





Birthing Mama

**Your Companion for a
Wholistic Pregnancy Journey**

*With Week-by-Week Reflections, Yoga,
Wellness Recipes, Journal Prompts, and More*

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Dedicated to
Arin David
and
Irina Sophia

These two beautiful beings chose me as their mama, and they have gifted me the profound personal, spiritual, and physical experience of conception, pregnancy, birth, and motherhood. Through many joys and challenges, they have been my greatest spiritual teachers. They brought me to places I never imagined going, illuminated layers of myself I never would have seen, and have helped my heart to grow in love and wisdom in ways I didn't know were possible.





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Welcome

This book is an offering from my heart. I offer it to you to support your pregnancy in being as transformational for your inner self as it will be for your outer self. I welcome you to approach each piece of this book, week by week, with openness and curiosity. And I invite you to hold yourself with love and compassion as you explore your inner landscape guided by the various prompts throughout.

Birthing Mama was originally born as prenatal and postnatal yoga classes in western Massachusetts. It then evolved into an online program, a prenatal yoga and wellness teacher training, and now the book and keepsake that you hold in your hands. It began for me as a spark of inner guidance from the Divine Mother when I was pregnant with my daughter (my second child) and in the years that followed. I was guided to create a framework to support expectant mothers in experiencing their pregnancy as a sacred and holistic life event and as a pathway to awakening. The process of bringing Birthing Mama to life has changed me, and I pray that my faithfulness and trust in the process add to your experience.

Included in this book is a diverse array of resources and ideas from various perspectives and traditions that have touched me most deeply. Most of the offerings are rooted in the teachings of yoga, Ayurveda, and holistic health, as well as my personal experience of motherhood, teaching yoga classes, training teachers, and working with families since 2003.

This book begins with the gifts and complexities of the first trimester, moves on to weekly offerings for weeks 14 through 40, and closes with the “fourth trimester,” more commonly known as the postpartum period. Each week contains a themed inspirational narrative as well as journal prompts related to your body, mind, and spirit, which will set a tone for that week. The other weekly offerings include musings about your growing baby’s stage of development, a yoga practice, nutritional suggestions and recipes, self-care practices, and creative projects.

As always, consult with your care provider before making changes to your physical or nutritional regime. While this book contains suggestions that I have found to be wonderful complements to the pregnancy journey, you and your care provider should always determine what is best for your health and your unique pregnancy.

The yoga offerings have been carefully chosen to address many common pregnancy-related symptoms and experiences as well as to help prepare you for labor and birth. I introduce movements and postures that strengthen, relax, and open your body, and that bring deep integration and wholeness to your body, mind, and spirit. Some practices are also appropriate for use during labor and birth. It is helpful to have a yoga mat; a pair of yoga blocks; a cushion, blanket, or towel; and a strap. No worries if you don't own these things—you can improvise with what you have at home. Please visit birthingmama.org to access our yoga videos that go into greater depth than what this book allows.

The spirit of Birthing Mama is rooted in love and respect for all. While this book does use she/her/hers pronouns and the terms *mother* and *woman*, this was not done to exclude those birthing parents who identify as male or non-binary. Every offering in this book is intended for any and all who are walking the journey of fertility, conception, pregnancy, birth, and parenthood. Every offering in this book is intended for all who are walking the journey of fertility, conception, pregnancy, birth, and parenthood.

In the deepest sense, *Birthing Mama* is not just about the process of becoming a mama/papa/parent. It's bigger than that. The name Birthing Mama is about birthing, honoring, and nurturing the presence of the Divine Mother and the Creative Principle of life. It's about recognizing that we each carry the Divine Mother within us. Her presence is often hiding, suppressed or ignored amid the pressing needs of life, or dismissed by the cynical and jaded zeitgeist. By celebrating the Divine Mother in every human and within the Earth itself, Birthing Mama seeks to support a movement toward restoration and balance in our collective consciousness.

