Placenta: The Forgotten Chakra (book excerpt)

by Ibu Robin Lim

Introduction by Debra Pascali-Bonaro

I have been blessed to learn from Ibu Robin Lim and share her inspiration at our Eat Pray Doula Workshops in Bali, Indonesia. Robin's wisdom and passion to defend every MotherBaby’s right to a gentle, culturally appropriate, sacred birth has inspired me. Her love and wisdom about the placenta has enhanced my appreciation of placentas and the many ways they have been honored around the world. I hope her insights will encourage you to consider all your options for how you will honor your baby’s placenta.

Ibu Robin Lim is a midwife and founder of Bali’s Yayasan Bumi Sehat (Healthy Mother Earth Foundation) health clinics, which offer free prenatal care, birthing services and medical aid to anyone who needs it. (Bumi Sehat is one our featured orgs we give-back to, thanks to your participation in our class). Robin was awarded the 2011 CNN Hero of the Year award by the CNN news network for helping thousands of low-income women in Indonesia with healthy pregnancy and birth services.

The following is an excerpt from Ibu Robin’s book, Placenta: the Forgotten Chakra:

As parents to be, you have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to plan for how your baby will be separated from his or her placenta. Just as birth is necessarily a parting between mother and baby, the placenta and baby will also be parted. The goal of this article and the book Placenta: The Forgotten Chakra is to minimize the separation trauma by helping families and healthcare providers execute it as gently as possible. Just as it is a well-known fact that the best place for a newborn is right up on its mother’s belly I propose that the best place for the placenta and baby is right beside each other while still connected by the umbilical cord for as long as possible. Remember, cutting cords needs to be a sterile procedure that requires the application of chemicals such as alcohol or Betadine, because it comes with some risks of infection. This is why it is
done either by the doctor or midwife, or the baby’s father, supervised by the healthcare provider. Again, I wonder about the message the baby receives when the father is the person who’s severing the cord?

“Delaying clamping the umbilical cord for a slightly longer period of time allows more umbilical cord blood volume to transfer from mother to infant and, with the critical. Extended, many good physiologic “gifts” are transferred through nature’s first stem cell transplant, Journal of Cellular and Molecular Medicine, 20110 (pg43)

The following are options that you available to parents. Remember to choose what is the gentlest path that feels right for your family and the sweetest way you can imagine; your baby cannot choose, but depends upon you to be wise.

1. Immediate clamping and cutting of the umbilical cord

This is the medical model is done in most hospitals and birth centers in the world today it has the advantage of being “easy”, and that the parents need not say anything or advocate at all. The doctor or midwife will simply clamp and cut the cord immediately after the baby is born, without discussion. Usually a plastic cord clamp is used, and this hard piece of plastic 3 to 4 cm in length does get between mother and baby when they are trying to initiate breast-feeding. Honestly, the cord clamp does cause the baby some discomfort. If twisted or jammed into baby's belly, it causes pain. I advised that if you allow the baby's cord to be cut, you ask for umbilical cord string or tape to be used instead of the clamp. Umbilical cord clamps look like plastic monsters with teeth.

2. Delayed clamping and cutting of the umbilical cord

This is not too difficult to get your healthcare provider to agree to. Advantages shown in the research are many, and only a three-minute delay and umbilical cord clamping has many benefits to the baby. However, this choice and the first option mean that the cord will be cut before the birth of the placenta. This is very sad, in my opinion. Also, usually, a cord clamp will be used (causing your baby discomfort).

3. Prolonged delay of umbilical cord severance

This method is practiced by most midwives who receive babies at home and in more liberal childbirth centers and hospitals. These practitioners usually wait for about 15 minutes before clamping and cutting the cord. Sometimes this means the cord is severed before the placenta is even born. I strongly suggest that the parents ask the healthcare provider to wait at least until the placenta has been born. Even better; wait until the baby has had his or her initial feed at the breast, and the placenta has been born. After this, I believe the baby has gotten 99% of the physical benefits of delayed umbilical cord severance. Whenever we see the placenta, cord and baby (root, stem and fruit) intact, I call this a Lotus Birth. When making this choice the placenta, once born, may simply go into a bowl, and tucked in close, beside MotherBaby, as they go ahead and have their first go at breastfeeding.
4. Burning the Umbilical Cord

This method can be done after the placenta has been born and the baby has fed well at the breast. It cauterizes the umbilical cord, preventing infection and there is no need to use an uncomfortable cord clamp. According to traditional Asian medicinal knowledge, the burning of the umbilical cord moves the Qi (life force) remaining in the placenta into the baby. One slight disadvantage is that it takes 10 to 15 minutes to do, whereas cutting takes but a moment. For instructions for safely burning the umbilical cord see page 46 in Placenta: the Forgotten Chakra. It is wise to wait a number of hours after the birth, before burning the umbilical cord. The first hour following birth is the precious “Golden Hour.” During this sacred time, it is best not to have any procedures going on. Simply bonding and breastfeeding in quiet supported bliss is best.

