***Chant of the Pregnant Goddess***

*I am the mother of the moon*

*sister of the stars*

*child of the light in your eyes.*

*I am powerful.*

*The geometry of my shape shifts*

*from gently curved lines*

*to expanding circles: earth, moon, sun.*

*I am powerful.*

*I am strong.*

*The tempo of my vibration quickens,*

*increasing from*

*butterfly wings, to floundering fish,*

*to beating drum,*

*erupting volcano,*

*the rhythm as old and constant as*

*the cycles of the sun*

*and the turn of the tides.*

*I am powerful.*

*I am strong.*

*I am beautiful.*

*I hold the hope of my ancestors*

*the knowledge of my time*

*the fate of my future.*

*I am powerful.*

*I am strong.*

*I am beautiful.*

*I am mother.*

*- Jana McCarthy*

**Circle Three: Birthing**

We are just past Imbolc now, past the official midpoint of the season, which means we are that much closer to Spring with each passing day.

Only a couple of weeks ago at Imbolc, it felt like time and energy was at a standstill. Like a liminal phase, where we knew the wheel was turning, and yet could not be compelled towards forward motion. The weather outside was bitter - the coldest of the season thus far, with temperatures plummeting double-digits below zero. Following the traditions of the season, many candles were lit and fires were burned… so much so that my home reeked of woodsmoke. I could smell it even on my clothing when I’d venture out.

Over the past week or so, there has been a perceptible change. The Sun is rising earlier in the morning; that wee bit of extra light energizes me, igniting my mind, inspiring my creative flow. I have been busy - a good kind of busy, tending to various projects and nurturing new ideas from a heart-centered place, and not one of expectation or duty. The visions that have been fluid all Winter are taking shape now, and I find I can barely keep up with myself and my creative impulses.

This is a stark contrast to the many recent months wherein I have intentionally moved more slowly, demanded less of myself, caught up on extra rest at night and during my daily naps. This is the quickening, as I know it all too well: the first flutters of movement within, in time with the first movements of seeds below the frozen earth.

We are, all of us, gestating now… preparing for birth.

The days are longer, the weather milder. The heavy snows which have narrowed our streets are melting. We can see small patches of grass along our sidewalks again. My son noticed this first, remarking “I miss grass, I miss it so much.”

Yes, we are in the final stretch of this season, akin to the third trimester of a pregnancy: the novelty has long worn off; the conditions are beginning to feel more uncomfortable; the anticipation almost unbearable. We know we still have a ways to go yet, and attitude is everything… so we remind ourselves to enjoy the journey. Make the most of it, if we can.

It’s a good time to continue dreaming, just as a mother dreams of her unborn child, moving visibly, pressing against all sides of her womb. The seeds we plant for the seasons ahead are moving, too… but not yet ready to crown their way through the soil. When the Winter feels endless, we delight in daydreams of the gardens we will grow. New beginnings are close, whether Spring comes early or late. It’s time to nest, creating the perfect environment for new life to flourish.

**Womb Wisdom**

When we embark upon a spiritual journey as womb-carrying women, inevitably we will be led to work that is very much focused on our wombs. Whether we ever birth children in our lives or not, our womb holds the potential for gestating new life, serving as the most sacred spiritual container of any that could be imagined or fashioned by human design. There is no temple, no altar, no cauldron wherein a spirit enters from the cosmic Source and is made into physical form, save for the womb. This greatest of all human capabilities is what sets women apart from men… and is likely why men have long oppressed and tried to control women: because of the awe, the fear, and the envy of what they can never experience or replicate for themselves.

Reclaiming our wombs, and the wisdom which lies therein, is perhaps one of the most potent tools we have to expand our consciousness and help the Divine Feminine to rise in this world. For womb wisdom *is* a consciousness of its own, which we have direct access to - once we begin to heal and deepen our connection to it.

Womb wisdom was acknowledged and honored throughout many notable cultures in the ancient world, found in Mayan, Tibetan, Gnostic Christian, Egyptian and Indian texts. Traditional rituals were developed and practiced using the womb as a channel to open to a Divine Energy which could help people cope with and heal various blockages in their lives.

