

David Freundlich

A Historical Perspective of Primal Therapy

(Excerpt from a long paper.)

David Freundlich, M.D. is a psychiatrist in private practice in New York City, and he is a founder member of the International Primal Association and a contributor to its journal, *Primal Community*.

JANOV AND PRIMAL THERAPY

Around 1967 Arthur Janov, a psychologist, from Los Angeles, developed Primal Therapy as it is known today. About this breakthrough he wrote (1970): *'Some years ago, I heard something that was to change the course of my professional life and the lives of my patients. What I heard may change the nature of psychotherapy as it is now known - an eerie scream welling up from the depths of a young man lying on the floor during a therapy session. I can liken it only to what one might hear from a person about to be murdered.'*

In *The Primal Scream* (1970) Janov presents his comprehensive theory of the causes and treatment of the neuroses. In *The Anatomy of Mental Illness* (1971) and *The Primal Revolution* (1972) Janov elucidates his own refinements and advances in primal theory and practice, discusses research findings which support his work, and proposes philosophical and social implications of the primal view of man. In *The Feeling Child* (1973), Janov presents worldwide research concerning intrauterine and neonatal life, further clarifies how birth is a prototypic trauma, and discusses childbearing problems. His fifth book, *Primal Man: The New Consciousness*, was published in 1975. Janov is also Editor-in-Chief of *The Journal of Primal Therapy*, a quarterly publication from his Institute with its first issue in 1973.

Janov's writings (in particular *The Primal Scream* and *The Primal Revolution*) have brought Primal Therapy to the attention of the lay public throughout the world and have created a demand for this type of therapy. Many people are deeply moved by these books because of emotional identification with Janov's patients. Janov's books frequently trigger primal feelings which then prompt the reader to seek primal oriented therapy. In fact, after reading Janov many people throughout the country have primaled themselves or sat with each other merely because no primal therapists were available in their area.

In my opinion, Janov's major contributions have been:

1. A unified theory of human development, the etiology of emotional disorders, and of Primal Therapy. Primal theory is basically Freudian in that

it stresses the importance of early childhood experiences on subsequent personality development. However, primal theory is able to adequately explain many facets of human psychology in a less complex manner than psychoanalysis.

2. Whereas Freud saw man as a cauldron of evil forces (sexual and aggressive impulses of the Id) which had to be contained by the defensive system, Janov has a more positive conception of humanity. Janov sees the real self as being needs and feelings. He believes that destructive forces are not intrinsic to humanity, but result from the frustration of basic needs. Janov views defenses as necessary for the child to survive when the hurts are too great and he is not allowed to feel his feelings. However, the defensive structure (unreal self) is neurosis in the adult, while getting better means becoming a more feeling person who needs fewer defenses.

3. The creation of a simple and descriptive terminology which includes: real self and primal needs; primal pain and catastrophic realization; primal pool of pain and reverberating memory circuits; personality split and unreal self; neurotic struggle, false hope and symbolic gratification; prototypic traumatic overload, and defenses; levels of consciousness; primals and primal connections.

4. Janov has developed a powerful regressive therapy that makes it possible to reach depths of historical affect that many other therapies have been unable to tap. Whereas traditional therapy has encouraged a talking about the past, Janov uses methods that enable the recovery of pre-verbal experiences going back to birth and possibly before.

5. The use of isolation during the three week intensive period of daily individual therapy with open ended sessions, as a means of breaking through the defense structure.

6. Human beings are seen in a total psycho-physiological context, and the Primal Institute is searching for physiological correlates of neurosis and health. Their research has focused on such parameters of tension as blood pressure, pulse, temperature and electro-encephalogram and how they are affected during therapy. Janov believes that 'Being neurotic is a physical fact in the brain,' and that getting well must be reflected there also.

7. Rigorous training and supervision in addition to the therapy and research at the Primal Institute.

8. Janov has demonstrated an awareness and interest in the implications of primal for society at large, i.e. the delivery room, childbearing practices, impact of education, causes of violence and crime, etc.

9. Janov has been a powerful and prolific writer in his books and the Journal of Primal Therapy. His presentation is clear and has great emotional impact because the generous case histories, often in form of diaries written by patients, ring a chord of truth in the reader.

