

Toward a New Era of Childbirth Education

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Full Text: Headnote ABSTRACT: Awareness may be suppressed in more than 90% of childbirths today, as a basis for the overuse of other medical interventions in the labor and delivery process. Current childbirth education programs offered by the medical establishment support the prevalent use of risky procedures that may impair biological and psychological health. The quality of awareness in the pregnant woman and the womb child may be the most essential value pivotal to needed decisive change in childbirth medicine and education. The medical paradigm has been expanding, allowing the possibility of specific changes in childbirth protocol and education. Quantum physics, meditation science, and psychological science offer insights into the nature of awareness at the moment of conception. New childbirth education curriculums may include advanced natural childbirth methods based on meditation that can access and protect innate awareness. KEY WORDS: awareness, childbirth education, consciousness, meditation, holistic, mind/body, incarnation INTRODUCTION In childbirth medicine today, through the widespread use of anesthesia and pain-blocking chemicals, awareness may be suppressed in more than 90% of the childbirths in the industrialized countries (Wagner, 1994). Although the medical establishment may believe that the reduction or elimination of awareness of labor pain is a compassionate intervention, and though chemically induced calm may allow other interventions, which make the process of childbirth convenient for doctors and lucrative for hospitals, the routine suppression of awareness in childbirth may be diminishing the evolutionary quality of the human species. This is a pivotal concern for a needed revolution in childbirth education. Quality of awareness may be the most essential concern in childbirth. Suppression of awareness in childbirth interferes with maternal and infant health. The recognition, cultivation, and protection of prenatal awareness may be the most essential challenge to childbirth science today. ESTABLISHING THE VALUE OF AWARENESS IN CHILDBIRTH Understanding that the awareness of the woman and the child are often suppressed by prevalent labor interventions that may impair physical and psychological health, we need to establish a new priority respecting the awareness of the pregnant woman and of the child in the womb. Natural childbirth is founded on prenatal awareness. Natural childbirth programs empower women to remain aware, trust their innate capability, and make choices that will protect their right to give birth naturally. This supports access to important developmental experiences in the process of childbirth, sometimes including paranormal experience, while avoiding interventions that take away the potential for that. The childbirth experience is an opportunity to strengthen and evolve psychologically. Natural childbirth training is not just about how to tolerate labor pain. It enables women to appreciate the intelligence of labor contractions and to come to expanded awareness in the process of a joyous birth (Odent, 1994). Various exercises, particularly breathing exercises, are offered in natural childbirth classes to preserve the integrity of awareness and natural capability, although programs presented by Dick-Read (1944), Lamaze (1958), and Bradley (1965) have not emphasized the full potential of awareness and realization in childbirth. Today, with the increasing availability of meditation methods in the West, more and more women come to pregnancy with a developed sense of the nature of awareness from meditation experience. Such women would choose childbirth education in which meditation training was an important option, if it was available. With meditation practices based on a more profound knowledge of breathing and awareness, we could be on the threshold of a new era of natural childbirth. Advanced childbirth education incorporating meditation science supported by more sensitive medical protocols could offer women a new level of childbirth experience and health and protect the evolutionary quality of the species as well. Use of the word science in conjunction with the word meditation reflects the fact that both

Buddhist and Hindu meditation traditions are based on centuries of experience with highly refined methods and knowledge of their psychological and physiological consequences. Extensive literature exists, much of it in excellent translation now and accessible internationally, illuminating the methods of this science. That literature is revered and is the basis of great teaching traditions. Buddhism, particularly, has always called itself a science of human development rather than a religion. In its meditation science, psychological phenomena are observed from a basis of invaluable experience and sophisticated methodology. In comparison, some of the most vaunted 20th century sciences, for lack of vision, have plunged this planet into the gravest of dangers, while meditation science has proven beneficial through the ages, doing no harm but much good. Meditation science, and psychological sciences in general, must work with professional medicine and established childbirth education curriculums to make decisive improvements in childbirth values.

