



Body Wise: All at sea

with Kamalamani

"He allowed himself to be swayed by his conviction that human beings are not born once and for all on the day their mothers give birth to them, but that life obliges them over and over again to give birth to themselves" (Márquez, 2007).

It's late afternoon and my friends and I are making our way along the beach connecting Polzeath and New Polzeath in North Cornwall. We have been wandering for hours. We check our watches—we're late—and start to run, joking, giddy with sugar highs from eating candy canes. We're suddenly in the midst of swirling tides, waves from all directions—not knowing whether they are coming or going—the strength of the undercurrent tugging at our ankles, the unforgiving rock face ahead of us too steep to scramble to safety. My senses are scrambled as I remember. Jokes are replaced with concerned yelps as we hop about trying to find shallow water and to avoid rocks. We piggy back the youngest of the party who starts to cry. It is unknown and suddenly dangerous; all the giddiness is gone. If we had been any later, we wouldn't have got through.

I'm reminded of another watery memory I found myself recounting at a conference workshop I facilitated last weekend, also in Cornwall, this time at the Eden project. I invited participants to tell

their 'earth stories' through sharing glimpses of my own. I included images of particular landscapes and seascapes, animals and flora and fauna, which have been significant in my earth story, one of them being Trebarwith Strand, a shallow-shelving beach barely 10 miles up the coast from Polzeath.



I recounted body boarding here when I was 13 years old—one of my favourite things at the time— and being dragged off of my board, thrown head over heels and dragged along the sharp rocks of the sea floor. I emerged shocked and sobered, gladder than ever to catch my breath and to turn to see people on the shore's edge. I have always felt awe for the sea, and that day it was amplified, with the sore bruises across my hips and thighs cautioning me of the sea's strength.

"Birth memories, deeply hidden in the unconscious mind, usually announce themselves indirectly. They appear in association with some triggering event, such as watching people fall through space in a movie, seeing someone pinned down in a fight, or perhaps just watching a fish wriggling and struggling on a fishing line. The extreme feeling of anxiety stirred up by these events calls attention to the significance of the memory hiding at deeper levels of consciousness" (Chamberlain, 1998, 92).

Birth memories often emerge in relationship to the sea for me, with its undercurrents, turning tides, rocks, and possible danger. Apparently, I have a very 'Neptunian' influence in my birth chart; I'm no astrologer, so I'm not sure what that means. Once I had recovered from my early terror of water and fear of disappearing down the plug hole when I was bathed—yes, really, much to the sadistic delight of my older brother, making sure I would be seated at the plug hole end whilst he sat back and enjoyed the drama...! I loved being in water and spent literally hours swimming, messing about, floating, body boarding. I think, for me, a triggering event, in Chamberlain's words, was recalling the body boarding memory at Trebarwith Strand.

Changing tides are the themes that emerge as I turn my attention towards engaging with this final print version of *Somatic Psychotherapy Today* about pre and peri-natal psychology. It is a timely theme, given that life has been punctuated by endings and beginnings of late. Four friends have died—three pretty suddenly—and I'm in the process of amicably leaving the Buddhist movement and order of which I have been a part for the past 21 years. In June I finally started being treated for two long-standing health issues, and I am feeling better and have much gratitude to the medical world,



after, I confess, much ambivalence (we didn't get off to a good start—when I was on the final module of my pre and peri natal training I had one of my most profound and mightily unexpected spiritual experiences holding some high forceps in the palms of my hands as I might an objective of infinite value or beauty). It has been a phase of thresholds; the unknown and unknowable. I suppose that as things draw to a close, as people die, or even as we move between things, our earliest echoes—our experiences in the womb and birth canal—are evoked on a visceral, if subconscious level. No wonder I feel a bit stuck for words and all at sea as I attempt to string something together, which has a faint hope of making sense.

