

The Breath of Life Conference 2005

By Andrea Lant and Gerrie Millar



This conference was held at the Brunei Gallery in London on the 28th and 29th May 2005. The Conference described itself as exploring “the subtleties of working in the craniosacral and allied fields from differing perspectives – the expression of the ‘Breath of Life’, working with trauma, non-violent communication, spirituality and psychotherapy.” We spent a deeply nourishing and enriching weekend where we experienced a deep connection between the conference facilitators, speakers and delegates as we shared our combined rhythms of life and pulsating hearts. There was an atmosphere of compassion and gentleness throughout.

Michael Shea began a series of presentations with a meditation around some words of Psalm 46 “Be still and know that I am God” before leading us through a wonderful description of the development of the embryo, especially focussing on the heart. He explained that in our early development we are all one big heart, with the heart being the first body part that develops starting at the top of the head. The hands come out of the side of the heart and appear to hold it. The hands then go up to the face with the embryo taking on a musical, flute

like position. He described that in the fourth week there is embryonic flexion where the head bows to the heart as if the embryo is bowing to its inner nature.

Linking our meditation he spoke of stillness in the centre of the heart, with stillness being the deepest imprint we have in our heart. He spoke of our heart connecting inside to outside. Last he described our bodies as retaining embryological imprints he reminded us that when our hands are in contact with a body we are in contact with the embryological field. This was a deeply moving presentation with *Michael Shea’s* conclusion that healing is a movement back to the time of conception – “to our original wholeness.”



Babette Rothschild (above) then led us into a lively presentation on the dualism of empathy: the benefits and risks of resonance,. With a wonderful slide of three laughing kittens, which demonstrated with enormous clarity that happiness is catching. Babette used the following definition of empathy: “The action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and, vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts and experience of another of either the past or present.”

As always her presentation had enormous clarity as she outlined the positives of empathy as well as the downside. Listing the positives she included being in tune, attachment fellowship, survival of the tribe and sussing your enemy. The downside included confusion of self and other, “whose mood is whose”, contagious emotions like mass hysteria or mob behaviour, secondary and vicarious trauma. She informed us that with emotional awareness it is possible to maximise the benefits and reduce the risks.

Babette played some well known pieces of music to us which stimulated feedback on memories and associations. This ably demonstrated that each experience we have leaves somatic and emotional traces associated with it, and that this helps us to relate to similar experiences of others.

She provided some helpful pointers for therapists’ self-care in discussing unconscious empathy which can lead to the risk of taking on what you might not be prepared for, and the importance of moving in and out of resonance to maintain the sense of self.

How can so much laughter be generated by an audience while being instructed in how to cause suffering to themselves and others?! This was a skill demonstrated by *Marshall Rosenberg* in his talk entitled “Non-Violent Communication, a Language for Life.”

With the assistance of his glove puppet friend, Jackal, he illustrated how language can be used to make others feel guilty, blamed, punished, inferior and frightened, while Giraffe, (chosen for his large heart) represented empathic connection. Marshall quoted Krishnamurti as saying “the highest form of human

intelligence is to observe without evaluating.” Audience participation had Jackal howling in derision at our attempts to simply name another’s annoying action without making a judgement. We found how difficult it was to observe action, name our feelings and needs aroused by that action and to make a request for needs to be fulfilled without judging ourselves or others. By the end of an hour and a half of Marshall’s humorous guidance, interlaced with examples of his world-wide work as a mediator in prisons, schools and corporations, we were getting the hang of connecting with needs and feelings that underlie action, and Giraffe was looking pleased. Praise, however, was not on offer. Praise is seen as an evaluation and can be used to manipulate behaviour by instilling a sense that someone is appreciated only for what they do, not for who they are. Expressions of gratitude from the heart and a statement of how life has been enriched seems to be the key here. The session finished with Marshall accompanying himself on his guitar and singing a moving song “See me beautiful.” We were left feeling that this non-violent communication is a very skilled and tricky art!



Michael Boxhall (above), a craniosacral therapist, gave a deeply spiritual presentation beginning with a long meditation. He spoke of spirit as being the great commonality. It is “what I am when I stop being other.” He referred to the unity of body, mind and spirit –

“the body can be permeated by the mind, and the spirit permeates the mind.” He talked of how the spirit underlies all forms, and is in the everlasting NOW. All forms are impermanent and if we do not live in the present we remain victims of past times and experiences – re-birth lies in the present. There is no “half falling off a cliff” – we either trust in, and surrender totally to the flow of the Breath of Life, or not at all. He spoke of the reception of knowledge as depending on the awareness of the receiving vessel, and before our finishing meditation Michael linked an empty mind to an empty bowl – “it sings!”