THE MEDICAL PARADIGM AND THE NATURE OF AWARENESS Before going farther, we must consider the changes taking place in the medical establishment that will make it possible to create a new quality of childbirth education and birth. A reductionist form of medicine (also called material, mechanical or physical medicine) has dominated medical science for at least 100 years (Dossey, 1993). This form of medicine holds tenaciously to the idea that human consciousness is a product of the brain. From this limited perspective the brain of a human fetus is considered incomplete, the brain of a newborn still immature, and intelligence or awareness is unexpected until months or years after birth. This justifies aggressive medical interventions during labor and delivery, during postpartum routines in hospital care, as well as during surgery at all phases including intrauterine surgery, surgical delivery, and major surgery postpartum. In prevalent birth medicine, there is the presumption that no infant learning or memory will occur in either the prenatal or perinatal period. This means that doctors and nurses, however compassionate they may be as individuals, offer care constrained by accepted medical beliefs and values they were taught in school. Fortunately, in the last few decades, medical science has been expanding its understanding of the infant senses, including the reality of pain perception in newborns, and has begun to consider that there might be a level of development that includes emotion and thought associated with the infant brain. And now, with important developments in the medical paradigm in the past three decades, mind/body medicine is included in medical and nursing education, a trend affected by a strong surge of public opinion in its favor. Such medicine has an a priori interest in infant awareness, as early as conception, and a strong interest in the use of meditation in childbirth. Currently, meditation is being extensively researched and broadly confirmed as a "new" science, although it has a very long history in which it has been repeatedly tested. This ancient method and its wisdom offer tools that could revolutionize natural childbirth. Meanwhile, childbirth education as presented under medical auspices still limits the tools it offers pregnant women, and encourages epidural anesthesia, chemical pain blocks, and c-sections as right and reasonable childbirth choices. It is imperative to incorporate new guidelines and higher values along with women's rights, in advanced childbirth education. What is missing in the current curriculum is the value and nature of awareness and the methods that bring natural, self-induced calm to the drama of childbirth.

SEEKING TO OBSERVE THE NATURE OF AWARENESS Adults can directly experience the timeless and open quality of awareness at any moment, and children can readily learn meditation. Children have a knack for experiencing open awareness probably because it's inherent. Although we don't have the technology to reveal mental states in womb children, their awareness may be innate. Therefore, it would be prudent to give them the benefit of doubt and respect their consciousness. Self-awareness is probably a very early experience of the fetus. In fact, evidence of awareness and intelligence are being noted at earlier and earlier stages of development (Verny, 1981, 2002; Chamberlain, 1998,1999). David Chamberlain's statement is pivotal, Prenatal/perinatal memories are transpersonal in transcending all the expected boundaries of consciousness during intra-uterine time and birth, especially memory, learning, sensation, emotion, perception, thought, dreaming, out-of-body experience, near-death experience, clairvoyance, and telepathy. None of these phenomena of consciousness were anticipated in the materialistic paradigm of 20th Century developmental psychology. In fact they were rejected..." (Chamberlain, 1999, p. 86-

87). It is time to consider how intelligence manifests itself from conception onwards. This would be consistent with the combined insights of quantum physics, Buddhist meditation science, and transpersonal psychology. It is not the intent of this writing to offer documentation from quantum physics pertaining to the creation of the universe, matter, and human conception, but to emphasize insights of revered scientists about the nature of these things. For instance, though Einstein (1954) was never satisfied that his Theory of Relativity was proven, his personal insights into the nature of the universe are of great value to us. This writing will call attention to some insights of renowned scientists that clarify our vision of conception. We look to teachings such as the Buddhist science of rebirth and the new field of scientific research corroborating past life experiences, but we wish to focus on the essential quality of awareness at the moment of conception and in intra-uterine life.

KNOWLEDGE AND THE MOMENT OF CONCEPTION Medical science has been characteristically devoted to observable phenomena and physical evidence. However, with the advent of quantum physics, "observation" has been shown to be more subjective than objective, and can influence the phenomena observed. Thus, observation can become self-serving projection - a sobering fact in the quest for true knowledge. At the least, this is pushing science to a new appreciation of psychic and spiritual phenomena and the various dimensions of consciousness suggested by psychologist William James (1902/1961). The fact that no technology has been created to observe the nature of awareness at conception is not important. What is important is that science, in its quest for true knowledge, has become more intuitive and telepathic, making use of various dimensions of consciousness. Some scientists look increasingly to ancient wisdom and its profound vision of reality. Regarding the moment of conception, renowned scientists have said that the basis of incarnation is universal field, universal mind, universal being. Since a large majority of people, including scientists, believe in reincarnation (Rosen, 1997, back cover), traditional and current knowledge of that important subject can help many of us understand the nature of awareness that is incarnating at conception. Indeed, reincarnation may be the most important fact of life, and one that can be known directly through inherent human capability. Transpersonal conscious recall of the moment of conception and other early embryonal experiences have in fact been obtained in meditation, in spontaneous recall by young children, in the process of regression therapies, in hypnotherapy, body psychotherapies, LSD-assisted psychotherapy, and in various other altered state experiences.

