



paper, wearing a piece of heirloom jewelry, cooking a beloved friend's recipe, or building a rock garden. *This* sense of Sabbath could infuse the joy and peace we crave from our spiritual life into so much *more* of what we do. She urges us, in the way of mindfulness teachers, to *listen* to our bodies and discover the mystery and paradox in our lives, even while we are busily engaged in living.

In eleven brief chapters, we find variations on the theme of practicing Sabbath Sense—and their titles convey their good sense: “Playing at Work,” “Putting Margins on the Pages of our Days,” “Creating Spirit Space,” “Clutter-free Living,” and, my favorite, “Spiritual Fitness: Allowing for the Unfinished”! Of course I starred this passage, which so vividly captures our plight:

Wasn't it nice, God will say, that you didn't look at your watch or do errands instead of taking your morning walk? Making like a human being instead of a clock is such an accomplishment.

Congratulations, God will say, and of course it will be exactly the opposite of what everyone else says. When I am late for the meeting because I stole the errand time from the meeting time, nobody praises me. When the mail and the messages stack up on the kitchen counter like planes over La Guardia, nobody says congratulations on my pleasant walk. They present their poverties. I present my walk.

And, of course, a little child shall lead us to the sanity and sense of reviving our play-ethic. Schaper reminds us of the joy of children playing on a carousel, which they call a *merry-go-round*; yet most adults use the same image as a pejorative metaphor for the whirling, non-stop pace of our lives. Perhaps we are not merry because we are concentrating on *doing*, and not on *being*, in our daily rounds! (Over my office bookshelf, next to a Sophia/Wisdom image, I keep a cartoon which shows Ziggy gazing out the window saying, “With so much to do, sometimes it's nice just to Be!!....That must be why we're called human Beings and not human Doings!”) Amen! Let us

reclaim merriment in the *fullness* of our lives!

The point is, as Virginia Woolf put it so well in *To the Lighthouse*:

What is the meaning of life? That was all—a simple question; one that tended to close in on one with years. The great revelation had never come. The great revelation perhaps never did come. Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark; here was one...

Just as Sabbath Sense provides a “spiritual antidote for the *overworked*,” this prescription, if taken to heart, could bring healing not only to our own lives, but to a *society* which is also desperately in need of renewal. For as we become increasingly caught up in those spiritual pauses, we are nourished and inspired in our redemptive outreach to other systems and structures which are constantly urging us to do it all, do it right, Just Do It!! Instead, Schaper urges us to participate in the Sabbath of Enough, where we may delight in the sufficiency of the day and give thanks for our abundant lives. And in coming to our (Sabbath) senses, we will know the glory of God-with-us, and, fulfilling the original intention of Sabbath, “keep it holy.” ♦

Reviewer **Betsy (Turecky) Alden** is the Coordinator for Service-Learning at Duke University in Durham, NC, and teaches courses in feminist leadership at Duke. A United Methodist clergywoman for 25 years, she has served in ministry in higher education in Dallas, TX and on the national staff of United Ministries in Education, as well as teaching at the University of New Mexico and TVI Community College in Albuquerque. She has three children and three lively little grandsons and says she needs all the Sabbath Sense she can get!

Betsy wrote this review for *EEWC Update* while fulfilling her job responsibilities at Duke and commuting on weekends to Indiana, where she was moving her father into assisted living and clearing out 150 years of memorabilia in a 15-room country house. She finished the review on a weekend in which she performed a 6:30 p.m. wedding, then rushed to the birth of her newest grandson who arrived a week early. She was holding and rocking him just 10 minutes after his birth at 7:15! You can read more about Betsy on the Web at <http://www.pubpol.duke.edu/people/faculty/alden/bio.html>

MotherLove: Re-Inventing a Good and Blessed Future for Our Children by Esther Davis-Thompson, 1999, 151 pages; and ***Raising Up Queens: Loving Our Daughters Loud and Strong*** by Esther Davis-Thompson, 2000, 153 pages. Both published by Innisfree Press (Philadelphia), \$12 each, paperback.

Reviewed by Anne Eggebroten

What is it about advice? Why is even the best advice sometimes hard to swallow?

MotherLove and *Raising Up Queens* are full of excellent advice, pearls of wisdom that demanded my highlighter's attention several times per page. Yet I read these books feeling glum and glummer, even in tears as I finished the last page.

In the case of *MotherLove*, much of the book was a chorus of positive, uplifting words:

Your child will believe in Joy, if she sees you joyful.

Your child will believe that Peace is attainable, if she sees you at peace with yourself.

Your child will learn most about Patience, if you are patient with her and the others in your world.

These are beautiful statements, well expressed in the cadences of the Sermon on the Mount or sometimes the book of Proverbs. But for a mother who comes to the book feeling rather panicked or desperate—not joyful or peaceful, often not patient—the lovely affirmations of *MotherLove* may feel like an impossible ideal. Statements like “You need to become more miracle-minded” or “I have enough time to do the things I really want to do” created in me an urgent desire that soon fizzled into frustration.

In the opening chapter of another book, *How To Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk*, Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish point out that people who are hurting usually don't want advice, philosophy, or psychology. We want a listening ear, someone who understands without scolding. If that's not available, we may turn to self-



help books. Didactic literature is an ancient genre, one that has been popular for thousands of years.

