

REGRESSION

THE PRIMAL PROCESS

Memories of Bill Swartley

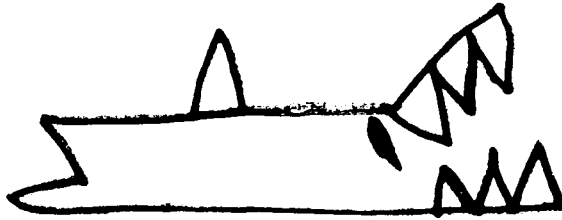
by Howell Lewis

Howell Lewis is a biologist who worked with Bill Swartley nearly twenty years ago.

"The Primal Integration Process
Is certainly not the only Way,
But it may be one of the hardest paths
For it offers no magic solutions.
For systematically denies you *anyone*
To whom you can surrender *any* responsibility.
It provides you with *no* one to look up to
Except your very own Self.
If you, nevertheless, choose to continue the Primal Process
It leads you, inevitably, to an active encounter
With the very worst in your Self.
Primal takes away only with the greatest pain
For which you may exchange
Only simple joy.
Finally,
You loose even your Self.
Even the Road disappears!"

Bill Nils 1976.

(A.k.a. Bill Swartley, from a dream.)



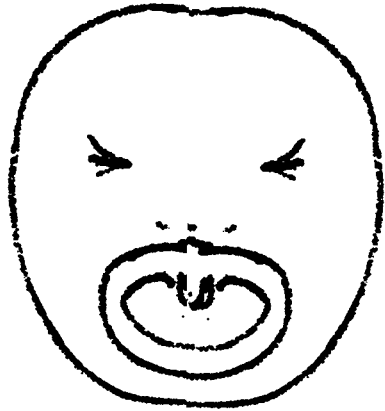
The Australian sun shone brightly from a cloudless blue sky and the ocean surrounding me sparkled and danced with joy. I was treading water beyond the breaking surf waiting for a big wave. My body lifted effortlessly as a wave passed on the way to its inevitable fate. Another big mound rose in the water ahead of me and flowed through. It was too fast to catch so I turned to acknowledge the timeless end of a long journey, the unstoppable force crashing and foaming where it met dry land. 'Problem was I didn't see the fin following this wave until it was a mere foot away. Clearly I was the only wave, the only body it wanted to surf. Instinct took over. I dived under into its world where my little body was no match for its power. I swam into the gap my head had opened in the sandy bottom but as I kicked and struggled for my life the sand turned into grease and, despite my frantic efforts, I couldn't move. It could though; sharp teeth in muscular jaws headed for me mercilessly.

I want a cure

I was left shaking uncontrollably for the rest of the day - my dreams are very vivid and real. After several other equally terrifying dreams I went to the University psychiatrist for help. He prescribed some pills, told me not to worry and sent me on my way. Dissatisfied with this approach and, having read some Jungian theory about integrating the unconscious, I set about looking for a suitable therapy. A friend lent me some Arthur Janov books. Primal therapy seemed to be *it*. Then I came across an ad in a psychology journal for a lecture on Primal Integration by Dr W. "Bill" Swartley. Impressed by him, his theoretical knowledge and experience, and by the therapists who worked with him, I made arrangements to attend a weekend group later that month. Previous sitting and talking sessions had not prepared me for what I was about to experience, nor had the Janov books.

The group room was a sea of foam. What I had jumped into? Where was the shark? Bill began by making it clear there were no instant cures on offer and that Primal was the most painful therapy available, leading to changes in friends, jobs, partners, income (usually lower) and life-style. Anyone not prepared for this could leave before the group began in earnest. I hadn't anticipated being warned off or making any changes in my life: I just wanted to be 'cured' of the nightmares and inexplicable depressions that had plagued me for too long. As a

biologist I knew growth was the only true criterium for determining life but didn't know that given neurotic defensive patterns laid down in infancy, it is not easy, quick and painless. Despite the warnings I stayed and worked with Bill for the two years prior to his death. And, although over fifteen years ago, I am still working with the challenges it provoked.



I chose my parents

...regression and subsequent reparenting featured very strongly in the early days of Primal communities

Primal Integration is about reaching self actualisation by working through traumas abreactively and then experiencing a second 'good enough' childhood. The English psychotherapists Winnicott, Balint and Guntrip were major influences and the phenomena of benign regression and subsequent reparenting featured very strongly in the early days of Primal communities. But about the time I was involved with

Bill, 1976/7, he was more interested in connecting with internal, archetypal parents, thus promoting greater self-sufficiency and eliminating the need for a primarily orientated supporting community. Bill Swartley's definition of Primal is 'who you were before you were born.' The bottom line is accepting responsibility for choosing your parents, nationality, era, spiritual influences etc, i.e. your whole life. And, from previous lives too, totally working through major traumas in order to rise above them, to forgive and be forgiven. It was this spiritual aspect of Bill's broad approach which most attracted me to him, even if, at the time, I wasn't terribly clear about it.