**"Let nothing disturb you
Let nothing frighten you..."**

(St Teresa, see SPCK)

St Teresa of Avila counsels, very wisely and helpfully, her words leaping off the page of the order of service at my friend's funeral last Friday week. Roy was my first spiritual teacher, the second vicar I met at my local parish church as a girl. It's uncanny to be reflecting on my early connections with spiritual practice and the stage I find myself in right now, leaving my spiritual home of more than two decades; a spiritual death of sorts. I hope that there will be some sort of spiritual rebirth after this in-between crepuscular space, but I can't know for sure.

Continued on page 66

What I do know is the beauty of the farewells I have been blessed to be part of this year. Two contrasting memories: Pete's funeral in a green Staffordshire valley on one of those days when summer makes a surprise curtain call. An afternoon of Polish song, coming of age tales, belly laughs and copious tears. Roy's simple, quiet, touching funeral on a still, beautifully blue, cold, crisp, clear winter's day on a pretty Somerset hillside, still speckled with the last few red and golden autumn leaves clinging to their branches.

I've found myself much comforted by St Teresa's words. I realise I'm much comforted by them because they put me in mind of Roy. Years ago I visited Roy and his lovely wife, Winifred, herself an exemplar of deep faith, when Roy was vicar to British expatriates living on the Costa Blanca in Spain. We had been to the beach—sea and sand again—and I was fussing about the sand on my legs and feet; I'm not a big fan of sand between my toes. Roy looked at me, smiled, and said in his gently lilting Yorkshire accent, "oh don't worry love, your legs will soon dry and the sand will brush off, don't notice it for now." I have often remembered this incident when I've been stressed, and I've remembered it many times since Roy's passing. To him it was probably just a passing comment; to me it was kind, soothing words at just the right moment.

In the past few weeks most things have frightened me, although thankfully this phase is easing. In remembering and writing about Roy I feel like I have been reminded of my church-going roots and remembering what I left behind in my early teens. I am gladdened that there is a chapter on the 'Theological Paradigm' in Maret's 'The Prenatal Person' (1997), which I plan to re-read and digest over the midwinter.

I am finding it hard to distinguish between birth and death, beginnings and endings, right now, so I looked them up in the dictionary; I go to my head and the safety of the intellect when fear is close at hand. The dictionary never fails. At birth our mothers bear us. Thinking about it, after death the earth bears us, or, at least, our remains. The 'th' of the words birth and death denote, apparently, a word which is a process. Quite a few wondrous words end in 'th', now I care to notice: aftermath, myth, oath, sooth, betroth, bequeath, growth,

earth. I like that the word earth denotes a process: 'earthing'? I am reminded of my friends who have died and how their return to the earth will give rise to new life in the next round of things. On and on it goes, the cycle of life.



The other memory that absolutely refuses to budge as I write this article is reading the magazine, which came with the Sunday paper in my teenage years—I'm guessing I would have been about 12 or 13 and it was *The Sunday Times* magazine. It was an article documenting the changes in operations on foetuses and very young babies and how it was only very recently that anaesthetics were used in these procedures. I remember my incredulity that clever people like doctors wouldn't have known or guessed that foetuses or babies feel pain. I think I even went and found my Mum to check whether this was actually the case (she was horrified too.) I can't get that memory out of my head. Interesting words—my poor head was so battered and bruised by my own tumultuous birth and rocky arrival here—not to mention my poor, long-suffering Mum, who was in shock following her Dad's very recent, sudden death. As a girl, I was terribly reluctant to join the world of grown ups - - with the exception of grown ups like Roy and Winifred. This memory throws one light on why this was the case.

"As we move through life we continue to change and grow. But events such as birth and weaning, which until now have been viewed as 'object', physiological phenomena, produce definite and long-lasting effects on the personality of a child. We must learn how to make the most of these opportunities" (Verny with Kelly, 1982:116).

I hadn't planned to write this final piece in a whatever-emerges-next sort of way. It's quite unnerving. I had planned an interesting article exploring character structure; voyaging into the patterns and character with birth at its heart—the boundary character, more traditionally known as the schizoid character. I wanted to explore how boundary character defences and patterning intrapsychically and relationally interact with the other character positions, which can shape us and our clients at the key stages of feeding, trying out our independence, time-tabling, coming in relationship with our sex and gender, and our emerging wilfulness (see Kamalamani, 2012). But it wasn't to be; hopefully another time.

