

BIRTH OF A REGGAE FESTIVAL

A MIDWIFE'S JOURNEY

by Jharna Harvey Ahmai

It's 2 a.m., the moon is full and I'm awake. I'm accustomed to being awoken in the middle of the night. Usually it's with "Jharna, I think my waters have broken," or "I'm beginning to have contractions and they're starting to get intense." You see, I am a midwife. I have been practicing homebirth midwifery actively for the past 15 years. I often wake up in the middle of the night – especially with the intensity of the full moon – to meditate on my birthing families. But not tonight.

Tonight I am awoken by... details. Is the security in place? Do we have pure food and water for the artists to enjoy? Port-o-johns, volunteers, vendors, publicity, sponsorship, flyers, medical booth, tour? The list seems endless.

My husband Bush I and I are co-producers and directors of the Vermont International Reggae Music Festival being held August 10-12, 2007 in Rutland, VT. As I contemplate the details



of producing on this scale, I bring the festival into a language that I can fully innerstand: the language and mechanics of birth.

The festival seems to be the end result, i.e. the birth. So what stage are we at right now – conception? No. This festival has been in conception from long ago. The concept of bringing forth music for the healing of others is ancient. As in birth and life, we look to our ancestry, to other festivals that have been born earth side: Reggae Sunsplash, Vermont Reggae Festival, Reggae on the River, Reggae on the Rocks, to name a few. All are beyond the stage of conception.

Pregnancy? Yes, that seems closer. Pregnancy is a time of gestation and building organs, bones, limbs and blood. The festival is currently gestating and building land, musical acts, education, community, loving action. I take a deep contemplative breath. Relating this process to pregnancy and birth allows me to relax. I know pregnancy and birth. This is a time of preparation and patience. My anxiety starts to ease as I integrate the different areas of my life.

I'm fully awake now, no longer languishing in that dreamy state. I get up and leave the warm safety of my bed and sleeping family. I go to my office and, as with most things in my life, I contemplate the "root." According to the several versions of the dictionary, "midwife" means to be "with woman." But the



Festival promoters bring reggae to life

definition goes on to say, "One that helps to produce or bring forth something." My thoughts are moving into place – divine inspiration.

I'm finding my path in producing this festival. In birth – and in my role as a midwife – the most important factor for my life is purposeful alignment

with my destined work. Midwifery called upon me and I answered. For Bush I and me, this festival is not merely a venue for great music: it is a very purposeful alignment with a much bigger destiny and calling; it is our contribution and call to action; it is Jah's work in its most inspired form: Song Medicine.



Back to the ancestors... I pull out my Bible:

Exodus 1:15-21. The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, "When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live." The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, "Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?"

The midwives answered Pharaoh, "Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive." So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. And because the midwives revered God, he gave them families of their own.

In these early documented acts of civil disobedience, midwives followed their hearts and aligned with their destined work. They risked their lives, reputations and livelihoods to bring forth the children. I feel that every time we bring forth this festival, we too are risking our reputation and livelihood in order to fulfill our work that we are called to do. This festival is helping to fund a free speech radio station on Goree Island in Senegal, West Africa (a launching gate for slavery). It is helping to fund humanitarian efforts for refugees in the Darfur region of Africa. This festival is helping to fund a school in Shashamania in Ethiopia, and helping Operation Reggae Funding to forward the work of Rastafarians through the organization, Rastafari National Council for Inity.

In pregnancy we are nourishing our bodies for the growth of our babies. In organizing the festival, we are nourishing the spirit and the artists for the impending birth of a better world.

By now the sun begins to rise over the fields and river outside my window. I'm at peace with the details. My full moon contemplations have brought me to this place of inner knowing. It is *not* the details of the festival or the pregnancy that consume me any longer. It is the act of aligning with positive works and actions that inspire these labors of love. Keep breathing. Surrender to the pain. Open. Purposeful alignment. Song medicine. Ring of fire. Birth. Life. ☆

Jharna Harvey Ahmai is mother of two (born at home), stepmother and grandmother. She is a practicing homebirth midwife in Massachusetts and a psychiatric registered nurse in Vermont. Jharna and her husband are sales coordinators for Juice Plus+ (www.jpalmightygroup.com – 17 raw fruits and vegetables juiced with the water, sugar and sodium removed and placed into a capsule). Together with a team of like-minded people, they co-produce the Vermont International Reggae Music Festival. www.vermontreggae.org