

Rebirthing – an Orphan Therapy or a Part of the Family of Psychotherapies?

J. Manné

La Conversion, Switzerland

Abstract

Rebirthing is a very powerful and important method of psychotherapy and of personal and spiritual development based upon breathwork. This article shows that Rebirthing has respectable ancestors in the family of psychotherapies. It considers the relationship between Rebirthing and breathing methods, Rebirthing and the birth trauma, Rebirthing and regression, Rebirthing and the Repetition Compulsion, and Rebirthing and spiritual development. It argues that Rebirthing makes an original contribution to psychotherapy particularly through its gentle uses. It describes Rebirthing an energy psychotherapy which deals with the problems described above in an original and constructive way.

Zusammenfassung

Rebirthing ist eine sehr wirksame und bedeutende Methode der Psychotherapie und der persönlichen und geistigen Entwicklung, die auf Atemarbeit beruht. Dieser Artikel zeigt, daß Rebirthing respektable Vorfahren in der Familie der Psychotherapien hat. Es wird die Beziehung zwischen Rebirthing und Atemmethoden, Rebirthing und dem Geburtstrauma, Rebirthing und Regression, Rebirthing und Wiederholungszwang, Rebirthing und geistiger Entwicklung untersucht. Es wird begründet, daß Rebirthing einen originalen Beitrag zur Psychotherapie macht, insbesondere in seinen sanften Anwendungen. Rebirthing wird als „Energie-Psychotherapie“ beschrieben, die sich mit den oben genannten Problemen in einer ursprünglichen und konstruktiven Weise beschäftigt.

Correspondence to: Joy Manné, Ph.D., Psychologue FSP, Chemin Crêt-de-Plan 150, CH-1093 La Conversion, Switzerland, Tel. +41 21 7913084, Fax +41 21 7912958

"To lose one parent, Mr Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness." (Oscar Wilde, *The importance of being Earnest, Act I*)

The first book published about Rebirthing is called *Rebirthing for the New Age* and was written by Leonard Orr and Sondra Ray and published in 1977 (revised edition 1983). The second is called *Rebirthing: the science of enjoying all of your life* and was published in 1983 by Jim Leonard and Phil Laut, who now call the type of Rebirthing they do Vivation. In Orr & Ray, Leonard Orr is acknowledged as the founder of Rebirthing. There are no other acknowledgements in that book with regard to influences upon Rebirthing,¹ although a relationship with psychoanalysis and psychotherapy is alluded to in the following comparison which is written with reference to the trauma of painful memories which frequently come back through Rebirthing:

"Rebirthing is focussed on releasing rather than on re-experiencing the trauma. . . . If psychoanalysis and psychotherapy are like diligently picking through your psychological garbage in an attempt to understand it, then rebirthing (in most cases) is like carrying out your garbage in one fell swoop."²

"In most cases". Is this in fact an acknowledgement that in the remaining cases Rebirthing is like psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, so that these are among its parents and ancestors?

The influence of Babaji on Leonard Orr and Sondra Ray is acknowledged in many places in this book.³

In Leonard & Laut, Leonard Orr is once again acknowledged as the founder of Rebirthing. I have found no reference to other therapies in this book.

Is Rebirthing really an orphan therapy as these books seem to indicate? Has it really no roots in the development of psychotherapy, which, James Hillman and Michael Ventura tell us, has gone on for 100 years "– and the world is getting worse".⁴

Nicholas Albery, in his book *How to feel reborn: varieties of Rebirthing experience – an exploration of Rebirthing and associated primal therapies, the benefits and the dangers, the facts and the fictions*, comments that "New therapies and new techniques often emphasise their newness by not fully acknowledging their indebtedness to their predecessors."⁵ Albery discusses some of the roots of Rebirthing. So does Irène Abbondio in her excellent monograph, *Traumatisme de la*

¹ Leboyer's *Birth without Violence* is mentioned on p. xx and Janov's *Primal Scream* is mentioned on p. 19, but neither is acknowledged as a source or as an inspiration for Rebirthing.

² Orr and Ray, p. 88.

³ Many followers of Babaji think that the Rebirthing books do not do justice to their experience of him and are uncomfortable with the way he is presented in them. I am not a follower of Babaji but I do think it is most important to respect the profound experiences that he has been able to evoke in various people. If you are interested in an inspiring book on this subject, I refer you to *Babaji: Shri Haidakhan Wale Baba*, by Gunnell Minnett, Stockholm, Sweden, 1986.

⁴ Hillman, James and Michael Ventura, 1993.

⁵ Albery, p. 19.