ON THE NATURE OF AWARENESS In contemporary science it is common to use the word mind as equivalent to consciousness or awareness. From the point of view of meditation science we can distinguish between mind and awareness. Awareness is innate cognitive capability, including intuition. It is an act of knowing. Awareness is probably an essential characteristic of the universal field and as such is often referred to as universal mind. In that context, energy has been seen to be essentially intelligent. (Chopra, 1989). Human awareness is first and foremost awareness of itself. It is capable of being cognizant of itself and of external phenomena at the same time. Mind is more difficult to define. It constantly changes. It thinks and speaks about itself. It has genetically-based qualities and qualities developed after infancy through language and other cultural experiences. Some energies of mind may be caused by reincarnation. In the following statements by renowned scientists, the word mind is used for what in childbirth we're calling awareness. Please be patient with that. Dr. Larry Dossey writes that: "Life sciences, such as biology and medicine, are not used to dealing with nonmaterial entities," like mind (1989), but physics is. In the advance of science in the 20th century the world enthusiastically received the work of great physicists, including Einstein (1954), Schrodinger (1969), Margenau (1987) and Bohm (1980), who were able to explain mind as a field effecting matter but not caused by it. Dossey comments, What has happened is that biologists, who once postulated a privileged role for the human mind in nature's hierarchy, have been moving relentlessly toward the hard-core materialism that characterized nineteenth century physics. At the same time, physicists, faced with compelling experimental evidence, have been moving away from strictly mechanical models of the universe to a view that sees the mind as playing an integral role in all physical events (Dossey, 1989, p. 162). In contrast to a biologist or medical scientist who is not interested in the new medical paradigm, or who is opposed to it, still insisting that mind is a

product of brain function, Dr. Margenau (1987) observes, The nonmaterial mind [with the properties of a field] may be completely free and independent from the physical brain, yet fully capable of influencing it, without having to furnish any of the energy required in the transaction between the two. In very complicated physical systems such as the brain, the neurons and sense organs, whose constituents are small enough to be governed by probabilistic quantum laws, the physical organ is always poised for a multitude of possible changes, each with a definite probability; If one change takes place that requires energy ... the intricate organism furnishes it automatically. Hence, even if the mind has anything to do with the change, that is, if there is a mind-body interaction, the mind would not be called on to furnish energy (p. 165). But where does the mind come from if not from the brain? And if it comes from the universal field, what is individual mind as it may appear at conception and influence the development of the zygote? To the Nobel Prize laureate physicist Erwin Schrodinger (1969), mind is universal and immortal. Any individual mind is the universal mind. Mind is one mind, transpersonal, timeless and non-local. Nobel Prize laureates Einstein, Godel and Bohm all agree that "Deep down the consciousness of all mankind is one; and if we don't see this it's because we're blinding ourselves to it" (Dossey, p. 175). The agreement of these eminent scientists is that not only is there a unification of consciousness in its universal nature, but it is also, in its essential non-locality, immortal. Being free of time and space are qualities that self-awareness perennially experiences in itself. Dossey, "Ultimately all the moments are really one ... therefore now is eternity ... everything, including me, is dying every moment into eternity and being born again" (p. 176). What they are not distinguishing, but what meditation science distinguishes, is that innate mind is both mind and awareness. The awareness has essential freedom from time and space that is a healthful basis for cognitive function in responding to the intense demands of human time and space, the life we are born into. Mind is chaotic, ego-centered thought, intensely concerned with time. Awareness, with its intuitive and open quality, provides a basis for the experience of timeless freedom. Contemporary "physics" (physical science) is respected by medical and psychological science for using scientific criteria. But history is changing faster than it ever has, and in part because of quantum physics, science is becoming more spiritual. In observing the nature of awareness, meditation science may be superior to physical science in distinguishing between mind and awareness and experiencing directly. Mind is derived from awareness, which is more fundamental. Meditation is able to know how inherent awareness is obscured by mind and it may offer freedom from reincarnated psychological obstructions as well as freedom from psychological obstruction developed in the present lifetime. In brief, based on centuries of observation with the full resources of perennial wisdom essential to the evolutionary quality of the species, meditation science affirmed, previous to quantum physics, that awareness is innate, universal, timeless, primordial, immortal, and unlimited in cognitive potential. This is what incarnates, what is present in conception. Meditation science was established in times less disturbed psychically, with more psychological stability, therefore with clearer vision. Its knowledge is as pertinent today as ever. Meditation science can help us recognize the dimensions of intelligence present at conception. Tarthang (2002) writes: "The knowledge of how to control the mind to shape the process of rebirth has been passed on by the great lineage holders of the past. There are works that describe in detail practices for taking rebirth knowingly and how to perfect and refine this capacity of mind through meditation much as a chemist might use chemical reactions possible only under rarified conditions to create a new molecule." The increasing presence in the West of meditation science is an important resource for an expanded vision of childbirth science. Furthermore, the fact that 72% of Americans polled believe in reincarnation (Rosen, 1997) indicates that public concern about the nature of what incarnates warrants a change in childbirth education in which the recognition of awareness present at conception is the basis of new childbirth methods and values. WHAT INCARNATES? The human egg and sperm unite to form the zygote, millions and millions of living molecules, all of them alive with powerful atoms. Inside the atomic function of the zygote is open space and electric force. Inside that atomic space is universal quantum field, the life potential, completely aware. The human zygote may receive aware incarnation as it is formed. For an instant awareness

