

## The Midwife

Goddess of the open door and the sharp edge

Compassion is the only tool with which to make hard choices

*Over in Rukh, the followers of the Weaver organize themselves into grand churches and sing beautiful songs to Her name and build beautiful buildings in which to sing them. It cannot be denied that those things are pretty and can uplift the soul, but beyond that ... what is the point? We have no time for these things – we are the faithful of the field, the stable and the hedgerow. We spend more time passing into and out of the doors of houses than we do building them and putting pretty things inside them. We go where the problems are and we solve them. We work hard, because we live in the real world, and we know that our work will not end any time soon.*

*Life is change, and change is painful. We are called to Her service by the pain of the world, and we take up whatever tools we can wield to salve that suffering. We make harsh decisions, and watch ourselves always for hubris – the sick pride that makes us think we are “better” than other simply because our eyes are open a little wider. We take what we can use to help us do our jobs, careful always not to pick up a tool that will cause greater harm than it heal.*

*Prayer is a source of strength for us, we pray to our Lady for inspiration and aid. But we also tell Her of challenges faced, problems solved and obstacles overcome. Sometimes she rewards us with blessings, and then we give thanks and honour Her name, and seek ways to use those blessings to solve the next set of problems that life presents to us.*

*Ours can sometimes be a solitary path – we rarely have need to organize into great congregations of those devoted to the Midwife. Rather, we seek the company of those who need our help, seeking our community amongst those for whom life is hardest, striving to help them change and grow. When we meet another devotee, we are polite and exchange notes and compare the challenges we have overcome, but after a day or two we often find that the other grates on our nerves and invite them to move on. We are proud, and the proud can rarely bear each others' company for long.*

*There is more to our faith than sewing up wounds. Life is change, and change hurts. The fire of a healing fever, the burned fingers that teach a child that fire is hot, the ache in the heart that reminds us of the inevitability of loss – this pain is important. Part of my job to lessen pain, guide grief, heal wounds and help the child make sense*

*of the confusion of becoming an adult. I won't take the pain or the grief away, because that doesn't work. But I know absolutely, in my heart and my soul, that once I have cauterized the stump or helped lay out the corpse my job is far from over. I have a duty of care, and it is a duty that is all the stronger because I choose it myself, and if the pretty Weaverites in their pretty temples look down on me for it, then let them. I am called to serve my Goddess, and I have no other allegiance save to Her.*

Some argue that the Midwife is the true face of the Weaver. They say that Her first devotees were the wise men and women of the tribes who oversaw to the rituals of life, death and coming of age. They were the ones who first looked beyond the immediacy of survival and said "If we salt some of this fish *now* we will need to fish less tomorrow" or "If we treat this sickness *now*, it will not become a plague tomorrow."

They had no time for kings and queens, palaces, dynasties or the other shallow trappings of civilization and power. Over time they faded into the background. They continued to work among their people to ensure that tomorrow was a little bit better than today, and to try and make sure that as many of their people as possible lived to see that tomorrow.

The child of the Midwife tends to the problems of their community, and solves them using the best tool available. In small communities Midwife followers are found working quietly to make that community a better place to live. They often maintain a body of wise lore – unlike followers of the Weaver, the faithful of the Midwife have little truck with the fatuous notion of dumping tradition for the sake of it. If a pregnant mother is having a difficult birth, you don't try out some half-brained new idea for helping her just because you fancy a change; if the tried and tested techniques will save her and the child, you do what has to be done.

A position in the community can easily lead her followers to become petty tyrants, convinced they know what is best for everyone. The Midwife is not served by preventing others from thinking for themselves this denies them the opportunity to learn and grow. The Midwife teaches her children to practice restraint, offering advice and good example, and not directly imposing their will on others. When people are independent and self-assured, then they are capable of dealing with situations before they become problems requiring the attention of the devotee.

Once a problem develops to the point where it threatens lives, *then* it is time for the devoted of the Midwife to act. Then it is time for the authoritative voice that causes others to listen, and see sense. This is where the soul of the devotee sings, at the fulcrum between disaster and success.

The greatest protection the faithful of the Midwife have against hubris and petty tyranny is the cultivation of compassion. Whatever they do, they know the importance of acting with a good heart – as the Kamakurans say, choosing the lesser of two evils is still a choice for evil. When one of the faithful feels they must cause suffering to prevent or end suffering, then is the time to step back and take careful stock, to consider about a different approach, to look for advice and to think very carefully indeed before making the world a darker place in the name

of doing good.