For millennia, people worshiped the womb of the Divine Mother as Goddess, the Source from which we have all come, wherein all life and possibilities exist. Through the Divine Mother’s creative power, anything can become manifest in the world. This same creative power exists within each of us, men and women, through the womb chakra. But as bearers of physical womb spaces, this power is amplified in women… as is our ability to access the wisdom of this channel which connects us directly to the Earth, the waters, and the cosmos.

Most women in the modern age are deeply disconnected from their womb spaces. As we no longer keep time by the cycles of the Moon, we have forgotten that innate connection we have with the movement of the heavenly bodies, and the tides of the seas. Many of us are quite ignorant of the cycles of our own bodies, and the phases of our own menstruation. Our blood has long been condemned and perceived as dirty, shameful, inconvenient and “a curse.” Many social taboos in the world today around our physical cycles prevent girls from attending school and receiving an education, and stigmatize women who, in many cultures, are considered to be “unclean” and even untouchable during their menses.

In the West, despite the abundant access we have to sanitary products and clean facilities, polls show that a majority of women wish they could stop menstruating, and even take medications which prevent their natural cycles from occurring. This might be seen as a type of body dysmorphia - a mental health condition where women view their bodies and the natural processes of their bodies as flawed, undesirable, and in need of alteration.

While it’s true that many of these perceptions may stem from the very real physical pain and challenges presented during a menstrual cycle, it also stands to reason that women struggle unnecessarily with these challenges because we live in a culture which does not support our needs: the expectation is for us to carry on with our home and work duties as if nothing is happening, even though we know factually from thousands of years of scientific studies that women’s physical, emotional and mental capacities are all affected by our menses and the processes of our wombs.

When we speak of “womb healing,” for many of us, this might be the first healing needed - learning about and understanding our own bodies and needs during each phase of a cycle, so that we might change our relationship to our wombs from something perceived as negative to a more positive, supportive, and regenerative experience. To be able to view our Moontime not as a curse, but as a sacred ceremony we get to honor each month.

For some, this is a most difficult endeavor… and yet, many find that this particular womb healing work literally changes the physical experience of the menstrual cycle - that when we heal or clear the emotional detritus connected to our wombs, we experience less pain and disruption in our lives.

Once we develop a healthy relationship to our wombs, we can begin to clear other blockages as well. Our wombs are a space in which we store a great deal of physical and emotional trauma - particularly those around our sexual experiences. The pain, grief and rage we experience from sexual abuse, violation, rape, abortions, miscarriages, the inability to conceive, and so forth, often builds like a brick wall in this sacred center of our being.

For some, it may manifest as a form of protection, effectively shutting women off from orgasmic pleasure, or shutting them down from opening to love, passion and intimacy, so that they cannot be hurt again.

For others, while it may not present as a barricade to loving intimacy, it instead presents other blockages in our lives - cutting us off from our intuition, our creativity, and our personal power. It may cause us to struggle with self-esteem and self-love, preventing us from creating healthy boundaries. It sometimes manifests in our relationships with other women - creating toxic and dysfunctional experiences with our mothers, sisters, friends, and female co-workers.

As womb healing and womb wisdom begin to re-emerge in the collective consciousness once more, we are seeing how this work can literally change one’s life from the inside out.

A woman in right relationship with her body, her blood, and her womb becomes a sort of spiritual mother for all those in her life. She is aligned in a more deeply connected way than she could be otherwise. When our womb space is clear, and we eradicate those blockages, we are able to experience life in much more fulfilling and meaningful ways, and we model that example for other women, inspiring them to do the work for themselves as well.

Womb healing (like all healing) is not a “one and done” process. It is ongoing. As we go through our lives on a healing path, we clear things, and then life presents new experiences which create their own healing needs. Developing a healthy relationship with your womb is like developing any kind of relationship in your life - it requires energy, attention, contemplation/reflection, and action. Our wombs - like all of us - need to be nourished in order to thrive.

