) was the cause of women’s difficult labors, as well as their numerous postpartum ailments. After the birth of her fifth child, she wrote:

I never felt such sacredness in carrying a child as I have in the case of this one. She is the largest and most vigorous baby I have ever had, weighing twelve pounds. And yet my labor was short and easy. I laid down about fifteen minutes and brought forth this big girl. I sat up immediately, changed my own clothes, put on a wet bandage, and after a few hours’ repose sat up again. Am I not almost a savage? For what refined, delicate, genteel, civilized woman would get well in so indecently short a time? Dear me, how much cruel bondage of mind and suffering of body poor woman will escape when she takes the liberty of being her own physician of both body and mind?(1971, p. 4)

Probably the best-known physician in the twentieth century to study the riddle of pain in childbirth—at least, in the English-speaking world—was Dr. Grantly Dick-Read. He included the story of the first pain-free birth he ever witnessed in *Childbirth Without Fear* because it amazed him enough to change forever the way he thought about childbirth. The birth in question took

place in the Whitechapel district of London around 1913. Despite the fact that the mother was laboring in the poorest of hovels, with the rain pouring in through a broken window, Dick-Read remarked on the atmosphere of “quiet kindness” in the room. The only note of dissonance during the entire experience stemmed from his attempt to persuade the laboring woman to let him put the chloroform mask over her nose and mouth as the baby’s head was being born. Dick-Read wrote:

She, however, resented the suggestion, and firmly but kindly refused to take this help. It was the first time in my short experience that I had ever been refused when offering chloroform. As I was about to leave some time later, I asked her why it was she would not use the mask. She did not answer at once, but looked from the old woman who had been assisting to the window through which was bursting the first light of dawn; then shyly she turned to me and said: “It didn’t hurt. It wasn’t meant to, was it, doctor? (1972, p. 5)

For months and years after that experience, Dick-Read thought about the woman’s question and eventually came to realize that “there was no law in nature and no design that could justify the pain of childbirth” (1953, p. 39). Later experience in World War I in foreign lands gave him chances to witness many more apparently painless births. The sum of all these experiences plus his own battlefield experience of terror and loneliness led him to articulate his theory of why some women experience pain in birth while others do not. “It slowly dawned on me that it was the peacefulness of the relatively painless labor that distinguished it most clearly from the others. There was a calm, it seemed almost faith, in the normal and natural outcome of childbirth,” he wrote (1953, p. 34).

Dick-Read was the first physician to write about birth as a spiritual experience and to discuss fear as a major contributing factor to pain in childbirth. He wrote the pain of what he called “cultural childbirth” was caused by a combination of fear and muscle tension caused by ignorance of the birth process, isolation during labor and uncompassionate care received in hospital labor and delivery wards.

Remember the soft groans mentioned earlier, in reference to a Javanese birth that took place in the nineteenth century? It is worth noting that the only way one could write about orgasm during that period of U.S. his-

tory was to allude to soft moans or groans. By the 1970s times had changed, and a new group of people began to weigh in on the topic of painless birth: women who, in the tradition of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, had given birth themselves and had something to say about their experience. Among them were Raven Lang (*The Birth Book*, 1972), Jeannine Parvati Baker (*Prenatal Yoga & Natural Birth*, 1974) and myself (*Spiritual Midwifery*, 1975). Not only did these writers mention painless birth, they also mentioned the phenomenon of orgasm during labor or birth.

Since the appearance of these books, virtually nothing has been written on this subject in the years since. When I began hearing from young women that many were opting for elective cesarean as a way avoiding pain during labor and birth, I began to wonder why so many writers and childbirth educators never mentioned the possibility of it. Is it so rare that they simply can't conceive of it or do they wish to avoid raising women's expectations—given that many women would still experience pain even if they knew that orgasm was a possibility? I began asking young women if they had ever heard of women having ecstatic labors and births and found that most hadn't.

Curious about how many women I could find who had orgasmic experiences in labor or birth, I decided to conduct a small survey among some close friends. Of 151 women, I found 32 who reported experiencing at least one orgasmic birth. That is 21 percent—considerably higher than I had expected. Most of the women had their babies on The Farm [the community in Tennessee where Gaskin and her colleagues have been practicing midwifery for over a quarter-century], but interestingly, some said the orgasm occurred during a hospital birth. I have included some of the women's comments below, as they perhaps shed some light on what factors are present when women have birth experiences such as these. (I have changed the women's names out of respect for their privacy.)

Julia: *I had an orgasm when I had my fourth child. It happened while I was pushing. We went to the hospital after I had been "stalled" at nine centimeters for a while, attempting a home birth with some midwives who made me nervous. I no sooner got inside the door than I began having overwhelming urges to push that baby OUT!!! I orgasmed as she was being born. They just barely got me onto the delivery table in time for her birth, but I was*

oblivious to all that because it was feeling so good to get her out.

