

The Birth Empowerment Workshop®: a truly holistic relationship building retreat for pregnant couples

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When a baby comes into our lives for the first time, the world as we know it changes dramatically. We not only give birth to a newborn that is utterly dependent on us, but we give birth to ourselves as new mothers and fathers. This requires a qualitative shift in our identity, in our activities and responsibilities, and in our relationships. The primary relationship of the couple goes through enormous change when the dyad becomes a triad, and our relationships with extended family and our community also shifts. As we redefine who we are in the world as new parents, we are also adjusting to the reality of 24/7 care of a newly born infant with needs and requirements for care. This is a challenging period of life, and some of us do it with more grace than others, but it is a much better experience if both parents are on the same page and supporting each other through the demands of newborn parenting.

As a childbirth educator for twenty years at the end of the 20th century, I taught comprehensive preparation for childbirth classes that helped my clients understand what to expect and what they could do to have a positive birth experience. I believe a good birth experience is the cornerstone for a positive parenting experience. However, as good as those classes were as mental and physical preparation for birth and beyond, they were missing the important elements of emotional and spiritual preparation. There isn't time for addressing these concerns in the typical birth preparation classes, and my classes were chock full of information and resources as it was. The inspiration to create The Birth Empowerment Workshop® to supplement those classes recognized the potential for exploring the emotional and spiritual dimensions of becoming parents in a safe atmosphere of trust and acceptance. This is true for first time parents and for those who already have children.

Couples who have attended the workshop have particularly appreciated that others share the same concerns and worries as they do and have enjoyed the group experience of collective sharing while expanding their awareness. *"I believe the workshop prepares couples more completely for the total experience of childbirth and parenting than the more traditional or conventional courses. Overall the effect of the workshop was very positive. It was reassuring to know that others had similar concerns, anxieties, hopes, etc."* – J.Harb; *"I was more assertive about my needs during labor and less confused and fearful about what was happening to me. [The workshop] was a very rich experience. I felt a sense of unity with the group as we shared our thoughts."* – A. Carbrey

For those who have stepped on to a spiritual path during their childbearing years, this workshop offers a chance to connect with the spirit of their unborn child through exercises and guided meditations. There are a variety of experiential activities that foster a spiritual attunement for birth and the parenting journey that unfolds afterwards. Welcoming a new

soul into the family and on to the planet can be a powerfully sacred moment when we embrace a holistic perspective. The Birth Empowerment Workshop® was designed to create a space for a multidimensional experience for prospective parents, including those who are new to spiritual practices. It is truly a mind/body/spirit passage.

We found that a vital component of this weekend intensive was how couples connected with each other on a deeper and more satisfying level through communication and relationship building exercises. When couples become closer and more attuned to each other, they can work as a duet when the baby comes, instead of moving in separate directions, which is often the case. They can draw on each other's strengths, understand what each one is going through, and be each other's support. No one feels left out or superfluous because they understand the importance of working together and the value of what each has to contribute. The workshop is also a reality check for prospective parents, presenting what life is actually like after a baby is born. Often a cause of postpartum depression and anxiety is the realization that the ideal of what *can be* doesn't match the reality of what *is*. A realistic understanding of what lies ahead helps couples stay connected while they travel through the transition to parenthood. Improved communication means they have each other's back through the sometimes turbulent times of the postnatal period, which challenges the best of us. That becomes a powerful foundation for the parenting years ahead, working as a team to parent effectively and lovingly. A good relationship is the best gift we can give our children.

The workshop helps couples assimilate the emotional and spiritual aspects of giving birth and becoming parents and this integration leads to the empowerment of those who attend. A sense of community is created within the group when we are learning and growing in a warm and harmonious environment. It is a great joy to watch the empowerment of those who take part – and this plays out during their birth experiences, while they are adjusting to life as parents, and in the depths of their relationships. It is known that for the vast majority of new parents, there is a dramatic drop in satisfaction with the relationship in the year after a baby is born. The Birth Empowerment Workshop® is a way to inoculate against this happening by helping to create strategies that bring us closer together to weather the storms ahead. The evolution of this workshop into a couples' retreat that strengthens relationships before the baby is born is an aspect of empowerment that emerged from the process, empowerment as a couple. Here is a statement by one of the fathers who took part: *"Birth Empowerment is about growth (both personal and interpersonal), about exploration, learning and discovery (both pragmatic and spiritual), but ultimately Birth Empowerment is about love; love and its most creative product: a beautiful healthy child and two ever closer growing parents enriched by the magical experience of birth."* – S. Kotansky

The Birth Empowerment Workshop® is coming to Los Angeles on June 21-22, to The Sanctuary Birth and Family Wellness Center. Here is the link for the event:
<http://www.birthsanctuary.com/classes-and-events/the-birth-empowerment-workshop-1>

If you are pregnant and want to prepare for parenthood by fostering your connection to your partner, this is a dynamic way to prepare for birth and parenthood. If you know someone who is expecting a baby soon, please share this information with them. The early bird special is ending on May 21st, so now is the time to register.