There are many ways we can work to heal our wombs:

First, by establishing a healthier connection and perspective about your body, your cycles, your physical processes and needs. This can be achieved by educating yourself about the menstrual cycle, and beginning to track your phases - including your emotional and mental states, as well as your energy levels. When you begin to understand your own unique flow each cycle, you can better anticipate and tend to your needs. Having consciousness of your own body is imperative.

Then, you can begin to develop meaningful practices or rituals which honor your cycles, and honor your body as the most sacred channel to the Divine. Creating a spiritual connection with your womb and its miraculous powers brings about a sense of reverence and even gratitude. Even for those women who no longer bleed, we can continue to create rituals honoring the post-menopausal phase of our lives… which is still very much connected to Earth and the cosmos above.

There are many practices, ceremonies and therapies which can assist deeper womb work - like clearing the energies of our past sexual partners and experiences, traumas, and emotions which block us in various ways. Sometimes, womb work involves healing the mother wound, or the sister wound. Other times, we may need to heal experiences which cut us off from our creative powers, or intuitive abilities.

Whether we use talk therapy, yoni steams, meditations, traditional ceremonies, ecstatic dance, plant medicines, or any other womb-healing practices, it is the womb which will guide us. The womb holds all the wisdom, and all the answers we seek. What comes up in these efforts is what our wombs indicate needs our attention. Our job is to be devoted and consistent in this work, to pay attention, to trust the messages which arise, and to commit ourselves to facing even those things we have worked hard to avoid facing so that we can truly liberate ourselves, and our lives. The only way out is through… and what awaits on the other side is well worth the ride.

**Gestation**

Our womb as a sacred channel of creation is not limited to human gestation alone, rather it is a cauldron in which all creative endeavors brew and gain potency to manifest in their fullest potential.

I am reminded of the Temperance, or Art, card of the tarot. The magic the card speaks of is the combining of two opposite materials (aka the Sacred Duality) in order to create something new. Its mystical meaning is contained in the simple magic of action - though, of course, the real magic is the *result* of the action, or what is created from the active impulse.

An essential component to this card is the vessel or container where this combining takes place. Containment provides us the opportunity to recognize something as unique and to separate it from its surroundings, so that the action you take will be thoroughly nurtured and create the desired result - just as a pregnant woman must clean her body by eating healthy foods, or must stop drinking alcohol or smoking cigarettes in order for the child to grow in health.[[1]](#footnote-0)

When we tend to our womb work and clear lingering blockages and toxicity from this sacred space, we increase our own creative fertility, and are able to provide the proper containment for our visions, ideas, dreams, projects and goals to gestate and mature to their full potential.

Gestation is the development of something over a period of time - like the process of growing inside the womb between conception and birth. It is a necessary and essential period prior to any birthing, both literal and figurative. If a fetus doesn’t reach appropriate markers of growth inside the womb, it will not be able to survive on its own.

The same can be said of our creative endeavors. When an idea or vision presents itself initially, and we are wrapt in the inspiration of the moment, very rarely is that the exact moment in which to try and manifest the vision in the world. Most creative endeavors need a considerable amount of time - some longer than others - specifically *to* gestate, to incubate, to reveal its true form and ultimate expression.

For example, as a songwriter, new pieces usually enter my consciousness as a brief melody implanted in my mind that repeats over and over again, or, maybe a lyrical phrase comes to me and I can intuitively sense that the poetry of it longs to be flushed out into a deeper story. When I sit down to work with either, I have found over time that - very much like actual childbirth - once the process begins, I must stay with it til the end: there is a magic in that inspired creative impulse which can’t be replicated later. If I leave the song unfinished, I am rarely able to return to it later.

Not all creative processes are the same. As another example, when I write these chapters, I have no problem taking breaks and returning to these pages over a period of time. I can come and go from these words, and they always take their intended shape. But again, when the words gestate within me, they take their own time which I must allow for.

What *is* the same is that the space in which I create - whether it’s a song or a book - is, itself, a sacred channel… which I view as an external reflection of my internal channel, my womb. For my ultimate creative expression to manifest, I tend to both of these spaces with devotion and consistency. They are kept clean. They are enveloped in images, sounds, and scents which comfort and delight me. I am conscious that if my external space is disorganized or feels chaotic, or my internal space feels disregarded or reeks of emotional havoc, it is difficult to tap into a proper creative flow.

