

Lessons with Leonard

Lee Preisler

Lee Preisler is Director of and trainer at the Holistic Rebirthing Institute and Transformational Trainings, a counsellor and a group leader

When I first met Leonard Orr, father of rebirthing, I was not particularly happy with what I saw. He reminded me of too many other 'smart aleck' black-leather jacketed 'know-it-alls' I was only too happy to leave back in America. I had come down from Findhorn, Scotland, representing myself and the newly formed rebirthers group within the community. However I was willing to overlook my first impressions, because every now and again I would hear a 'gem of wisdom' to remind me that here was a totally committed and courageous innovator from whom, with enough patience, I could learn much.

I had no idea then that he was actually pushing me along as fast as I could go. That first evening he said something important, rather simply, that went straight in having to do with the over-active attached mind always insisting upon analysing every little thing before co-operating. "When you take out the garbage you don't have to go through every little bit, you can just let it all go." I was also stunned when he discussed the topic of physical immortality, which brought up basic life questions I hadn't considered, let alone remembered, since early childhood.

Along with the breathing sessions, I felt I was regaining parts of myself I had given away in order to become what I thought was a mature and worldly adult. Floods of feelings and memories followed.

In the Underground

I was quite envious of his seemingly inexhaustable supply of personal power and magnetism. I asked him about it and was told, "personal power is equal to the number of transactions completed in the moment." That didn't quite sink in till I witnessed him negotiating with each participant for the cost of the training. Toni Tye, whom I met on the training (and was later to become my wife and partner) will serve as a good example here. She explained that she didn't have money to pay for the training, but was a photographer and would be willing to take publicity photographs.

He ignored her promises for photos (although years later he used a brilliant photo taken by her for his cassette jackets), and asked her how much money she had on her now. Six pounds, was the answer. "I'll take half that now," he told her. I watched him, over and over, negotiate until both he and the other person were satisfied. Nothing was left over to be completed at a

future date; he never felt cheated, as if he seemed to know that his good work would always be rewarded in one way or another. The other person was always left feeling that he had given Leonard everything he wanted in exchange for the training, even though it was often less than the training was supposed to cost.

In retrospect, I can now see that Leonard's major method of teaching is by directly confronting a person with the experience of that which they need to learn. I travelled the length of Britain, with all the money I possessed, in order to be trained in rebirthing and be rebirthed by 'the man' himself. I was in for an initial disappointment, as Leonard had brought with him three assistants, two women and a man, each of whom was still comparatively in the early stages of their own learning process, and we were asked to choose one to be our rebirther for the duration. I thought I'd feel safer with a woman, but the man approached me said that he was planning on coming to Findhorn for a month and could continue to work with me, so I chose him. I was staying in Covent Garden and each morning would travel by underground from Leicester Square (Northern Line) to Brent Cross, thirteen stops further on. As fate would have it, as I jumped on the train one morning there was Leonard (with a sweet young French girl-friend/groupie) also on the way to the training. Almost as soon as we sat down (Leonard across from me), he looked around the crowded car and remarked how stuffy it felt and would I mind if he did some breathing. "It's fine with me," I replied, thinking what an eccentric man this was who was so addicted to this type of breathing that he had to do it even in public. Within a few stops, the energy around Leonard was becoming very psychedelic. I couldn't believe the man sitting next to me was still buried in his morning paper, as if nothing extraordinary was taking place. It felt as if Leonard was the only person breathing on the entire rush-hour train. His hands soon cramped into a tetany (a form of paralysis) so obvious that he shoved them inside his jacket, and even his face became quite paralysed. What a ride! I was completely tuned into his process, and yet felt calm and full of energy at the same time. His 'cycle' was incomplete when we arrived at the other end, so he leaned heavily on us over to a bench outside (luckily an above-ground station) and finished his 'session' lying across our laps. Several years later, when Toni brought Leonard over to meet me as her new partner, Leonard smiled at me and said, "I'll never forget the rebirth you gave me on the underground." Only then did I realise that he had taken that opportunity to personally train me to be a rebirther.

Surrender to the truth

Leonard was not like other people in numerous ways. He had no sense of politeness and really seemed to care little about all social graces. He always seemed to know what he wanted and where he was going at all times, and this took priority over everything else. Other people were expected to look after their own needs equally well, and he respected them exactly to the extent that they respected themselves.

