

# The Power of The Child

Jill Hall

---

Yes (I wish to say to Alice Miller and others), it is important to pay attention to the experience of the wounded child in each of us, but only as a stage in the process of healing. It is equally important to ensure that attempts to understand human nature are not being made from that same wounded place.

There is an urgent need to expand our framework of thought beyond that of linear causality and develop a new way of viewing who we are and how we relate to the world. If our energy is focussed on how mother and father failed us, we can never grow up, nor can there be a tenable solution to our ills. After all, mother and father also had it 'done wrong' to them and mass psychotherapy for prospective parents is not only impossible but shows little sign that it would make everything better. Even when we give up our initial demand for perfect parents and talk in more reasonable terms of 'good enough' mothering, we are nonetheless placing all power in our parents' hands. This is serious. As long as we do this — as long as our consciousness is caught in this mode of thinking — we render each and every one of us psychic victims.

I believe that we are misreading the nature of the psyche and, for all our so-



phistication, we are still approaching it as we would a material object or a mechanical system. The psyche, although interacting with events in time, is itself atemporal and multi-dimensional. We are only dealing with the 'tip of the iceberg' when we trace linear causal chains back to our childhood wounds; such knowledge has value of a limited nature only. It is distorting if such an activity is taken as fundamental.

The more we see ourselves as a mere result of other people's actions and attitudes the more we generate a culture of blame, shame and guilt. And adulthood will elude us. As I see it, the only way out of our predicament is to reframe our thinking about infant and mother. If we start life with an intense and all-pervading power imbalance we shall create relationships and societies obsessed with power issues, and the male of the species will be stuck with a profound and primal fear of the feminine. And we shall all be stuck with what flows from this: the fury and confusion, violence and pain.

I have become engaged in the project of empowering the infant and explore this

*Jill Hall works as a psychotherapist, trainer and supervisor and enjoys facilitating self-development groups of many different kinds. She is also a writer and lives in Norfolk.*

issue in my book *The Reluctant Adult*. If we acknowledge that we start life as a being of equal status to mother, then a different human story can emerge. Of course this is not possible if we see ourselves only as biological beings — on this level she does hold the power and our initial biological dependence gives her an awesome place in our psyche. In order to know ourselves as essentially equal beings we have to embrace an extended view of self and affirm our atemporal or spiritual nature. I wish to stress that it is not so that we can rise above our biology and earthly condition that we need, to know ourselves as spirit, but so that we can release ourselves from our blaming mode of thought. The way is then cleared for the next step in the fulfilment of our biological heritage and our ability to live well on earth.

Once we consider the existence of a spiritual reality, we see that if spirit exists at all then spirit must exist from the start. When we contemplate the nature of spirit we apprehend that spirit simply is. It may manifest physically in time, space and process but it is not subject to these aspects of life. Therefore we do not develop a spirit. It doesn't pop out of a mid-life crisis, though we can, of course, develop our awareness of spirit. Once we really seriously take on this notion, the relationship between mother and infant shifts. We begin to see and treat and experience the infant as a full spiritual being, having mutuality with mother on this level. Both are whole beings. And with such acknowledgement the primal underpinning of our present power relationships can begin to loosen.

No person is in a better position to influence another person as profoundly as

a mother her child. Yet it was as a mother that I experienced just how much less power I had in relation to my children than their own power to be themselves. However great my influence — and I do not want to dismiss the importance of this influence — it was secondary. Their responses to all my actions and qualities, ideas and beliefs, neuroses and hopes, were uniquely their own. Each drew from the spectrum of what I had to offer — 'good' or 'bad' — to build their own psychological schema and life story in their own, special way. Things that I liked or valued most about myself were not necessarily helpful to them — or were a comfort to one and a stumbling block to the other. My faults, it appears, were sometimes just what they needed. My children are each a starting point in their own right. It seems quite unfitting to take either blame or credit for them. I do, of course, have responsibilities towards them, but I do not cause and cannot control their personhood or their destinies.

When our thinking opens to the idea that the infant is empowered at this most basic and essential level, we can begin to break the cycle of insecurity, blame and victimhood that rules so many of our interactions — and ease the sense of self-betrayal that feeds self-hate. Freedom from blaming is an even greater gift than freedom from being blamed; it allows us to reclaim our energy and power as our own.

The infant-in-us-all is indeed more powerful than 'mother' or 'other' because an infant experiences itself directly. Its power lies in its immediacy. The infant is raw consciousness free of concepts and words, at the centre of the experienced universe and utterly focussed on its being.

And the infant is someone because an infant is whole spirit, freshly and uniquely embodied. Have you ever experienced the aura of a newborn baby? Our 'isness' shines before we take our first suck of mother's milk. Our particular way of being has an immediate and profound impact on others from our first moment on. We are all source points of energy.

If we deny this 'source' energy then we become selfish, not selfless. We become suckers of others' energy, dependent and attached; self-absorbed in our emptiness and generators of an addictive consumer society. Furthermore, if we continue to

experience ourselves as a victim of mother then it is hardly surprising that we should later retaliate by victimising Mother Earth. A primal state of blaming passivity leads to exploitation and a fanatical desire to control when, with our grown bodies, we eventually stir to action. Unless we grow up psychologically, by claiming our intrinsic and initial wholeness we shall remain compulsive consumers. We need to stop going back to mother (or, rather, not stop at going back to mother) and re-enter our essential infant power so that we can begin to water the seed of the full adult woman or man in us.

---

### *Further Reading*

Alice Miller, *The Drama of Being a Child*, Virago

Jill Hall, *The Reluctant Adult*, Prism Press 1993

---

---

## ***Demons are Alive and Well***

*John Rowan*

---

Anyone who thinks that the belief in demons and exorcism is dying out should read the interesting paper by Samuel Pfeifer from his work in Switzerland. He surveyed 343 mainly Protestant outpatients of a psychiatric clinic who described themselves as religious. Of these, 38% believed in the possible causation of their problems through the influence of evil spirits, labelling this as 'occult bondage' or 'possession'. In the case of patients in charismatic free churches suffering

from anxiety disorders and schizophrenia, 70% had been involved in rituals of exorcism. Those so involved thought they were good, but no visible improvement in their condition resulted. They actually got worse where medical treatment was refused and coercive forms of exorcism were used.

The author makes the point that therapists should be aware that some of their patients may hold these beliefs, and be prepared to empathise with them.

Samuel Pfeifer, 'Belief in Demons and Exorcism in Psychiatric Patients in Switzerland', *British Journal of Medical Psychology* Vol 67 No3, 1994