Margaret: *I had a cosmic union orgasm, a bliss-enhanced state. In a way, this has had a permanent effect. I can still go to that place.*

Vivian: *Being in labor felt like work; but giving birth, the actual process of passing the baby's entire body out of my womb, (which did happen quite quickly), was indescribably incredible, particularly the first time.*

Marilyn: *My last birth was very orgasmic in a sustained sort of way, like I was riding on waves of orgasmic bliss. I knew more what to expect, was less afraid, and tried to meet and flow with the energy rather than avoid or resist as I had the first time. The effect was probably mostly psychological in that it gave me tremendous satisfaction just to have accomplished such a difficult passage safely. I felt great for months afterward, which helped me feel positive about myself in general. This, in turn, affected how I felt about myself sexually. I also think that, for me, learning to let go and let my body take over in labor (as opposed to thinking about it with my mind all the way through!) helped me tap into a part of me I never knew before and helped me feel more willing to let go while making love.*

Janelle: *Giving birth was like pre- and post-orgasm by the second or third birth but did not contain the pulsation felt at climax. Being in tune with rushes [contractions], pushing, deeply relaxing in between was a very sexual and powerful experience but higher than orgasm, because orgasm can seem more self-gratifying and is short-lived. Giving birth is such a spiritual experience, so miraculous, you are very in tune with God and seeing the divinity in everyone that the sexual part is not that important. You are totally immersed in selfless love and so the blissful and sexual feelings are a byproduct, a gift of allowing your body to do what it knows how to do while your consciousness is very expanded.*

Paula: *I have been pondering this question for some time. I have always felt that labor and birth were like one big orgasm. The contractions were like waves of pleasure rippling through the body. I only found the final few centimeters of dilation as extremely strong and slightly less pleasurable. But I felt like labor and birth were/are a continuous orgasm. I can't say that it is like the orgasm experienced during sexual intercourse, where I find myself being engulfed and lost in the wave of orgasm. The type I experienced during labor and birth was a more*

all-consuming feeling that required more of my attention than that experienced during sex. However, I do feel that it is an orgasm. The birth itself is very orgasmic as the baby comes through the birth canal—extremely pleasurable and rewarding.

Maria: I had to think about this one for a few days. At first I thought “no,” but there certainly were sensations in the first stage during dilation that were incredibly intense when Ted would kiss me or I would bury my face in his neck during a rush. I did not have a particularly hard time during the first stage of any of my births and remember enjoying the birthing process for the most part. The general excitement, rushes of energy, and all the touching were very pleasurable. The sensations weren’t the same as an orgasm exactly, but when the rushes would end, the total splash-out [relaxation] was very similar to how I feel after orgasm now (which I call the wet-noodle effect). For me, however, the second stage was another story. I remember not liking that part because of the intense stinging of the tissue stretching. I always thought I was weird since I liked the first stage and couldn’t really get into the second stage. Anyway, it goes without saying that good energy rushes are enjoyable and, even though I don’t know if my inner muscles were twitching rhythmically or not, having a baby was the greatest energy sweep ever. I think it is very probable that it is much larger than an orgasm rush, or certainly different. One other thing I think might be true—I think it is possible that I hadn’t perfected the art of having superorgasms back then when I was so young and having the babies. Since then, over the years, I have become quite good at it, so I’m not sure if that lack of experience could have kept me from experiencing some of those sensations during labor and birth.

Some of the women described, instead of orgasm, a euphoria that had some similarities to the bliss they associate with sexual pleasure.

Elayne: I didn’t have an orgasm, but I felt a little bit like it when I had my first baby. And that was only at the transition shortly before pushing. For a moment I felt like being shortly before orgasm—being high, having pain, and being afraid what’s coming next. And I felt all this at the same time.

Alicia: No, I can’t say I would describe the experience as “orgasmic.” Rather, it was “euphoric.” To say it was orgasmic would describe the experience in almost a base way. Rather, it was spiritual.

Nanette: I wouldn’t say I experienced orgasm either in labor or giving birth. However, I would say the sensation of out-of-controlled-ness (!) was comparable. My sister says that giving birth was “like” the biggest orgasm ever—but only “like” it—so it sounds like a qualitative difference. I remember you telling me that my brain had migrated to my pelvic area, which was where it was needed, and I think you were right—the births of all three children are a delightful blur that was so much just being there and experiencing it with my body and not my head.

To conclude, I’ll speak from personal experience. It is easier to reach orgasm if one is not feeling violated, angry, frightened, distracted, or goal-oriented. I’m sure that it is easier when there is no one shouting at you when and how to push or counting. As I mentioned earlier, I haven’t encountered any reports of orgasm in women who had received pain medication. Orgasm is more possible if one is touched in just the right way—at the right place, the right pace, the right amount of pressure, and the right time. The challenge for women and their caregivers during birth is to come up with a system of pregnancy preparation and birth care that is not inimical to orgasm during labor and birth.

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Why Are We Born?

By Paul Reeder

“When the conscious sense of Self allows all of one’s being access to conscious self-expression, then one of the purposes of birth has been fulfilled... A sense of Self which is true includes all of the creative impulses of being. Achieving an identity of wholeness is behind the urge to take birth in this world”



Paul Reeder

Why are we born? This is an ageless question. What is the purpose of living? Many common answers come to mind. The purpose of living is to be happy. The purpose of living is to serve others, to serve the Whole of Life. Good answers and correct answers, but what does this mean? If the purpose of living is to be happy, why is life so hard? Why do so many suffer so?