I consider my creative works to be little beings I birth into the world, and I act as both pregnant mother and midwife to them, taking the precautions I know I must for healthy gestation and labor.

Creating proper containment and honoring the gestation period for our birthings is wisdom in action. Containment can also speak to what we share with others about our ideas, and *when*. There is a magic in holding your creative visions within yourself - though it can be difficult, especially when we are excited or looking for input and affirmation from others.

It is equally wise to understand the potential danger in sharing what we are incubating: we may experience the pressures of others to bring the vision to life faster than we can or should; we can lose our own inspiration if our ideas are met with ambivalence or disapproval; sometimes in the sharing of an idea, the energy of it spills out through our words, and is depleted when it’s time to take action; and in some instances, unscrupulous people will steal your idea for themselves.

There is a long-held superstition that a pregnant woman should not share the news of her pregnancy until she is past the first trimester, about 13 weeks. This is a very delicate time for both the fetus and mother, wherein many factors could jeopardize the health and stability for the fetus. The notion is not to generate enthusiasm from loved ones before there is greater certainty that the baby will continue to grow. This is great advice for all of the little “children” we create within ourselves.

To honor and nourish a creative process, to successfully midwife our many birthings, to prepare for motherhood in any and every sense of the word, it is our duty to tend to our healing work, to create the proper environments (both internally and externally) for our creations to grow, to allow the necessary time for our creations to reach their full maturity and highest potential, and to see the process through from the spark of conception to the birthing itself.

**The Quickening**

When we reach this point in the season, the Crone aspect of late-Autumn and early-Winter is now transforming into the Maiden, who becomes ripe with fertility which will flourish in the Spring.

This Triple Goddess archetype of Maiden (new life of Spring), Mother (abundance of Summer and Autumn), and Crone (rest and wisdom of Winter) is a perfect metaphor for the cycles of our lives, and the energies available to us through the seasons of the year. As we continue the journey through this Cycle together, we will more deeply integrate these energies into our lives, learning how to work with them for our highest good and greatest potential.

At Imbolc, we experience an energetic quality we call “the quickening.” This term is also related to pregnancy, as it is defined as “*when a pregnant woman starts to feel their baby’s movement in their womb. It feels like flutters, bubbles, or tiny pulses.”*

In the early part of Winter, when the Moon governs the sky and we are ensconced in darkness, we enter into the Dreamtime. As we rest more, our subconscious worlds are hard at work while our physical bodies recover and regenerate for the seasons ahead. In the Dreamtime, everything exists and all is possible.

The messages speaking to us through our intuitive bodies in the Dreamtime are like those little sparks of inspiration - just like the spark of life shot from a man into a woman during intercourse. Like those little sperm, these sparks may or may not penetrate and begin to take form. Some of these little “spirit babies” remain in the nebula, while others begin to quicken within us.

It is at this time in the season when the seeds below the frozen earth’s crust, who have been lying in stillness and darkness, begin to quicken themselves. The sap begins to run through the trees. There is movement, slow but steady - much like the increasing light of the Sun growing each day.

We begin to experience this quickening as an increase in physical energy, and creative impulses. We think back to Yule, to our earliest imaginings of what this new year would bring to our lives, and now we begin to see the pathway forward. Visions have taken form. We are mapping charts for the voyage ahead.

We begin to plant our seeds - the seeds for this year’s gardens, and for our lives. This, too, is imperative in the process of growth and development - the planning, laying a strong foundation, preparations and intentions - all are needed to manifest our desired abundance. We feel that quickening movement and are excited… but this is not the time to push or to move too fast. We are still gestating, still incubating. Trusting in divine time, and being mindful to enjoy the process along the way.

**Nesting**

When you hear the term “nesting,” you might think of songbirds gathering twigs, grasses and soft leaves to make a cozy home for their hatchlings. But the impulse to create a safe, comfortable space to house and protect your newborn child is experienced across the animal kingdom - humans included.

