

Pregnancies and Mohawk Tradition

BY SAKOKWENONKWAS

The following is an accumulation of knowledge from many Elders concerning the dos and the don'ts of pregnancies.

It must be understood that when a woman is pregnant, her husband is also pregnant. Whatever health and mental precautions are observed by pregnant women, the father is also obligated to observe as well. This is the traditional Mohawk or Iroquois understanding.

The pregnant parents have an additional power in their being. This power is seemingly like that of radiation. You can't hear it, you can't feel it physically, but it is a strong force! In the beginning when the world was new, the Creator (Sonkwaiatison) made human beings from the dirt of the Mother Earth and he blew the breath of life into humans. Sonkwaiatison instructed that women and men would reproduce offsprings from that point on.

Sonkwaiatison also made it known that his most precious gift in all life was that of a new baby. It made no difference if it was animal, human or bird. A baby was the greatest and most sacred gift in the eyes of Sonkwaiatison. It is for this reason that Sonkwaiatison gave the expectant mother and father this additional power or strength during the nine months of pregnancy.

For all Iroquois people it is a given fact that Kariwiiio forbids all Iroquois to consume anything that changes the natural state of mind (to

mention a few, whisky, wine, beer, drugs). Therefore it is essential that a pregnant couple absolutely do not use these things for the sake of the baby's well being and good health. Cigarette smoking also should be stopped.

It is also understood that during the nine months the parents should not mingle in large and strange crowds, because the baby does feel and detect all feelings of emotion both physically and mentally from both parents. In a large strange crowd the possibility exists that you may see someone who is deformed in some way. When someone sees this, the natural reaction is to stare at them and if you or your husband sees this it is a good way to mark

your baby. What I mean is that any deformity you see could possibly be somehow transmitted to your unborn. So it is best, our Elders say, not to mingle in large unknown crowds.

The other important thing to remember is not to go visiting unannounced, as there are many people who use special medicines, especially the elderly people. I will give an example of what happened to me one time. This was about 17 years ago. When my wife and I were expecting our first child, I went to visit my grandmother, as I usually did. When I entered, I just happened to catch my grandmother pouring from a gallon jug, medicine into a glass. This was a tonic to help her as she was getting old. My grandmother kind of was taken back when she saw me. She said, "you killed my medicine." I said, "grandma, I didn't mean to." She said, "because



your wife and you are expecting a child, you have too much power and it is your extra power that ruined my medicine." So grandma said, "come here," and she told me to take a sip of the medicine in the glass so that I would restore its power in that way. Then she drank the rest. She also said for me to put my finger into the gallon jug of medicine and also restore its power in that way. Then she drank the rest. She also said for me to put my finger into the gallon jug of medicine with a white cloth and put it back in the refrigerator. I knew this is what happened, but I was not thinking.

According to Kariwii and the teachings of our elder people, it must be strongly understood that, during the nine months of pregnancy, there should be no arguments between the wife and husband. These arguments can cause the fetus or unborn baby to become sad. The unborn baby will become discouraged at hearing the argument and his or her growth development will be stunted. It may be that the baby will think that she or he is the cause of his mother and father's arguments and may just stop breathing and the result will be a stillborn. The baby will conclude that he/she is not wanted and will return to the Creator, where there is peace and a world of love. Conclusion, of course: no bad feelings or arguments between expectant parents for the entire nine months. Our grandparents said that during the nine months it is a great time. Usually the expectant mother becomes moody at different times. The mother also has times when she craves and usually at the oddest times. Therefore the expectant father must

en ha te nikon riioste (be very kind and patient during this nine month period.)

In time past every man had to hunt to survive, and in contemporary times it is not unusual for a family to raise farm animals for food. Back then and now it is forbidden for an expectant father to kill or butcher an animal in any way. The act of killing a life and the butchering is too violent and bloody. The expectant father is not to witness or be a part of such killing, as it will affect the unborn baby. It is then up to the uncles, brothers and other relatives to hunt during the nine months period on behalf of the expectant father.

Also the expectant mother and father should be sure to get up early each morning. They should keep busy during the day. It is frowned upon to sleep late and to be lazy. This practice will be inherited by the new baby. So if you want a baby that is ambitious and industrious with good sleep and work habits, then it is up to you.

It is also forbidden for the pregnant mother or father to wear a choker or to button up their shirt tightly around the neck, or to wear tight necklaces. The reason for this is because the baby is connected to the mother by a long umbilical cord. The baby feeling the same sensation as his mother or father will move around until the umbilical cord manages to wrap around the little baby's neck. Sometimes this can choke the baby and result in brain damage or even death.

The elders also say that the mother and father should never flop themselves across the bed when they are resting or sleeping; to do so will mean that you could cause the baby to be born breeched or born side-

ways and the delivery of the baby would be very painful and lengthy.

When you are going upstairs and you are halfway up, then you remember something you forgot, you must not go back down. You must go all the way up the stairs and then go all the way back down. You must never stop in the doorway or entranceway. The reason is because at the time of birth when the delivery is happening, the baby will travel the birth route and when he gets close to the birth door, he may stop there and even may try to go back. This of course again means a prolonged and painful delivery

During the later stage of pregnancy, the expectant mother should take the slippery elm bark medicine so her delivery will be fast and easy. There are also different medicines used to strengthen the expectant mother.

Now this is as far as I will go about the subject of pregnancies and parents. As you can see, the Mohawk people take very extreme measures in the birth of our children.

Sometimes I have heard criticism about the Mohawk way to prepare and give birth. Some have termed the whole practice as that of "old wives' tales," etc. My response to that kind of statement would be perhaps it is just old wives' tales, but the real essence of it is the fact that if a mother and father would observe all these preparations for a brand spanking new baby, that new baby will be emotionally and physically welcomed and the love of that mother and father so great for the newborn. What a wonderful way to start life!

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