

Prenatal Psychology – Where Science and Spirituality Meet

I regularly hold 3 day seminars during which I guide people through their own birth and pregnancy. As an introduction, I relate the story of a young woman who succeeded in experiencing a healing new experience during an acutely threatening life crisis and thus had the feeling, for the first time in her life, that she wanted to live and - that means - to be in this world. The experience I have gained while advising and supporting many people over the years, has led me to the conclusion that the source of all our intense emotions, fears and conflicts is always during the preverbal period – in our time as a baby, during the birth and especially during the time in the womb.

This lecture is a summary of my new book: 'The Gateway to Life' which is an account of my experiences in prenatal, body psychotherapy with babies, young children and their families, but also with adults. In this book I have, for the first time, compiled what we know from the literature about the possible influence of a pregnancy – assessed on the basis of depressive moods, fears or feelings of stress on the part of the mother. I would like to supplement this with insights from my therapeutic experience, that a baby senses the unresolved traumatisations of its father just as strongly.

1) Psychological studies:

In the case of depression or fear on the part of the mother during a pregnancy, babies have an increased risk of:

- Premature birth
- Complications during the birth
- Death before or during the birth, a tendency to sudden infant death syndrome
- Low birth weight
- Excessive screaming or apathy on the part of the baby
- Colics, feeding difficulties
- Sleep disturbances
- Clinginess or withdrawal through to autism
- Propensity to illness: collapse of the immune system
- Little curiosity, impaired attention

- Hyperactivity (in combination with attention: the basis for ADHD: attention deficit hyperactivity disorder)
- Heightened fear and frightened behaviour, easily panicked
- Minimal emotional regulation, baby is difficult to placate and the adult also has problems reaching an inner balance
- Delayed motoric and language development
- Diminished learning capacity and intelligence, memory disorders

2) Clinical studies: Most of the research in this area has been carried out by David Barker and Peter Nathanielsz. What they discovered is that a tendency to health or, on the contrary, to illness is moulded during the pregnancy. The term used to describe this is foetal programming. Nathanielsz, for example, has proved that in critical phases of a pregnancy, during periods of rapid cell growth, it can be demonstrated that the embryo is very vulnerable. Under certain circumstances this vulnerability may only reveal itself late in life or even in old age. This is to say that every development is dependent on an earlier phase – it is possible that a minor disorder in the embryo/foetus results in a permanent mutation in the organism. Both researchers, Baker and Nathanielsz, come to the conclusion that the origins of all major illnesses which a person suffers during his/her life are during the pregnancy. This tradition is pursued in the scientific journal: The journal of developmental origin of health and disease (can be googled under dohad). Several world congresses have already been held on this topic.

Parents - and mothers in particular - tend to develop feelings of guilt. Is the enormous significance of the pregnancy far more than they can cope with? It is crucially important to take the following background into account in this regard: Nowadays, every fourth child is aborted during the pregnancy, which means that practically every baby, at the very beginning of its life, has to deal with a high degree of ambivalence on the part of its parents regarding its very existence. However, there are no "wicked" or "bad" parents; there are only those who have to deal with their own state of "not being wanted" in this world. The parent's ambivalence is thus only a repetition of their own fate. When their baby cries intensely, it is a chance for them to cure their own past wounds.

What should not be forgotten in the context of these statements is that the somatic components of all these developments should always be taken into account as well: the environmental pollution and contamination that we are subject to, already affects the baby in its mother's womb, throughout the entire pregnancy.

The spiritual dimension of psychic life

The triumphal march of the sciences over the last two centuries has resulted in spirituality being almost completely banned from our conception of the world. Ken Wilber, in the United States, has been pushing for many years the fact that we will only be able to achieve an "integral" conception of the world, or humanity, when we succeed in combining the scientific discoveries of the West with the spiritual experience to be found in meditation techniques from the East, without one area dominating the other. It should also be mentioned that the loss of spirituality was historically associated with a deafening or blinding to the wishes and nature of a baby.

In prenatal and perinatal psychology, it has been chiefly David Chamberlain and William Emerson who have pointed out that we can only understand a baby, and therefore of course, children and adult human beings too, when we also pay attention to the spiritual dimension of their psychic lives. Wendy McCarty of the Santa Barbara Graduate Institute (welcoming consciousness) believes that we should always try to understand an infant from both perspectives: 1) The baby with its human, corporal consciousness and connected with this, its high degree of vulnerability and 2) The baby with its spiritual, transcendental consciousness, what in common terms is known as the soul. And this soul is of divine origin and thus omniscient (William Emerson). It is only when we take account of both types of consciousness and understand them that we may talk of an integral consciousness, or an integral self. Like many other prenatal therapists, I believe in reincarnation (research by Ian Stevenson and Michael Newton), which means: we are all souls who, in their previous life, could not complete certain tasks and steps in a learning process. This is why we have decided, in the spiritual world, to dare another attempt in this world. In order to take this step, we chose suitable parents with their very particular abilities and strengths, but also with their individual wounds. And how we are moulded in the

pre-linguistic phase, during the pregnancy, the birth and in infancy: this forms the psychosomatic background for our entire lives, the basis for the learning steps planned in our current lives. This is our task in life, the meaning of our lives. And I believe, the harder a person's fate, the greater is the task which he/she has planned in the spiritual world for this world and with these parents. When we succeed in realizing our spiritual potential and transforming our original wounds, i.e. allowing them to heal, then an endlessly beautiful enrichment, a kernel of happiness, contentment and joy is concealed in every hard fate.

We live in a time of great insecurity in the western, civilised world, our social and political structures are threatening to collapse. If prenatal psychotherapy manages to blend together science and spirituality into an integral view of the world and humanity, then we are an important source of hope for the near future, to give people the courage to see this collapse as a prerequisite for the formation of a new world, combined with the evolution of a higher consciousness. I wish us prenatal therapists much trust in our work.

See: www.franz-renggli.ch. Various articles are published there in English as well.