Nesting in pregnancy is an instinctual urge to ‘ready your nest’ during pregnancy in preparation for birth and the arrival of a newborn. Of course, the “nest” here refers to a baby's nursery and your home in general. This increase in activity can translate to things like organizing and cleaning your home, creating a support plan for postpartum, and slowing down your social calendar.

Experts aren’t entirely sure *why* the nesting instinct occurs, and studies on the topic are limited. There is no scientific evidence that nesting while pregnant is biological. Still, some experts - and many pregnant women - believe nesting is instinctual and may be tied to the hormonal changes pregnancy brings, especially since it’s a maternal instinct seen in other animals as well.[[2]](#footnote-1)

In the Wheel of the Year, we might relate the nesting instinct to a sort of “spring cleaning.” As we take a look around our homes, it’s common to see the buildup of cobwebs, dust, little remnants from holiday decorations, dried puddles of wet snow on the floors, etc. Traditionally, as we prepare for Spring, this second half of the season is the optimal time to “wash away the ills of Winter,” which might also include an internal cleansing of sorts - adjusting one’s diet, committing to a movement practice, abstaining from alcohol, or otherwise cleaning out our bodily temples as we also clean the temples of our homes.

For soon, as the weather continues to improve and become more temperate, our lives will pick up pace again, and we will be more active - often spending less time at home and indoors than we do in the Winter months. The physical activity of cleaning has benefits of its own: it can often be an aerobic activity; it is an opportunity to approach our homes with a sense of ritual honoring and tending; and it’s a perfect way to further gestate those ideas and visions. Often, when we are engaged in a repetitive activity such as housecleaning, our minds are able to drift into that liminal, dreamy state where our imaginations can wander, and inspiration takes hold.

Not every pregnant woman experiences the urge to nest, just as not every person feels called to clean and organize their living spaces or their internal bodies. But when the urge strikes, it’s a great plan to flow with it. As mentioned earlier, our external spaces often reflect our internal spaces. Clearing out debris from our homes might be a helpful tool in clearing out the debris of our wombs, minds, hearts, bodies, and wombs.

**Stages of Labor**

For many women, their birth experience is not just what happens in the delivery room - or what their support people are able to see.

The birth experience is often described as an "out of body" or a "spirit and birthing world combined" journey. There is a thin veil between the spiritual and birthing world. During each phase of labor, the birthing person dives deeper and deeper into the spiritual world.

We note that during the **first stage** of labor, you are laboring alone or with your partner: the environment is quiet and serene - the energy is calm. You, your partner, and your body are anticipating the journey that you will face in the coming hours. This is when you first enter the veil of the spiritual world.

During the active labor (which is part of the first stage), you are between the two worlds: spiritual and birth. This is when your rituals and rhythms begin. Your partner or your doula may be more hands-on as you concentrate on your patterns while laboring. While in the spirit world, you are now with all the other women who are birthing on the same day and time with you. You are concentrated and with your thoughts. Remember, one contraction at a time; you can do anything for one minute.

In the **second stage**, the birthing people from your past - your mother, grandmother, and ancestors - are in the spiritual world guiding you through the transition phase of your labor. The transition can sometimes feel like the most intense part of your labor; this is a good time to remind yourself that there are so many other laboring people going through this beautiful stage of labor with you. You are safe, you are strong, and you can get through this and move on to meeting your baby.The birthing waves and contractions will start becoming more intense. You will start feeling the need to bear down. Birth and emergence - this is when you will start pushing. Think of all the power within you that has gotten you to this point. Think about the women in your past who birthed before you and the women who will meet their baby after you. You will then come back Earthside, the birthing side, once your baby is born. The support people that were with you, including your doula and partner, will help guide you back to Earth where you will meet and bond with your baby.