In contrast to favorable lay response to Janov, the professional therapist, the training institutes, the professional journal have generally responded unfavorably to Primal Therapy. I believe the main reasons for this rejection are the following:

1. Janov's work became known to the general public through his popular books, whereas most therapists initially present their new ideas to the audience reached through professional journals.
2. Janov first gave the impression that primal is a quick form of therapy: following the three week intensive the patient 'should plan to attend (post-Primal groups) for a period of several months. After that, therapy is over.' Today, most primal oriented therapists (including Janov) consider the process to take a year or more, followed by periodic primaling as the person continues to grow throughout his life.
3. The statement 'The Cure for Neurosis' which appears on the cover of *The Primal Scream* and is reasserted throughout Janov's writings has antagonized many professionals and is confusing to the general public. To claim that Primal Therapy is the only cure for neurosis is indeed a premature statement that also disregards the fact that many persons have been significantly helped by such divergent methods as psychoanalysis and behaviour therapy.
4. I do not think Janov gives adequate credit to the historical predecessors of his work.

The revolutionary methods of delivery and neo-natal care developed by the French physician, Frederick Leboyer, support Janov's work about birth trauma and offer the hope of preventing unnecessary neonatal trauma. See F. Leboyer, *Birth Without Violence*, New York: Knopf, 1975.

5. Janov often states authoritatively as fact what in reality is more probably hypotheses. However, in his third book, *The Primal Revolution*, he utilizes more phrases like 'I think. . . Perhaps. . . Probably. . . It is possible.'
6. Janov's conditions for certifying therapists is apparently so stringent that it is virtually impossible for them to leave the Primal Institute and initiate an independent practice. Apparently those therapists who have trained with Janov and left his organization have not done so under the most amicable circumstances or with his approval.

FEELING THERAPY AND INTENSIVE THERAPY

In 1971 nine professionals who were formally associated with Janov left the Primal Institute and founded the Centre for Feeling Therapy in Los Angeles (6). Two of their therapists were certified by Janov and four others were in training at the Primal Institute. The Centre engages in therapy, training and research, and among therapists affiliated with them are Josepy Hart, Ph.D., Dominic Cirincione, M.A., and Richard Corriere, Ph.D.

Although utilizing the three week intensive developed by Janov feeling therapy seems to differ from Janov's approach by using more eclectic methods; placing greater emphasis on present-day feelings (weekly reality groups) as well as in lie-down abreactive work; and by 'not espousing a final state of health to be labeled cure'.

Another group which broke away from Janov formed the Marin Centre for Intensive Therapy (San Rafael, Cali.) and was co-directed by David Rosen, M.D. and Alvin Wasserman, M.S. They acknowledge that their theoretical roots are founded in Freud, Perls, Reich and Janov.

The Marin Centre defines neurosis as 'the inability to feel our basic needs; the inability to experience what is happening now; a separation between what we think and what we feel; a dulling of the sensorium which prevents the discrimination of specific feelings. . . People who are neurotic have at best a limited capacity to feel. They may understand everything but experience nothing' (brochure).

The Marin Center uses the three week intensive but states, 'If cure is thought of as being anxiety-free, defenseless, a rebirth, we do not cure anyone. Our therapy has modest goals - modest in terms of those who expect a defenseless existence and a total lack of anxiety. We are able to help people experience more of what is happening to them and help them make connections in their past to the feeling basis of many of their present day experiences. . . We do not see ourselves as leaders in a new, therapy-oriented society, or as some mystical order which is engaged in a *messianic mission* to distribute the truth'.

INTERNATIONAL PRIMAL ASSOCIATION

In 1973 about 100 people gathered in Montreal for the first meeting of the International Primal Association (IPA), a group formed independently of Janov under the leadership of William Swartley, Ph.D. and Thomas Verny, M.D., who is in practice in Toronto. The Second Congress of IPA was held in Pensacola, Florida in 1974, and was attended by about 150 people from throughout the United States, Canada, Europe and Israel. Janov was invited by letter to participate but no response was received. The Second Congress also marked the beginning of Primal Community, the IPA journal which is published quarterly.

IPA differs from other professional organizations in that its membership is drawn from

therapists, patients and lay people who are interested in primal oriented therapies. The purpose of the organization is not to establish a professional elite, but to create a forum for the exchange of experiences with primal among as many people as possible. For these reasons some professionals have chosen not to affiliate with IPA.

