The Mind in the Sacred Window

During postpartum, the subtle senses are vulnerable. Cortisol (fight or flight) is high. Oxytocin (love and attachment) is flowing. Our mind and senses are primed and ready for love, nurturing and gentleness. They are also susceptible to fear, anxiety, doubt, sadness, stress and insecurity. Keeping this at the forefront of our Caregiving practice will yield incredible benefits for the parents you work with. Understand your role in leading by example for the entire caregiving team (family, friends, support network) to implement the Universal Mother Principles. When stressful moments occur (and they will!) use the Universal Mother Principles to help parents process and rebalance.

Postpartum Anxiety and Depression

It is no wonder that in our modern western culture, largely devoid of any rooted postpartum traditions of care, that parents are highly susceptible to postpartum mood disorders ranging from mild to dangerously severe. While people around the world will suffer from depression and anxiety postpartum, when there is a consciousness around their needs during this window of time, they will most certainly be in a better place to counterbalance depression and anxiety in a more supported way.

There are countless studies out there to research, and I will not go into that here. I will say that work is being done to change the medical culture around keeping abreast with how new parents are doing during routine well baby visits. In the years since having my first child in 2007 and my most recent in 2017, the care providers ask more questions, approach the subject in paperwork, and are all around more vigilant in looking out for new parents health and well being.

Many people will experience heightened sensitivity, vulnerability, lack of confidence, and other tender feelings we often hear referred to as “baby blues” the first days and weeks. It is no wonder when we take into consideration the doshic imbalance of extreme vata, which results in lack of stability, weakness, anxiety, cold, brittle and dry qualities in the body, mind and spirit. The state of consciousness is affected by the doshas as well. By applying pacifying qualities to the imbalanced ones, we can help soothe the “baby blues” and take care of the heart, spirit and emotions of the frayed new parent.

People who suffer from depression and/or anxiety before they have their babies are particularly susceptible to postpartum depression and anxiety. When we look at depression and anxiety from a doshic perspective, we can recognize differences in the “type” of depression or anxiety a person experiences. Vata type can be more anxious, fearful, ungrounded and low confidence. Pitta type depression can be critical and more aggressive. Kapha type can be lethargic, unmotivated and heavy hearted. By observing (and addressing) the qualities of the depression and anxiety, we can have a more informed approach about how to support a new parent through these difficult feelings.
As caregivers, it is our role to keep monitoring in our daily observations how a new parent’s spirits are. By communicating, questioning, watching and intuiting, we can step in when needed to suggest further support, alert family and friends, and make sure they are not suffering. There is a difference between managing the natural difficulties of new parenthood, the flood of transition, the understandable wave of inconsistency at times, versus SUFFERING. When we suspect a person is suffering in their heart and mind, and unable to balance the challenges of the sacred window without extreme difficulty, it is our obligation to help them find additional support. Have at hand several resources for counselors, books, hotlines, energy practitioners, prescribers, new mother/parent circles and support groups, books, websites, etc. Let them know that you are in it with them, there are always people to help, and that they are never alone. If they would like you to, you can help facilitate contacting extra support people. Then continue to do as you are doing.

As with everything using Ayurvedic Principles, we can look at the qualities, the gunas, that are present in digestion, behavior and feelings. The same is true with Depression and Anxiety. What are the gunas that are presenting?

**Vata** - Vata type Depression and/or Anxiety can be characterized by fear, instability, indecisiveness, emptiness, emaciation, and can be triggered by loss. (loss of identity, loss of routine, loss of control…)

**Pitta** - Pitta type Depression and/or Anxiety can be characterized by self judgement, self criticism, criticism of others, irritability or anger.

**Kapha** - Kapha type Depression and/or Anxiety can be characterized by sluggishness, attachment (to ideas, to routine, to expectations), stubbornness, resistance to change, solitude, excessive sleep, lack of motivation.

Depression and Anxiety can be bi or tridoshic in quality, and can absolutely be triggered by the trauma of birth. Regaining balance after birth is rocky, and a result of the imbalance can be an unstable mind and emotions.

Remember the Mahagnas of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. Too much of a Tamasic state will weigh down the mind and can create Depression. The goal is to move out of that Tamasic state into a more Rajasic state, and then into a Sattvic state which encompasses lightness, joy, awareness and love.

