

## Re-Purpose Your Placenta: 7 Amazing Gifts From Your Baby's Afterbirth

### HISTORY, FOLKLORE AND CULTURAL PRACTICES

The following is a compilation of cultural and historical placental facts that you may find curious or intriguing.

The placenta's role in pregnancy and birth is recognized in many cultures by the rituals that surround its disposition. For many ancient cultures, the process of birth is not complete until the placenta has received a proper disposal.

Some cultures bury the placenta for various reasons. The Māori of New Zealand traditionally bury a newborn's placenta to emphasize the relationship between humans and the earth. In fact a renowned Maori artist, Nathan Manos produces vessels intended to pay homage to this tradition. Through an email conversation Manos writes:

*" It is still common practice among our people to return the newborns placenta and umbilicus to be buried on the land with which the child has genealogical connections.*

*The concept is of binding person to place, of affirming one's Whakapapa, one's links to Turangawaewae and ultimately to our primordial mother Papatuanuku.*

*Whenua is the Maori word for land as well as for the placenta. We are nurtured, nourished and cherished by the Whenua. It reminds us that we are born of the womb of our primeval mother Papatuanuku and of the wombs of our human mothers.*

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*These vessels are embellished with decorative elements appropriate for the protection of the physical and spiritual well being of the growing child. This vessel features mokomoko (lizard forms) which are a tribal kaitiaki of my people."*

*The word Whakapapa translates as genealogy and Turangawaewae as 'a place to stand / your place' ....these are in reality spiritual concepts...I'm sure a little further "Googling" will help to give a deeper understanding. ....This is one site I'm familiar with - <http://collections.tepapa.govt.nz/theme.aspx?irn=1437>*

There are countless descriptions of placenta folklore and cultural practices that may be found throughout birth literature. Those listed below are just snippets of the vast information from Robin Lim's *Placenta: The Forgotten Chakra* and Sarah Buckley, *Placenta Rituals and Folklore From Around the World*.

Similar to the Maori, the Navajo of the American Southwest bury the placenta and umbilical cord at a specially-chosen site particularly if the baby dies during birth.

In Cambodia and Costa Rica, burial of the placenta is believed to protect and ensure the health of the baby and the mother. If a mother dies in childbirth, the Aymara of Bolivia bury the placenta in a secret place so that the mother's spirit will not return to reclaim her baby.

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The placenta is believed by some communities to have power over the lives of the baby or its parents. The Kwakiutl of British Columbia will bury a girl's placenta to give her skill in digging clams, and will expose a boy's placenta to ravens in order to encourage prophetic visions. In Turkey, the proper disposal of the placenta and umbilical cord is believed to promote devout habits in the child later in life. In the Ukraine, Transylvania and Japan, interaction with a disposed placenta is thought to influence the parents' future fertility.

Several cultures believe the placenta to be or have been alive, often as a relative of the baby. The Nepalese think of the placenta as a friend of the baby. In contrast, in Malaysia, the Orang Asli regard it as the baby's older sibling. The Ibo of Nigeria consider the placenta the deceased twin of the baby, and conduct full funeral rites for it. Native Hawaiians believe that the placenta is a part of the baby, and traditionally plant it with a tree that can then grow alongside the child. The Javanese in Indonesia believe that the placenta has a spirit and needs to be buried outside the family house.

The practice of eating the placenta, is known as placentophagy. In some eastern cultures, such as China, the dried placenta is believed to be a healthful restorative. It is therefore sometimes used in traditional Chinese medicinal preparations.

Traditional midwives in Mexico report that the placenta is used in much the same way. A boy's placenta is used for preparations intended for a male to use (to treat, for example, erectile dysfunction or low testosterone) and a girl's placenta is used for female issues (to treat premenstrual syndrome or menopause). (Sotelo, 2003)

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### References

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