

timing and process.

I now live in nature by the sea, and as the darkening days lead towards the year's final contraction I sense the promise of new light at the end of this cycle; new ideas and energy germinating from a deeper self underneath the old skins I have shed. Com-

mitting to the life of your body, following its truth, challenges all the patterns we have constructed to avoid the terror of the unknown; yet walking step by step with all of the body's irrational wisdom gives back life, with lots of heart, power and consciousness.

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## ***Ecopsychology: A matter of life and death***

*Mary-Jayne Rust and Ruth Roth*

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**W**e are all familiar with the cycles of living and dying: the changing world of the seasons, loved ones passing on, new beings coming into the world. We know that we, as human beings, must all face our own deaths at some point in the future. In the world of psychotherapy we are also familiar with the cycles of living and dying in our emotional lives.

What is harder to take on board is the wider reality that unless we act now to radically change our lifestyles, our whole species is threatened. The human race may face a premature death at our own hands. Many other species — without the words to protest — have already become extinct as a result of our lack of care for our environment.

How are we coping with this? We are faced daily with information about the environmental crisis; to acknowledge the uncertainty of our future and all that is entailed to set us on a sustainable course is a monumental task and can feel overwhelming. So overwhelming, in fact, that most of us can only survive by living in

total or partial denial of our current reality. Perhaps in our minds is the thought that 'they' will sort it out one day with 'their' wonderful science and technology. Such faith in the omniscience of humankind!

We have been members of an ecopsychology group which has been meeting regularly for the past three years. The group emerged from PCSR, Psychotherapists and Counsellors for Social Responsibility. We are all therapists who feel passionately about the state of our planet and the impact this situation has on our psyches — and the psyches of the people with whom we work. We believe it to be a matter of life and death. We have been, and are still, exploring the layers of complicated feelings that we all carry, from guilt, despair and hopelessness through to excitement about the possibility of change. We question the traditional psychotherapeutic definition of mental health, which has been focused solely on human relatedness. We believe that maturity and mental health might be better described as a far more inclusive relatedness.

At the 1998 AHP conference we ran two ecopsychology workshops called 'A Matter of Life and Death', which explored this wider definition of health in a practical way. We provided clay for a more embodied, earthed experience. We began by outlining the above thoughts. After introductions and warm-up exercises we read a Native American story which reflected some of the themes of the workshop. We then invited the group to make whatever emerged from the clay in their hands, and to express their own feelings about the themes we had introduced.

Some chose to work more on their own within the group, while others created forms and shapes together. We watched as settlements sprang up, connected by rivers or pathways. Other dwellings were isolated, unsure whether they wanted to be connected. It seemed to us that a microcosm was in the making, reflecting all the struggles and conflicts of today's society.

Coming into 'talking time' felt difficult after the absorbing, non-verbal space people had been inhabiting. As we did so, an extraordinary diversity of material emerged, showing how differently people had perceived one another's creations and actions. The task of the group became an expression of the difficulty in allowing difference. The tension between verbal and non-verbal reflected the divide between human and non-human species. The voice of the 'contented majority' ran counter to the call for change. A range of emotions danced between hopelessness, guilt, despair, powerlessness, rage and manic denial.

The message for us was that unless we can begin to experience the complexity of the overwhelming feelings that are locked behind our denial there is no chance of being able to move forward into hope and action. For this, the workshop was an exciting prelude.

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## *Initiation through the Dark Goddess*

*Jocelyn Chaplin*

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For the past forty years or so Western civilisation has increasingly worshipped youth. Our culture has largely rejected the old-style patriarchal adulthood, but perhaps we haven't yet found new ways of being grown up.

Part of this imbalanced adoration of being young is a denial of the natural ageing and dying processes. We have finally

bought the myth of superman and woman who can conquer nature, use technology to overcome her limitations. Yet it is only with a full acceptance of death that we can deeply appreciate the realities and beauties of nature's cycles, rhythms and interconnected opposites, which include darkness as well as light. And it is often in the darker recesses of our souls that the most pro-