

We come to realise that, even if not always consciously, we function on many levels of existence. Further, instead of seeing the commandment to 'Love thy neighbour as thyself' solely as a moral imperative, we discover, as part of the nature of things, that what we are and what we do for ourselves we inevitably do for and share with others. Although essentially unique individuals, we are not separate. This becomes actual experience. And then we realise how much there is to be done.

As the changes come on, people are increasingly confused. The limitations of ordinary ego-consciousness make us see change largely in terms of destruction and death. I suggest that one of the "ways through" may be the living knowledge that we exist also in other worlds.

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### A NATURAL BIRTH

***36-year-old has her first baby, at home, in Kensington - in warm water!***

This is only a brief report on my wonderful experience - I feel much more could be said, but I hope this short article will be enough to generate some fruitful thinking among parents who are expecting.

My pregnancy went fine. No major trouble. The few inconveniences were all greatly compensated for by the joy of creating a little baby body in my womb, and my feeling so much love for the baby coming to us.

I was confident that I would do the right thing when the time came for the actual birth if I fully understood the process, and both my husband and myself made sure that we would be ready for that.

It was so obvious to us that Baby should be born at home. Hospitals are for illnesses or accidents - birth is a natural process and a joyful event. As a first face-to-face contact with life on Earth, we wanted

Baby to come into a warm and loving atmosphere, into the place where Baby was going to live - not into an unfriendly hospital room full of strange instruments and awful smells. We wanted to be able to choose the midwife carefully and to prepare the birth with her, not to have some total stranger (or worse: strangers) come to us at the moment of the birth, and perform some standard mechanics.

And I wanted to be together with my husband through the birth and then continue to stay together with him and with the baby - as we had done throughout the pregnancy: it would have been awful to have to follow hospital rules and have my husband leave me after such an emotional happening - our 'couple' now becoming a true family.

Originally, having been warned of all the risks of home delivery for an older mother and a first baby, we accepted sadly the prospect of having to book into a hospital: we certainly would not have wanted to take the slightest risk for Baby's health or life, even though I was willing to take the risk of haemorage for myself: The West London Hospital was close, and had a good reputation for natural birth, Leboyer-style (without violence for the baby, as well as for the mother). Anyway, neither the G.P. nor the NHS midwife would take the responsibility of delivering at home the first baby of an 'old mother' (after 30 you are definitely considered to be an old mother, regardless of your health, life-style and attitudes . . . although I truly feel younger and younger as the time passes . . . and intend to continue that way . . .).

One week before the actual due date, we had the opportunity, as part of the hospital's ante-natal classes, to visit the delivery ward. We then definitely felt that, however hard the hospital had tried - and compared with others, I am sure that the West London is very good - we did not want such surroundings for our birth. It seems to me in retrospect that the delivery would have been more difficult in hospital because I would not have felt as comfortable as I did at home - free to do as I wished, to eat or drink what I suddenly felt like, or to listen to music.

But by now, there was only one week to go! I found some brief information about the Natural Childbirth Trust, and as it seemed in the line of what we wanted, I telephoned - to be told that a midwife had to be booked at least six months before the due date, and that there were only two in London anyway, and one of them was leaving on holiday just the next day! Not very encouraging.

But we are not people who give up when it is important, and to prove that miracles are possible, I was eventually put on to Belinda, a young, well-trained midwife, who herself already had a two-year-old son. Belinda agreed to re-arrange her activities and to take charge of the home birth of our baby. God Bless Her ! And she was absolutely perfect all along.

I asked her before making the commitment what she would do, if . . . (all the problems which might occur, as I had been warned) and Belinda explained exactly how each of these could be handled. At worst, we would slow down the process of the birth and drive to the hospital.

Once the home birth was arranged, our G.P., the area NHS midwife, and the registrar we had been under at the West London, were all quite happy about it and wished us well. As Baby was eventually over two weeks overdue (apparently), we were grateful to be able to pop into the hospital three times in the final six days to monitor Baby's (very healthy) heartbeat on their machines. And our decision not to consider inducing was right, as Baby's condition and the condition of the placenta were perfect at the birth.

Eventually the contractions started on the early morning of the 7th of July, and I could quietly continue to have a nice time at home, not worrying about when to rush to the hospital. I was of course in regular telephone contact with the midwife, who came at about 7pm, and checked then that everything was all right. She told me, too, that when the contractions got stronger, it was generally comfortable to get into a warm bath. I did . . . and as soon as I was in it, I felt so much better . . .

I began to think "I am very comfortable here in the water - Baby is also in the warm water of my womb, and has been in warm water for nine months - Leboyer puts babies back into a warm water bath just after birth to make them feel comfortable . . . . Why should I get out of the bath just to give birth?!"

So I asked Belinda if anyone had ever thought of that or even done it: "that's interesting you might think of that, because Dr. Odent in France has just recently started delivering babies in a pool, and they are doing the same in Russia, too. They do it in a swimming pool".