Remember the effects of AMA, which can clog the senses, weigh down the mind and contribute to Depression. Take steps to increase AGNI and digest/flush out AMA from the system which will help clear the body/mind/spirit and support freedom to experience SATTVA.

As her Caregiver, there are some things we can do to provide proper support on our end as well as ascertain if we need to call in some additional supports.

- Make sure we are not contributing to the build up of AMA by choosing foods that are appropriate to their digestive capabilities.
- Keep updated on their appetite and elimination to ensure that their AGNI is strong enough.
- Make sure their Cortisol levels are not rising due to excess sugar, caffeine, alcohol or other stressors.
Partner and Family Dynamics - is there some extra support that can be provided to partner, other children, or to them in negotiating family relationships? Even simple listening and acknowledging is enough to validate the birth parent's feelings and help them feel heard and supported.

Pranayama is a Powerful Tool in treating Depression and Anxiety. By educating our clients in this simple and effective practice whether they are suffering from Depression and Anxiety or not is essential, wise and overwhelmingly supportive.

Other simple tools that can support the mind are the use of Mantra, Aromatherapy, Prayer, Music and Art, and simple loving companionship and care.

This article by Laura Perlin is a helpful resource on understanding Depression from an Ayurvedic Perspective.

Ayurveda and Cultural Appropriation

I personally recognize that what I know about Ayurveda has been filtered and diluted throughout time. I do not claim to know all there is to know about this vast science. It is imperative in preserving the cultural integrity of Ayurveda to recognize where it originated, the pathways that it has become available to individuals around the world today, and to humbly honor our own limitations in applying Ayurveda in modern day practice. Recognizing that Ayurveda and Yoga have been adopted into white mainstream culture is important. This is a medical tradition that comes from a land where individuals have been oppressed, and their traditions and voices silenced. What does it mean for us to practice Ayurveda? I, along with many others, have been drawn to Ayurveda because it resonates with the entire being, and explains nature's own principles at play in the human body/mind/spirit. This is an important aspect of life that is largely ignored in western medicine. As we impart elements of Ayurveda into our teachings at the Center for Sacred Window Studies, I acknowledge that what we teach may not align with classical Ayurvedic texts. It is aligned with our mission to teach supportive postpartum care in a modern context, and to meet each mother/father/individual/family where they are. We do not seek to place any tradition onto anyone, but merely to observe nature within, and adjust our care to help postpartum people feel happier and stronger.

Cultural Awareness and Humility

Culture is something that is always changing and growing. In essence, it is the reflection of life itself. As we see the elements, the doshas, ebb and flow within and throughout nature, they do so within the cultural dance that is humanity living together on the planet. By approaching life and caregiving with awareness of ourselves and others,
and by committing to life long learning, we are best able to offer service to families that is truly supportive. As with balance in Ayurveda, we will never arrive at that destination for good. We move in, out, through and back again. So it is with learning and living with cultural changes. We may feel uncomfortable with something new. After integrating what we have learned, and developing our own relationship with what is new, we become more fluent. Families come in all ranges of backgrounds and combinations. At the heart of caregiving is the ability to fully support ALL families, regardless of cultural background. It can feel unclear how to navigate through the world with acknowledgement of inequality and responsibility for fighting against inequality. This navigation is one that is from the heart, organic, and a journey unique to each of us.

Ways of Practicing Cultural Awareness and Humility, and Questions to Reflect Upon:
- Remember that culture is always shifting and changing. It is not static.
- Never stop learning! If there is an image, item or aspect from another culture that you are drawn to, learn about it to honor it fully. (for example: having decorative items or artwork in your spaces)
- Recognize dominant culture privileges.
- Reflect on why we are learning, offering, serving others using Ayurveda, and how this tradition speaks to us.
- Reflect on how marginalized cultures have been exploited, and how we can proceed with respect and honor for traditional culture’s wisdom, in which our modern capitalistic culture is deficient.
- How can we be supportive in our professional practices to those from marginalized groups?
- How can we offer support in the healing of cultural trauma?

We are Postpartum Caregivers and Activists in the Mission to Support ALL Families During the Sacred Window

Be ready to offer conscious and mindful support to families in various communities and situations. This is a mindful beginning.