*naissance et souffle dans la psychologie occidentale: manual de référence à l'usage des Thérapeutes du Souffle.*⁶

Rebirthing is practised in 44 countries.⁷ The first book, Orr & Ray, already claimed that approximately half a million people⁸ had been rebirthing. The second book, in which “rebirthing” was awarded its capital letter claims that Rebirthing “has been used successfully by millions of people throughout the world.”⁹ These numbers are certainly exaggerated and may be taken to designate “a lot” in American culture, just as in the Buddhist texts certain numbers like 1250 or 500 designate simply “a lot” and are not to be taken literally.¹⁰ Certainly there are enough people who practise Rebirthing, i.e. who receive Rebirthing sessions, give Rebirthing sessions and teach Rebirthing, for it to warrant taking seriously. The Rebirthers themselves have taken themselves seriously, and at a conference in Sweden in July–August 1994 founded *The International Breathwork Foundation*¹¹ which has among its goals making Rebirthing more widely known, research, documentation, professionalism and international cooperation.

Perhaps, if the “orphan therapy” that Rebirthing seems to be can find its parent therapies, and thus its roots, it will be able to grow in the way that I myself, many other Rebirthers and the *International Breathwork Foundation* would like it to. Its interests in research require roots in other theories, therapies and practices. Its connection to other theories, therapies and practices requires recognition so that they, in return, can become more effective through adopting some of its methods.

For the purposes of this paper I will take several prominent aspects of Rebirthing and show that they have in fact respectable roots – as Jack Worthing turned out to have in Oscar Wilde’s play *The Importance of Being Earnest* – in psychoanalysis, psychotherapy and in the mystical traditions of many religions.

Rebirthing not only has ancestors but it has descendents. By placing Rebirthing in the family of therapies to which it belongs its contribution can better be recognised, and we can better develop the training of Rebirthers and thus the way Rebirthing is practiced. We can also suggest those other methods which could usefully incorporate Rebirthing techniques.

⁶ Abbondio, 1994. This can be obtained directly from her at Irène Abbondio, Cité Derrière 4, CH-1005 Lausanne.

⁷ The source of this information is the International Breathwork Foundation.

⁸ Orr and Ray, p. 173.

⁹ Leonard and Laut, p. xii.

¹⁰ Manné, 1990, pp. 45, ii; 49, c. These numbers frequently designate the size of the Buddha’s following, especially during debates with members of other religions.

¹¹ Information can be obtained from Gunnell Minnett, 25 Campbell Drive, Peterborough PE4 7ZJ, UK.

What is Rebirthing?

This question cannot be answered in full in one article. I have written about it in the article on my school¹² that appeared in *Breathe*¹³ and in my book, *The Discerning Person's Guide to Personal and Spiritual Development*.¹⁴ I am writing more about it in this article and I have other articles and books on this subject in preparation: this is not a simple question to answer and my purpose here is only to establish some aspects of the parentage and the heritage of Rebirthing. What I will say is that it is a very powerful, interesting and important method of psychotherapy and of personal and spiritual development based upon breathwork, whose potential and effects have barely begun to be seriously described.

Rebirthing is particularly identified with being a breathing technique which brings about regression so that memories of the Rebirthee's¹⁵ birth trauma and of other traumas previously unconscious become accessible to consciousness. Rebirthing recognises that people repeat unproductive behaviour patterns and works with these through the breath, through relationship trainings and through affirmations. The repetition of unproductive behaviour patterns is known technically in psychoanalysis as the Repetition Compulsion. Rebirthing leads to a large variety of altered states of consciousness, to what Maslow called peak experiences,¹⁶ to transpersonal states and to ecstatic experiences. It is these aspects of Rebirthing and their roots in other therapies and practices that I will write about in this paper under the following headings: (1) Rebirthing and breathing methods, (2) Rebirthing and the birth trauma, (3) Rebirthing and regression, (4) Rebirthing and the Repetition Compulsion, and (5) Rebirthing and spiritual development.

I am purposefully avoiding what Albery calls *The Wilder Fringes*¹⁷ of Rebirthing, such as Orr & Ray's ideas about Physical Immortality (although I suspect that someone with enthusiasm for this subject will be able to relate it to Freud's concepts of the Death Urge and the Pleasure Principle) and the first 42 pages of Leonard & Laut which purport to explain all of life and which I find unreadable. These first books about Rebirthing are not easy to read because of their "wilder fringes". Nevertheless they contain a considerable amount of interesting and useful material. I hope that through my training in philology I will be able to reveal some of this in what follows.

¹² L'École d'Évolution Personnelle et Spirituelle, 150 Cêrt-de-Plan, CH-1093 La Conversion. Tel. +41 21 7913084. The school offers a four year training in Rebirthing, Voice Dialogue, and other methods for accompanying people in their personal and spiritual development.

¹³ Manné, 1994.

¹⁴ Forthcoming.

¹⁵ This is the usual term for the person receiving the Rebirthing session.

¹⁶ Maslow, 1968.

¹⁷ Albery, 1985, pp. 67–83.

Rebirthing and Breathing Methods

Rebirthing is also called “conscious breathing” or “energy breathing” or “a relaxed, continuous breathing rhythm”.¹⁸

The potential parent of this aspect of Rebirthing might be Arthur Janov who is known for having invented *Primal Scream* therapy or Primal therapy.

