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# PRIMAL INTEGRATION WORK

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by

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## The LSD-Primal Era

My own entry into this field dates back to 1954 when I began, at Scaleshor Park Hospital under the NHS, to use LSD 25 in the therapy of neuroses and personality disorders. A paragraph in the 1965 Introduction to the tome *Clinical Theology* expresses my initial incredulity at the regularity with which peri-natal traumas were relived.

*'What I was not prepared for was the frequent abreaction of birth trauma. I was assured by neurologists that the nervous system of the baby was such that it was out of the question that any memory to do with birth could be reliably recorded as fact. I relayed my incredulity to my patients, and, as always happens in such cases, they tended thereafter to suppress what I was evidently unprepared, for so-called scientific reasons, to believe. But then a number of cases emerged in which the reliving of specific birth injuries, or forceps delivery, of the cord round the neck, of the stretched brachial plexus, and various other dramatic episodes were so vivid, so unmistakable in their origin, and afterwards confirmed by the*

*mother or other reliable informants, that my scepticism was shaken. Even if the patient had known that this or that difficulty had attended his entry into the world, nothing would convince him or her that this was a fantasy, and not an actual reliving of a vividly 'remembered' birth. Later, I visited an international congress of psychiatrists working with LSD and learnt that they, too, had collected many records of birth trauma, abreacted under lysergic acid. It seemed that Otto Rank has been right all along. This left me free to allow my patients to continue my education!'*

Only at the very end of our LSD era, in 1969 and 1970, did we invite those who wanted to work at primal depth with LSD to come for five days, six 'patients' with six spouses or friends. This group work greatly potentiated the process and I wished we had got on to it earlier. However, at that time, the Reichian and Bioenergetic discovery broke upon us, claiming that deeper breathing alone, nothing more 'chemical' than that, in a supportive group context, was a sufficient catalyst to primal recapitulation and assimilation. We quickly found this to be so, and

'primal' work became the deepest layer of the emotional re-education process we offered in our residential Growth Groups and in individual therapy (usually with counsellors in training present, along with a spouse or friend).

### **Otto Rank. The Trauma of Birth**

In spite of Freud's reluctance to work with primal material, the analytic movement had subsequent prophets calling their colleagues to take seriously the traumatic experiences before, during and after birth. Otto Rank, perhaps emboldened by Freud's statement that 'all anxiety goes back originally to birth', unexpectedly published his own revolutionary book on **'The Trauma of Birth'** in 1923. Freud wrote eagerly to Ferenczi that it was 'the most important progress since the discovery of psycho-analysis'.

In it, Rank wrote, 'we believe we have discovered in the trauma of birth the primal trauma'. He refers frequently also, to primal anxiety' and to 'primal repression'.

#### **'All neurosis goes back to birth'**

'We believe', wrote Rank, 'that we have succeeded in recognising all forms and symptoms of neurosis as expressions of a regression from the stage of sexual adjustment to the pre-natal primal state, or to the birth situation, which must be thereby overcome'. 'We have recognised the neuroses in all their manifold forms as reproductions of, and reactions to, the birth trauma'. They are therefore 'not diseases in the strict medical sense of the

term'. They represent failed attempts to overcome the birth trauma. 'All symptoms ultimately relate to this primal fixation', and the place of the fixation is 'in the maternal body' and in peri-natal experiences'.

### **The 'purely human' task**

Rank asserted that this is 'technically possible' and that it 'means going back to a repetition of the birth trauma, with the help of an experienced midwife. I have purposely avoided writing "doctor",' Rank says, 'because I want to emphasise the purely human and practical factor of the process'. With this trend towards lay participation I fully agree.

### **Betrayal**

Unfortunately for Rank and for psychoanalysis, Freud, over the course of six weeks in 1924, yielded to the protests of Abraham, Jones and others of the core group, which inflamed his own fear 'lest the whole of his life work be dissolved by the importance attached to the trauma of birth. He turned against Rank, writing to Abraham, 'I am getting further and further away from the birth trauma, I believe it will "fall flat" if one doesn't criticise it too sharply, and then Rank, who I valued for his gifts and the great service he has rendered, will have learned a useful lesson'.

What astonishes a primal therapist like myself, who for twenty-three years has been digging out these experiences as **direct** memories (whether assisted by LSD or not) and as immediately available primal

relivings, is to realise that all the work of Rank, and of the two other distinguished psycho-analysts in this field, Nandor Fodor and Francis Mott, depended on the analysis of derivative, or secondary data emerging from dreams or within the transference.

### **Nandor Fodor (1895-1964)**

Nandor Fodor in **The Search for the Beloved** extended the analytic understanding of peri-natal events more than any other analyst. Most of the findings we have arrived at by direct reliving, he reached derivatively, through dreams.

