



Bellydance with Nicola

Ideas for Blessing Ways: Honouring the Expectant Mother Through Gathering and Ritual

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A Blessing Way does not have to take on spiritual connotations, nor involve "ritual" if that idea may make the mother uncomfortable. Ritual is simply a series of actions combined with spoken or written words that are focused around a common intent or purpose. No deity need be invoked or prayed to, your "prayers" or "blessings" may be directed in general to the mother, or the Universe, or to whatever you choose. The important part is to understand the intent of the gathering and to make the time positive.

The Blessing Way, or Mother Shower, is different than a baby shower in that gifts for the wee one are NOT the focus. Gifts may be a part of the time, but they should be focused on items that will help and support in the journey of birth or parenthood, e.g. a CD of favourite, soothing music, massage oil (make sure you check that the oils are safe for use during pregnancy), a beautiful sarong to wear, an amulet or figurine to hold during tough times, and so on.

I strongly recommend that the host attend a Blessing Way before attempting to host one, and that s/he talk to the mother or her close family to find out if a ceremony that may involve gifts for the baby is culturally appropriate. In my ancestry, it is considered bad luck to hold a baby shower or give baby gifts before the birth. Be certain you are not treading on toes.

It is also advisable that you carefully consider who should attend, and on this note, I would recommend that you talk it over with the mom or parents so that the gathering does keep a focus on her/them and not on you, the fabulous hostess. This is not a tea or cocktail party! Find out whom they would prefer to have there, and whom they would prefer not. (I chose who should attend mine based on who I felt would contribute the most positive, natural-birth-focused and midwife-supportive energy.)

Here are some ideas that many folks will find inoffensive, supportive, inspiring and in the spirit of the gathering:

- There are generic, non-religious and non-sectarian blessings available on many websites that you can download, edit or change as you see fit.
- Collect inspiring quotes about pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, and parenting and

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put them in a scrapbook.

- Make a calendar with photos of the mom's closest female friends and family. It will help her feel watched over in hard times of colic, tender nipples, and healing stitches.
- Give the guests a polished stone or rock and a permanent, fine-tip marker. Have them draw a symbol, plant or animal that for them evokes the spirit of strength, courage, resilience, patience, or whatever else they think the mom/parents will need. Have them be ready to talk about what they drew and why.
- Make a small pouch out of leather, silk or other luxurious fabric with a drawstring. You may or may not make it so that it can be worn around the neck. Fill it with a potpourri of dried herbs and flowers that have meanings and/or magical properties (there are oodles of books and websites devoted to this subject.) or with small polished crystals (again, chosen for their properties). Give this to the mom to wear or hold during the last days of her pregnancy and during birth.
- Collect money to buy the parents a Birth Tree for their child. (Wait till spring if it's a winter baby...) Find out what Tree Month the child was born in (again, do some reading online or in the library) or choose something that will grow well in their yard. If they don't have a yard, they can consider planting it in common park space or in a relative's or friend's yard.
- Get friends and family to sign up for shifts to go to the mother's/parents' home and take turns doing gardening, grass mowing, dishes, cooking, babysitting of older children, housecleaning, laundry, holding the baby while mom showers or sleeps, or just visiting, in the hectic weeks that follow a new baby coming home. Give the schedule to the mom so she has visit to look forward to.
- Give her a gift certificate to a book store for the mom to choose birth and parenting books that suit her beliefs. We can all be well-intentioned but heavy-handed in thrusting books we liked or heard about upon a new mom, without considering that she may not share our perspective.
- Give a subscription (or old back issues) of a good parenting magazine such as Mothering, Parents, or Parenting. They each have their own perspectives on child-rearing. My

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favourite is Mothering for its well-balanced, alternative, and thought-provoking articles.

- Give a gift basket of luxurious edibles such as dark chocolate, berries, cheese, crackers, and so on, OR, a basket full of soaps and other body care products. (Make sure they are safe to use during pregnancy.)
- Make scrapbook pages that show and tell how the mom is loved and appreciated by the others gathered together.
- Get a ball of red, cotton yarn. Red symbolises the blood all women shed in birth. You can easily choose green for growth, blue for calm, or whatever you think is fitting. Sit in a circle and wrap it several times around one of your wrists, passing the ball of yarn to person beside you. Keep the yarn continuous as you each speak about what you wish for the mom/parents or what blessings/prayers you are contributing (e.g. strength, humour). When everyone has had a turn, cut the yarn so each person can tie it like a bracelet. Wear the yarn until the birth is complete or until the baby comes home.
- Hire someone to do henna tattoos, a belly casting, tarot card/rune readings, and/or belly dance. Henna forces the mom to sit still and be pampered, and the closer she is to birth, the more likely she is to be anxious. Henna is very soothing in its feel and smell, and watching a henna artist work is very hypnotic. MAKE SURE the henna artist is using a high-grade henna powder with no dangerous additives or lead, and that s/he is not adding essential oils or dyes that may be dangerous to mom or baby. Belly castings are generally quite safe, if messy!
- Hire someone, or take turns, to do the mom's makeup, hair and nails. Pampering is what she needs and deserves.
- Give her a blessing from the Elements: earth, air, fire, water, and spirit. Use objects or give/make gifts that evoke those elements, such as incense, candles, floral/herb water, crystals/stones, and a small amulet or figurine such as a faery, angel, goddess, or animal. Think and talk about what each these elements might lend to her as she goes through birth and the first days of parenting and breastfeeding after birth.
- Give her a foot rub or massage, again, making sure the oils and lotions you use are safe.

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- Take up a collection and give her a gift certificate for a website or store that sells flattering, funky maternity clothes, great bras, and/or comfortable, flattering clothes for after baby. My favourites:

[Milkface](#)

[One Hot Mama](#)

[Fig Leaves](#)

[Nest Mom](#)

[Japanese Weekend](#)

[Bravado](#)

- Make a feast of nutritious, fun foods that she won't have time to make or enjoy after birth. Remember to include a great non-alcoholic punch or cocktail that she can enjoy safely and guilt-free. The feast can be potluck, cooked together at the gathering, or prepared by one enthusiastic and organized cook.

In general, everyone gathered together needs to put aside their personal moods, baggage and opinions for the duration of the Blessing Way, and bring only good tidings, best wishes and pure intent to your time together. If the mom-to-be leaves the gathering relaxed, happy and feeling surrounded by love and caring, the goal has been accomplished.

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