

## TLAZOLTEOTL

NORTH AMERICA, FIFTEENTH CENTURY CE

*In the house with the tortoise chair  
she will give birth to the pearl  
to the beautiful feather  
in the house of the goddess who sits on a tortoise  
she will give birth to the necklace of pearls  
to the beautiful feathers we are  
there she sits on the tortoise  
swelling to give us birth  
on your way on your way  
child be on your way to me here  
you whom I made new  
come here child come be pearl  
be beautiful feather*

—AZTEC POEM TO EASE BIRTH

Just as the Goddess Ixchel weaves our destinies from the fabric of existence, so also woman weaves living beings from the tissues of her body. And just as Spider spirals out from the center of her web, and just as life itself evolved from the single-celled amoeba, so also woman, in the ultimate act of creation, builds a living being around her fertilized egg.

In this ceremonial statue made of aplite speckled with garnets, the Goddess Tlazolteotl portrays the heroic aspect of birthing. She is the image of woman reclaiming her power through the act of consciously giving birth. The purpose of ceremony and ritual is to bring full consciousness to all our actions, and it is possible to experience trance, or bliss, even in the most challenging moments of life.

The Aztecs accorded special respect to a woman who died in childbirth and honored her as a warrior. Some of the most demanding Native American and Samoan rituals are said to inspire men to the courage of a birthing woman. Men's and children's participation is an important part of conscious birthing, and of learning to live fully and peacefully. Once

one knows the cost as well as the miracle of creation, one values life much more.

Author Vicki Noble says that in childbirth, a woman is

quintessentially shamanic. A woman about to give birth stands at the gateway between death and life. She peers into the death realm, not knowing for certain if she will come out alive, and she reaches over there to bring through another new soul. To face death without fear to save a soul, is the feat that all apprentices must master before they can call themselves shamans. Most forms of what we call shamanism are takeoffs on the original prototype, a mother giving birth.

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*Tlazolteotl, help me reclaim the power of consciously giving birth in all aspects of life. Goddess of the Earth, show me how to be strong in the face of fear, focused in the face of pain, knowing that to create new life, I must at times offer my life.*