### **Recreating the conditions of birth by simulation**

Mindful of these findings, that birth-related symptoms are at the root of so many personality disorders, behavioural problems, emotional difficulties, commitment - and separation-anxieties, compulsive clingings and aversions, and phobias, from the fear of death, or falling, or being crushed, to sleep-walking, Fodor wrote,

*An intelligent recreation of the conditions of birth and a re-living of the ordeal by simulation are techniques which the growing generation desperately needs.*

That could well stand as a text for what is actually happening now in all the centres where Primal Integration is offered.

### **W. Donald Winnicott**

Support for the relevance of birth trauma has not come from many

British psychiatrists or psychoanalysts, but has been given by one of the most distinguished of them, Dr. Donald Winnicott. He writes 'The . . . point that I want to make is that in common with other analysts I do find in my analytic and other work that there is evidence that the personal birth experience is significant, and is held as memory material'. He was also clear that intra-uterine experience pre-natally was of importance to later development.

*There is certainly before birth the beginning of an emotional development, and it is likely that there is before birth a capacity for false and unhealthy forward movement in emotional development; in health environmental disturbances of a certain degree are valuable stimuli, but beyond a certain degree these disturbances are unhelpful in that they bring about a reaction. At this very early state of development there is not sufficient ego strength for there to be a reaction without loss of identity . . . . When birth trauma is significant every detail of impingement and reaction is, as it were, etched on the patient's memory in the way to which we become accustomed when patients relive traumatic experiences of later life . . . One meets an order of detail which cannot fail to impress.*

### **The Group Process as the Matrix for Primal Integration**

It should be made clear at the outset that Primal Integration work, as we offer it, is only one aspect of a total group process. In a week-end

conference of, say 14 members divided into two sub-groups of seven, each with a leader and co-leader, it may be well on into the second day before anyone is 'ripe' for primal work. On the other hand, when, as often is the case, members are on a return visit, they may come appropriately ready to 'work' as soon as the groups divide.

### **Introductions**

After a meal and introductions the members are invited to share whatever they choose to about their lives at this point, and particularly what they hope to work on during the week-end. As they begin to open up on a bewildering variety of problems, they gain courage from one another and a group of people emerges ready to take certain well-judged risks. In order to be free to grow together in a limited time they allow trust and openness to develop without the usual British delay and caution. The leaders' responses facilitate this movement towards sharing by staying close to what people are feeling, sensitive to the ambivalence about risk-taking which is inevitable at the start.

### **Focusing**

We find it helps to focus each person's task by inviting them to say in what way they would like to be different when they leave on the third day. This enlarges their expectancy of something radically changing for the better during this time. That leaders encourage this definitive staking of a claim on the group's time with serious intention, implies that they have some faith in the process. We expect major

changes to take place and few leave without a significant movement, felt to be growth. Most people nowadays seem to come with something already shaping up in their minds, a difficult relationship perhaps, a major decision that has to be made with an as yet unclear emotional background, a secret fear or doubt or disability that is really hurting. We make it clear that this is only a preliminary negotiation of something to work on, and that this can be changed. As the group life deepens people find that they can bring up issues so painful that they never imagined that it could be possible to speak of them. Others may realise that they had not bargained on the strength of their own inner resistances. Our main difficulty seems to be with people who have been over-persuaded by others to come, or have been 'sent'.

### **Facilitative Leadership**

Meanwhile all the leaders are homing in on what people are offering, making a preliminary estimate of the level on which they are likely to be able to work. What ego strength do they have in themselves? How do they relate to the group? Do they come over as adults who will be able to be affirmed by the group to do their own work, or are they still in their 'Child', asking the group and the leadership to 'Parent' them? If so, they are not really able yet to take responsibility for genuine work at recovering the painful bits. Or are they perhaps already struggling with painful defensive needs to withdraw inwardly, experiencing precisely this loving group life as an increased threat? How realistic are the expectations?

## Guidelines

Among the guidelines offered by Michael Broder for the members of his primal integration groups are suggestions such as these:

1. Participate as you see fit, but remember, the responsibility to get that which you have come for rests with you at all times. You are encouraged to allow yourself the liberty of always being yourself, and exploring all aspects of your personality.
2. When you become aware of something you want, do not wait for the leaders or other group members to come to your aid. Ask for it. If you find this difficult to do, that in itself may be worth working on.
3. If you get into a feeling, go with it. You do not have to wait your turn or be concerned that what you are experiencing was not what was on your 'agenda'. Always trust your body and inner sense of spontaneity to lead the way.
4. This is **your** group. If you don't like what is happening, or if it is not moving in the direction you would like, express yourself. Also, if you feel an urge to confront or reach out to another member, **do it**.
5. When reacting to others, try to make 'I' statements rather than asking questions or talking in generalities. Such statements can often tell you much about who you are if you listen to them.
6. You are encouraged to be as open and honest with yourself and

others as you can allow yourself to be. We suggest that you let the group see more of the real you than you normally reveal to others in your life. This group is a place where it is not only acceptable, but highly desirable to let down your social façade.