Doing nothing and doing it very well

So, how did he work; what did Bill do? As little as possible:

‘Anything a therapist does for a client effectively robs them of the chance to do it for themselves.’

His strength lay in being *comfortable* with who you were, *what* you were going through and *wherever* you needed to regress to. This ease effectively gave you permission to move through the presenting layer of feelings to the more intense feelings below and then on down to the mechanism of change layer at the bottom. But only if you were ready to. His confidence, respect and trust in *you* and *your* process helped to dispel the terror that inevitably surfaces along the way and so often stops any deeper work. His eclectic approach meant it was possible to swap options easily, e.g. if stuck in the feeling function it was okay to work on thinking. His razor sharp perceptiveness was useful too. Not that he intruded unnecessarily or did anything: unless you asked! He emphasised the *integration* and *change* aspects of the process, for without them there is no point in reliving so much pain and there is a danger of going round and round merely making the rut deeper.

He gave people hope because, thanks to his warm and *total* acceptance of them, they perceived themselves as okay too.

Everybody’s shit stinks

Shadowy aspects were not seen as anything different, they just were. After I’d bashed hell out of a cushion and admitted to my murderous feelings, a big step at the time, he simply replied: ‘Welcome to the human race.’ He enjoyed his work and was modest: not high priestly,

‘We are all our own gurus.’

And to that extent we are equal. Yes, we *are* responsible for our own growth, but that didn’t mean to say he did not care. He had an immense capacity to *listen* wholeheartedly and involve himself in client’s work without actually doing anything other than just being himself, i.e. real and present all the time. A product, no doubt, of the work he’d done, first and foremost, on himself. It is very difficult to describe his inspirational energy but after training as a healer I now realise it was *the* essential healing ingredient: love. He trusted life as an okay process and saw it as an opportunity to come to terms with death, as a time to resolve and go beyond attachments, to live now.

Regressing to preverbal spaces was bad enough, but when my base chakra opened after some particularly intense work, my world was turned upside down

Pleasure harder than pain

Going back to rational University life after a group was always a problem. I had been trying to come to terms with belief in something other than the material world for several years but, despite methodically searching for an answer, I still did not have proof. (I now realise God does not have parameters). Regressing to preverbal spaces was bad enough, but when my base chakra opened after some particularly intense work, my world was turned upside down. I asked Bill what the hell was going on. I mean, I was there to get better, not experience 'condalini' (as I thought he said). At the time there weren't many explanatory books around but I eventually managed to find one in a small shop near the British Museum. (There certainly weren't any in the University library). What I read was more weird and wonderful than I could imagine. And worse: Kundalini and God consciousness. What!? Give me statistics any day! Many groups, much cathartic and energy work, insights and chakra openings later, my deepest and most profoundly challenging experience was a regression to death in my last life.

I had regressed to birth and into my womb many times; useful cathartic stuff but still this lifetime. That it was possible at all wobbled my belief system but going back further could only mean there really is life before and after death, God/soul exists, and that I had lived and died before. And, horror of horrors, according to the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Stan Grof and Bill's work I had indeed chosen my life. What a bummer! I spent the first day of the weekend taking in good nourishment like group massages and just generally being happily regressed. Bill believed Westerners have more difficulty with pleasure than pain and always encouraged as much pleasure as possible because taking in goodies first sets up a space from which to deal with even deeper stuff later and, just for itself, is growth work (not all primal needs to be painful). The following morning big energy rushes flowed up from my base centre. My head wanted to nod, so I let it. Before long it was hanging sideways on my chest and when I lay down my jaw dropped open. Wide open. I lay there unable to speak or move. Bill came over and put a rubber hose around my neck. He didn't say anything but just sat patiently next to me. After a few minutes (?) I fell asleep only to dream I was ice skating in a circle and, in the process, cutting a hole in the ice. I woke in a terrified panic with one leg in the air trying to stop myself from falling through the hole as the ice fell away. Later that day Bill showed me a photograph of hung people, their heads and jaws dangling as mine had been. His only comment.

'We are our own judge, jury and executioner.'

Connect with my Soul

Unfortunately one recollection wasn't enough to work through the memory of this trauma. A few weeks later I had a gut churning dream in which two people were to bite my neck with large fanged teeth. Just as they bit it the guy I was sharing a room with crunched on a piece of crusty toast; I *felt* and *heard* the sound *in* my neck. I woke, sat bolt upright and stared at him in horror. He stopped in mid bite, looked quizzically at his toast then asked if I was okay. I grunted, fell back down and slept soundly for hours. After many similar dreams and a lot of heartbreaking release I no longer suffer such horrific nightmares. A trance medium has since confirmed that tragic life/death .

The Primal process has led to connecting with my soul and I no longer have any problem believing in anything other than the material world and, thanks to being relatively free of blockages, I have had brief kundalini experience about ten times. The process continues.

I would like to thank Nick Hyam for his support and for his excellent constructive criticism on this article.