IPA is concerned about ethics, training qualifications, and certification. These are difficult problems because most people involved in primal were not formally trained but learned about it through their own primaling and Janov's publications. Since primal is such a new field, IPA is reluctant to become a therapist's guild and establish premature and rigid standards. Although IPA does not condone unqualified people labeling themselves 'primal therapists,' it does have a cautious referral network. The problems, however, are compounded by Janov's stern advice: 'WARNING! Primal Therapy should not be practiced by anyone who is not qualified to do so. The only person qualified to practice Primal Therapy is someone with a certificate and approval as a Primal Therapist from the Primal Foundation in Los Angeles, California' (J. Primal Therapy, 2:3, Winter 1975).

In the legal realm, Janov has made it difficult for others to utilize the name Primal Therapy by stating, 'Primal Therapy has been service-marked as a protection to the public. It is available only at the Primal Institute in Los Angeles. It is dangerous in the hands of untrained personnel' Janov's concern for the public being abused by quacks is appreciated, but the fact is that much creative and serious work is occurring in the area of primal throughout the world. IPA fully acknowledges the innovative contributions of Janov but is mainly interested in developing his ideas and methods further.

CONCLUSIONS

At this point, public interest in Primal Therapy continues to grow, but acceptance (or even interest) among the professional community is still scant. Some primal oriented therapists retain strict adherence to the classical form of Primal Therapy developed at the Primal Institute by Janov and his colleagues, while many others have integrated the basic principles of primal with other therapeutic orientations even though Janov denies this possibility in 'The dangers in the misuse of Primal Therapy' (4, Spring 1974).

Just as Freud tried to solidify his position at the head of the psychoanalytic movement, it seems that Janov is trying to control Primal Therapy as though it were his possession. As was Freud's experience, so with Janov - people have had to leave him to develop their own work and ideas. Janov has been seminal in his theories and methods, and it is natural that he should want to guard and protect his discoveries from misuse or misunderstanding. However, he seems to be isolating himself from the primal movement and may unfortunately end up as an outsider to the movement to which he contributed so much.

A century elapsed between Charcot's work with hysteria and hypnosis in 1870 and the publication of *The Primal Scream* by Janov in 1970. I hope this historical perspective conveys the gradual evolution of these ideas, and credits the contributions made by

numerous people in different countries and from various backgrounds. I hope that those involved with primal will continue to grow through a free exchange of ideas and experiences so that even more effective ways of helping people to grow will evolve.

Bill Swartley

Interviewed by John Rowan

I can't help associating Primal with Janov, and talking about it in relation to Janov. Do you have this three-week intensive which Janov first introduced or do you avoid that?

We avoid it. We think two things, which may sound contradictory. One is that his is his most original contribution. The other is that it's gotten very stereotyped. Its gotten to be almost magical and mythological at this point, and I coming from the encounter movement have as one of my major values spontaneity and self-regulation, so we encourage people to do whatever they want to do, and that means that some people will do three weeks, or two weeks, and some people will do one day. We let them *choose* how they do it.

I've got the impression that Janov's three week is really rather programmed. He knows what he expects to happen on Day 4.

I can't really answer that question. As far as I know that's not true. The one impression I have is that the three week intensive with Janov means somewhere between two and three hours a day for the five weekdays, i.e. 15 hours, and in a typical weekend marathon encounter group a person actually puts in that many hours working on himself, or that person can if they can stand it. I believe that a marathon can be a more intense experience than a three week intensive, because in Janov's format he has them staying at a hotel and they go back to the hotel each day, and get started all over again the next morning. That means some start-up time, and so a block of time of even less hours can be more productive than doing the three-week intensive.

How do you work normally?

In a typical group I have 18 people. That's my favourite number in a group. With a female co-leader and usually a number of assistants we'll be doing massage as an adjunct and have a pool as an adjunct. We go round and those 18 people decide what we are going to do in the next period of the group; and some will get into Psychodrama, and go through a rape that they experienced somewhere in their childhood, and others will decide to get into an incest situation with their father and set up a psychodrama situation for that, and others will go to the pool and get into pre-birth and pre-uterine experiences. They pair up and split up and go in whatever direction they are going, and some people will get into birth experience, and pre-birth experience and others adolescent experiences and so forth.