7. Both inside and outside the group, try to move into areas of new behaviour. Taking risks in the 'here-and-now' is the essence of the integration process that will result in those desired changes in your attitudes, beliefs and behaviours.

## Resistances

Most human grouping in society, including the religious and the medical, the educational and the social work, are not, at this stage of the game, very friendly to this primal integration project. That is not to be wondered at. They are products of our culture and its basic demand has been that fallen human nature itself, which has provided us with a tough armament of defensive mental mechanisms inwardly, and an endless programme of diversionary games to play outwardly (some very good religious and philanthropic games, academic and therapeutic games among them) should be allowed to go on with its defences intact. To attempt reconciliation at depth in spite of intense resistances and neglectful of diversionary tactics, is for most people unthinkable. There has, however, never been a time when so many people were open to the possibility that we can dispense with games and venture creatively into the interior of our disordered selves, to make

tracks in the jungle and clearings fit for people to live in.

### **The Primal Integration Process**

By an odd coincidence, for the way back, the directions proposed by the Primal Integrators seem to be synonymous with those in Scripture for 'entering the Kingdom of God'. It is to be entered, only 'through great tribulation (**thlipsis** in the Greek means 'strong crushing pressure'), by 'becoming as little children' (the **infans** in infancy means 'not speaking', by re-entering the pre-verbal areas) and by 'being born again' (much as Nicodemus suggested and was not flatly contradicted). All of which, the mature man of the world and the man of religion hopes to avoid. 'Strength made perfect through weakness' has a low appeal-rating.

Although this tribulation, the reliving, now, of the fall into dread and the abyss is undeniably frightening, I can think back on dozens of occasions when it has been undertaken by courageous people of all ages, including, some while ago, a clergyman of 64 about to move into retirement. They are able, in the strengthened fortitude of the adult, to relive the child's fragmenting dereliction along with it, bearing the whole experience up into a vastly enlarged consciousness. It is here that 'the theological resources' of the death of Christ and His own dereliction are of paramount importance, and not only to known Christians.

### **Post-abreactive rewards and tasks**

The satisfactory conclusion of any piece of primal work which has

enabled some trapped fear or longing, rage or joy, wilderness-state or prolonged birth struggle to be reached and fully explored, felt, expressed and connected up to its original context, is one of immense satisfaction and sense of achievement. It is also very moving to watch a person who has seemed to be, though supported by the group, quite cut off in the primal experience, turn at the end of it and look round at the group with a feeling of intense love and gratitude. At that point, the joyful hugs which would have been utterly inappropriate earlier are quite appropriate now. But this is not a Parent Child affair, they are Adults celebrating the victory of one of their number. 'When one member rejoices, all the other members rejoice with it'.

### **Leading captivity captive**

The tasks of re-entry must be taken seriously if any lasting benefit, growth, maturation and change is to accrue. This requires three columns. (I learnt this from a Baptist Minister friend who is very expert in the use of primal method in the community of which he is leader).

**The first column** contains all the 'conclusions' and 'decisions' they came to about life and death, danger and deliverance, in those hectic hours of pain, or in the stretched out deserts of weakness. The spontaneous words that struggled to grasp the non-verbal experience before language was formed often have the force of a life-motto.

**The second column** contains a record of all the recent and some past occasions when their life has been irretrievably controlled and skewed by that 'prematurely final' conclusion in the first column. These usually come in clusters, all similarly patterned, and scattered up and down through life from infancy to the present moment. Their patterns evoke each other, grim reminders of an unfaceable day, too often the First Birthday.

**The third column** is for breakaway decisions, either counter to the first two, but preferably totally free of them. It is a good thing to break a

bad habit by systematically doing the opposite, creating the good habit in counterpoise. But it is better to reach down to the roots of being, in nature and in grace, to celebrate the new-found freedom and to ask what new style of loving and living caring and creativity, flows by the Spirit out of these inwards parts. So the third column may be 'a Word from the Lord', laying down new relationships, new freedoms, new and joyous disciplines. Or it may record the first free personal decision this person has been able to make, unthreatened by the old fears now their bondage is broken and the days of their power past.

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