In order to get the right answer to a question, it is necessary to ask the right question, or to ask in the right way. So in order to know why we are born we must first understand who we are or, more importantly, what we are. We are infinite being, wholeness, consciousness itself, manifesting as a particular living person.

When life itself takes birth in the universe of form, it is split into halves: the yin and yang of the Tao, prakriti and purusha in Vedic lore, soul and spirit in Western philosophies. From that beginning, the eternal quest of living is to evolve a form that reunites these primal halves of being. Alchemists call this the marriage of the Sun and the Moon.

As humans we have three components of being – Spirit and Soul, which are eternal; and Body, which is temporal, living in space and time and constantly changing. Body refers to not just the physical body, but also its energy, the feelings, the mind, the intelligence, the intuition, and the creative power through which we know ourselves and our world, and direct our lives.

These seven layers of manifestation: body, energy, feeling, mental, intellectual, intuitive and creative, correspond to the seven chakras. Body is the field in which consciousness strives to realize its wholeness and unity and includes the apparently external world as well. In birth, not just the labor but the gestation as well, consciousness builds and then enters into these layers one by one.

Present within the psychic machinery is a function often called ego. Ego, the power of identification, arises from a blending of the mental function of rote learning or belief and intelligent discernment resulting from curiosity. From birth we are conditioned to identify with the body, its feelings, and the mind and its ideas. These conditioning influences come from our family, our educators and from the collective at large in the form of ideas directed at us and in the examples of how others live. The impact of all these suggestions is cumulative and a false sense of Self grows stronger and stronger as time passes.

The ego self is not the True Self. The True Self is the whole self and includes energies the ego self rejects. The ego is a part of the vehicle the True Self uses to focus its presence in space and time. The True Self demonstrates amazing patience with the ego self. Even when in a spiritual frame of mind, when thinking or talking about oneself, it is the ego self doing the thinking or talking. This is one of the errors in common thoughts of reincarnation. The ego thinks it will reincarnate when in fact it is sure to die, never to be seen again. The only hope the ego has for survival is to undergo the seemingly endless transformations needed to recondition its sense of self to identify with the True Self or Whole Self.

Until this process of reconditioning the ego is complete, the human lives in a state of fragmentation. The conscious self includes all those creative impulses within the psyche which have developed attitudes, beliefs and behaviors which allow them to coexist harmoniously as a conscious unit or singularity. The rest of the creative impulses of the True Self are fragmented within the subconscious. From there, using attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that do not harmonize with the conscious self, the creative impulses contribute confusion and suffering and motivate our ongoing psychological and spiritual development.

Every creative impulse within our being, whether conscious or not, functions with ego. The conscious ego, which is what we think we are, is subject to change. Fragments of Self, living from the subconscious, contribute to our life experience in ways designed to get the conscious Self's attention. Once this is accomplished a fragment of Self's creative energy is raised from subconscious functioning to conscious functioning where new attitudes, beliefs and behaviors can be developed

to integrate the fragment into the conscious whole.

Both the conscious self and the fragmented self experience an ego death and rebirth during the process of integration. The experience of death is painful and we resist it instinctively, putting it off until the pain of living is greater than the pain of dying. The experience of new birth is joyous. This apocalyptic process will go on over and over again until the entire creative potential has access to conscious expression where psychological and spiritual growth is taking place. When the conscious sense of Self allows all of one's being access to conscious self-expression, then one of the purposes of birth has been fulfilled.

Until that time, however, the pure creative impulses of the spirit are tainted by the attachments of the false sense of Self. The resistance to the death and rebirth process that characterizes spiritual development is often described in spiritual literature as an inner battle or war. In the Bible this takes the form of the Apocalypse in Revelations. In the Koran, it appears as Jihad; in the Bhagavad-Gita it is the battle of Kurukshetra. It is a shame that the materially-minded externalize these spiritual images as political events.

Both the sense of Self expressed by fragmented aspects of being, and a conscious sense of Self which excludes those fragments, are false representations of the whole being. A sense of Self which is true includes all of the creative impulses of being. Achieving an identity of wholeness is behind the urge to take birth in this world.

Through Grace come experiences that counter the conditioning to identify with temporary and constantly changing aspects of Self. These experiences set into motion a process of conditioning the ego function to identify with transcendent, infinite and eternal aspects of Self. These experiences progressively bring about a transformation in the ego function replacing the conditioned sense of Self with an unconditional awareness of being.

Soul is the aspect of eternal Self that connects the present to the past. It is the Yin Self, the intuitive Self. Soul is the repository of memory and stores all our karmas, all unfinished actions and all connections to others. Soul is individual self.

Spirit is the aspect of eternal Self that connects

present to the future. It is the Yang Self, the creative Self. Spirit is the repository of creative impulses, and is the source of vision and inspiration. Spirit is universal self.

