

Book Reviews

Everything You Need to Know To Feel Go(o)d by Candace B. Pert, Ph.D. 2006. Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, Inc. 287 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1-4019-1059-4

This new book begins with an update, covering the intervening ten years, of Dr. Pert's exploration of the new paradigm that blends science with spirituality. She writes about her own conflicts, such as that arising from being both a scientist and being a woman who believes in spiritual connection with God. The stories of her personal and professional transformation are engaging and clearly show the mental and emotional gymnastics that were provoked. A dialog between Dr. Pert and her long-time friend and co-author, Nancy Marriott, introduces the book's casual and personal style.

Dr. Pert's work, describing neuropeptides and their relationship to various states of consciousness and emotional reactions, offers a deep look at the effect of these chemical messengers on babies, during and after birth, and also while in the mother's womb.

Dr. Pert describes the research of Nobel Prize winner (2000), Dr. Eric R. Kandel, which shows that our memories are stored via neuropeptides not only in the brain, but in our spinal cords as well as all major organs. Chemical messengers affect a baby-in-womb when the mother experiences strong emotions, stemming from both joyous and less-than-ideal situations in her life. Unexpressed emotions (stuck neuropeptides?) that lie far below the surface of our recollection can affect our perceptions, decisions, behaviors, and even health. Newborns who cry constantly after a traumatic birth may be expressing emotions that would otherwise be detrimental in the long term.

Dr. Pert explains that receptor sites for neuropeptides (a form of "ligand") are found only in areas where sensory information (e.g., sight, sound, smell) is carried into the brain and spinal cord, and never in areas used for outgoing information. As nerve impulses travel to the brain from a location of sensory input, the synapses occur at varying rates and act like collection and filtering systems as they

pick up neuropeptides that store memories as information. Memories at the sensory stopping points are “recollections of every perception that you've ever had, from your earliest consciousness of bliss at your mother's breast to the emotional upset you had after a fight with your boss the other day.” The peptide/receptor connection creates a physiological response. “Our bodies are our subconscious minds.” Most of this vibrational dance of feelings occurs below the level of our conscious awareness.

One study that I found compelling, although its implications deeply saddened me, was done on a group of bonnet macaques monkeys in which the mother-infant bond is especially strong. These monkeys are known to suckle their babies for six months, gazing intently into their eyes for long periods of time. Researchers decided to determine how stress on the mothers would affect their offspring. The monkeys were divided into three groups, one with food readily available nearby. The second group had food mixed with wood chips, requiring the mothers to search extensively for food in the bins. The third group had food that was changed unpredictably between high and low availability. Remarkably, all the monkey babies had the same growth and weight gain. The one group that showed abnormality was the one with unpredictable food availability. The babies of that group looked and acted depressed; sitting slumped over and alone in their cages, not playing with their siblings, showing these behaviors even years later. Cortisol releasing factor (CRF), a hormone attributed to stress, was found elevated in all these baby monkeys. This is the same hormone found elevated in humans who have committed suicide. These findings indicate that emotions related to guilt and worry in mothers can affect the emotional health of their children. Also, this study implies that an inconsistent level of attention paid to an infant is more damaging than less one-on-one contact overall.

In another chapter, Dr. Pert relates a story from when she was three years old: She knocked on the door of her parents' bedroom and when her father invited her to come in, a blonde woman who was not her mother was sitting in bed next to her father smoking cigarettes. Later, her mother found out about the incident, and little Candace was used as a witness to get information. She was put in the middle of the fighting that ensued between her parents, who temporarily separated. She felt guilty for “causing” her parents' problems and also felt abandoned when they separated. Her body/mind told her that “she couldn't be trusted because she had caused so much anger and pain in the two people that mattered the most to her.” This message, stored at the subconscious level, created a doubt that “she could ever be good

enough to receive love.” Dr. Pert shares how powerful was this discovery, by helping her see that low self-esteem issues had sabotaged many of her successes. She used this new insight to propel her into the next arena of personal growth and healing.

This attractive book makes it easy to see the profound implications of Dr. Pert’s work for healing not only individuals, but communities and the planet as a whole. I am excited to see what fruit is borne out of the many seeds that have been planted in the body/minds of readers inspired by the possibilities that this book offers.

*Reviewed by Leslie Bedell, D.C., C.Ad.
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CALMS: A Guide to Soothing Your Baby by Carrie Conte, Ph.D. and Debby Takikawa, D.C. 2007. Los Olivos, CA: Hana Peace Works. 96 pages, 26 photos. Orders: www.whatbabieswant.com

This book is the first in a series of parenting books flowing from the legacy of an important video that captured wide attention, *What Babies Want*, directed by Debby Takikawa. Innocently small and a cinch to read, this little book is a gem! Wherever you dip into it, you get helpful information, a profoundly true point of view about babies, and yes, wise counsel on every page. It is tailor-made for new parents.

