

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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**F**or 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-

found healing can take place, both for ourselves and for the planet.

In the workshop we start by looking at the kind of new adult we want to be initiated into. What new stage of life are we entering? What will be our new characteristics? For some it may be learning to develop authority without being authoritarian. For others it may be becoming responsible out of love, not fear. For yet others it may be committing to a creative or spiritual path. These aims are written down, shared and put into the alchemical vessel. There is then a ceremony of purification of the past through the sprinkling of water. This is to clear out anything blocking the change, which might be a fear, a shame or a belief, such as the childish illusion of 'having it all' or attaining a

mythical perfection.

Then it is time to face the shadow, the underworld. A guided journey and meditation is used to take us into another level of consciousness. In that state each initiate, one at a time, is covered with a black veil and led to meet the goddess of the underworld, where they take on her role and sit on her throne for a while. Here they are taking on her wisdom and intuition as if they have 'become' her. Here they are able to answer questions from a deeper place than usual. Questions may be asked by other members of the group and by the facilitator. Finally the veil is lifted and the initiate is given a personal ritual awakening and led away to meditate while another takes their place. The group ends in a circle, with chanting and celebration.

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## ***Death, Sex and Enlightenment***

*Nick Totton*

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What links these three concepts is the theme of surrender. A lot of humanistic therapy is founded on exploring surrender, although more recently our attention has tended to focus on clients' resistance to it, and on supporting their need to protect their individuality from being overwhelmed. And quite rightly so — no one can or should surrender unless they feel safe to do so.

Surrender itself, however, remains a core therapeutic issue; a capacity to let go, to melt, to allow the ego temporarily to stop keeping track of things, is crucial to human satisfaction of every kind. What we surrender to, ultimately, is the impulses

and sensations of our own body, and as Wilhelm Reich pointed out, we often have enormous difficulty in doing this — because we experience these overwhelming bodily feelings as potential death.

The human ego is a neurotic structure. And a key aspect of the ego's neurosis is that it experiences surrender to the body — of which orgasm is the archetype — as carrying the threat of death. Reich says in *The Function of the Orgasm* that 'fear of death and dying is identical with unconscious orgasm anxiety, and the alleged death drive, the longing for disintegration, for nothingness, is the unconscious longing for the orgasmic resolution of tension'.