There are three aspects of karma. They are *kriya-man karma*, *sinchit karma*, and *pralabd karma*. *Kriya-man karma* is simply the law of sowing and reaping, the first principal of karma. *Sinchit karma* refers to all the accumulated creative energies that have been set into motion, but not yet manifest in the form of experience. *Pralabd karma* is that subset of *sinchit karma* that the soul and spirit have agreed before birth to encounter in the course of this life. It is *pralabd karma* that is served in the choice of family of origin, the choice of where and when to take birth, and into what conditions. The timing of birth reflected in the birth chart of the heavens is in mathematical or musical, vibrational harmony with *pralabd karma*. Rightly understood, the birth chart is a musical score to the dance of life.

The purpose of living - the reason we are born - is to develop awareness and functioning within the temporal Self that allows these eternal halves of being, soul and spirit, to be forever rejoined even in this temporal dimension. For most souls this takes so long, so many lifetimes of suffering, that it is easy to become discouraged. But the saints who come in all cultures provide proof positive that success is possible. Indeed, if we accept their teachings, success is inevitable!

The soul must be fully developed and healed. Our sense of connection to and awareness of others and the whole of life must be developed. Conditioning within the soul that blocks this sense of connection has to be healed. Conditioning is the association of creative impulses with specific attitudes, beliefs and behaviors and can either bind the psyche in hypnotic states or loops of choices and actions which consistently produce dissatisfying experiences. These aspects of the self are essentially trapped in the past and disconnected from the present world of unlimited possibility.

The spirit must be fully developed. We must learn to embrace our creative impulses constantly growing new ways to express them. This process of learning and growing, of becoming more than we already are, is what makes us happy in the short term. Even a fully conscious saint is still learning and growing. This state of readiness and willingness to learn allows the limit-

less life force of the spirit to fully inhabit the body in the present assuring good health in spite of constitutional limitations.

Once the spirit and soul are both developed and living in the body, the process of balancing and merging them becomes natural. Unification brings lasting joy and happiness of such dimension that it is referred to as bliss.

Everyone, regardless of religious, cultural, moral, class or economic background is on this path of development. Some are moving slowly forward. Some are making very little progress at all. Some, sad to say, are moving backwards. Some, with extra presence of mind and introspection, are experiencing through Grace an acceleration of progress.

Our place on the path seems to go through four stages. In the first stage we are focused upon survival. All our creative powers are directed towards getting through the present day, week, month or year. We serve ourselves. In the second stage we are focused on acquisition and consumption. Our creative powers are concentrated on comfort and security, ownership and power over our world. We serve ourselves and those who are trying to survive. In the third stage of development we are learning to live by and for the sake of principles. We are willing to sacrifice comfort in the service of ideals and principles that serve a progressively larger sense of the world. We serve ourselves, those who are trying to survive, and those who are trying to acquire. Finally, at the fourth stage of development, we are focused on understanding the principles of life and helping others to understand them as well. We serve ourselves and all of humanity.

Thus it is progress on the path, progress in developing wholeness, and service to ourselves and others that fulfills the reason we are born and produces joy and happiness in life.

Paul Reeder has been studying spirituality since 1967 and astrology since 1979. He has been practicing astrology full time since 1984. Currently, he teaches beginning and intermediate astrology, and is on the faculty of the yoga teacher training program, teaching yoga philosophy at the Providence Institute.

Paul Reeder – Spiritual Astrologer
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Getting (Earthen) Plastered

By Mollie Curry

“I, for one, am so happy to see the beautiful clays of this area grace more and more buildings—it’s local, it’s fun, and it works!”



Mollie Curry

If you think smearing mud all over your living room walls is either an act of insanity or vandalism, think again. Without having to build a straw bale house or a mud hut, you can experience the beauties and benefits of earthen (clay-based) plasters by doing

a bit of eco-remodeling in the house you live in right now. You can totally change the personality of a room that is tired or sterile with a coat of mud on the walls.

Many colors are possible, mostly in muted hues. Earthen plasters, with their minor — or major, if you choose — variations in surface texture, reflectivity, and color bring a sense of life to a room or a whole house. They lend a handmade feel, often in a classic Old World sense. Some finishes look almost like leather or marble, but there is a lot of room for creativity. You can smooth and round corners, and transform boringly flat sheet-rock by adding a bit of sensuous undulation or trowel or hand marks. Most people feel more comfortable in rooms that have some variation in wall surface, shape, and texture, and color, perhaps because we humans have been housed for millennia in caves, and houses of wood, stone, mud and thatch — not in flat-planed boxes!

If you want to start with a small project, try accent touches around doorways or windows, over a brick fireplace, or in an alcove. You can even do relief sculptures on the wall, sometimes with the help of simple armature like screws. Mosaic with tile or mirror is another option, as well as a form of high-relief stenciling. With the addition of oil and wax, people have even made sinks and bathtubs out of mud! Plastering the exterior of an existing home is possible in some cases, but has different issues to address than interior work, which is what this article mainly addresses.