As this draws to a close, I'm laughing at myself—Zen style—because it feels like this piece of writing might be one of those pieces that never quite made it off the ground; a bit like my feeble attempts at making paper airplanes, let alone more sophisticated forms of origami. It puts me in mind of some of the great Mahayan sutras of Buddhism; the White Lotus sutra comes to mind (see Soothill, 1987). These sutras are incredibly flowery and abundant; there is much praise for the wisdom and insight of the truth displayed in the sutra's verses, with repetitive verses and ornate surroundings, populated by billions of beings of shapes and sizes—lots of detail so that it is easy to miss what the sutra is actually saying.

Well, I'm not comfortable comparing my writing to a Buddhist sutra (!) but in the mean time, I have finally got around to the project I set myself, the night of Roy's funeral, which is to translate or adapt the words of St Teresa of Avila into non-God language. I've got nothing against God or those who worship him; it's just that life itself is my God (and I hope St Teresa forgives my poetic license).

**Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing frighten you,
All things are passing:
Life constantly changing.
Practise patiently.
Whoever knows life lacks nothing;
Life alone prevails.**

I want to thank dear Nancy, editor of *Somatic Psychotherapy Today*, for her invitation to write for this excellent publication four and a half years ago. It has been a fabulous experience to be part of this project and to get to know you through this working relationship, as well as to read words of wisdom from the rest of you writing and contributing. A big thank you.

Kamalamani is an Embodied-Relational therapist, Wild therapist, supervisor, facilitator, and writer, living and working in Bristol, England. She's been a practicing Buddhist since her early 20s and loves seeing how age-old teachings and practices are relevant to contemporary life. *Continued on page 112*

Val Hudson is a painter drawing on a wide spectrum of ideas and influences. Her paintings present a dreamlike quality of ephemeral spaces punctuated with half seen evocations of memory, experience and sensory imaginings. The content of her paintings are the starting point of a conversation with the viewer where the language is not just visual but emotive and evocative with a subtle potency of shifting illusive signs and symbols. *Continued on page 112*



Reagen continued from page 42

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Kindred Media Interview With In Utero Filmmakers: <http://kindredmedia.org/2016/10/womb-ecology-becomes-world-ecology-utero-filmmakers-interview-new-demand-viewing-insights/>

What's Behind the Increased Numbers of Black Women Dying During Pregnancy and Childbirth in the United States? <http://www.ourbodiesourselves.org/2016/03/increased-numbers-of-black-women-dying-during-pregnancy-and-childbirth/>

Samsarah Morgan at the International Center for Traditional Childbearing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqgNh8fAXNQ>

Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: <http://joydegruy.com>

Association for Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health: www.birthpsychology.com

Resource review continued from page 111

practitioner can be involved more in the book, but for now the team does an impressive job for the experienced.

Magnavita and his team successfully tackle a difficult, underestimated and often overlooked portion of psychology and create a succinct overview of Decision Analytics and its application to bias. If applied to practice, one who wishes to shed inappropriate bias and focus on almost exclusively empirical based treatment could successfully do so. Whether applied in part or in whole, Magnavita's encouragement to shed bias provides the psychological community with a chance to improve treatment and explore new methodologies.

Kamamalani continued from page 67

She works at the interface of body psychotherapy, ecopsychology and ecodharma, drawing upon her experiences of being a development worker in sub-Saharan Africa, a lecturer in International Development at the University of Bristol, her current meditation practice and being a child lost and found in nature. She has published two books: 'Meditating with Character' (post-Reichian character structure applied to meditation) and 'Other than Mother: Choosing Childlessness with Life in mind'. www.kamalamani.co.uk

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Val Hudson continued from page 67

There is a sense that the viewer is invited to decipher meaning through their own non-verbal, non-cognitive contemplation. The paintings are also imbued with a strong visual presence because of their human scale and strength of colour and composition. The only way to fully appreciate Val's painting is to stand in front of one until the internal noise quietsens ...

<http://www.valhudson.co.uk/>