Janov gives the impression that he would like to have been the father of Rebirthing. In fact, in the 1970’s he came near to inventing it with his Primal Scream Therapy and his birth trauma work.¹⁹ Chapter 9 of his book *The Primal Scream* could almost be about Rebirthing:

“The technique of deep breathing is used during Primal Therapy to get the patient closer to his feelings. . . . patients reported the differences in their breathing after therapy; only after they had begun to breathe deeply did they understand how shallow their breathing had been previously. . . . Proper breathing should be instinctual . . . forcing the Primal patient to breath deeply often helps lift the lid of repression. The result is the emission of explosive force, . . . Primal breathing techniques become the *via regia* to the Pain, unblocking memories along the way. . . . they are the pathway to the unconscious.

It is tempting to minimize the Primal experience as simply a result of the hyperventilation syndrome . . .

In the majority of cases, breathing techniques are either not necessary or rarely used after the first few days of therapy. It must be remembered that it is the Pain we are after and that breathing is one of many devices we use to arrive at it.”²⁰

The indispensable element in a Rebirthing session is the breathing technique. Janov came near, but did not quite invent Rebirthing, as his last paragraph clearly shows. This makes him very cross, and he blames others for misinforming him:

“When I started out we were told that it was impossible for a person to relive his birth because the nervous system was not sufficiently mature at the time to record usable memories. I discounted the event of birth for years due to that misinformation. We know now that the birth trauma is indeed coded and stored in the nervous system. A whole cottage industry of rebirthers has grown up around my discoveries, leading to the most dangerous kind of charlatanism.”²¹

Here Janov tries to claim Rebirthing as his offspring. The fact that he is so very angry about not being recognised as the inventor of Rebirthing tells us how important and how powerful a therapy he thinks Rebirthing is.

For various reasons the Rebirthing method of breathing has become identified with hyperventilation. Orr & Ray claims its importance,²² yet, not all of the case histories in their book relate the results of Rebirthing to hyperventilation.²³

¹⁸ Orr in Orr and Ray, p. xvii.

¹⁹ See Albery, Chapter 2, pp. 19–66 for a full and interesting discussion of the relationship between Primal Scream therapy and Rebirthing. pp. 41–66 contain a discussion between Albery and Janov, commented upon by Leonard Orr, Eve Jones and Avoda Judith Collignon. The two latter are prominent practitioners of Rebirthing.

²⁰ Janov, 1973, p. 125f.

²¹ Janov, 1991, p. xii.

²² Orr and Ray, p. 20, 173–179; Albery, Chapter 4, pp. 84–120.

²³ E.g. Sondra’s does (Orr and Ray, pp. xxii f.) while Rick’s (Orr and Ray, pp. 115–123) and Gary’s (Orr and Ray, pp. 123–138) do not, etc.

Leonard & Laut dismiss it as unnecessary in just one paragraph.²⁴ There are also many passages like the following in both Orr & Ray and Leonard & Laut:

“Rebirthing is primarily a relaxed, continuous breathing rhythm in which the inhale is connected to the exhale in a continuous circle. This rhythm has to be intuitive, because the purpose of the breathing is to breathe life energy as well as air. Breathing life energy cannot be done with a mechanical breathing technique. Energy is the source of the physical body and the universe. The breathing mechanism is a vehicle to reach aliveness, but it is not automatic. spiritual breathing is intuitive, it is an inspiration, not a discipline. The key to success at conscious breathing is softness and gentleness.”²⁵

I have argued against the use of hyperventilation, which I see as a way of raping the unconscious, in my article in *Breathe* and in my book.

Perhaps this identification with hyperventilation is the Janov element in Rebirthing’s heritage: its Janov gene!

Of course neither Janov nor anyone else invented working with the breath. As long ago as ancient India, Buddhism and Yoga and other disciplines recognised the importance of the breath, and based their methods and techniques for spiritual development upon it. The famous Buddhist text that explains the traditional Vipassana exercise of attention on the breath is described as follows in the Pali Buddhist sutras.

The Buddha is speaking:

“There is one *dhamma*, Monks, which when developed and practised frequently is very fruitful and deserves great praise. What is this one *dhamma*?

It is mindfulness of breathing. And how, Monks, is mindfulness of breathing developed? How does it become very fruitful and deserving of great praise when practised frequently?

This is how. A monk goes into the forest or to the foot of a tree or to an uninhabited place and sits with his legs crossed, and with his body erect he generates mindfulness and being mindful he breathes in and being mindful he breathes out.

As he breathes in a long breath he recognises that he is breathing in a long breath; as he breathes out a long breath, he recognises that he is breathing out a long breath. As he breathes in a short breath he recognises that he is breathing in a short breath; as he breathes out a short breath, he recognises that he is breathing out a short breath.

He trains himself to breath in experiencing his whole body and to breath out experiencing his whole body. He trains himself to breath in calming bodily activity and to breath out calming bodily activity.

