



## **10 THINGS... What Every HELPER Should Know About POSTPARTUM**

Asserting that Black people in America are not as community minded as they once were because they have assimilated into American culture is not a sufficient reason to not begin to *re-establish cultural postpartum rituals*. In fact, our assimilation into Western society's very individualistic culture. Before integration, Black people were extremely dependant on one another and many lived as others in indigenous cultures all over the world. Our ancestors had to know how to work with the environment to feed, clothe, shelter, heal and protect themselves up until the middle of the 20th Century. Our survival and the protection of our Black mothers and babies is dependant upon our willingness to reconnect with each other and our sacred practices in the childbearing year.

Opportunities for reconnection can easily be seen during the pregnancy, labor and postpartum. Look beyond the surface... see how important it is that we resist efforts to portray us as helpless. Remember, the ultimate objective. It only took one generation to disassemble our practices. Ancestral memory is still intact and we can lean on it. We are our great grandmother's daughters.

#IAmTheAnswer ... You are the Answer. When we EQUIP OURSELVES to HELP OURSELVES and HEAL OURSELVES, then we can SAVE OURSELVES.  
#WeSaveOurselves



## *The Foundations of Indigenous Postpartum Rituals*

- 1. Roles the community plays during pregnancy & postpartum**
  - a. The protection of the community
  - b. The resourcefulness of the community
- 2. The help of the mother/mother-in-law and family during postpartum**
  - a. From an African context
  - b. Mother as the first TEACHER
  - c. Mother as the first HEALER
- 3. Helper for the postpartum (new) mother**
  - a. Renewal for new mom... stillness
  - b. EVERY postpartum mom, a new mom
- 4. Postpartum time (40 days/6weeks)**
  - a. Observed in almost every culture
  - b. What is happening in the woman's body
- 5. The importance of warmth in the postpartum body**
  - a. Cold state of the body
  - b. The body is open... literally
- 6. Vaginal Steams - <https://www.steamychick.com/>**
  - a. User Guide
  - b. Do-It-Yourself



- 7. Basic Nutrition during postpartum**
  - a. Warming foods and spices
    - i. Ginger, garlic, cinnamon, etc.
    - ii. Soups and other soft foods
  - b. Southern Herbalism - <https://www.divinebirthwisdom.com/>
- 8. Breastfeeding expectations**
  - a. Biological breastfeeding
  - b. Comfort of the mom
    - i. Bring everything to the mom
    - ii. Comfortable location
- 9. Change that birth creates for mother in the community**
  - a. Honor and Respect
  - b. Elevation of Status
- 10. Rites-of-passage from girlhood to womanhood**
  - a. Introducing young girls to themselves from an indigenous perspective
  - b. The rites-of-passage throughout diverse seasons of life

## African Perspectives in Birth and Postpartum

### *The South African Model*

TITLE	DESCRIPTION
Umsizi Wombelethisis	One with a calling or gift or an acquired skill inherited by family/elders; assists midwives with certain errands; works under direction, supervision and instruction of midwives during prenatal labor; has a general knowledge of all basic things required during the birthing process; can identify critical signs and knows where to source help when needed
Umxukuzi	A person who seems to be gifted with an innate ability and is identified by the community as one who has a reputation that gets recognized by the people [as one desired to provide support]; should have knowledge about pregnancy and the ability to determine if other interventions are required and how to source help if needed
Umbelethisi	One who oversees the day-to-day medical needs and requirements of expectant women; she deals with situations at hand related to pregnancy birth and postpartum; she is expected to be a brave individual who has an general knowledge of motherhood and birthing systems; she must know how to handle, manage and resolve different challenges pertaining to pregnancy and child birthing; needs to have know-how and what to do under different circumstances of child birthing; must have a deep sense and knowledge of the philosophy and practices of [traditional midwifery]; know how to assess the pregnancy including positions of the unborn baby; know how to cut the cord; know how to check the placenta; know the dos and don'ts of pregnancy and child birthing; be knowledgeable on safety processes and measures; knows when to refer; she continues to check on the the new mother and baby after birth as a means to monitor progress, growth and health of both; she is able to assess and be in position to tell if further management is required and make recommendation or necessary reference.
Umfukamisi	<p>An elderly woman in the family or elderly woman in the community when an elderly woman is not available in family; can take care of certain errands for the mother and child; teaches first time mother how to handle, bathe and take care of the infant; makes sure the new mother eats well and recovers well; knows what healthy postpartum looks like and where to source when needed</p> <p>The family chooses her and she shows a good understanding of childcare; has a regard and respect for traditions and cultures; has connection with traditional midwife about the progress of the mother and infant; should "know what needs to be done with and to the child and when as well as to the mother". Is able to identify the good and bad signs of health with both the new mother and infant and knows where to source help when needed</p>



## *Cultural Notes about Birth Practices in South Africa*

Those who have not given birth are not invited into the labor room, although they may be asked to assist the traditional midwife in other ways. (rites-of-passage)

Those who are *abasizi* (helpers) are identified by the traditional midwife for having particular attributes that are deemed complementary to the birth environment.

Those who assisted in childbirth were expected to be of good moral character, trustworthy, reliable, calm and rational, high level of confidentiality, have listening skills that assist with mediation, conflict resolution and management (relationship strategies)

There is an expectation that there be a knowledge and understanding of "isiZulu" (or a culturally traditional way of life). Cultural rituals around postpartum are a part of EVERY indigenous culture around the world.

## *Foundations of Cultural Postpartum Rituals*

All over Africa, there are similar rituals that might have different names, be done at a different time for mothers, and are considered protection for the new baby. There are also common behaviors, meaning they do not require training or certain expertise. I have offered a foundation.



**Consider how you might fit into helping get back to the basics of "*building birth legacy*" and "*re-establishing cultural postpartum rituals.*"**

What do you sense your personal super power will be? What do you feel confident to offer to new moms?

Why do you feel this is a strength of yours? Have people told you you were good at this before? Or is this a skill that you will learn and build?

How will you continue to build this superpower?

How could the message of "re-establishing cultural postpartum rituals" through the Sankofa Tribe be elevated? Thoughts? Ideas? Suggestions?