When the feminine and masculine aspects of ourselves come into greater balance and all pregnant people are able to embark on a conscious pregnancy and birth journey, the way we raise our children will change. When we attend to our own spiritual aspirations and nurture our own inner being, we develop the capacity to nurture more whole and connected adults. This is the way of the future: Let us wake up together, one pregnancy at a time. Let us raise each child with more awareness, and let us create a new society with love and generosity at its center.

With gratitude, love, and blessings,

Corinne



ABOUT YOGA AND AYURVEDA

Yoga and Ayurveda are known as sister sciences that arose out of India. Each comprises a complete philosophical system and includes a wide array practices and frameworks for application. Yoga is basically a framework for self-inquiry and truth seeking. The teachings of yoga grew progressively out of a complex landscape of intersecting lineages, traditions, and streams of wisdom. The practices popular in health and wellness circles in the West represent a very recent riff on this ancient theme. Yes, yoga is about breathing, meditating, alignment, postures, and health-supporting practices, as long as they also serve the deeper purpose of self-inquiry and seeking the true nature of all things. When modern yoga veers into self-improvement, glamor, and ego-aggrandizement, it deviates from the spirit of the tradition.

I began studying yoga in 1998, during a time when I was seeking a sense of self, purpose, and an overall healthier lifestyle. Since then it's been my passion, my personal path, and my work in the world. I have been particularly drawn to yogic teachings about the universal Divine Mother. The Divine Mother pervades all existence: the universe is her body, and she lives within the heart of every being. She

is matter, life, mind, and space. She is alive within compassion and ferocity, harmony and dissonance, chaos and order. The Divine Mother has many different names, forms, faces, and personalities. She is the very life that animates us. She gives birth to every thought, hope, ache, and action. Our hearts' deepest longings to be seen, to be whole and fulfilled, are her longings. She is the source of all comfort, assurance, and satisfaction. We inhabit her and she inhabits us. Humans have praised the Divine Mother since the beginning of time in many different traditions throughout the world. Ancient artwork depicts her as the keeper of fertility, the governor of the cycles of nature, and a force of protection for those who are vulnerable.

Ayurveda is an ancient holistic health-care tradition that focuses on preventing and healing dis-ease in the body, mind, and soul through knowing one's constitution. The teachings of Ayurveda help us discern which specific lifestyle choices will best support our unique body/mind/spirit as it seeks integration and wholeness. It is an old and wise system that leverages practices like herbal medicine, diet, and yoga. I have explored Ayurveda since 2002 and woven its wisdom into my everyday living and teachings.





First Trimester

*The soul swings
through millions of births
like the endless circling
of the sun and moon.*

—KABIR





WEEKS 1 TO 4

Conception

Every woman's fertility and conception journey is as unique as she is. And yet we all begin our lives as two cells that became one—holding completely balanced opposing energies and a spark of divine light. As we divide and multiply and become an embryo, fetus, baby, toddler, child, and adult, we still have a cellular memory of being one single, whole, wise, balanced, and light-filled cell. And this can be radically comforting to remember at times when life feels crazy and complex.

GROWING BABY

- ◆ Fertilization takes place within the fallopian tubes. Three to five days after that, a ball of more than 100 cells (called a blastocyst) will travel to the uterus and implant itself in the uterine lining. The blastocyst is setting up the scene to grow the amniotic sac and the primitive yolk sac, which will eventually become the placenta. The yolk sac will nourish your sweet embryo until the placenta is fully formed.
- ◆ Next, a two-layered disk develops, a midline forms in that disk, and the primitive node arises. The primitive streak will arise from there, laying the foundation of what will become the notochord and then the spine. This means your little one already has the beginning of a core, with what will be a head at one end and a tail at the other.
- ◆ By the end of week 4, your little one will have a neural tube, which will eventually become a brain and spinal cord.

YOGA

Bound Angle Pose

In general, it is safe to continue whatever yoga practice you were engaging in before trying to conceive, as long as you are feeling well enough to do so. Nausea, vomiting, and exhaustion are very common during the first trimester, so if you experience any of these, take a break from practice as usual and do a lot of deep resting in its place.

