

Wisdom

There is a myth in our modern birth culture: If you learn enough, you can avoid hardship and disappointment. It's true that the knowledge you glean from others may help you avoid common stumbling blocks, but it is unrealistic to think that if you learn enough, you won't get your sneakers dirty on your Heroic Journey.

It is very natural to want to drink from the fountain of knowledge and absorb as much as you can from those who are initiated, who have walked the path that you are getting ready to embark upon. Throughout history, people have sought counsel from wise elders before a life transition in hopes of accessing some of their mentor's far-seeing perspective, gaining a deeper understanding of what they may encounter, and learning how they might overcome challenges on their journey.

Knowledge comes from books, experts, and advisors, but wisdom is cultivated through experience. It's a knowing in your bones rather than a knowing in your head. Wisdom cannot be acquired without struggle. It is essential for a person to be challenged in a way that makes them question what they believed was right, or who they believed they were, in order to unwrap the gift of wisdom.

When examining the difference between knowledge and wisdom, I always think of this beloved passage from *The Velveteen Rabbit*:

"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real."

"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.

"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are Real you don't mind being hurt."

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or have been carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

While it's important to become informed about the birth and the healthcare system, it is not your job to have all the answers before birth begins. The most important things you will learn through this process will come from meeting the unknown and somehow finding your way through.

Journal about an experience in your life that took you from knowledge to wisdom. What shifted within you at that time? What was given up, or taken? What was gained?

If something came up in birth that caused you to do the thing you don't want to do, or not do the thing you really want to do, having an idea of how you might cope would serve as an emotional safety net. Like holding a cup in each hand, you could feel frustration and disappointment while simultaneously coping. Under these circumstances, a resilient mindset would help you stay focused on showing up for yourself and doing the next best thing, instead of spiraling into self-judgment and despair.

One small thing I could do to cope with this undesired circumstance would be:

Taking one small step toward the fulcrum of my beliefs on this topic would make a difference for me in this way now, and in birth:

One other small thing I could do to cope would be:

Making this commitment to yourself doesn't mean you have to give up your strong feelings about birth. It does, however, give you more breathing room to do what needs to be done in labor, working with the hand that's dealt to you, without attaching your self-worth to a medical outcome.