



Marsupial Mothering In A Modem World

By Jody Lee Halfmoon, Ph.D.

There's a Native American philosophy that all decisions need to be based on their overall affect for seven generations to come. With a keen eye on the welfare of our species, we must look more closely at what we really are doing today.

Glancing at our sisters from other cultures, we quickly notice the value placed on their offspring. Babies are kept with their mothers at all times. These women are busy throughout the day, thus a baby carrier is their most essential tool for maintaining the mother-baby bond.

In a day in the life of America chances are you will not often see a mother wearing her baby. If you do see her with her baby, most likely a plastic carrier or a stroller will be in use. Such vehicles for transportation are simply not sufficient for the emotional and physical needs of our young. First, there is virtually no tactile stimulation between the mother and baby. Our largest organ is our skin, and babies thrive on the communication they receive through touch. Second, there is no natural rhythm of movement involved for the baby. Studies from Tulane University at New Orleans have concluded that proper neurological development is a result of babies receiving rocking motions offered by an active mother who wears her baby. Wearing a baby actually stimulates a baby's brain, increases the blood flow, offers continuous contact, and makes natural, unrestrictive breastfeeding possible.

Some valuable techniques for successful marsupial mothering in our society include:

- Using a carrier that is simplistic and easy to breastfeed with. Nothing is more frustrating, for both mother and baby, than a cumbersome carrier that complicates the nursing experience.
- Finding a carrier that accommodates the newborn through toddler helps keeps the continuity from womb to the outside world and also saves money.
- Bringing along or wearing your carrier, even when your baby is not in it (though those times may be rare), offers your baby the constant availability of his/her "womb with a view".
- Designing a wardrobe for yourself that ensures easy access breastfeeding, such as a skirt and a loose shirt, also enables you to use the restroom while your baby is asleep.
- Keeping your baby's and your own comfort in mind is vital when purchasing a carrier. Is the fabric too heavy or cumbersome? Does your baby feel cozy or uncomfortably trapped? Can your older baby see the world about him/her or is he/ she stuck with a constant view of mom's throat?

Women who choose to wear their babies are truly rare in our culture, but the numbers are increasing. Like peace, the goal may seem far off, but the intent certainly smooths the way.

My daughter, Sarah Lee, (who is two-and-a-half years old) and I have recently entered a new phase of societal pressure as a result of our practicing marsupial mothering in a non-contact society. There seems to be discrimination against treating a two-year-old as if she were a baby. Sarah Lee still spends much of her time in our sling. She continues to take her daily naps securely nestled against me as I carry on with my daily chores. Frequent comments I receive



from store clerks or assertive passers by include: “Can’t she walk?” or “She’s too old to be carried.” or “You should make her walk!”—and I thought societal pressure ended with toddler nursing. . . Oh well, one great advantage to swimming upstream against society is that we become strong, resilient, excellent swimmers—and we develop strong backs.

So, why should we take up the belief in marsupial mothering? What makes us so sure it’s what is best for our babies? Let’s ask the babies.

Observers of babies being carried continuously by their mothers have noticed an increase in feedings, which tends to facilitate early weight gain and lengthen the overall nursing relationship. These “continuous contact” babies are also very alert and aware of their surroundings, forever moving into more stimulating environments with their mothers explaining and interpreting what is going on.

Babies worn by their mothers have few reasons to cry. They are too busy experiencing such feelings as pleasure, warmth, tactile stimulation, security, and a sense of oneness with their mothers.

All of the baby’s senses are being utilized while being worn by his/her mother. According to renowned anthropologist Ashley Montagu, who is one of the leading proponents of the mother-child relationship: “Sense deprivation in infancy will adversely affect physical and mental health, subsequent sexual behavior, and perceptual development.” He goes on to say that “All babies look forward to having a womb with a view, so that they may remain connected with the first person in their lives, mother.”

Learning from our sisters of other cultures is to understand that need to become marsupial in our mothering, whether at the typewriter, the laundromat, the garden, or the kitchen, and to carry that knowledge into the night where our breasts become God’s pillow for the upcoming generation of loving, loveable, and peaceful Homo sapiens, putting us on course to give the seventh generation from now exactly what they need.

Jody Lee Halfmoon, Ph.D., is a single mother of one daughter. She is the creator of Cozy Cradles, a 100% cotton baby sling, available for sale by writing to: Cozy Cradles, P.O. Box 514, Tahlequah, OK 74465. Jody, in her desire to support marsupial mothering, offers a carrier free to any mother who cannot afford one. Please write to her at the above address.