

# **Breastfeeding and the Early Years**

**By Sheila Kippley** September 14th, 2008

Probably the most important part of the **biological oneness between mother and baby** is their ecological relationship: what affects one affects the other. We see this in the many health benefits for both. By health benefits, I am including the emotional health benefits as well as the physical health benefits.

If breastfeeding is shortened and the mother stops nursing during the early weeks or months, then both she and baby lose the many benefits of breastfeeding. The World Health Organization said it well: *“Mothers and babies form an inseparable biological and social unit; the health and nutrition of one group cannot be divorced from the health and nutrition of the other.”*

In addition, quite often the mother soon loses that physical intimate contact with her growing baby when she bottlefeeds. Rare is the mother who holds her baby during the early years when bottlefeeding. Rare is the mother who insists on doing the bottlefeeding herself and who takes her baby with her, but sometimes it happens. The first couple John and I knew who took their baby with them to college faculty parties were bottlefeeding. I admired them because they gave us support for what we were doing with our breastfed baby.

## **Breast milk or Mother**

The value of breastfeeding is heavily emphasized today. Because so many mothers work, much attention is given to pumping milk at work and storing breast milk. This is good, but what gets lost is the mother-baby biological oneness. You can't give a talk today without someone asking, “What about the working mother?” While there are many mothers who have to work for the basic necessities and who would prefer being home with their baby, there are also many mothers who could stay home and choose not to do so. The pressure today is for those latter mothers to leave their babies and little ones and earn money or follow their career.

But babies do need their mothers. The continuous contact with mom during the early years is the first step towards building a good foundation for life and future relationships. God provides for this essential foundation through the presence of the mother. How does He do this? With breastfeeding. The breastfeeding relationship ensures that the mother will remain with her baby. As Maria Montessori stressed years ago, prolonged lactation of 1.5 to 3 years is good for the baby because it keeps the mother with her baby.