We checked that it was possible as well for us and that there was enough space for the midwife to deliver Baby from her position at the edge of the bath, and she then said: "Well, if this is what you want, I can do it!" I must say that Belinda belongs to an organisation

(The Association of Radical Midwives) whose purpose it is to give back to the mothers the responsibility in the birth, and to take the mothers off their role as 'patients', obeying the (generally male) specialists. At this point, I decided only to stay attuned to what I would feel was right, moment by moment. My first concern was naturally that Baby should be comfortable, and in fact I have the impression that she was sleeping through the entire process, as she only kicked twice, each time when my husband put his hand on my belly (we got used to this behaviour during the pregnancy!) The stronger the contractions became, the less question there was for me to leave the bath.

Belinda was regularly adding hot water from our electric kettle to the bath to keep it warm, while my lovely husband was giving me not only all his loving support, but also two strong arms and hands for me to squeeze while I bit very hard, with all my nerves on the thick rubber of a kitchen spatula! to make sure that the tension was all only in my hands and teeth, not in the area of the womb where it would interfere with the natural, automatic work of the muscles. Terry's love was very efficient at that time, and I could not imagine giving birth to our baby without him. I am sure, too, that the homeopathic treatment followed three weeks before the birth (caulophillum 30) and the lobelia herb preparation (the day of the birth) helped as well. And Belinda herself was perfect, being very discreet while I was following my own attunement with Baby's progress, and then guiding me very well when I asked her what I should do at the second stage.

At 10.30 Belinda had estimated that delivery would not be before 2.30 am. In fact the contractions went so well with the water that Baby was born at 0.30 am. Baby came out safely under water in the hands of the midwife and then immediately out of the water on to my belly. Our lovely Baby girl gave just one brief cry - the first breath - and from then on breathed gently on my breast where I could pour on to her a stream of love and words of welcome. We had talked so much to her while she was in the womb, not able to imagine her face, and now there she was!

Baby herself was born with no more than one tiny spot of blood on her cheek, and there was absolutely no distortion to the shape of her head. She had plenty of hair, and her little fingernails were already long enough to need cutting. Baby did not develop any jaundice like many babies apparently do after a few days.



***A few minutes after the birth. Happy Mother, Baby, Father, and dolphins on the bathroom wall.***

We had used no drugs; no incisions had been necessary; so no stitches; and there were only two little bruises that were uncomfortable. I found that there is a natural mechanism which gets the mother to relax totally between contractions (actually "between" rather means "when the contractions were less strong", as they were non stop after 9.30 pm).

The cord, which generally stops pulsating after 5 minutes, continued to pump healthily for half-an-hour, much to our surprise, at which point it was beginning to be much weaker. The time being right, at Terry's suggestion, I did the cutting myself (I didn't feel anything of course, and Baby didn't react either). It seemed right, as Baby was attached to me, that I would be the one to un-attach her. Afterwards Terry very happily took Baby in his arms.

The placenta, which was holding firmly as long as I was in the bath, was delivered very easily without the usual injection by squatting in the bath while letting the bath water run out - the gravity and the apparent suction of the falling water level on the weight of the placenta all seemed to help considerably, and it dropped itself into the water like a ripe fruit, entire and beautiful.

There was no mess anywhere in the home (I had been a little bit concerned for my wall-to-wall carpet at the prospect of a home birth, so I appreciated this trivial detail!). Without getting out of the bath I could shower and be ready for a very welcome and deserved bed (ours!) in our next door bedroom.

Once I was in bed, Baby was given back to me, and she sucked the precious colostrum from my breasts for one whole hour. I then slept for a very good night, Baby lying between myself and Terry, who so much enjoyed her little contented gurgles.

I am not saying that hospitals are not useful, and as each case is different, every mother has to check that all the best conditions are realised before making the decision of a home birth, (and the most important of all is certainly confidence), but in case of a home birth, my experience is that the birth under water makes everything much easier and probably much more secure.

I do not want either to give the impression that it was all dream-like pleasure. Obviously if it had not been for the birth of our baby, the same sensations would have been very painful. Only the love and the joy transformed the contractions into a 'labour' rather than a 'pain'. I must also say that our neighbours thought there were cats around that night, as I used the screaming to release some of the tension and effort! There is indeed a tremendous energy involved and the feelings are quite spectacular, although I did not feel any ecstasy sometimes described about birth. At the end of the first stage - around 10.40 to 11.00 pm - I was probably feeling about the same as mothers who ask for an epidural, but I knew that this would have prevented me pushing in due time, and might have made Baby dangerously listless, and the greatness of the work I was accomplishing gave me such determination that I told my husband at that point: "I think I can stand it for as long as necessary". Patience went along with the strong intention to see Baby, gently and safely, and as soon as possible, OUT.

Whether it is thanks to the fact that I was in my home, baby being with me all the time, sleeping in the same bed - or to the good food my husband got for me - or the absence of drug after-effects - I did not have any trace of "post natal depression". On the contrary, for the month following the birth I felt an extraordinary feeling of joy, love, and a happy development of my spiritual awareness as being now a parent. (God has often been compared to a father, and now more and more to a "father-mother").



*Baby in bed, seven hours after the birth.*

I am so grateful about this birth for myself, for Baby, and for my husband! He told me just one hour ago "Do you know, I recall the birth so many times, and I am so moved!" Our love for each other had already increased a lot during the pregnancy, the birth itself did much more. This is why I take the time and trouble to write although I am very busy now with our lovely daughter and the housework: I will be so pleased if more and more parents can have births in this way - and even better . . . . . WHY NOT ?

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