He trains himself to breath in experiencing joy and to breath out experiencing joy; to breath in experiencing happiness and to breath out experiencing happiness.

He trains himself to breath in experiencing mental activity and to breath out experiencing mental activity; to breath in calming mental activity and to breath out calming mental activity; to breath in experiencing mind and to breath out experiencing mind.²⁶

He trains himself to breath in pleasing the mind, and to breath out pleasing the mind; to breath in concentrating the mind and to breath out concentrating the mind; to breath in releasing the mind and to breath out releasing the mind.

²⁴ Leonard and Laut, p. 51.

²⁵ Orr, in Orr and Ray, p. xvii.

²⁶ Experiencing mind only experienced Rebirthers can do, who can watch the contents of their mind go past without being disturbed emotionally or physically or with regard to their concentration.

He trains himself to breath in observing impermanence and to breath out observing impermanence; to breath in observing freedom from passion and to breath out observing freedom from passion; to breath in observing cessation and to breath out observing cessation; to breath in observing renunciation and to breath out observing renunciation.”²⁷

Many people who have done Rebirthing will recognise some of the experiences described in this passage, such as recognising the type of breathing, breathing in such a way as to experience the whole body and breathing in such a way as to experience joy, etc.

With regard to other ancient methods of using the breath, Gunnel Minnet has written about Chinese breathing methods and about Kundalini in her book, *Breath and Spirit: Rebirthing as a healing technique*.²⁸

Janov is one potential ancestor of Rebirthing. In the history of psychoanalysis, the importance of the breath as a tool for the release of tension was recognised already by Wilhelm Reich, once an orthodox Freudian,²⁹ and by his student Alexander Lowen who created Bio-Energetics. Reich and Lowen are also potential ancestors of Rebirthing, at least with regard to the use of the breath in therapy, as are Georg Groddeck, Fritz Perls and other Gestaltists.³⁰ The ancient Indian methods for spiritual development based upon the breath, which were becoming increasingly widely known in America at the time that Rebirthing was invented are other potential ancestors. Thus, with regard to the use of the breath in therapy, we may conclude that Rebirthing has a very respectable pedigree.

Rebirthing and the Birth Trauma

Rebirthing is particularly connected with recovering memories of the birth trauma.

“The word rebirthing was originally used because we used redwood hot tubs to stimulate birth memories and people literally rewrote their birth scripts in the subconscious. A hot tub is a simulated womb.”³¹

Rebirthing recognises the importance of the birth trauma in the formation of character and in its influence over the way people live their lives.

“The purpose of rebirthing is to remember and re-experience one’s birth; to relive it physiologically, psychologically, and spiritually the moment of one’s first breath and release the trauma of it. The process begins the transformation of the subconscious impression of birth from one of primal pain to one of pleasure. the effects on life are immediate. Negative energy patterns held in the mind and body start to dissolve. ‘Youthing’ replaces aging and life becomes more fun. It is learning how to fill the physical body with divine energy on a practical daily basis.”³²

²⁷ *Majjhima-Nikāya III*. pp. 82f. London: Pali Text Society, 1977. My translation.

²⁸ pp. 37–49.

²⁹ Brown, 1964, p. 100.

³⁰ See Abbondio, Chapter *Les Psychothérapies centrées sur le corps*, pp. 9–15.

³¹ Orr in Orr and Ray, pp. xvii, xx–xxiv.

³² Orr and Ray, p. 71.

The potential parent of birth trauma psychology is Wilhelm Rank, one of Freud's early followers, who had the theory that all neurosis originates in the trauma of birth.³³ Orr himself admits admiration for Nandor Fodor, a New York analyst influenced by Rank,³⁴ whose book, *The Search for the Beloved*, he describes as "the best book written so far about birth trauma".³⁵ D. W. Winnicott also took seriously the influence of the type of birth a baby has upon her or his future life and problems.³⁶ During the last fifteen or twenty years, research into the life, functioning and capacities of the baby from conception onwards has increased³⁷ and goes on increasing.³⁸ I do not know how it is possible for anyone who has read this research to have any doubt at all that conception, gestation and birth influence the life of the human being. On the subject of birth trauma psychology, Rebirthing has a respectable pedigree, and many brothers and sisters.

As among the practitioners of all therapies, there are black sheep in the family. These should not be the excuse to execute the whole family, nor – if you will forgive me – to throw the very promising, healthy baby away with the bath water! When Yapko refers to "a therapy called rebirthing and reparenting ... which involved guiding the individual back in time in order to relive the process of being born"³⁹ or to "a therapeutic process commonly called 'rebirthing' " in which a therapist tells the client she "must have (had) a traumatic birth", he is scape-goating or gossiping and this is disappointing in an otherwise remarkably sensitive, intelligent and well-balanced book. All therapies that work with the birth trauma, or which "guide" clients back to their birth trauma or to anything else are not Rebirthing, or hypnosis, or Voice Dialogue, or Freudian analysis, etc., nor does every qualified Rebirther necessarily or invariably use Rebirthing to "guide" the client back to her/his birth trauma, or anywhere else for that matter.