Organising for him was certainly 'sudden school'. For example, he loved spending hours in the bath (still does) and would have to be coaxed out and escorted to his workshops where

we would have been chanting spiritual mantras for some time to prepare the ‘vibes’ before his grand entrance with a ‘squeaky clean and fresh aura’. Mind you, I’ve never seen anyone focus with such unconditional loving attention and eternal patience equally with every participant for long periods of time. He also seemed to mirror the state of his audience accurately, and could be in turn boring or brilliant depending on whether they were ready and were willing and able to draw the best out of him. I only speak about Leonard here in the past, because of his ability to grow and change quickly so I don’t wish to hold him to how he has been in the past, bearing in mind that many of his former characteristics may well still remain as ‘tendencies’.

One person who couldn’t stand it any longer said that wasn’t at all what they had come for and that they were really upset. Leonard then explained that PDS was when you gave your power away to authority figures (e.g. parents) and didn’t ask for or see that you got what you really wanted; and then he got up and left.

A friend and fellow rebirther in the States told me that he once organized a one year seminar (another of Leonard’s ideas to set up a support family for intensive personal growth over a longer period) and invited Leonard to lead a day on the Parental Disapproval Syndrome (PDS). The day consisted of Leonard calling on various people to stand and read from his guru Babaji’s teachings and his own publications until, by the end of day, one person who couldn’t stand it any longer said that wasn’t at all what they had come for and that they were really upset. Leonard then explained that PDS was when you gave your power away to authority figures (e.g. parents) and didn’t ask for or see that you got what you really wanted; and then he got up and left.

A somewhat similar incident took place for Toni on Leonard’s 1980 Special Leadership Training for Rebirthers in Holland. It was scheduled so that part of each day would be spent rebirthing each other in small groups (without Leonard), and would begin by listening to tapes, meeting with Leonard for some time each evening only. At the first meeting Toni shocked the others saying, “This isn’t what I’ve come here for, to rebirth my London clients over here, listen to cassettes and spend so little time with you”. “Right”, said Leonard, “Toni, you meet with the others and organize it the way you want and I’ll meet with you in an hour”. She really learned about leadership that way. My admiration for the man has continued to grow over the years. Although he goes completely for what he wants, as I have become clear (but not demanding) about what I want, he is equally dedicated to seeing that I get it, “full measure, pressed down, and running over”. I also respect him for his ability to surrender to the truth at all times and to change and grow rapidly. When I bought some of his tapes to take back to Findhorn, he carefully told me how to reimburse him for any copies I might make; a few months later he wrote to me from India, telling me to copy any tapes I liked with no

charge, sell or give them away, he would only come up with new ideas and new tapes, the supply was endless and it was more important to share the information. Over the years I have seen and experienced many spin-offs of his original ideas from those who worked and trained with him long ago. Trainings like the LRT and Vivation, numerous prosperity workshops, natural and underwater birth, books and so on, all owe much to the creativity and generosity of his original thinking and self-exploration.

Breath With Everything

by Catherine Grundy

Mention the word ‘rebirthing’ and expect the sorts of negative responses which salesmen (persons) are trained to tackle. Mention the word ‘breathing’ and expect a more gentle put-down (“I know it all already — did Yoga/NCT/Relaxation or Singing classes, etc”). Advance with trepidation further into the conversation and attempt to put three words together — ‘mercury amalgam fillings’. Stand firm against the barrage of glazed eyes and tight professional smiles. It is possible that the room will clear at this stage! However, pregnant women and new mothers can usually be relied upon to face the monster of Unwelcome Information and, quaking in their Doc Marten’s, will start asking the dreaded question “Do I have to have my fillings out?”

Only the intrepid informer-of-the-general-public with her or his wounds scarcely healed and battle-scars carefully hidden, will dare to proceed to the next fences. Colon health — watch out for the lavatorial humour, often hilarious, a little naughty and always (dare I say it?) undermining! Vega testing and Mora treatment (more bored looks and yawns), dowsers (relief, now we know you’re simply whacky) and so on. Wholefood provides a welcome break, as many people have become interested in and/or educated about food over the past decade or so.

Only the really foolhardy would mention veganism at the dinner table (especially amongst vegetarians). Go one step further and do it all in print then you won’t need to watch anyone else’s reactions to confirm your suspicions of your own craziness — the mail will do it for you!

For myself, after years of living between bed and sofa (plus a stagger to the shops on a good day), appearing in public (whether in person or in print) has its own particular horrors. These include a certain feeling of exposure, and displacement. It also serves a specific and very personal purpose by reminding me that I am alive. I have faced my nemesis and come through to tell the tale. Mythology is full of heroes (and presumably heroines too) who are given the