In any yoga practice, even during this very early phase of pregnancy, remember to always balance the expansion of opening with toning so that you cultivate both flexibility and strength. Try this seated Bound Angle posture to incorporate tone with opening and releasing.

1 Sit tall on a folded blanket, towel, or cushion and bring the soles of your feet together. Your heels should be as close to your pelvic floor (the base/bottom of your pelvis) as is comfortable.

2 Open your knees, but instead of allowing them to simply flop open, gently pulse the soles of your feet together.

3 As you pulse your feet together, current your inner thigh muscles up toward your pelvic floor. To “current” your inner thighs means to engage them but not move them physically—as if you were holding a block between your thighs and were trying to lift it up and into your pelvic floor. For more support, place blocks underneath your thighs.

4 Keep breathing, and explore the balance between staying toned while also opening and releasing. Enjoy for 3 to 10 breaths, or longer if you like.



NOURISH & CREATE

Full-Body Oil Rubs

Create a plan to nourish yourself with full-body oil rubs for the duration of your pregnancy. Do it after a bath or shower, or slather the oil on thick before showering and don't wash with soap, instead letting the water help your skin absorb the oil. Full-body oil rubs are deeply nourishing. They provide a layer of protection for your skin and thereby your whole body, since your skin is the barrier between your outer and inner worlds. Oil rubs are also very grounding and balancing for your nervous system and can support your immune and digestive health. Below are suggestions for oils to nourish you during each trimester.



ESSENTIAL-OIL SAFETY

Do not apply essential oils directly to your skin. They are highly concentrated and should always be diluted in a carrier oil. Use a few drops of essential oils within the carrier oil. Great carrier oils include sesame, olive, jojoba, coconut, and almond oils. Additionally, essential oils should not be used or taken internally.

Different oils vary in potency, so follow the less-is-more policy to play it safe. Try making a massage oil using 1 cup of your choice of carrier oil with 3 to 8 drops of the essential oil. If you have never used an

essential oil, stay closer to 3 drops and do a test rub on a part of your arm to ensure you don't have a sensitivity to it.

Avoid essential oils that are emmenagogues (meaning they may bring on menstrual flow) or are skin sensitizing, irritant, or toxic in nature. These include angelica, aniseed, basil, clary sage, cedarwood, chamomile, cinnamon, elecampane, fennel, ginger, jasmine, juniper, lemon grass, marjoram, melissa, pennyroyal, peppermint, sage, sassafras, thuja, thyme, wintergreen, and wormwood.

First Trimester

During this time, your baby is developing major body structures, including head, limbs, heart, reproductive organs, ears, and other sensory faculties. This can be a challenging time of pregnancy due to morning sickness, nausea, headache, acidity, heartburn, and exhaustion. Try using any of the options below to ease some of the common difficulties of the first trimester.

