

## Book Reviews

**Windows to the Womb: Revealing the Conscious Baby from Conception to Birth** by David Chamberlain (2013) Berkeley: North Atlantic Books. ISBN: 1583945512(paperback). 978-1583945513(eBook).

I can point to a handful of people, experiences, and books that deeply changed the course of my life. One of those books was *Babies Remember Birth* (now re-titled *The Mind of your Newborn Baby*) and one of those teachers was David Chamberlain. I was only a few months pregnant with my first child when I was assigned this book in a graduate course. I was profoundly affected by the clear, well supported, empowering, affirmation of humanity I felt from the words Dr. Chamberlain had written. I found an unfamiliar courage in myself (and also in my child to be born and in my husband) to live the truth I felt Dr. Chamberlain had laid before me. I chose a very different path than the vast majority of women becoming mothers. As a result, 24 years ago, I gave birth to my daughter, Jane, in water, in my home, supported by people who I loved and mattered to me. Jane's birth was a beautiful, transformational experience that changed my life and the lives of others present that day. The guidance I followed from Dr. Chamberlain's book woke many of us up to the power of women, of the birthing experience, and who we really are as babies.

Now coming full circle as a Ph.D. clinician with a doctorate that specializes in Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology (PPN), I have the great pleasure to review Dr. Chamberlain's new work, *Windows to the Womb: Revealing the conscious baby from conception to birth*. Once again I am impressed with the breadth of material and compelling stories of children, adults, and parents Dr. Chamberlain has collected over decades of practice. He has skillfully arranged a wealth of information that reveals the deep intelligence, learning capacity, and conscious compassionate awareness that is present for us in the very earliest parts of life.

At this stage of my career in the PPN field, I am steeped in complex research findings from areas like neurobiology, psychophysiology, and trauma research about the evidence for the profound formational impact this period of life can have on who we become. These studies are often masterful and crucial for detailing the intricate chemical and neurological networks

involved in our early development and connecting them to future pathology. And then, like a tuning fork, *Windows to the Womb* arrives and I am back in my heart again, remembering why I fell in love with this field of study and chose to dedicate my professional life to it. I find I am equally convinced about the impact of our early life through the prose like descriptions Chamberlain includes of people remembering their conceptions through hypnosis, or children reporting astounding memories of womb life to parents, or adults tracing their lifelong patterns of dysfunctional behavior to an event such as surviving an abortion attempt, or not being wanted early on, or the loss of a twin in the womb. Chamberlain's choice to "offer scientifically based chapters in story form" in *Windows to the Womb*, plays a harmonic chord my heart seems to love. I appreciate the opportunity to learn in a way that marries art with science, human connectedness with deep minded understanding. This has always been the quality of teaching I have felt from Dr. Chamberlain and this book fits well in that rare tradition.

In a deceptively simple manner, *Windows to the Womb* takes the reader through a thorough up-to-date understanding of the beginnings of embodiment. Chamberlain includes fascinating facts that remind us of what we used to believe about that area of our life. For example, regarding conception, Chamberlain tells us the story of the scientist, van Leeuwenhoek, who in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was certain he could see a tiny person on every sperm's head (confirming for him and many others that men contributed the baby and women just incubated the child) and we debated about who really conceived a person for hundreds of years after that (p. 14). Chamberlain clearly lays out in the beginning chapters of the book, the science that is now available to us through such instruments as very sophisticated sonography and the exploding fields of research like neuroembryology has greatly advanced our knowledge of what happens at conception as well as other areas of our early life.

From there Chamberlain prepares for us some of the most notable and provocative research on early learning and what happens when trauma is present at conception or during gestation and birth. Topics such as prenatal memory, habituation, language acquisition, spatial intelligence and movement mastery are all covered. He urges us to see prenatates with more than a solid five senses operating, but rather at least twelve senses for which he has provided evidence. One of my favorite questions

Chamberlain proposes from the chapter, “The Intelligent Prenate” is one researcher Mary Straub’s research has led her to ask (p.84). She speculates that the fetuses may learn to create altered states by squeezing the umbilical cord and changing oxygen flow. Fascinating!

In the last chapters of *Windows to the Womb*, it is the sentient, conscious, baby or to use Chamberlain’s own words, “the baby with an innate mind, personal yearnings, spunk, spirit, and purpose” that he urges us to not only see but to also nurture and hold in love and amazement(p.174). I hear Chamberlain’s voice at its strongest when he speaks of the aware, spiritual beings we are from conception and before. He includes an appendix called “Ensoulement” where he outlines beautifully the various beliefs and traditions for how we come into form.

For some, Chamberlain’s inclusion of the mystical as a guidepost to our development may lessen the ability of PPN to reach the traditional and powerful mainstream scientific and academic communities that are now waking up to what he and others have known for decades. In my opinion, he rightly challenges us to examine what we consider to be the authoritative voice of truth and validity by including evidence from what he has called the debate between the “materialists and the spiritualists” (p.186). Chamberlain takes a broad view of who we are as human beings when he seeks to understand. And in this book, he does so with clarity, simplicity, evidence, and a warm hearted kind of gentleness that makes it so easy to listen and read.

What a world this would be if all babies were held with the loving awareness that Dr. Chamberlain gives us in *Windows to the Womb*. You know the handbook for parenting everyone is always saying is missing? It has finally arrived! Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology’s own modern day mystic, David Chamberlain has delivered it! Now it’s our job to hand it out to everyone.

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**Dancing with Yin & Yang, Ancient Wisdom, Modern Psychotherapy and Randolph Stone's Polarity Therapy** by John Chitty (2013) Boulder, CO., Polarity Press, 422 pages, ISBN: 978-0-941732-04-8.

