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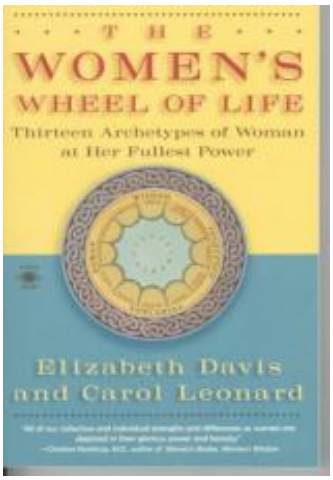
The Women's Wheel of Life

by Elizabeth Davis and Carol Leonard



About the Book

A New Look at an Ancient Mystery

If you dig deep into the past, before Christianity and the advent of science, you will discover a time when women's Blood Mysteries ? the biological events of menstruation, childbirth, and menopause ? accorded them great power and respect. People once believed that conception was a culmination of some kind of female magic ? that women conceived children on their own by withholding their menstrual blood. During this time, women in menopause were also revered for their ability to carry within themselves their magical, mysterious blood ? and all its power. But as science became more sophisticated, seeking to tame and dominate the forces of nature, the Mystery was lost. Now, in *The Women's Wheel of Life*, the authors re-examine the Blood Mysteries, creating new, empowering archetypes that guide women towards greater self-awareness and self-respect.

The Thirteen Stages of Women's Lives

Middle-aged women who have turned to women's spirituality have struggled with the confining concept of the triple Goddess found in many ancient religions. The image portrays just three phases in women's lives: the Maiden, whose rite is menstruation; the Mother, whose rite is childbirth; and the Crone, whose rite is menopause. But where does the woman in her late thirties and forties fit in? For the first time, the authors of *The Women's Wheel of Life* offer a fourth phase which falls between the Mother and the Crone ? the Matriarch: She is a woman at the peak of her sexual and professional power, who, over the years, has developed a powerful sense of timing which compensates for any loss of youthful energy. But the Matriarch is just one figure in *The Women's Wheel of Life*. There are twelve archetypes around the wheel residing in phases of innocence, power, nurturing, and wisdom. Although the stages flow somewhat consecutively, women revisit certain stages in their lives numerous times or leap ahead to stages further along the Wheel. The means of movement among the stages relies on the thirteenth stage and archetype ? the Transformer. Completing the women's wheel of life, the Transformer is at the center, and whenever we cross the threshold of a major

life transition, we enter this stage.

The authors developed the Wheel as a synthesis of forty years' work in women's health, spirituality, and psychology, drawing on over a hundred interviews with women in all stages of life. As you read *The Women's Wheel of Life*, look into your own experiences, find your own truth ? and share what you learn with others. A truly transformational experience awaits!

Discussion Guide

1. Which archetype on the wheel do you feel best represents you now? Why? What are the events in your life that have led you to this stage?

2. Are there stages on the wheel you have visited again and again? Are there stages which you would like to enter, yet they elude you?

3. As the authors point out, many ancient religions represent women's lives in three phases: the Maiden, the Mother and the Crone. In this book, the authors have added the Matriarch phase to this trinity. What do you know about women at this time in their lives, either from your own experience or from the experiences of others? Does this fourth phase seem to you to be a valid addition to the trinity?

4. What are some of our society's misconceptions about older women? How do you yourself feel about growing older? What are some of the ways in which this book redefines a woman's aging process?

5.What do you think your grandmother's experience with her own Blood Mysteries was like? Your mother's? Your daughter's? Try to place these different experiences into a historical context which reflects the growth of the women's movement over the last few generations.

6.The thirteenth stage, the Transformer, represents the medium of change in women's lives. Some of the women interviewed describe this stage as a period of descent somewhat akin to depression. Describe your experience of change. How did other people treat you when you were in this stage? What has your relationship been to feminism? When and where did you first encounter the concept? How did that experience change the way you feel about yourself, other women, and men? Describe how this book has impacted your feminism, or femininity.

7.The media often portrays women before and during their periods as unreasonable, unhappy, and emotionally unstable. What actually happens to you at this time of the month? Has the media affected your perceptions of yourself? How has this book changed that perception?

8.What is it like for women at your place of employment? What are co-workers' expectations of you? One woman interviewed in the book noticed that "as you provide some women's knowledge in a male-based world, it feels right to both of you" (page 210-211). Are the people you work with willing to accept unconventional kinds of wisdom?

Author Bio

A renowned expert on women's issues, Elizabeth Davis has been a midwife, women's health care specialist, educator, and consultant for more than twenty years. She holds a degree in Holistic Maternity Care from Antioch University and has served as president of the Midwifery Education Accreditation Council of the United States. Internationally active in women's rights, she travels and lectures widely on women's spirituality, sexuality, and the Blood Mysteries. Her books include: the classic *Heart and Hands: A Midwife's Guide to Pregnancy and Birth*; *Energetic Pregnancy*; *Women's Intuition*; and *Women, Sex and Desire: Exploring Your Sexuality at Every Stage of Life*. She lives in Windsor, California and is the mother of three children.

Critical Praise

"The archetypal descriptions...give us a new language for women's wisdom which feels absolutely right and very affirming. "

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