Low Environmental Impact

Clay-based plasters — I use the plural because there are so many recipes and variations — represent a lower environmental cost than cement or gypsum-based products because they are not heated to high temperatures, which takes a huge amount of energy with corresponding pollution and greenhouse gasses. They are not as resistant to impact or abrasion as the other common stucco/plaster options, but with reasonable forethought about where to apply them as well as attention to proper mixing and application, they should do fine in many situations.

Unless certain pigments are added for color, earthen plasters (and paints) are very low on the toxicity scale — they are the original “no VOC” (volatile organic compound) wall coatings! Iron oxides and ochres are the safest pigments, though a wide variety is available through ceramic supply stores. You want something besides an iron oxide or ochre: ask for “Mason Stains.” Do be careful not to breathe the dust of clay or sand (or anything!) while mixing, as this can result in serious lung problems.

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What About Water and Humidity?

Earthen plasters can get wet on occasion, but repeated driving rains, constant wetness, or excessive humidity are likely to result in some degree of damage. Luckily, clay-based plasters are easier to fix than concrete stuccos. It's all about choosing what rooms to put your plasters. They do best in places that receive light and air circulation, not in dark, damp places that already tend to grow mildew. In the desert climate of Arizona, mold is not usually a large concern. In fact, because of clay's ability to molecularly absorb water without getting wet (to a point, of course) then to let it evaporate easily when drier air wafts past, earthen plasters with the right ingredients can be surprisingly resistant to mold, even in humid climates. Some museums have even earth-plastered their walls to help moderate swings in humidity, which can damage valuable works of art.

Mold doesn't actually grow on clay or sand, but the “organic matter” ingredients of plaster could feed it. However, experience has shown that it has to be a pretty bad situation for a mold problem to develop (little sun or air circulation). Clay has been found to have protected straw used as insulation in Tudor-style timber frames in Germany for hundreds of years.

Hydrated lime-based plasters (which can also have clay in them) are even more mold-resistant due to their alkalinity. Unlike garden lime, hydrated lime (builder's lime) is heated to a high temperature (similar to cement) to change its molecular structure. If treated correctly, it slowly turns back to limestone as it cures on your wall.

Of Recipes and Experiments

The basics: Plasters are usually made up of three main components: binder, aggregate, and fiber. In this case, clay is the binder, sand is the aggregate, and straw or manure from grass-eating animals serves as the fiber (the manure completely loses its odor when dry). There are also many possible additives that improve the workability, durability, or water-resistance of the finished product. I have found that ingredients that are sticky when wet generally become hard when dry, thus adding to the durability of this relatively “soft” coating. Some common additives include milk products, wheat paste (like old-fashioned wallpaper paste), oil, paper



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pulp, and prickly pear cactus juice. Borax has sometimes been added to retard mold, especially in earthen paint, which is sometimes done over a plaster or “regular” wall for color or other decorative effect. Earthen paint is like earthen plaster but thinner and sometimes smoother.

People hate to hear this, but there are literally millions of plaster “recipes.” I once heard two of the most experienced earthen plasterers in the Southwest state that they had never made the same mix twice! So it’s best to approach it with the attitude that it is all a big experiment, as is all of life. Of course, basic knowledge goes a long way in mixing up something that will work well. And it is good to remember that **lots** of things will work well — many ways exist to “do it right.” There are no “mess ups,” just interesting lessons to learn from. I always make test patches — it is just part of the process.

More Things to Consider

The plaster has to be able to grip the wall well enough so that it doesn’t fall off. The thicker the coat, the heavier it is and the more likely not to stick, so go



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for thin. There are several potential solutions to this: Applying a “primer” coat of masonry adhesive or wheat paste with sand added, gluing or stapling up burlap, installing stucco mesh, or roughing up a smooth texture present good possibilities. You may not need to modify the surface at all — do some large test patches and see how well they stick.

Plasters can be applied with hands or trowels, and are sometimes smoothed with trowels or sponges or wooden “floats.” Sometimes plasters are burnished or polished with a trowel or piece of plastic when they are partially dry to make them really smooth. It doesn’t take most people long to get the hang of the basics, but it is definitely hard work if you are going to be doing a large area. Of course, having someone with experience to teach you the techniques (and help out) is ideal.

If you don’t want to try mixing your own, look into the ready-mixed earthen plasters that you could trowel on yourself or hire an experienced person to apply. You can also buy clay and fine sand from a ceramics supply company instead of digging it up yourself. There is even a natural building supply store called “Originate” at 526 N. 9th St. (520-792-4207) in Tucson. If you want to make your own plasters from the soil instead of from a bag — and I highly recommend it for the fun, connectedness and pride you will feel — do some further reading and/or take a class, since this is not a comprehensive “how-to” article. I, for one, am so happy to see the beautiful clays of this area grace more and more buildings — it’s local, it’s fun, and it works!

Mollie Curry has been learning and teaching natural building for the last nine years at Earthaven EcoVillage in North Carolina, and now lives in Tucson part-time. She owns Earth Circle Natural Building, specializing in earthen paints and plasters in addition to consulting and teaching classes. Her passion is helping people connect with themselves, Earth, and each other through natural building (and other means!). For more information about classes or other questions, contact her at 520-743-3828 or molliemat@hotmail.com.