- ◆ Tangerine
- ◆ Orange
- ◆ Neroli
- ◆ Grapefruit
- ◆ Lavender

Second Trimester

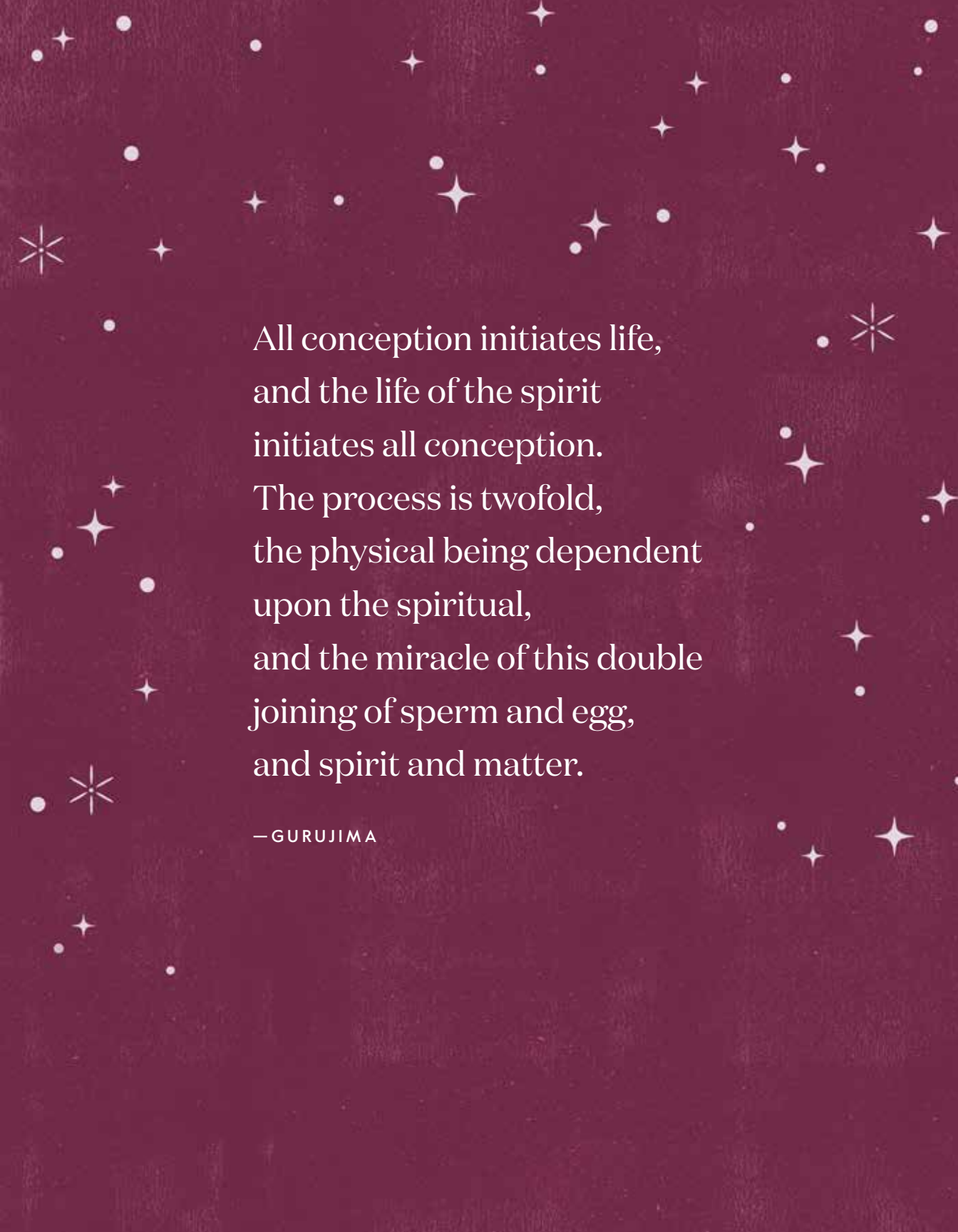
At this stage, your little one is developing muscles, blood, the five senses, skin, hair, fingers, veins, nails, teeth, bones, eyelids, and brain activity. At this juncture, you may face challenges like constipation, itchy skin, stretch marks, anxiety, nervousness, and nightmares. Try these soothing essential oils:

- ◆ Sandalwood
- ◆ Lavender
- ◆ Frankincense
- ◆ Palo santo
- ◆ Grapefruit

Third Trimester

During the third trimester, you will feel your baby move around a lot as your little one becomes fully human. You might experience difficulty sleeping, fatigue, swollen ankles, lower-back ache, and other complexities in your day-to-day living. Try any of these wonderful essential oils:

- ◆ Frankincense
- ◆ Ylang-ylang
- ◆ Mandarin
- ◆ Lavender
- ◆ Lemon
- ◆ Bergamot



All conception initiates life,
and the life of the spirit
initiates all conception.
The process is twofold,
the physical being dependent
upon the spiritual,
and the miracle of this double
joining of sperm and egg,
and spirit and matter.

—GURUJIMA