Caring for Transgender and Genderqueer Families

In service to all families, it is our responsibility as caregivers to understand how to best support families who are not comprised of the dominant gender roles in our culture. A caregiver must first understand that Gender is a spectrum, and though a person is born with certain anatomy, their gender identity may not align with what dominant culture dictates as the appropriate expression. **Identity** is: who we know ourselves to be, and the vocabulary we use to describe ourselves. **Gender Identity** and **Gender Expression** are **psychological**. Our **anatomy**, our **sex**, is **biological**. 99% of humans are born with anatomy that is either male or female. 1% of humans are born with an
intersex condition, meaning they are born with male and female sex organs or other sexual characteristics. **Orientation** refers to who we love/who we partner with. Orientation is different from Gender. What is imperative to understand is that all humans have gender identity and orientation. To assert that people whose gender aligns with their sexual organs do not need to acknowledge their gender identity and orientation is to suggest that those whose gender identity and orientation is different from that alignment are not normal, thus contributing to cultural inequality. **Cisgender** is the gender identity that matches the sex one is assigned at birth. By identifying as Cisgender, one is supporting transgender and genderqueer people by normalizing gender identity. It is also important to understand that we will not fully understand babies gender until they are old enough to express it to us. We make an assumption based on sex organs and often times that aligns. Sometimes it will not. Talking about gender identity is something that is becoming fluent in younger generations. To care for babies, who grow into children, who grow into adults, and who have babies of their own, the caregiver's unconditional support role is imperative. It is also necessary to understand the special needs of this community, and the discrimination experienced within the healthcare community.

Questions to ask when meeting potential clients, and for working with Transgender and Genderqueer Families:
- What pronouns do you use?
- Who is in your family?
- Are there specific words you prefer to use for parts of your body that you'd like me to use also?

Ways a professional caregiver can be supportive of transgender and genderqueer families:
- Use gender inclusive language in your materials that are for the public, or for all clients.
- Use diverse imagery in your print and online presence, representing different types of families.
- Learn as you practice. Ask if you are unclear about something that is important for you as the caregiver to know, while also being respectful of appropriate boundaries.
- Make sure your forms are gender inclusive.
- Follow your client's lead in terms of language.
- Educate yourself and do not rely on your clients to teach you.
- Don't make assumptions about someone's gender identity or orientation.

When working with a family and it is clear what their Gender Identities are, caregivers can use the language that applies. In respect to all families, it is important to follow their lead before making an assumption. As culture is always shifting to reflect the people who live in it, we as conscious caregivers can continue to educate ourselves on aspects of culture we may not be familiar with. In terms of Transgender and Genderqueer people, this population experiences gross inequality in general, and the medical field is no exception. Families need caregivers to recognize their needs and advocate for them as they navigate the process of becoming parents.

**Caring for Individuals who have experienced Trauma**
The Sacred Window is a time for gentle support, and not one for aggressive intervention or “treatment”. This goes for someone without any special considerations, as well as someone who has experienced abuse or other types of trauma. However, when working with an individual who is working through trauma, we have an important role. We are not only caregivers, but ADVOCATES. We are there to help provide information, resources and to facilitate extra support. Be there to help integrate a specialized support person with the new parent, being a gentle supportive presence as histories are shared. Allow space for questions and talking through experiences and emotions. Be mindful of boundaries and vigilant about respecting space. Offer gentle training in simple breathing techniques that can help center them any time they need it. Be extra mindful of the Universal Mother Principles and use your intuition to guide you in your support of this sensitive time. There are resources available to help you navigate the caregiving of individuals dealing with trauma. Don't go it alone! When approaching trauma in the physical and subtle channels, we must first do no harm.