Rebirthing and Regression

Regression, not only to the birth trauma but also to other childhood traumas is a fundamental part of the Rebirthing experience.

"If people experience their birth in rebirthing, they may go on to re-experience various periods of infancy which are wrought with feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. These periods can last for weeks and are sometimes accompanied by symptoms ..."⁴⁰

Regression is known to take place during psychoanalysis and during almost every other psychotherapy. Regression means going back to a painful event that

³³ Rank (1924), see Brown, 1964, p. 52–54.

³⁴ Brown, 1964, p. 54.

³⁵ Albery, 1985, p. 64.

³⁶ Winnicott, 1958, cited in Abbondio, 1994, p. 7.

³⁷ See Albery, 1985, pp. 121–148. Abbondio, 1994, pp. 34–41.

³⁸ See e.g. *Pre- and Perinatal Psychology Journal* and *Primal Health Research* among others.

³⁹ Yapko, 1994, p. 62.

⁴⁰ Orr and Ray, p. 95.

took place in the past and that has been forgotten or repressed so that it comes back into consciousness on all levels and in full detail. The remembering can involve re-experiencing the event in detail including physical pain and other symptoms, hearing again the sounds that are part of the memory, etc. Regression can also mean going back to an infantile way of functioning. Regression is an essential part of therapies that believe that painful experiences that are unconscious need to become conscious so that their influence can be integrated and the individual become free of it. Some therapies take a positive attitude towards regression and find it empowering. Others take a negative view and find it disempowering. One may deduce from this that judgments about the usefulness of regression as a psychotherapeutic experience depend upon the theories, the school and, above all, upon the competence of the practitioner to work with this phenomenon and the efficiency of the technique for dealing with it, rather than upon a solid theoretical basis.

There are therapies today which are abusing the capacity for regression by inducing it under unreliable conditions. The book *True Stories of False Memories* by Eleanor Goldstein, and Kevin Farmer cites examples of people being persuaded that they had been sexually abused i.a. during hypnotherapy or under the influence of a supposed “truth drug”. The memories that these particular forms of induced regression are supposed to give access to are increasingly considered unreliable due to their vulnerability to influence by the therapist.⁴¹

The ubiquity of the phenomenon of regression in therapy is one further element that puts the erstwhile orphan, Rebirthing, into a family of therapies, a family which, in the case of this subject too seems to include several black sheep!⁴²

With regard to regression in therapy, the Rebirthing method has something important to offer.

Historically, birth memories were induced in Rebirthing, either through the use of sleeping bags to stimulate the womb experience⁴³ or through reading Leboyer⁴⁴ or through strong, connected breathing with a snorkel in a hot tub. This is quite unnecessary.⁴⁵ In fact, all the client has to do is to put her or his attention on their breathing, in the neutral manner described in the Buddhist text cited above, i.e.

As he breathes in a long breath he recognises that he is breathing in a long breath; as he breathes out a long breath, he recognises that he is breathing out a long breath. As he breathes in a short breath he recognises that he is breathing in a short breath; as he breathes out a short breath, he recognises that he is breathing out a short breath,

and feelings in the body, memories and thoughts will become conscious. They will become conscious of their own accord without the use of suggestion. Without any suggestion or coercion, the body will find the breathing rhythm that is most conducive to the integration of the experience that is coming into consciousness.

⁴¹ There has been a discussion of this in *The Therapist*, Volume 2, Nos. 1 and 2, 1994. See also *New Scientist*, 23 July 1994.

⁴² See Yapko, 1994.

⁴³ e.g. Orr and Ray, p. xxi.

⁴⁴ e.g. Orr and Ray, p. 124.

⁴⁵ Manné, 1994; Manné, forthcoming, Part VII.

I have called this minimal method of working with the breath *Gentle Rebirthing* to distinguish it from *Traditional Rebirthing*, which is how I describe the Rebirthing that is based on strong connected breathing and hyperventilation.⁴⁶ Some clients have to be taught to be aware of what is going on in their mind and body, in the same way as people have to be taught to meditate. In these cases regressions do not take place until the client has competence in self-awareness. This makes this way of working very safe. When we trust the unconscious and do not try to manipulate or to coerce it, it will open up and reveal its secrets in a balanced and healthy way so that the integration that the client is capable of can occur.⁴⁷

In the context of regression, Rebirthing, especially *Gentle Rebirthing*⁴⁸ is solidly part of the family of therapies that work well with this phenomenon.

Rebirthing and the Repetition Compulsion

I have said⁴⁹ that those of Freud's ideas that are good and useful are now so much a part of our way of thinking that they have become part of our psychological common sense. This is certainly true of aspects of his observation of the *compulsion to repeat*.

