

The Basic Needs of a Woman in Labour



This book is inspired by the work of Dr Michel Odent. Dr Odent started his medical career as a surgeon and became involved in birth when he was put in charge of a hospital in Pithiviers, outside Paris. He soon realised that hospitals were not conducive to a woman in labour. They were too bright, sterile and uncomfortable and lacked privacy. He was the first person to introduce low beds (easier for a labouring woman to climb in and out of), dim lighting, beautiful home-like rooms, and eventually water as a form of pain relief, in a hospital setting. The hospital in Pithiviers was so successful that many people came specially to have their babies there. Dr Odent was there from 1962 to 1985. He worked with six midwives and oversaw approximately 1000 births per year. The hospital's maternity section had excellent statistics with low rates of intervention. He eventually moved to London and became a home birth midwife there. Again, he was able to make many interesting observations through his experience there. Later he founded the Primal Health Research Centre (see www.primalhealthresearch.com). For the last 12 years, he has been working with a doula called Liliana Lammers. Together they run the Paramana Doula course in London. Liliana is a quiet and unassuming woman who holds an incredible strength in doing very little at a birth. She is able to hold a space with her presence alone, a quiet strength. She must make a woman feel very safe in labour. Through his many years (more than half a century) of attending births (around 15 000 births) in both hospitals and at home, Dr. Odent has come to the conclusion that a labouring woman needs not much more than to be left alone, simply to be attended to by a quiet, non-invasive and low profile midwife. This little booklet is a summary of what I have learned from attending Michel Odent and Liliana Lammers course

in December 2010, by reading Michels books, and from my own experience and work with pregnant and labouring women.

This is what Dr Odent had to say about this book: There are two important published documents about birth physiology and the basic needs of labouring women. The first one is an enormous book written thousands of years ago. In the very first pages of this bestseller, there are some lines suggesting an association between the consumption of the fruit of the tree of knowledge (translate knowing too much or having developed a powerful neocortex) and the difficulties of human birth. At the end of this book, we can read about the birth of a legendary man whose mission was to promote love. His mother found a strategy to overcome the human handicap: with humility she gave birth among non-human mammals, in a stable. The second document is the opposite of the first one in terms of size. It is a booklet by Ruth Ehrhardt. To bring together what is important in such a small number of pages is a feat. I hope that, on the five continents, all pregnant women, midwives, doulas, doctors, etc. will take the time to assimilate the contents of this chef oeuvre: it will be a turning point in the history of childbirth and therefore in the history of mankind.

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