



RUNNING ON 'BABY-TIME'

We become a parent the moment we conceive a child and more tangibly so at the moment of birth but it takes the journey of a life-time to become a parent in the deepest sense. It can be a journey into a new way of being and of using time;; a transition we make during our first child's early months and years and one we continually re-make as we weave our family life into the wider world and back again.

Have you ever travelled to less industrialised, less capitalised places or countries where visitors like you bemoan how nothing ever seems to happen on time or in time? A delivery is promised tomorrow and we ask if that is on 'Real time' or 'Island time', or similar. All sorts of jobs, tasks and projects might be planned and whether they be small or large, creative or practical, simple or complex, urgent or not, the task can be put on hold, side-tracked or delayed minutes, hours, weeks or months. Our western time- and task-controlled world and the type of mind that goes with it often doesn't recognise the reasons behind such delays. We visitors are apt to consider the frequent if not constant delays and disruptions to be indicators of laziness, backwardness, inefficiency, disrespect, not coping or inability.

When we bridge the cultural barrier, however, and we can see the whole picture from the point of view of the 'locals', we often discover that the task or project is secondary to human needs, so it's quite natural that everything stop in order to meet a need for food, drink, toilet-stop or such like at the time the need is felt. Sometimes it might be a less tangible and less obvious need (and this frustrates us westerners no end!) for some rest, some interpersonal connection via a chat or a game; or time-out to deal with a family matter; or the need to help a friend or a whole village; or perhaps some quiet-time to commune with nature, self or spirit.

On my travels I have been frustrated by delays, perceived incompetence and inefficiencies but there has often been something about the culture, the pace and priorities in these countries that has intrigued me and that I have envied.

It wasn't until I had children that I realised exactly what it was that I envied ... It is the ability to meet real human needs and relationship needs BEFORE AND ABOVE feeling the necessity to complete the task, the job, the project, or the commitment.

My idealised vision of the sort of mother I wanted to be had me really 'being there' for my young baby – understanding that every cry reflected a need and striving to determine what need that was, then meeting it lovingly, patiently, with understanding and a flowing, orderly rhythm. How difficult it was to leave the dishes half done, the floor half swept, cancel that appointment, admit that I hadn't had time to complete a promised task, be late meeting someone (and not just a few minutes late), say no to so many outside requests, and invitations! Rarely is it because I have a publicly acceptable, tangible, alternative or reason. I am still learning to simply admit that my child or my family need me (and not necessarily because there is something wrong) and that they need my best energies not my hurried, pressured, divided, second-best energies.

I wanted and needed to run on **BABY-TIME or PEOPLE-TIME**, revolving my tasks, projects, commitments around my baby's needs: the need for sleep - for a young baby the need to sleep according to their body clock on that day; for feeds; for suckling; for my undivided attention; and for my touch, my calm soothing unflustered voice (and not the tension my voice conveys when I'm trying to be there but also feel I must constantly "just do this, just finish that, just get there and then I'll.....").

Entrenched in me was the notion that being a good mother (and partner, sister, daughter, friend, worker), an efficient, 'coping' person; someone who was mature, independent, intelligent, competent, contributing to society and in control of herself, and her life, meant achieving certain things, completing this or that, meeting the deadline, looking like this or appearing to be like that. All of which I can now see are simply the task-oriented and time-oriented indicators of success or achievement that our western, industrialised, material world values over all else.

What I needed to do was learn to seek indicators for progress and success in relationships and human needs. One of the first things I can remember consciously doing was to explore just how task-oriented I was and try to focus more on my relationships. Then the tasks that are so numerous, unrelenting and inevitable became

more meaningful and deciding which tasks were more important and which could wait (forever if necessary!) became easier and more natural.

Another turning point came when I let myself realise just how much parenting is a journey, an ever twisting and turning journey and not something you arrive at or become. If you are on a leisurely journey, as you can be sometimes when you travel through a new interesting country in a relaxed way, you are more likely to be able to operate on 'people-time' or 'baby time' than if you are trying very hard to get somewhere, be something or get through to the other side.

Gradually I became aware that I could, at some stage in each day or week, connect more with my own inner self: my inner child, my essence, my right-brain side, day-dreaming side. When I do this (and I need to read this piece regularly to be reminded!), I connect more with people, my children and family, rather than letting the tasks, the things, the material world take over so much.

I now realise that my vision of motherhood, in the broadest possible sense is – first and foremost, meeting our own and others' human needs for connection and love (in its many varied forms), letting most else take care of itself, or at least happen incidentally. Now you might well interject (as I would have until fairly recently) that such a notion, applied to a whole society, is quite impractical, a recipe for chaos that would result in minimal productivity, no sense of responsibility, no development, no social or economic organisation.

It has been an amazing revelation to me that the times I have genuinely been able to operate on 'Baby-time' or 'people-time', my life, our family relations and most aspects of our world have felt much more deeply harmonious, loving and fulfilling. What is even more amazing is that I am then more able to meet those needs in others AND THEN we are all more able to be loving, aware, tolerant, understanding, and responsible within the wider world. We, individually and as a family, can genuinely contribute more constructively to the deeper needs of our community, which may well include becoming more organised, efficient and productive but not at the expense of being more compassionate, sensitive, connected, creative and responsive to each other.

WOW! What a realisation! Perhaps motherhood/parenthood can be a major vehicle through which we achieve a more utopian, compassionate, just and peaceful world. All of this time I thought I had put my social activism on hold while my children were young. Could it be that through struggling with this sort of motherhood, we do more for social change and the peaceful evolution of our world than we have ever done before?

POSTSCRIPT: These paragraphs almost wrote themselves in my journal when my children were 6 and 2 years old. My wonderful ones are now 12 and 8. I breast-fed them until they were 3 and 4 and mothered quite intensively until they started school. I'm enjoying more sleep, more time to myself, some work and time for yoga, walking and writing. Yet every time I come back to this piece I feel quite sobered by the realisation that I still struggle on a daily basis to live at least some of my day on PEOPLE TIME.

Lynn Romeo, *ESSENCE*, The magazine of the Australian Breast feeding Association, Vol 43, Number 4, July 2007
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