Freud noticed a compulsion to repeat in normal people,

"all of whose relationships have the same outcome: such as the benefactor who is abandoned in anger after a time by each of his *protégés*, however much they may otherwise differ from one another, and who thus seems doomed to taste all the bitterness of ingratitude; or the man whose friendships all end in betrayal by his friend; or the man who time after time in the course of his life raises someone else into a position of great private or public authority and then, after a certain interval, himself upsets that authority and replaces him by a new one; or, again, the lover each of whose love affairs with a woman passes through the same phases and reaches the same conclusion."⁵⁰

In these cases the compulsion to repeat is related to active behaviour, but Freud noticed that it also occurs as a passive experience, over which a person has no influence. He cites the case of "the woman who married three successive husbands each of whom fell ill soon afterwards and had to be nursed by her on their death-beds."⁵¹

The compulsion to repeat occurs in the transference.⁵² This means – and I do not know whether Freud said this or not, but enough analysts of all descriptions

⁴⁶ See Manné, 1994 and Manné, forthcoming, Part VII.

⁴⁷ "The unconscious – that is to say, the 'repressed' – offers no resistance whatever to the efforts of the treatment. Indeed, it itself has no other endeavour than to break through the pressure weighing down on it and force its way either to consciousness or to a discharge through some real action." Freud, 1920, p. 189.

⁴⁸ See Manné, 1994 and forthcoming.

⁴⁹ Manné, forthcoming.

⁵⁰ Freud, 1920, p. 292. Freud discusses the compulsion to repeat in terms of the pleasure principle.

⁵¹ Op.cit. p. 293.

⁵² Op.cit. p. 291.

have observed this⁵³ – that it will also occur in the counter-transference except in those rare practitioners who have gone beyond projection.⁵⁴

We now know that the compulsion to repeat causes family problems such as sexual and other abuse to repeat over generations just as genes cause families to be predisposed to certain illnesses.

Rebirthing recognises the compulsion to repeat and takes a practical approach to it through the breathing method, through relationship work and through exercises. The way the theory is presented can be very clear, if simplistic, or it can belong to what Albery politely calls *The Wilder Fringes*.⁵⁵

The compulsion to repeat is explained in the Rebirthing maxim “Thought is Creative”. What this means in Rebirthing terms is that “*Your thoughts always produce results! . . . Your positive thoughts produce positive results for you, and your negative thoughts produce negative results.*”⁵⁶ The compulsion to repeat is treated first of all through becoming aware of the negative thoughts that are causing the unproductive situations and events to repeat and then through the use of autosuggestion in the form of Affirmations:

*“An affirmation is a positive thought that you choose to immerse in your consciousness to produce a desired result.”*⁵⁷

“An affirmation is basically a good thought to hold in your mind.”⁵⁸

So, for example, Sondra Ray had a tendency to smash up her car once a month, a pattern which she was unable to stop. Leonard Orr gave her the affirmation: “I now have a safe driving consciousness” to work on. Sondra stopped smashing up her car.⁵⁹ Both of the early books contain abundant information on how to use affirmations.⁶⁰ Affirmations do not have to be used in a superficial or simplistic manner, although they often are. Well used, they are a way of gently and finely performing archeology on the unconscious and can productively reveal thoughts and beliefs that have been very deeply hidden.⁶¹

The compulsion to repeat unproductive behaviour patterns that regularly spoil relationships is treated in Sondra Ray’s book, *Loving Relationships*. This book contains a great deal of useful information, good advice and exercises, and not too much *wilder fringe* material.

That what and how we think has a great deal of influence over our lives and causes us to repeat unproductive behaviour patterns has become common knowledge in the almost twenty years since the first Rebirthing book was published and it was not new then.⁶² Combined with techniques like creative visu-

⁵³ Myers, 1992; Siegel and Lowe, 1993.

⁵⁴ See the section on Projection in Manné, forthcoming.

⁵⁵ Albery, 1985, pp. 67–83.

⁵⁶ Orr and Ray, p. 53.

⁵⁷ Orr and Ray, p. 65. Their italics.

⁵⁸ Leonard and Laut, p. 76.

⁵⁹ Orr and Ray, pp. 2 f.

⁶⁰ Orr and Ray, pp. 65–69, etc.; Leonard and Laut, pp. 76 f, 115–143.

⁶¹ See Manné, forthcoming.

⁶² See Albery, p. 19. Orr’s exposition of the notion that thoughts are creative also contains similarities to Kelly’s Personal Construct Theory.

alisation, affirmations are now used in almost all of the new therapies and also in medical circumstances: for example, to fight cancer.⁶³ In its recognition of the compulsion to repeat, Rebirthing has respectable ancestors and, in its way of dealing with it, many siblings.