The **third stage** of labor includes delivery of the placenta and recovery, where you will be holding your baby who also helped you during this journey. The placenta is sometimes referred to as the “tree of life.” This tree of life has nourished your baby and in many cultures, it is honored. In Uganda, the placenta is seen as your child’s twin and holds its own spirit, which resides in the umbilical cord. In our culture, it has become accepted and normal to honor the placenta via [placenta encapsulation](http://static1.squarespace.com/static/601acdb9bf42d61eed1261fc/6052484e630e49730524df8b/6052485c630e49730524e174/1616005212726/placenta-services?format=original) or other forms such as placenta art.

The **fourth stage** is postpartum and weaving. This is when we are fully back down to Earth. We can communicate and start reciting our birth story. Birth can sometimes feel like a lot of very long, blurry moments. Weaving your stories with your partner and your [doula](http://static1.squarespace.com/static/601acdb9bf42d61eed1261fc/6052484e630e49730524df8b/6052485c630e49730524e169/1616005212672/services?format=original) is so important. This is a time that your birth team can help you fill in the blanks of your birth story. They can remind you of how strong you were during all the stages of labor. You can share this story with others who weren’t present for the birth, and most importantly, you will eventually be able to share your unique story with your child.

I love the visuals and the support that the journey of the spiritual world can provide for birthing people. It is a comfort to know that along with the support of doulas, partners, and midwives, we also have the support of past generations of birthing people alongside us throughout this journey.[[3]](#footnote-2)

And so we can adequately relate this stages of labor to any birthing creation:

In the first stage, we have created a quiet and serene environment. It is calm. We are sharing this time only with those closest to us. We are opening ourselves, and the channel of our wombs, to the cosmos and spirit world beyond. We may have tools or practices which help us, or those who are guiding us with love and clarity. We draw on support from others in the world who are also in a creative birthing process. It may not be easy, but we are not alone, and can take it one step at a time.

In the second stage, we might connect with our ancestors, the spirits of the land, our guardians and guides, and all those who truly support our highest good with their love and encouragement. We have to dig deep, be courageous, being mindful of our personal power and ability to transcend these worlds and then come back down to Earth.

In the third stage, we honor our creation, giving thanks for the miracle of manifestation in form. We honor the tools which helped us on this journey, and the beings who were at our side.

Finally, in the fourth stage, we are ready to share that which we have birthed, along with the story of how this creation first presented itself as a spark of inspiration, and how we nourished and nurtured its gestation, to then undergo the birthing process. This is the artists’ story or statement. We present our creation to the world, and allow others to connect with it in their own personal way.

Though we usually think of Spring as the birthing season, it may not always be so. Some beings are ready ahead of schedule, and some take longer than anticipated. But when we prepare and enter a creative process with consciousness, intention, proper preparation, and surrender to its unfolding, we can be assured that everything is working in divine time.

**Sharing the Wisdom: Preparing Your Ritual**

Use this space to consider how you would honor the energy of this time of year in a ritual way, whether for yourself or for others. This is meant to be a loose guide to inspire you, and to build confidence in your own intuition, vision, and abilities to incorporate more ritual in your life.

1. **What would your ritual space look like/what environment do you envision?**
2. **What items would you include on your altar? What do they represent to you?**
3. **What Elements would you include? How will you include them? And why?**
4. **What words do you feel should be spoken or sung? You might jot down your ideas, and create a loose outline to follow.**
5. **What is the best way for you, personally, to connect with this time of year? How will you demonstrate that through ritual action?**

**Reflections and Integration**

Going back through your life in increments of 5 years, reflect upon this season/sabbat in the Wheel of the Year and what it has meant to you in those various stages of life. Use these questions as a guide:

* **What memories stand out to me the most about this season in each stage of life?**
* **How did this season/sabbat make me feel emotionally? Physically?**
* **How do my past experiences of the season/sabbat correlate to the present?**
* **In my highest vision, how would I best connect with this season/sabbat?**
* **From this year forward, what changes might I make to align myself more with the energies of this season/sabbat?**

1. From The Wheel of Change Tarot by Alexandra Genetti [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. From “Everything You Need to Know About Nesting During Pregnancy” by Elena Donovan Mauer [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. From “Stages of Labor: Spirit and Birth World Combined” by Emma at One Love Doula Services [↑](#footnote-ref-2)