Grief and Loss

There are a variety of experiences where a new parent may experience grief or a sense of loss such as identity, partnership or the pregnant state. As caregivers who are mindful of the essential need for space to process all childbearing experiences, we can expect that new parents will feel often feel a sense of loss or sadness at times. When a baby is separated (surrogacy, adoption, foster), a new parent will be navigating the very crucial window of healing from the postpartum window while experiencing acute separation from their baby. When a baby dies, new parents experience debilitating grief on top of the vulnerabilities present for the body/mind/spirit during the sacred window. Please take careful consideration and prepare yourself for knowing how to support grieving parents. Our imperative role is to facilitate the healing process by holding their space, allowing them to move through their grief in the way that is unique to them. There are most definitely wrong and unhelpful things to say and do. Be non-directive in your approach to postpartum support. Be ready to help them in any way you can, and ask what you can do specifically. They will often not know how to ask. Facilitate family support and offer gentle guidance to their community in ways to support them. Be steadfast, and let them know you have resources that can be helpful, though never push a grieving parent to reach out to someone else unless it feels right to them. Make note of the baby's birthday, and reach out each year. Check in with the parents after your caregiving has ended, healing takes a long time. Your immediate and continued support can have life long poingancy.

Racial Equity, Implicit Bias and White Supremacy

Speaking these words, even reading these words usually creates a strong reaction from people. It could be immediate discomfort and an urge to not think about it. It could be anger, fear, confusion or sadness. It could be an experience you identify with on a personal level, or one of guilt as a white person. In thinking of the activism required in changing the paradigm of postpartum care in our modern day culture, I cannot help but think about the barriers of care that exist to many birthers and families based on race. Three times the number of black women will die from pregnancy or childbirth related deaths than white women because their symptoms were not addressed, their concerns were not heard, and they were not given the same care...
a white person would have been given. The fact is that implicit bias, and white supremacy are built into the cultural systems we navigate on a daily basis. White supremacy is not compartmentalized to scary white people wearing hoods. It lives deep in the fabric of our medical systems, our school systems, our financial systems and all other systems we engage in to navigate life.

By ignoring it because we think we are not racist simply perpetuates the flow of the system, undisturbed by our avoidance. In order to participate in changing that system, it is necessary to actively engage in activities, thoughts and dialogue that can help counterbalance that unhealthy system.

Just as in Ayurveda, where we are called to apply the opposite to bring balance to a state of being, we are now called culturally to bring about a rebalance, equality. And this requires conscious care.

There is a plethora of great conversation and resources for learning and thinking more about cultural healing, anti-bias training and anti-racist work. We provide a beginning resource for you to explore. We as postpartum caregivers want to see all birthers receive the sacred care they desire. We have an incredible opportunity to be a part of change on so many levels of healing. Our work starts at the very beginning of life, for a baby, for a mother. I am in awe at the possibility available for resetting the tissues in the body during this sacred window of time, and also at the possibility for resetting our own consciousness around human care, healing and connection.

Practicing as an Ayurvedic Postpartum Caregiver

Your practice should reflect YOU. There is no one way to do this work. A successful practice will work with your schedule, with your resources, highlighting your individual training and experience, and motivated by your personal gifts and mission. Recognizing this, it is helpful to get an idea of how others practice, and comparing what works for others with what can work for you.

When setting up your practice, consider the following:

- What is your available work time? What times during the day or night would you enjoy working the most, and what will work with your current personal, family and community obligations?
- What is my skill set and trainings? What support do I feel confident and comfortable offering to clients and families? Just because another person with your training offers a certain spectrum of services, if that does not feel right for you, you can offer the types of services that do feel appropriate for you.
- What type of services do I ENJOY offering the most? (cooking, consultation, planning, body work, herbal support, etc.) Consider teaming up with a group of others who have different skills to offer. Spend your working hours doing what you love to do, and work with an inspiring team of other caregivers to offer a full spectrum of services without feeling depleted by trying to do it all.
- What are other caregivers in your community offering, and what are the needs of new parents in your area? Think about what will be most supportive for the families you will be serving. What do the other professional postpartum caregiving practices look like? What works about them, and what could be better for the caregivers and the families?
Potential and New Client Basics

When working with new clients, you will need to have an introductory procedure set up. You will be meeting individuals, couples and families, and deciding if you are a good fit for each other. Think about how you would want to meet a potential caregiver as an expecting parent. Let the Universal Mother Principles guide you in providing a loving first experience that will show a family the type of caregiver you are. When thinking about connecting with potential clients, consider the following:

- What information will you provide to potential clients? A nice idea is to have a folder of materials that talk about your practice, the services you offer and their benefits. This is a great place to do some introductory education about the Sacred Window and its importance. Highlight what sets you apart from other caregivers, and what your personal mission in doing this work is.
- Where do you prefer to meet potential clients? Do you want to meet in their home, in your home or professional space, at a public space? Think about what is comfortable for you, and suggest this to potential clients when setting up an initial meeting.
- What would be helpful for you to know about a new client/couple/family when first meeting them? Think about the questions you’d like to ask and let these questions help structure your time together. Make sure to give them ample time to ask you questions they may have about you and your practice.
- Remember that you do not have to work with every client that you meet with. Honor your own boundaries and preserve your integrity. If you feel uncomfortable in any way, or if this family does not feel like a good fit for you, do not hesitate to refer them to another caregiver.

Working with New Clients

When you have decided to work with a family, you ideally will have time before baby arrives to get to know them, work out a plan that feels strong for both of you, and become clear about the type of support you can offer that will be ideal for their individual constitution and needs. Central to a new caregiver/client relationship are thorough Intake Forms that will document all the information you need to keep on hand to best serve your clients in a professional way. Your intake forms can be structured in the way that you prefer, there is no one way to design them. They can be an online form such as a Google Form, or they can be a physical form that families fill out with pen and paper. Make sure the information on your Forms uses inclusive language regarding gender identity and family members. When designing your Intake Forms, make sure to include the following:

- Basic information such as name, email, phone, address
- Due date
- Partner and family member names
- Healthcare provider information
- Where they are going to birth and who are their doctor/midwives
- Who will be around to help during the Sacred Window
- Medical concerns or conditions
- Allergies
- Food Preferences and Aversions
- Special Diets
- Additional information on what type of care they are looking for, what will serve them best and anything else that would be helpful for you to know.

Think closely on what information will best help you to care for this family. Put that on your Intake form too.

**Sacred Window Daily Care Observations**

Central to providing close and conscious daily care to a postpartum parent, is a Daily Observation Guide. As with your Intake Forms, you should design your Daily Observation Guide to best support you and your client in the practice you have designed. There is no one way to create it and gather information. It can be an online Spreadsheet that helps you keep track of progress, or it can be a physical piece of paper that is filled out each day you work with a client. It can be something they fill out, or it can be one that you fill out as you check in with them each visit. When designing your Daily Observation Guide, make sure to include space to monitor the following:

- Name and Date
- Digestion and Elimination
- Breastfeeding and Lactation
- Physical comfort and perineum healing
- Lochia
- Incision
- Mental and Emotional state
- Successes and Challenges
- Questions and Concerns
- Baby’s Digestion and Elimination
- Cord Care
- Bottom Care
- Appetite of Mom and Baby
- Sleep and Rest

What else would be helpful for you to know and check in with in order to provide the best caregiving you can for this parent? Put it on your Daily Observation Guide!
Different types of Caregivers and Schedules

Some caregivers will want to do the full spectrum of caregiving, and others wish to specialize in one or two aspects of it. There is no one way to be a postpartum caregiver! Offer the services that work for you, your schedule, your practice and your clients.

**Full Spectrum Ayurvedic Postpartum Caregiver** - this type of Caregiver will provide Cooking, Meal Prep, Herbal Support, In home support, Postpartum Bodywork or Instruction, Infant Massage Instruction, and often much more. It may be a combination of the above or all of it, but it will be a variety of services in support to a new family during the Sacred Window.

**Cooking and Meal Preparation** - some Caregivers prefer to provide meals only to new families. They may prepare food in the family’s home, or in a certified kitchen. Sometimes they will cook from their own homes and deliver meals to families. Be sure to be aware of the laws regarding cooking for others in your state. You can look up Cottage Food Laws online for your state to find out more.

**Postpartum Abhyanga and Body Treatments** - some Caregivers offer postpartum Abhyanga or other practitioner give body treatments in a new family’s home. Daily or weekly (or as often as possible!) warm oil application for a postpartum person is incredibly supportive to restoration of strength, tissues, digestion, elimination, emotional and mental wellness, physical recovery and hormonal balance.