Teaching this compassion is a small but vital part of life for many of the faithful. The wounds of the spirit are as deadly to the health of the individual and the community as any sickness. Encouraging others to develop empathy and sympathy can help to head off problems before they ever develop to the point where one of Her faithful must become involved.

The children of the Midwife look at the problem in front of them – what will suffice to close *this* wound before the patient dies, to save *this* ship from sinking right now. They strive to make the future better but not at the expense of people's lives today. In doing this they must constantly balance the worth of new ideas against the wisdom they have already accumulated. The followers of the Midwife see no contradiction in this, for they do not divide the world into the realms of the traditional and the original, but into what works and what does not.

The devoted never stop learning, but they also know that learning alone is insufficient. They may ruthlessly pillage books and scrolls, take every opportunity to talk to foreigners about the topics that interest them, but they evaluate what they think they know against their own experience. If something works, a devotee incorporates it into her practices. If something doesn't work, it is instantly discarded (although not forgotten). At the end of the day, however, every devotee knows that learning is just another tool they have, and that it is their own instincts and ingenuity that they must rely on when push comes to shove.

While devotees tend to have a practical bent, their faith is not defined solely in these

terms. They are spiritual beings as much as any other devotee; they understand that life is change, and that change hurts. Part of their path involves helping others deal with the pain that these changes bring, helping them learn from them and become stronger beings.

Among the Merisusi, devotees of a martial bent often travel with raiding parties, cunningly and skilfully wielding axe or bow. When the battle is over, and the wounds are tended to, they leave their compatriots to squabble over gold and trade goods while they seek out scrolls, books and tools. They make thralls of the clever and learned among the defeated foe, treating them well and occasionally freeing them if they prove sensible. Some Merisusi use the symbol of the crow or raven to represent the Midwife due to this perceived practice of picking through the wreckage after a fight to locate the choicest morsels.

While the faith of the Midwife is strongest among the Merisusi, it is hardly unknown in other lands. Wherever there are individuals who exist slightly outside the local power-structures, doing what they can to solve the problems of their community, there is the Midwife. She is particularly honoured among the Tritoni, the Gnolls of Bantustan and by certain women of the Amu-sar, but the back-street doctor in the alleys of Nordon, or the clever young Malathian man who tracks the movements of a rival Clan so that his brothers can steal their cattle with minimal risk to the family, both are as likely to hear the whispers of the Midwife as they are the more distant call of the Weaver.

## **The Unwritten Rules of the Midwife**

### **Remove the rotten meat with the shallowest cut**

Life is filled with hard choices and it is often difficult to know when something is good enough or when you should strive for better. Often there is no right way, just a set of least bad options. In these cases you must let compassion be your guide. Compassion to ease the pain and suffering of others in the long term. When you are cutting flesh it is vitally important to remove all the infection but just as important to make sure you do not cause greater suffering in the pursuit of your goal.

### **What worked last time may not work this time.**

True wisdom is not found in the learning of the past but nor is it found in the fertile imagination of those trying new ways. True wisdom is knowing *when* to use the ideas that have already been tried and when to reach for something new. Don't ignore the value in using customs and traditions when they work toward your ends, but recognise always that they are just tools and that like any other tool they are not appropriate to every situation.

### **Respect is earned through doing, not saying**

Don't judge others based on what they *say* they will do, or on what other people *say* they have done. Judge them based on what you *know* they *have done*. Likewise, you gain respect by taking action, not talking about it. Offer respect where it has been earned, and expect it in turn.

### **Wield your insight before you wield your knives.**

Take a moment to think about what is going on. Understanding a problem is the first step towards resolving it. Make sure that you understand what is *really* going on. Poke your nose in everywhere, learn everything you can, about the world and the people in it. If you treat the symptom, the disease will bide its time and kill its victim when you are not around.

### **Be proud, but watch out for hubris**

Do not be ashamed of your good qualities, they make you who you are. Yet at the same time know when to act and when to refrain from acting. If you "help" someone who does not ask for your help, are you truly making a situation better, or are you treating them like children and earning their resentment? Would the situation be better if they help themselves, and thank you for your advice? Trust your gut first, and do the job, but don't assume you know best – that way the poison of hubris lies.

*"If I use my wits to enrich myself I am no better than a greedy merchant or a contemptuous scribe. By using my wits to enrich the lives of my friends, my family – yes, my damned 'community' if you want to use that word with such contempt - then I am actively bringing paradise a little bit closer every day. Can you say as much, with your pretty marble temple and your pretty songs?"*