At the beginning of his talk, “The Little Wind”, *Hugh Milne* asked us to meditate with our eyes open. Picking up on one of Marshall’s points that no-one can make anyone do anything, he humorously amended his request to “perhaps you might like to meditate upon this picture.” 250 people sat in silent communication, meditating upon a screen filled with a picture of the Californian countryside around Esalen. This set the mood for a mystical and poetic journey, visiting different cultures and their spiritual beliefs. Hugh’s vision of madness was shutting out other ways of knowing and that whatever worked for us should be accepted. He gave us a sense of his love of poetry and stories, saying that poetry answers to our deepest needs and that stories feed the “old soul” of a child who hears things they already know but want to hear again. This makes them feel that they are in the right place. Andrea was touched by this image of an “old soul” being made to feel at home by simple story-telling. He spoke eloquently about the spirit and energy of the wind, how the inhibition of its flow leads to primary lesions, and the value of osteopathy and energy work in restoring this flow. Hugh’s talk brought a sense of being as free as

this “Little Wind” that crosses all boundaries, being a part of an interconnecting flow, and a belief in the breath of Life that is breathed into all beings.



Gerda Boyesen (above) speaking about “Between Psyche and Soma: The Realm of Biodynamic Psychology” gave us a dynamic and entertaining story of her life and work. Speaking of Freud’s view that there is a no man’s land between psyche and soma Gerda explained that this is where she works.

His Holiness the 12th Gyalwang Drukpa (pictured overleaf), presented us with the concept of understanding as the key to Health and that until we understand our minds, our desires, our anger, we will continue to be sick and suffer. He saw anger as a manifestation of ego and the expression of anger as detrimental in cause and effect. If we study anger closely we will find no cause for it other than our ego. He stressed the need for compassion both for ourselves and others, but again this needed to be understood. It is to be experienced freely from the heart, not because we have been taught by religious leaders that this is what we ought to be. He spoke of how imbalance between our male and female energies leaves us vulnerable to illness related to strong desires and anger. We were given the message that we hold all



understanding within ourselves, that all deities are within and we have no need to rely on something outside for our well-being. Meditation, visualisation and the chanting of mantras keep the mind too busy to be angry or to think “nonsense which leads to mental pollution.” He spoke with simplicity and humanity which reached to the heart of how to live life well. However, I am aware that the simplest of paths are, for me, the hardest and most disciplined to travel – which is why His Holiness is “His Holiness” and why, I Andrea, am just “Mrs.”!

It is hoped that this brief article has conveyed at least some of the essence of this conference; the love, humour and compassion at the heart of it, though words are a poor substitute for feelings! A short while after the conference we received, via email, a summary of delegates’ feedback and we were struck by the time and trouble that had been taken to do this. Comments and suggestions had been taken on board so hopefully both food and air-conditioning will be better next time! Overall there was praise for the high quality of the speakers and the venue and also some ideas for workshops and bodywork for future inclusion.

I (Andrea) always look forward to attending conferences and set out with great expectations of being intellectually inspired and spiritually nourished, only to be disappointed. This conference did not disappoint in any way and we left with a sense of having been truly nurtured by “The Breath of Life”.

The 2007 Breath of Life Conference will be held on May 26th and 27th 2007 (for updated information, see www.breathoflifeconference.co.uk). Confirmed speakers are listed as:

- **Mae Wan Ho** – physicist, author of 'The Rainbow and the Worm', and editor of 'Science In Society'.
- **Masaru Emoto** – author of 'Messages from Water' 1 & 2 and 'The Hidden Messages in Water'.
- **Stanley Keleman** – pioneer of body psychotherapy and author of 'Emotional Anatomy'.
- **James Oschman** – biologist and physicist, and author of the acclaimed book, 'Energy Medicine'.
- **Franklyn Sills** – craniosacral therapist, psychotherapist and author of 'Craniosacral Biodynamics Vols. 1 & 2' and 'The Polarity Process'.
- **Jaap van der Wal** – leading embryologist and author of several papers and books on the speech and movements of the embryo.

News and Courses

The Chiron Centre

The courses below are described in detail in Chiron’s Open and/or Advanced Training and Professional Development Programmes. For copies, please phone 0208 997 5219 or email chiron@chiron.org. All of these events will be held at Chiron, 26 Eaton Rise, London W5 2ER.

Monika Schaible will run a *Revision/Study Day for Biodynamic Massage Therapists* on Saturday, 19 November. Fee: £70.

Alun Reynolds will run a *Family Constellations weekend* on 10/11 December. Fee: £150.

One-day workshop '*Energy Flow and Chakras*' with Bernd Eiden on Sunday, 6 November. Fee: £75.

Somatic Trauma Therapy training with Babette Rothschild: Workshop 1: 1-4 June 2006; Workshop 2: 26-29 October 2006; Workshop 3: 31 May-3 June 2007. Fee: £1,200.

Six Friday evening seminars with Roz Carroll '*Exploring the Mind in the Body*' on 27 Jan., 24 Feb., 24 March, 28 April, 26 May and 30 June. Fee: £240 for the series or £42 per seminar.

Family Constellations weekend with Yishai Gaster on 4/5 March. Fee: £150.

'*Setting up as a Biodynamic Massage Therapist*' on 19 November with Francie van Hout. Fee: £70.

'*Working with Breath and Movement*' on 5 November with Gearoid McCann. Fee: £75.