Dancing on the Path

A listing of news items, tidbits and events of interest to our readers. Submissions welcome by email at: bob@arizonachoice.com

Festivals of Light, holidays from a range of cultures and customs. Sunday, Dec. 4: Diwali (East Indian) Sunday, Dec. 18: Italian Christmas. Monday, Dec. 26: Hanukkah. Saturday, Dec. 31: Kwanzaa. Sunday, Jan. 1: Japanese New Year. Saturday, Jan. 7: Three Kings Day. Saturday, Jan. 28: Chinese New Year. Event included with admission price of \$3.50 for children 2 to 16; \$5.50 for adults; \$4.50 for seniors. Tucson Children's Museum. 200 S. Sixth Ave. (520) 792-9985.

LoveLight Ceremony, Wednesday December 7, 2005, Tucson Medical Center. 5301 East Grant Road. The TMC hosts the 15th Annual LoveLight Ceremony at 5:00pm. The lighting of the tree takes place at the Lifegain Park, located near Peppi's House on the TMC campus. The jovert Steel Drum Band will perform.

Downtown Parade of Lights, Saturday December 10, 2005. The 11th Annual Parade of Lights kicks off with family fun at Armory Park, 6th Avenue and 17th Street. The Parade begins at 6:00pm. Crafts, food vendors, live entertainment and community parade entries are sure to delight children of all ages. For more information, visit www.downtowntucson.org

Psst...Your Soul is Showing: The 3rd Annual All Souls Film Festival, Friday December 9 - Saturday December 10, 2005. The Free Festival is scheduled to take place at the screening room, 127 E. Congress Street. Show times are at 8:00pm with a reception on Friday night at 6.30pm across the street at Vaudeville with catered food for a fee of \$5. For more information, visit www.allsoulsproression.org

Indian America, Friday Dec 30 thru Sunday Jan 1st, Rillito Raceway Park (inside racetrack). River Road and 1st Avenue, Tucson. Dancers from over 50 tribes, authentic handmade crafts, traditional foods, singing and drum contests.

American Indian Exposition, Jan 27th - Feb 12th 2006. Tucson Expo Center, Irvington Rd. & Palo Verde Road. I-10 exit 264B. 3750 E. Irvington Rd., Tucson. 10,000 years of culture: 150 nations - 14 days

Tibetan Buddhist Meditation Hour: Every Friday from 5:30 to 6:30, UA Pierce McCormick Building, 1401 E. 1st St. Newcomers and advanced practitioners alike are welcome. Alternating Chenrezig, White Tara and Vajrasatva practices. Visit dharma-kirti.org for more information.

Happy Hour Partner Yoga: every 2nd Friday of the month at Providence Institute. Create healthy partnering and have fun with movement, breath, Thai Massage and joy. No experience necessary. Pre-registration suggested. 323-0203.

Community Drum Circle, Himmel Park, 1st Street and Tucson Boulevard, 1-5 pm every Sunday. Bring a drum/percussion instrument, a chair and a blanket. Call 271-2102 for more information.

Where to find Arizona Choices Journal in Tucson

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At Ease Chiropractic	Metaphysics World
Beach Combers Hot Tubs	Millie's Pancake Haus, Tanque Verde
Bentley's Coffee	Mountain View Retirement Community
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Bookmans Bookstore, Ina	New Life on Ajo
Bookmans Bookstore on Speedway	New Life on Broadway
Borders Bookstore on Broadway	New Life on Oracle
Casa de La Luz Hospice	New Life on Speedway
Casa Video	Paul Reeder
Casbah Tea House	Phyllis Winslow
Coffee XChange Campbell/Grant	Pima Community Access
Congress Hotel	Pima Heart, on St. Mary's Road
Cope/El Rio, on Broadway	Priority Auto and Tire Center
Create Cafe	Proactive Health Solutions
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Steve Liu, L.Ac.

The HanLing Acupuncture Healing Center is coming of age. Founded in June 2001, the Center has grown steadily under the direction of Steve Liu, L.Ac. In addition to offering traditional Chinese Medicine (including acupuncture and Chinese herbs), this year the center offers an exciting new program that helps improve patients with low-vision disorders such as age-related macular degeneration.

Age-related macular degeneration is the leading cause of partial or total blindness in people over age 50, and currently has no known treatment from allopathic

medicine. However, a relatively new European acupuncture technique has helped over 5,000 patients in a Scandinavian eye clinic where Steve was trained. Many Tucson patients now have seen vision improvement with the acupuncture treatment since the program was first introduced in last November. So do not loose hope over the low vision, give us a call!

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Dr. Bergner has a master's in holistic nutrition, and has studied natural hygiene and other schools of natural living for many years. She has practiced advanced NAET for seven years.