Rebirthing and Spiritual Development

Rebirthing has from the beginning been connected with spiritual development. Leonard Orr is described by Sondra Ray as someone who read metaphysical books who, and from the beginning, gave his students books like *Life and Teaching of the Masters of the Far East* to read.⁶⁴

The energy release is one among very many examples of moving spiritual experiences that happen through Rebirthing. It is described in this way,

“At some point in rebirthing there is a reconnection to Divine Energy and as a result you may experience vibrating and tingling in your body. It starts in different places in different people and, before rebirthing is complete, it usually is felt throughout the whole body. This energy reconnects your body to the universal energy by vibrating out tension which is the manifestation of negative mental mass. Negative mental mass can be permanently dissolved by continuing to breathe in a regular rhythm while your body is vibrating and tingling – experiencing your reconnection to the Divine Energy.”⁶⁵

All religions and spiritual practices that use the breath in any way in order to attain altered states of consciousness share the parentage of this aspect of Rebirthing. I have quoted from a Theravada Buddhist texts above simply because I happen to know these texts well. Experts on other texts could have found interesting and relevant material from their study and discipline.⁶⁶ With regard to its recognition of the importance and indeed the necessity of spiritual experiences, Rebirthing has both ancestors and a pedigree in the literature of many religions and spiritual practices.

What about ancestors in psychology?

Historically, As Luckoff et al say, “psychiatry, in its diagnostic classification systems as well as its theory, research, and practice, has tended to either ignore or pathologize the religious and spiritual dimensions of life. . . . From Freud’s writings through the 1976 report on mysticism by the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry (GAP), there has been a tendency to associate spiritual experiences with psychopathology.”⁶⁷ Luckoff et al.’s article documents “the ‘religiosity gap’ between clinicians and patients,” and holds responsible “the inadequate training in religious and spiritual issues (of clinicians), and the role that biological primacy has played in creating insensitivity to these issues.” This religiosity gap could be the reason why so many people have turned to the new therapies, and are still turning to the new therapies, that have sprung up during the last twenty or thirty years: the established therapies were not and still are not meeting their

⁶³ Simonton et al., 1978.

⁶⁴ Orr and Ray, p. 19.

⁶⁵ Orr and Ray, p. 83; see further pp. 83–87.

⁶⁶ See e.g. Minnett, pp. 37–49.

⁶⁷ Luckoff et al., 1992, p. 673.

needs. Luckoff et al proposed that a new category of “psychoreligious or psychospiritual problems” be included in the DSM-IV⁶⁸ and this has now been done.⁶⁹ They also propose that professionals be adequately trained to deal with these problems. Rebirthing is an appropriate method for these people to learn and Rebirthers who have had a good training, which includes an adequate knowledge of psychology,⁷⁰ are competent to deal with many of these problems.

Despite a general incompetence on the part of psychiatry to deal with the spiritual aspect of human life, the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* and the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* are now well established, and it is in this current that Rebirthing has its ancestors, siblings and descendents.

Rebirthing’s Pedigree

It is actually quite dangerous to be an orphan, as we all know. There is no-one to protect an orphan, and anyone can lay claim to it at any time!

Leonard Orr and Sondra Ray are certainly the literary parents of Rebirthing.

I have shown in this article that, whether its literary parents acknowledge it or not, Rebirthing has a respectable pedigree: it has respectable grandparents and other ancestors in psychoanalysis and in psychotherapy and belongs fully to the family of psychotherapies. Furthermore, it has ancestors in various respectable spiritual disciplines. It has enough family to protect it and to help it to grow up!

Albery said, “There seems to be very little that is original in the main bits that make up the Rebirthing package.”⁷¹ I have presented here some of the conceptual ancestors of Rebirthing: psychotherapies and spiritual practices that realise the importance of the breath, that respect the importance of the birth trauma, that acknowledge the importance of regression in the healing of the psyche, that recognise the compulsion to repeat and that appreciate the importance of the development of the spiritual aspects of the human being. In this way I have shown that at least in these aspects Rebirthing has connections to other psychotherapies. To say that there is “very little that is original”, as Albery has done, seems to me, however, to be an exaggeration.

Rebirthing makes an original contribution to psychotherapy through its way of working with the breath: **not** the notorious use of hyperventilation which I reject entirely – although I accept that strong and deep breathing techniques, when well-used and brought in at the appropriate moment in the development process, can lead to important transpersonal experiences⁷² – but also, and particularly, its *gentle* uses.⁷³ I have argued that Rebirthing is an *energy psychotherapy*,⁷⁴ and it is as an energy psychotherapy that it deals with the phenomena described above in an original, constructive and important way. I will have more to say about how

⁶⁸ Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – IV.

⁶⁹ DSM-IV, Section V62.89 *Religious or Spiritual Problem*.

⁷⁰ See Manné, forthcoming, Part VI.

⁷¹ Albery, p. 19.

⁷² Manné, 1994 and forthcoming.

⁷³ See the quote above; See also Manné, 1994 and forthcoming.