**Postpartum Preparation** - some Caregivers choose to center their professional practices on helping families prepare for the Sacred Window. This type of practice can help gather and gear up family, friends and community circles in preparation for the Sacred Window. They can help a family prepare their homes, pantries, and key spaces around the house a new parent will spend the most time in - customizing the spaces to support the needs of the Sacred Window. Feeling prepared is key to allowing for healthy rest and security during the vulnerable days and weeks following the birth of a baby.

**Postpartum Consultation** - some Caregivers will offer Postpartum Consultations to individuals and families who are looking to problem solve during the Sacred Window. The difficulties that often arise postpartum can be a surprise to families in our culture because of lack of awareness of the Sacred Window. Often parents are unprepared for the demands of this time.

Usually Caregivers will offer a variety of services. What resonates with YOU?

Caregiving Hours and Schedules
Caregivers also have choices on when they would like to schedule their clients depending on their preference and availability as professional caregivers. Sometimes a caregiver can work around their children’s school schedules, offering care during the day, or alternatively, offering care when their partner returns from work and can take over family care. Postpartum Caregiving can be beneficial for families at all times! What works for you?

- **Daytime** - This can be a 4-8 hour visit during the daytime hours. This time can be used for gentle education and training, cooking and meal prep, serving snacks, meals and herbal support, household tasks, listening and observing, space for rest, bodywork, and any other balancing routine for parent/baby/family.
- **Afternoon** - Sometimes the hours between when older children come home from school and when partner comes home from work can be an especially tricky time for a postpartum family. A caregiver’s support can be invaluable for providing snacks for the family, attention to older children, meal preparation for dinner, support for birth parent and baby, and any/all of the above.
- **Evening** - The hours including dinner and bedtime can also be challenging, and a caregiver can be especially helpful. Providing support during dinner, clean up, preparing older children for bed, tucking everyone in and preparing for the next day can be invaluable.
- **Nighttime** - Some caregivers support families through the night. I liken these caregivers to magical fairies who make amazing things happen while the family gets some much needed rest. Tidying the house, preparing food for the next day, cleaning nursing supplies, and offering soothing support to baby are all key elements to night time caregiving.

The Caregiving Day/Hours can flow how you want it to flow, as long as you leave plenty of room for change and potential abandonment of any established plan! Ideally, you will propose an idea to a new parent, and then adjust as the family/baby needs.

**Educating and Facilitating**

**Talks and Workshops** - An incredibly important aspect to Sacred Window Care is educating communities, families and individuals about the importance and value of conscious postpartum care. Be it a free talk at a local library or other location, a podcast or an online forum such as an article or blog, our work intrinsically involves getting the word out. Many do not know that this work exists, and in order to change the paradigm of gaps in postpartum care in our culture, we need to continue to talk about it. Consider how you can raise awareness about your caregiving and this work in general in your community. Free talks or paid workshops can be held at community centers, birthing centers, hospitals, doctor’s offices, libraries, churches, family centers, herbal shops, cafe’s, childcare centers, and more! Reach out and invite your community to learn from you.

**Circle Facilitation** - Another way to create support communities is to establish a pregnancy Circle, or a new parent Circle for individuals in your area. Enough cannot be said about the healing and support that is offered through a group of caring individuals going through a similar stage as you. You will be responsible for facilitating life-long
friendships, and generating a feeling of being held and supported, heard and validated. Circles can be held at any of the above spaces and many more.

Emergence

Graduating from the Sacred Window is ideally done in baby steps. Some days a new parent will feel “back to normal”, others they may feel extra fragile. This is life! We learn from studying Ayurveda, that “balance” is not a destination we arrive at and then remain until we decide to depart. We are continuously adjusting our actions, nutrition and extra supports to flex with the seasons, the time of day, the states of consciousness we slip in and out of, the elemental influences that nature and our choices dictate. Such is life as we emerge from our sacred postpartum window. Take care, go slow, always observe and as a parent, be gentle with yourself and your expectations. We understand that as we come out of a “cleanse”, the most important part is reintroducing foods and experiences VERY slowly, so as not to overwhelm our systems thus creating mental, physical and emotional AMA. This can be likened to the sacred window as well. Take a step, evaluate, take another, re-evaluate, etc. In this way, we can build our strength and abilities without overwhelming our still delicate constitutions. In this way, we are rebuilding a strong foundation and setting ourselves up for parenthood and beyond for the next 42 years!