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Allen Smith

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Paul is on the faculty of the Providence Institute Yoga Teacher Training program, and is an inspiring teacher of spiritual psychology and mysticism. Classes in

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Miriam graduated from Stanford University and has been a Bodywork Therapist since 1982. She is a licensed Massage Therapist and Certified Practitioner of the arts in which she now specializes.

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and minister, Robert Martin is dedicated to his mission of relieving suffering & attaining health. Author of "Healing with Divine Energy."

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Healing Sleep



Rubin Naiman

Dr. Rubin Naiman is clinical assistant professor of medicine and the sleep and dream specialist at the University of Arizona's Program in Integrative Medicine directed by Dr. Andrew Weil. He maintains a private practice specializing in integrative and alternative approaches to sleep disorders and also offers professional consultation and training in sleep health. Dr. Naiman founded the sleep services program at Canyon Ranch and is the sleep and dream specialist at Miraval. He is the author of Healing Night: the Science and Spirit of Sleeping,

Dreaming, and Awakening (Fall 2005) and The Sleep Advisor: Help for Insomnia and Other Sleep problems (Summer 2005), software designed to evaluate and manage sleep problems. Please visit DrNaiman.com for more information.

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Stephen G. Scalese, MSW, LCSW
Holistic Counselor &
Licensed Therapist
Sabino Canyon Area
975-2157
1-888-304-9115
sgscalese@yahoo.com

Holistic Energy Healing



Cynthia Tierra

Release pain, illness and stress in an hour. Are you concerned about your relationships, physical health, or the direction your life has taken? Do you want to be healthy and happy? Whatever is happening in your life, you can find peace. Bring your mind, spirit and body into balance. Experience a healing treatment, unlike any other.

Eliminate pain by identifying and releasing the underlying causes. When you are in balance mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually, you naturally move towards a state of health. Holistic Health Practitioner/Reiki

Master Teacher, Cynthia Tierra works with the whole person, mind, spirit and body. Cynthia is certified by The American Association of Drugless Practitioners and runs a healing center on ten acres of desert, adjacent to Saguaro National Park West.

Healing From The Heart
Cynthia Tierra - Holistic Health
Practitioner/Reiki Master Teacher
12876 West Fort Lowell Road
Tucson, AZ 85743 ph: 520-616-0998
cynthiatierra@hotmail.com
www.healingone.net

Holistic Medicine



Synchronicity Center

When was the last time you had the opportunity to get ALL your health questions answered in a relaxed and supportive atmosphere? As medical physicians who embrace time-honored healing philosophies, we meld the best of all worlds with Western, Alternative, and Mind/Body/Spirit Medicine. Join us for a comprehensive evaluation of your physical, nutritional, emotional, and spiritual health. Learn to tap into your own treasure trove of deep healing ability.

Dr. Bruce Roberts, MD, is certified in Family Practice, Psychiatry, Holistic

Medicine, Mind/Body/Spirit Medicine and Shamanic Healing Arts. Dr. Molly Roberts, MD, MS, is certified in Family Medicine, Holistic Medicine, Mind/Body/Spirit Medicine, Shamanic Healing Arts, and is a Psychotherapist and non-denominational Minister. Yes, you can have the best of all worlds!

Synchronicity Center
1701 E Lind Rd
Tucson, AZ 85719
327-9624 (32-SYNCH)
www.SynchronicityCenter.com

Hospice Care



Casa de la Luz Hospice

“Our Mission is to provide superior care to patients and their loved ones, so that they may complete their mission on this earth in comfort, dignity and harmony.” At Casa de la Luz Hospice, we affirm life and believe that death, like birth, is a natural and sacred time of transition. Hospice seeks not to hasten or postpone end-of-life, but to assist persons to live fully with the maximum quality of life. While most hospice care is at home, Casa also offers care in our hospice home Kanmar Place and our Inpatient Unit. Both have private, beautifully ap-

pointed rooms and gardens. At both locations, we offer a music thanatologist and body worker to enhance comfort, healing and peace. Call to find out about how our comprehensive services can help you and your family.

Casa de la Luz Hospice
400 W. Magee Rd.
Tucson, AZ 85742
520-544-9890
www.casahospice.com

Life Coach



Dr. Susan Ricketson

Expect miracles! Personal Life Coaching from Dr. Susan Ricketson will bring zest, satisfying relationships, prosperity, spiritual fulfillment and anything you intend into your life. In addition to being a highly effective Life Coach, Dr. Ricketson is a seasoned therapist for individuals, couples and families, with a specialty in Grief Counseling and Support. She focuses on: Enriching Relationships; Aging with Purpose; and Career and Life Transitions. She has studied many body and energy modes and is a 3rd degree master in

Radiance/Reiki. Her coaching will enable you to find your mission and live your vision in life. “Life’s short, start now to unleash your gifts and let wonders happen in your life. It is possible to manifest your dreams.”
 – Susan Richardson

Dr. Susan Ricketson
Personal Life Coach
520-577-3730
Email: tonkissue@comcast.com
www.livefromyourheart.com

Natural Skin Care



Amazon Herb Co.

