

Closing the Bones – an ancient practice with deep shamanic roots.

I stumbled across Closing the Bones after becoming aware of Rebozo's when I attended a CPD for pregnancy massage. The trainer talked about working with Rebozo's – beautiful woven cloths made in Mexico, as part of helping women during pregnancy and birth. This stuck in my mind for a while, and a couple of years afterwards just casually perusing the internet, I found a Closing the Bones training with Japjeet Kaur – one of the best trainings I have been ever done – and I have done a few!

So, what is Closing the Bones? Well, all of which I am about to tell you I learned from my training with Japjeet and from further research of my own.

Throughout human history, we have always practiced certain rituals for certain events happening in our lives, all over the world. They transcend time, bringing a true sense of healing and solace, along with a deep and profound connection the land, mother earth, and importantly our ancestors. Closing the Bones ceremonies, an ancient postpartum practice, has roots in various indigenous cultures across the globe. It is a beautiful and sacred ritual designed to support new mothers as they transition from childbirth, helping them to heal physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Although it is generally believed to have originated from Central and South America, it is also found here in Europe and other parts of the world.

Up until the early 20th century, we had it documented proving it was regular practice here in the UK. But sadly, it is nowhere to be seen within our healthcare systems anymore. In France and The Netherlands, it was recently a part of their national health systems, dying out over the last 5 – 10 years. Women were given cloth belts to wrap around their hips as part of their postpartum care.

In Central and South America, particularly amongst the indigenous people, it is a normal part of the immediate postnatal care given to women, from 6 hours after they give birth up to 40 days. It is, in my opinion, an incredibly important aspect of giving birth. It closes the bones that have been opened by the pregnancy and birthing process. It is fundamental in honouring the feminine aspect that pregnancy and birth should be honoured with. It's not a "feminist" act, it is not about social standing, it is purely honouring the birth and rebirth. At the heart of this ritual is the belief that childbirth is an act of opening a woman's body, spirit, and energy when bringing new life into the world. Therefore, we need to close this opening, to bring a sense of completeness and wholeness to the mother. Common sense really.

The ceremony typically takes place within the first 40 days of the postnatal period. This is a crucial time for a woman's postpartum recovery. It can be done any time after giving birth, 30/40/50/however many years post birth. It is never too late for this ceremony to be given and is a wonderful thing for all women to have in reverence to the feminine.

The first thing to do is to allow time. Women are often rushed to have babies, rushed out of the hospital, rushed to get back to work. But the most important standing point is not rushing. Often mothers will have their newborn babies with them as they are very much part of the whole ritual, and this allows the time to be respected.

The space is prepared to have the sense of safety, sacredness and peace. Respecting the process of pregnancy and birth.

Rebozo's are the key part in this ritual as they "hold" the mother. They allow her to reconnect with **her self**. The massage is done both with rebozos and in the traditional understanding of hands. The rebozo massage brings the parasympathetic system into a quiet and peaceful state; the massage of the abdomen and upper body is then carried out, and finally, the wrapping, or binding using the rebozos happens completing the ritual. Either a song, a poem, chanting, or a guided meditation is given, so to connect and respect with the ancestors, the process of birth, and to allow the woman to begin integrating the ceremony. Then the mother is carefully unwrapped from the rebozos, and this is symbolic of her rebirth, her integration into the new world she is entering.

Once all this is done, taking 2 -3 hours or there abouts, a herbal tea is drunk for warming and grounding purposes.

Beyond the physical benefits, the Closing the Bones ceremony holds deep emotional and spiritual significance. It provides a special and dedicated space for the mother to process her birthing experience, to grieve any losses, and to celebrate her strength and resilience. The presence of a skilled practitioner or a supportive community enhances this healing process, offering a sense of belonging and acknowledgment.

More recently, a growing interest in Closing the Bones is taking place. More training is becoming available, and more midwives, doulas and other practitioners are bringing this ancient and important practice into being. Women who have experienced the Closing the Bones ceremony state how profound a sense of closure occurs, and that is really helps with their physical recovery as well as emotional and spiritual renewal. This ancient practice is something not to be dismissed as woo-woo or new-age, it is something I believe that as midwife, if I could have given to all the women I met over the 20+ years I practiced in the NHS, so many problems, issues, isolation, physical pain and so much more, would have resolved. It is something that should be so normal, so fundamental as a part of birth that women and their families wouldn't think twice of having or even expecting.

Closing the Bones is a testament to the wisdom of our ancestors and the timeless nature of healing rituals. It is a celebration of motherhood, a tribute to the strength and resilience of women, and a reminder of the interconnectedness of body, mind, and spirit. By embracing and honouring this sacred tradition, we not only support new mothers in their journey but also enrich our collective understanding of holistic well-being. It invites us to slow down, to honour the sacred transitions of life, and to reconnect with the ancient rhythms that have sustained humanity for generations. It is a ritual of love, healing, and rebirth – one that deserves to be cherished and passed on to future generations.