The title CALMS is an acronym standing for an indispensable 5-step process that parents can use to maintain composure during the inevitable stresses and strains encountered in the first weeks of parenting after the birth. The secret method is disclosed in Part One. The steps make good sense *and are good psychology*. The novelty and simplicity of CALMS may startle you.

Part Two presents infant development information from the expanded view made possible by studies in prenatal psychology over the last 25 years. This view brings new depth to the challenge of bonding and opens the door wider than ever to unlimited communication between babies and parents. In a series of 13 very brief messages—which are the heart of the book—the authors have packed essential information about the real nature of babies.

In Part Three, three couples illustrate how they used the CALMS method to deal with situations they faced in real life: trying to soothe their babies at the outset of breastfeeding, with nighttime sleep problems, and enhancing their teamwork with each other.

Additional tips and resources are given in Part Four, including how

to cope with feelings of guilt, how to read the baby's body language, a helpful guide to rapid development early in gestation, and a list of reliable internet sites where more information is available for parents.

If new parents take this information to heart, their babies will be abundantly blessed.

*Reviewed by David B. Chamberlain, Ph.D.
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The Rape of Innocence: One Woman's Story of Female Genital Mutilation in the U.S.A. by Patricia Robinett. 2006. Eugene, Oregon: Aesculapius Press. 112 pages. ISBN-10: 187-8411047; ISBN-13: 978-1878411044.

Intactivist Patricia Robinett has written a truly remarkable account of her personal story. (Fair disclosure: Although I do not believe this affected my opinion of her book, Patricia is a friend of mine.) The author was a victim of genital surgeries performed on her when she was a child. She describes the events objectively though not without passion, and of course strong anger particularly toward her mother who arranged for the procedure.

Patricia proves herself that rarest of writers who can write a memoir as her first book and maintain a focus and an objectivity that is genuinely admirable. She writes movingly, stunningly, about events arising from her own incredible experiences while leading the reader through her emotional roller coaster ride rather than, as is more common and much easier, essentially strapping the reader into the car and leaving them to handle the rough ride themselves. More impressively, Patricia simultaneously manages to achieve a paradoxical distance and perspective that places her life events in a larger societal context relating to the paradox that is genital cutting in the US.

Some of us know that the nineteenth century craze for medicalized male circumcision was accompanied by a passion for the corresponding female procedure. Medical justifications were virtually identical, the general idea being that moral hygiene and personal hygiene mirrored each other and that both could be advanced by reducing the incentive, i.e., the pleasure produced by youthful masturbation.

Female circumcision appears never to have numerically matched the cutting of boys. The practice was dying here in the 1950s although articles advocating female circumcision were published in medical journals and popular magazines (including *Cosmopolitan*) into the

1970s. As the author states on the back cover of her book, Blue Cross Blue Shield actually paid for clitoridectomies until 1977. Ever since medicalized circumcision developed one and a half centuries ago, we have lived in a profoundly wounded culture, which in turn has found an almost limitless number of ways to harm individual boys and girls. The author does make one basic mistake when she incorrectly states that a reduction in urinary tract infections (UTIs) from two in a hundred boys to one in a hundred boys would be a 100% reduction in UTIs whereas of course it is actually a 50% reduction. Nevertheless her point remains valid: relative percentage reductions can seem high even though the actual overall reduction is small.

Patricia's story is a horribly sad one. It is bad enough that her labia were cut in a misguided attempt to prevent UTIs but as she relates, she was forced to undergo a second genital cutting "not necessarily for medical purposes." According to the author, she and her mother never bonded and the repeat surgery was a symptom of an ongoing power struggle. Apparently, the author learned to survive through psychological defense mechanisms.

In her twenties, Patricia took an important step in her path of self-discovery and recovery when she started volunteering as a counselor at an institution called White Bird. She describes White Bird as "a surreal environment where all the PhDs wore plaid, flannel shirts and were paid minimum wage, including the CEO." In one pivotal session, a previously suicidal client of Patricia's turned over to her all the razor blades the client had previously used to cut herself. As she gained maturity and perspective from her work and from her path of healing, "My world view became less judgmental. I saw that there are no good guys, there are no bad guys—there is only fear and love."

Luckily, this author was able to find redemptive value in relating her story to others and moving on, transforming the pain and working to protect others from it. This rare book is essential for anyone wanting to understand the inner meaning of genital mutilation, and indeed anyone interested in humanity, love, and survival.

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