Do you want beautiful and healthy skin naturally? Now there are carefully selected wild and organic Rainforest botanicals that have been specifically and naturally formulated for skin care. The Rainforest is the most concentrated source of life energy on Earth. The Amazon Herb Co. partners with Indigenous Communities who eco-harvest these powerful plants for skin care and wild foods nutrition. Choosing these products contributes to a healthy sustainable future for the Amazon Rainforest and its residents.

Nancy McGee Wongmo has been a Natural Health Consultant for 35 years, in Oregon, Hawaii, and Arizona. Her passion is helping people achieve optimum health, personal growth, and financial freedom through eco-commerce. Call for a free consultation and samples. Make a difference in your health and Rainforest preservation.

Amazon Herb Co.
Nancy McGee Wongmo
(520) 290-6889
www.AmazonHerbsAlive.com
Nancy@AmazonHerbsAlive.com

Playshops



Shari Silvey

Do you want to find your passion and joy, manifest your dreams, unleash your creativity, and stimulate your intuition? Through experiential hands-on art, energy work, movement and creating body energy shifts, we will transform shadow into light, fear into courage, and inaction into focused inspired intent. In addition to working indoors, we will go outside for a guided journey to unlock the mysterious portals to unseen dimensions and heal with nature. Learn to focus this powerful energy

and become the channel for manifesting your dreams! Shari travels extensively around the U.S. to sell her artwork and facilitate her visionary playshops and wilderness retreats.

Shari Silvey
520-744-6328
www.artworkbyshari.com
shari@artworkbyshari.com

Sound Healing Events



Tucson Soundings' goal is to expand awareness of sound healing through experiential sound circles and ceremonies, toning, group and self-study, quartz crystal and Tibetan singing bowls, multi-cultural story telling and dancing, Native American Flute, didgeridoo, drumming and workshops with local, national and international presenters in the world of sound healing. Join us for a special holiday toning circle Sunday, December 11, 3-5 PM with the renowned Grand Mistress Storyteller Sylvia McConico and world class didge master Allen Smith at

the beautiful Tucson Creative Living Center, 4850 W. Jojoba Drive set in the natural desert beauty of the Ironwood Hills. \$10.

Tucson Soundings
520-409-8439
joanv8@yahoo.com

Toning Circles

Zero Balancing



Zero Balancing is a unique hands-on body work system that aligns the energy body with the physical body by working gently and subtly with the bones and key joints in the body. While addressing specific needs, the focus of Zero Balancing is the whole person. With roots in osteopathy and acupuncture, this work combines western approaches to the body with eastern concepts of energy and healing. Its benefits include: relief of symptoms of stress, a feeling of core well-being and balance, a reduction in physical, emotional, and chronic pain, relief of musculoskeletal tension, a great-

er capacity to manage difficult transitions in life and live more fully.

Dorsett Edmunds is a licensed physical therapist who has been practicing Zero Balancing for more than 17 years and teaching it for 10 years in the southwest and northwest. Her goal as a teacher and as a clinician is to empower the self-healing process and awareness in her clients and her students so that they can live and practice from their own core well-being.

Dorsett Edmunds, M.A., P.T.
2612 E. Drachman St.
Tucson, Arizona 85716
520-326-5221 dorsette@gmail.com

Dorsett Edmunds

“Be firm like a rock, deep and serious like the sea. Think of the Earth as a Mother. This is one Earth. Don’t be divided by thinking of yourself as belonging to different countries. This is one Earth.”

—Babaji

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EL RIO

COMMUNITY
HEALTH CENTER

more than
just medicine

El Rio Community Health Center is proud to celebrate 35 years of caring for Tucson.

El Rio Community Health Center is passionate about providing the highest quality health care. Our doctors and nurses are some of the best in the country, and we've been nationally recognized for our innovative approach to medicine. But it isn't the recognition that drives us to give exceptional service to each and every one of our patients. It's the lives we touch every day.

With 11 sites in Tucson, El Rio is a part of your neighborhood. We offer comprehensive internal and family medicine, including women's and children's services, for everyone. We accept AHCCCS, Medicaid, Medicare, KidsCare and most private insurance

plans and our mission is to care for everyone – especially the uninsured and underserved members of the community.

Our diabetes specialists have helped many Tucsonans take control of this life-threatening disease, and our HIV/AIDS clinic offers compassionate guidance and care.

We also operate the largest nonprofit dental clinic in the state, with three offices to keep your family smiling. And, if you need a prescription filled, we have three full-service, computerized pharmacies to meet our patients' needs.

Let us
care for
your family.

EL RIO
COMMUNITY
HEALTH CENTER



MAIN MEDICAL CLINICS

Appointments: (520) 670-3909

Main Clinic
839 W. Congress

Southwest Clinic
1500 W. Commerce Court, *Valencia just west of I-19*

Northwest Clinic
320 West Prince Road, *Prince & Oracle*

DENTAL CLINICS

Appointments: (520) 670-3758

Main Dental Clinic
839 W. Congress

Southwest Dental Clinic
1530 W. Commerce Court, *Valencia just west of I-19*

Northwest Dental Clinic
4009 N. Flowing Wells