⁷⁴ Manné, forthcoming.

well Rebirthing deals with these phenomena, about Energy Psychotherapy, and about how the competent use of **Breathwork**, including Rebirthing, constructs an authentic process of psychotherapy which encompasses the full range of personal and spiritual development, from problems that we might call “freudian” through experiences that we might call “jungian”, through the Humanistic to the Transpersonal.⁷⁵

References

- Abbondio, I. (1994). *Traumatisme de la naissance et souffle dans la psychologie occidentale: manuel de référence l'usage des Thérapeutes du Souffle*. Irène Abbondio, Cité Derrière 4, CH-1005 Lausanne
- Albery, N. (1985). *How to feel reborn: varieties of Rebirthing experience – an exploration of Rebirthing and associated primal therapies, the benefits and the dangers, the facts and the fictions*. London, Regeneration Press
- Brown, J.A.C. (1964). *Freud and the Post-Freudians*. Penguin Books. [1974 ed.]
- Freud, S. (1920). Beyond the Pleasure Principle. In: *On Metapsychology: the theory of Psychoanalysis*. The Pelican Freud Library, Vol. 11, Pelican Books, 1984
- DSM IV. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. (1994) American Psychiatric Association, Washington DC
- Goldstein, E. and Farmer, K. (1993). *True Stories of False Memories*. SIRS Books
- Hillman, J. and Ventura, M. (1993). *We've had a hundred years of psychotherapy – and the world's getting worse*. Harper, San Francisco
- Janov, Arthur (1991). *The New Primal Scream*. London : Abacus. pp.xii.
- Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, P.O. Box 4437, Stanford, CA 94305. 1969–
- Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Suite 205, 1314 Westwood Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90024. 1961–
- Kelly, G.A. (1963). *A Theory of Personality: the Psychology of Personal Constructs*. New York, W.W. Norton & Company
- Leboyer, F. (1975). *Birth without Violence*. London, Wildwood House
- Leonard, J. and Laut, P. (1983). *Rebirthing: the science of enjoying all of your life*. Berkeley, CA, Celestial Arts
- Luckoff, D., Lu, F. and Turner, R. (1992). Towards a More Culturally Sensitive DSM-IV: Psychoreligious and Psychospiritual Problems. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* Vol. 180, No. 11, November 1992
- Manné, J. (1990). Categories of Sutta in the Pāli Nikāyas and their implications for our appreciation of the Buddhist teaching and literature. *Journal of the Pāli Text Society* XV, 29–87. See pp. 45, ii; 49, c.
- Manné, J. (1994). École D'Évolution Personnelle et Spirituelle', in *Breathe International*, July, August September 1994. *Breathe*, c/o Robert Moore, 36 Higher Green, South Brent, Devon TQ10 9PL, UK
- Manné, J. (forthcoming) *The Discerning Person's Guide to Personal and Spiritual Development*. This book is at the moment looking for a publisher. If you are impatient and would like a copy, please write to me at 150 Crêt-de-Plan, CH-1093 La Conversion, Switzerland
- Maslow, A.H. (1968). *Towards a Psychology of Being*. New York, D. Van Nostrand Company. [2nd ed.], (1971)
- Minnett, G. (1986). *Babaji: Shri Haidakhan Wale Baba*. Stockholm, Sweden
- Minnett, G. (1994). *Breath and Spirit: Rebirthing as a healing technique*. London, The Aquarian Press

⁷⁵ See Rowan, 1994, p. 7.

- Myers, W.A. (1992). *Shrink Dreams: the secret longings, fantasies, and prejudices of therapists and how they affect their patients*. New York, Simon and Schuster
New Scientist, July 23, 1994, pp. 32–35.
- Orr, L. and Ray, S. (1977). *Rebirthing for the New Age* (revised edition 1983). California, Trinity Publications
- Pre and Perinatal Psychology Journal*, Human Sciences Press, Inc., 233 Spring Street, New York, NY 10013-1578
- Primal Health Research*, Primal Health Research Centre, 59 Roderick Road, London NW3 2NP. The editor of this journal is Dr. Michel Odent, a leading influence with regard to gentle childbirth practices.
- Rank, O. (1924) *The Trauma of Birth*. New York, Dover Publications, 1993 edition
- Rowan, J. (1994). *A Guide to Humanistic Psychology*. Britain: the Association for Humanistic Psychology. [First edition 1987]
- Siegel, S. and Lowe, E. Jr. (1993). *The Patient who cured his Therapist: and other tales of therapy*. Plume (Penguin)
- Simonton, O.C., Matthews-Simonton, S. and Creighton, J. (1978). *Getting Well Again: A step-by-step, self-help guide to overcoming cancer for patients and their families*. Los Angeles, J.P. Tarcher
- The Therapist*, Journal of the European Therapy Studies Institute, 1 Lovers Meadow, Chalvington, Hailsham, East Sussex, BN27 3TE10, UK
- Winnicott, D.W. (1958). *Birth Memories, Birth Trauma and Anxiety 1949–54*. London, Collected Papers, 1958
- Yapko, M.D. (1994). *Suggestions of Abuse: true and false memories of childhood sexual trauma*. New York, Simon and Schuster