Throughout history most of these books have woven stories into their admonitions, both as illustrations and entertainment. Even today books like the *Chicken Soup* series, *Reviving Ophelia*, and *Embracing Persephone* are chock full of examples to illustrate their points.

The Bible is a case in point: God gave us more than a collection of proverbs. There are stories, stories, and more stories. If we can't rise to the heights of the letters of John, we can still relate to the confusion and bickering among the disciples, the mistakes of King David, or the struggles of Miriam, Esther, and Ruth.

In *MotherLove* and *Raising Up Queens*, however, there are no personal stories. The book jackets announce that the author is "mother of ten," but no single child or event enters the pages of either book—no anecdotes illustrate the highs and lows of being a mother or raising queens.

Because I have performed the acrobatic act of raising just three children while teaching English off and on (as Davis-Thompson also has done while raising ten), I was hoping to hear some true-to-life examples from the author's experience. In retrospect, however, I think some of the children must have said, "No, Mom! If you're going to write a book, don't put us in it." Whatever the reason, the author has chosen to use "we" and "you" but never a first-person narrator with a specific story.

For example, one paragraph of *Raising Up Queens* begins, "Many of us have been roaming around aimlessly in a valley of Despair for a while," and the next paragraph begins, "What if a new home awaits you, but you are acting dead so you can't get up and get to it?" I wanted to hear more about the author or her friends and how they coped with the specific problems they faced.

Another pet peeve: the valley of Despair paragraph consists of two sentences followed by seven fragments—one or two of which are dramatic and rhetorically effective. If delivered orally, it would all sound fine, but on paper the repeated use of fragments felt like a drag.

At any rate, these books are a blend

of general wisdom, exhortation and affirmation that many women would enjoy. Successful mothers would read them and glow. Mothers-to-be or mothers of toddlers could read and dream and learn how to do things right. It's just the mothers of struggling teens who may not be able to relate consistently to Davis-Thompson's upbeat optimism.

The advice itself is great. She divides *MotherLove* into two halves, the first about nourishing oneself as a mother, the next about extending nurture to one's children. In the first half, she advises us to begin with forgiveness of our parents and of our own selves. Then she directs the reader toward self-care, self-respect, and how to wage spiritual warfare against despair. After quoting from *A Course in Miracles*, she urges the mother to tend to her own healing lest her own pain harm her children.

Whatever you are holding in your heart will come directly out through your eyes when you look at your child. If you are filled with tiredness-of-dealing, that is what will come out of you. When you are seething with anger, you send pointed poison darts directly from your soul into your child's. When you are breathless with despair and hurt, that is the *MotherLove* you offer for that day.

She moves on to advise taking time to nourish oneself spiritually, to meet one's own needs for growth, and to spend time with supportive women. Great advice. I wish someone had sat me down and forced me to hear these things when I was trying to cope with a baby, a toddler, and a five-year-old.

On the next-to-last page, Davis-Thompson reminds us that a mother will have a lasting impact on her daughter, "for better or worse . . . whether your involvement in her life was positive or negative." Something about this dualism, and my own current sense of inadequacy, moved me to tears, despite the following admonition to "walk on through the storms." As a reader, I had failed to rise to the hallelujah chorus of the ending.

In *Raising Up Queens*, the structure is much more accepting of the reality of problems in mothering. Most chapter ti-

ties follow the pattern of "From Fear to Courage... From Trouble to Possibility... From Busyness to Balance." This worked well for me.

In the last chapter, however, I was kicked in the gut by a little parable about the "Queen of the Land" and her miserable daughters vs. the poor sewing-woman (really the "Queen of Spirit") and her strong, joyful daughters. This was the only place in the two books where I suddenly felt that my race and class alienated me from the message of the author. An African-American or other minority reader who had been denied opportunities I have had would probably have identified clearly with the poor sewing-woman, but I felt the misery of the other mother, who "came secretly, longingly every day" to watch the poor woman and her perfect daughters.

The flaws in *MotherLove* and *Raising Up Queens* are balanced by several things Davis-Thompson definitely got right. Both books are short and easy to read with lots of blank space, sometimes adorned with striking geometric art. The first book presents a helpful statement in large print at the bottom of almost every page—for example "I will breathe deep and lean on God's Spirit." Many pages also begin with a quotation from a famous person—Maya Angelou, Renita Weems, Friedrich Nietzsche. Text, art, and space are so interwoven that the chapters blend imperceptibly from one to the next. *Raising Up Queens* is slightly more conventional—there's a title page to announce each chapter.

Also worth noting: the language is completely inclusive. There are no references to God as "father" and almost no references to husbands; mothers are not assumed to be married or heterosexual. Churchy language is avoided, and the language of sisterhood is frequent and powerful. Davis-Thompson writes, "Gathering together with other like-minded sisters is important in re-inventing the MotherSpace"—and I say *amen*. ♦

Reviewer **Anne Eggebroten** has been with EEWC since its earliest days and now serves on the Executive Council as one of our Southwest representatives. A scholar of medieval literature, she has had a busy life as a writer, college professor, and mother of three daughters.