



THE MYTH OF THE BLISS AND THE BLISS IN THE MYTH

"A new-born baby!"

"Oh, isn't it wonderful!"

"It's such a lovely feeling!"

"You just want to hold them and watch them and stay like that for ever!"

"It's so precious, there's nothing else like it!"

Yes, I felt the blissful moments as I held my new born babies – there is such a sense of the preciousness, the wonder and the miraculous in the whole process of recreating our race, of creating this amazing individual. My babies seemed so perfect, so wise and so completely worthy of the best I, my partner and this world had to offer. So much so that every blissful moment was quickly overtaken by feelings of deep, broad, high and never-ending responsibility. My idealist nature sees all that can be and if I'm not balanced and centred, I quickly become overwhelmed and operate, negatively, from a sense of lack.

With hindsight this is the explanation I would give myself in my first few months of motherhood, when I would often ask myself – *"What is wrong with me? When will the bliss kick in? When will I be overwhelmed, not by the sense of responsibility and lists of things to do, but by the feelings of joy and wonder that I remember feeling as a ten and then twelve year old, when I held each of my two new-born and much yearned for brothers?"*

For many mothers, especially first-time mothers, in the first weeks and months we can be overwhelmed by the draining physical demands of changing, feeding, bathing, settling, cleaning, preparing food routines; the sleep-deprivation; establishing (or trying) breast-feeding; massive physical and biochemical changes in our bodies; the sense of responsibility, of isolation, of being stranded in a

strange land without many signposts; needing to operate from a different part of yourself, but not being sure what that is or how to access it. All of this takes over the bliss.

When we go out into the world what we see in others and what we sense is expected of us is a warm blissful glow – often the polar opposite to what we are feeling within. Yet, paradoxically, if we could only see ourselves without our inner haze we just might see that we are actually radiating a warm blissful glow. I know from my experience and from talking to many mothers along the way, that we wonder what is wrong with us, why it is that everyone else looks like they're finding it easy and all so wonderful and yet at exactly the same time others think we are the ones who have it all working so well.

I spent the first months and years of motherhood wanting to shout from the rooftops "*THIS BLISS IS A MYTH!*" and "*LET'S STOP PERPETUATING IT!*". I spent the next few years trying to work out how to warn and prepare other mothers, how to help us all talk about the realities. At times I would notice that I became quite a negative influence, the bringer of doom and gloom, so I would revert to trying to support, draw attention to and enhance the positives. And then a new mother would say to me:

"Why didn't anyone tell me it was this hard, why isn't anyone else talking about it?"

So again I would go on my quest to dispel the myth, in the same way that Betty Friedan, one of the mothers of modern feminism, did in 1963. Betty wrote *'The Feminine Mystique'* as an effort to reconcile the misfit between the 50's and early 60's image of 'happy house-wife who had never had it better' and the deep discontent she and other mothers around her were feeling in their experience of motherhood. Back then and now (and, I wonder, in most periods since the industrial revolution when we started to split home and work-place/private and public spheres) we have been perpetuating a myth of the bliss of motherhood as a role and a daily occupation/vocation.

What I have only just realised is that it is really very much like the whole process one goes through in meditation practice, in the creative process and perhaps in mountain climbing too. We set out with a destination in mind, aiming for that blissful, enlightened state, that state of creativity where your art (be it music, painting, writing, etc) simply flows through you, or that moment when you reach the pinnacle. Along the way we find many obstacles and hurdles, some foreseen, many not. While we're in the process of meeting those challenges we feel anything but the bliss we anticipated. It is all hard work, often gut-wrenching, seemingly 'soul-destroying' and threatening to the very core of who we are and how we see ourselves.

Surprisingly, somehow or other, it is when we are facing those challenges and even feeling wretched within ourselves, that we actually radiate a blissful energy. When we are truly following our chosen path, trying to be the perfect parent our child deserves at a deep level, it is blissful, even if we're too preoccupied with the challenges to feel it.

So in a sense there IS bliss in the myth as we strive for our parenting ideals.

Lynn Romeo, 2005