5. Waiting, taking it one day at a time

Many families are not sure they wish to sever the court immediately and have not decided on the method that they are most comfortable with. I feel there’s absolutely no hurry to decide. Leave the umbilical cord intact and review it as a family, one hour or one day at a time. If you feel the transition time for baby is complete, you can always burn the cord after half a day, or one or two or three days following the birth. If the umbilical cord becomes brittle and breaks off before it releases at the bellybutton, don’t distress, the baby must have been ready. Keep in mind that babies in the womb are bonded to mother, and they are also bonded to the placenta and the umbilical cord. When you separate them, the baby will miss the cord and placenta, just as she or he would miss mother. Allow your baby’s transition from life in the womb to life in the light of our world to be a gentle landing. Take it slowly.

6. Full Lotus Birth

This is the most patient, spiritual, special way. To allow the cord to release from the baby with no rush, nothing but patience and nonviolence. It is not for everyone, but it is worth the trouble. Families must be more mindful and move more slowly when handling the baby who is left intact with his or her umbilical cord and placenta. Although the baby who has had a few hours with her placenta has already gotten 99% or more of the benefits of delayed cord severance, I love Lotus Birth and feel it is the best possible start we can give our babies and grandbabies. Instructions for how to care for the Full Lotus Birth placenta (so there is no unpleasant odor) can be found in Ibu Robin Lim’s book, Placenta the Forgotten Chakra: http://gaia-d.com/robin-lim-e-books/
What will you do with your placenta?

1. Placenta Prints

Several families that I’ve helped in home births have decided to honor the baby’s placenta by making a print of it. This is quite easy to do. Just use a nice big piece of art paper. The blood serves as the ink. I simply pat it a bit, not too dry, and carefully place it on the print paper. First the baby side, then the mother’s side down. After the print has dried well, spray embedded art fixative or regular old hairspray over the print. Let it dry again and frame.

We often call these The Tree of Life, as your print will look very much like a tree.

The roots of trees draw moisture and nutrients from the earth mother, and then by way of precipitation, they deliver this life-giving water back to the Earth’s atmosphere thus, the miracle of rain. At the same time, trees transport carbon dioxide into life-sustaining oxygen. By rain and by air the trees also purify our environment. We see this relationship mirrored in the placetas of all higher mammals. Placentas are joint venture between mother and child it is these exact functions of delivering nutrients, moisture and oxygen that sustain life on earth as well as life in the womb

2. Dream Catcher

A beautiful way to save and use the umbilical cord, which was the conduit delivering life to the baby, is to make a dream catcher. This tradition is said to have its roots in the Ojibwe and Chippewa Native American history. It is easy to do and will be a delight to have. And just maybe, it will filter out nightmares, while inspiring good dreams.

2. Ingestion

Eat a small piece to stop bleeding, make a placenta smoothie, or a placenta recipe. If the idea of eating placenta is revolting to you, ask yourself: how come? A mother’s placenta is exactly formulated to give her optimal benefits. The placenta is so rich in nutrients that it has been found to prevent postpartum depression when ingested. It contains iron and all the minerals that a high quality meat can offer. Women who have eaten placenta postpartum, either raw to help control/stop hemorrhage, or cooked as a postpartum meal, or encapsulated, report feeling brighter and
more alert. It is the only meat we can get by giving life, instead of the violence of killing.

4. Create a Ritual, Planting your placenta under a tree

You have a right to keep your baby’s placenta and to create a meaningful ritual for letting it to rest. If even a tiny part of you believes, as people in many cultures believe, that the placenta is the physical body of the child’s guardian angel, you must take it home.

Many women today ask their doula or midwife who is certified in Placenta encapsulation to dry their placenta and grind it up into powder that is put into capsules to be taken 3 times a day to help with healing and to stabilize postpartum moods.

Did you realize there is so much to consider about your baby’s placenta? If you would like to learn more from historical traditions to urban myths, tantalizing stories and accounts of how placenta has been worshiped in the past, Ibu Robin Lim’s book, Placenta the Forgotten Chakra is a great place to begin. It may help you to understand the reasons why and how placental traditions lost their value with modern medicine and in hospitals. Inside this illustrated book you will read stories of how families have created placenta rituals, so that you too can create your own placenta practice. Read Ibu Robin’s book: The Forgotten Chakra, available for download at: http://gaia-d.com/robin-lim-e-books/.