may be incarnate in a single cell, in its live quantum field. And then the cell starts to multiply dynamically forming embodiment. At this point in the history of our species we can acknowledge a number of well-known facts about the status of reincarnation as we consider the question, "What incarnates?" According to Stanislav Grof (1993), major traditions, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, some important sects of Judaism and Christianity, schools, and various other orders, have been firm believers in reincarnation, the continuity of life after death, and in rebirth. Such conviction is based on profound knowledge that is considered sacred. In the West, a large majority of people accept reincarnation, despite Roman Catholic doctrine which declares it a heresy. Other branches of Christianity are free to believe or disbelieve, but an increasing number embrace reincarnation. The current widespread belief in reincarnation means that most pregnant women and their partners could very well be interested in knowing more about what incarnates. Childbirth professionals should therefore be more educated on this subject and be more ready to appreciate how it relates to the entire process of conception, pregnancy, and birth. The dimensions of what incarnates can be the basis of increased respect for the prenatal process, respect that may be cultivated through new educational norms. At the moment of conception most likely the universal and individual basis of a life enter the zygote at its first instant of formation. Otherwise the zygote itself would be the complete basis of life, and that life would have only the potential inherent in the genetic factors of its chromosomes. But often children are remarkably unlike their parents. Many people have non-ordinary experiences in which they engage one or more past lives, which are sometimes confirmed. One senses that something does incarnate that has both a spiritual and a biographical continuity, so that the genetic basis alone is an insufficient explanation of what happens at conception. It is important to respect that various people in non-ordinary states of consciousness, inherent super-consciousness, have been able to know directly what incarnates. It has been seen that the incarnating entity is an aspect of universal mind, a "spirit" or "soul" endowed with awareness and mind, carrying with it the great potential of individual human life. Generally it is assumed that people reincarnate for reasons related to their own spiritual growth or lessons to be learned. Some believe that a form of "contract" exists behind the choice of family members based on past relationships. Others who incarnate may be coming to relieve suffering in the world. In the Buddhist tradition this is known as a "bodhisattva," one who has taken a vow to reincarnate in compassionate service to all life. Some parents, ancient and modern, have prepared spiritually to become pregnant and welcome a child soul into their life. Often they are able to directly perceive the moment of conception. Today there is a growing literature of parent reports of how their babies contacted them in meditations, visions, dreams, or other altered state experiences to tell them of their wish to join the family (Hallett, 1995). At this time, when women and children are most often anesthetized in labor and delivery, appropriate childbirth education can be based on respect for awareness at conception, and the need to give women the option of childbirth with awareness. It's a matter of health and evolution. CONCLUSION Possible problems caused by the suppression of awareness in childbirth may be viewed in different ways. First, if awareness is reduced or eliminated to avoid labor pain, the fear of pain may be strengthened, and a tendency to use pain-blocking agents may be imparted to the child being born. This may later contribute to addiction and extend the fear of pain. A consequence to the birthing woman is loss of her opportunity to prove her innate capacity for pain management in labor, and loss of opportunity to increase her spirit. Today, women sometimes confess to feeling humiliated or cheated out of a normal birth experience after being routinely subjected to a series of medical interventions, depriving them of personal power and meaning. These depressing interventions are bad for the woman's psychological and physiological health and probably adversely impact her child, coming into the child in high dosages. For illuminating the variety of traumas caused by unaware professionals and parents in the prevalent way of birth, we can thank contributors to the Journal of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health, Volumes 1-17, from 1986 to the present. Practitioners in this new field are working to create new forms of therapy to resolve primal wounds, beginning as early as earliest pregnancy. For a broad and knowledgeable assessment of birth around the world we can thank Dr. Marsden Wagner (1994). His important work for the World Health Organization has helped expose the tragic risks that

come with unnatural childbirth. Appropriate childbirth education could be based on recognition of the awareness in both the pregnant woman and in the womb child, with recognition of women's rights and infants' rights to a humane and holistic birth experience.

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