John Chitty's book *Dancing with Yin & Yang* is not just another book on therapy and psychology. It is a must read for all practitioners including and especially those who explore into the realms of pre- and perinatal consciousness. By interweaving awareness of the human energy field with the development of the body, John shows us how the body, emotions, mind and spirit are all part of the same whole, and he shares practical tools for our therapeutic practices.

*Dancing with Yin and Yang* expands our understanding. John does an eloquent job of doing exactly what the title of his book states, sharing how an understanding of the primary forces of the universe (yin/yang) as taught by Dr. Randolph Stone, can enhance the work of anyone practicing preventative and restorative psychological approaches.

John is one of the leading teachers and practitioners of Polarity Therapy and has been so for more than 30 years. He is a past President of the American Polarity Therapy Association. He has the ability to synthesize, chart, simplify and explain complicated concepts so that they are readily usable by the reader.

*Dancing with Yin & Yang* is half theory (replete with examples) and half practical application to psychological work with all ages. He has shared experience with pregnant women, newborns, children and adults. He discusses the PPN field and our birthing practices in view of the development of the social nervous system.

*Dancing with Yin and Yang* is a masterful pulling together of the work of so many contributors to the healing arts, citing their individual work and ideas and describing how it supports the a holistic understanding of somatic or body/mind work. John is meticulous in crediting those who have influenced his thinking and the way he works. He references leading thinkers in the field, adding footnotes that make further research easy without being cumbersome. He cites William Emerson, Thomas Verny, David Chamberlain, Bruce Lipton, Jaap van der Wal, Dan Siegel, Stephen Porges, Peter Levine, Stan Tatkin, James Jealous, Virginia Satir, Barbara Brennan, his wife Anna Chitty, Ron Kurtz, Marshall Rosenberg, Robert Wilson, Alfred Korzybski,

Franklyn Sills, myself and others. And that is in the first chapter! He fully acknowledges his wife, Anna Chitty who formulated a good part of the conceptual material and exercises he presents.

John's explanation of the autonomic nervous system with the sympathetic, parasympathetic, and social nervous systems, with charts and examples are exemplary in their clarity and application to trauma prevention and resolution, including its application to birthing practices.

Doctor Randolph Stone pulled together ideas and techniques from both east and west during his 60 year career as health care practitioner from multiple healing systems into what he called polarity therapy based on an understanding of energy flow (or restriction) between opposite poles. Polarity therapy includes theory, touch, nutrition, exercise and counseling.

Like Stone, John has the capacity to synthesize, integrate and be fully eclectic in his approach. He pulls together the work of myriad contributors, sees their particular gift to the field and helps us all integrate their ideas.

As a clinician, with decades of experience, he provides examples of using the theory in situations as diverse as the sitting with a new father feeling 'left out' of the mother/child bond, an adult who had experienced abuse as a child, a baby who couldn't settle.

He gives clinical examples of supporting people through what he calls the yin and yang relationship stages of creating and sustaining a life partner relationship: dating, courtship, engagement, marriage, sex, parenting including conception, pregnancy, birthing, career, elder care and care for the dying.

He discusses lifestyle choices from a polarity perspective in terms of optimizing health.

John uses the concept of yang (or yin) dysfunction, whether hypo or hyper and how this affects relationships and our nervous systems. He shows how the three guna's (+ yang, Neutral, — yin) and five element theory (earth, water, fire, air, ether) applies to all aspects of life from nutrition, to emotions to relationships. He fully utilizes Dr Stone's theories and makes them accessible to those new to energy awareness.

I personally have spent 40 years trying to disprove Dr. Stone without success. My efforts to disprove Dr. Stone's energy concept has lead me through these past four decades of experience with repeated affirmative knowing, literally proving itself before my very eyes, and in my experience. The energetic perspective from

Dr. Randolph Stone's polarity therapy, so eloquently described by John, is central to my work as a practitioner and teacher in the PPN field. I draw on it in every session with clients of all ages, from prenatals and their parents, to children/families and adults in both individual and group settings. Dr. Stone's energy concept, tracking energy in family relationships and his polarity therapy form the very core my understanding of individual, family and group dynamics. And Dr. Stone's polarity therapy ground and thoroughly informs my teaching.

I am grateful to John that he has written such a clear explanation of the basic principles of polarity therapy as they apply to the work we are all doing. *Dancing With Yin & Yang* is a must read for all of my students, and I wholeheartedly recommend this book to all members of the APPPAH community.

Thank you for the opportunity to review such an important book.

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**How Birth Influences Behavior** by Annie Brooke, PhD (2012)  
Smart Body Books, Boulder, CO. Vol 1: ISBN: 978-0-9760449-5-6,  
Vol 2: ISBN: 978-0-9760449-6-3

Now is the time for a book like *How Birth Influences Behavior* to be written. Recently, much momentum has been gained in the understanding of how formative and vital the earliest experiences are in shaping personhood. More than a few researchers, professionals and lay people have taken notice and research on the primal period is quickly accumulating, bringing to light what the founding PPN pioneers have known for decades. At the same time, it is truly challenging to capture both the art and science of the field of prenatal and perinatal psychology into one book and perhaps that is why it has taken this long to be done. The wait is over; Annie Brook's beautifully articulated and comprehensive book has accomplished this.

The field of prenatal and perinatal psychology is informed by diverse modalities. In *How Birth Influences Behavior*, Dr. Brook

has woven them together so masterfully, it creates a clear and accessible read for those new to the field and yet is also equally satisfying for professionals well-versed in birth trauma research and clinical practices that facilitate healing early trauma. Dr. Brook has created a pioneering manual for the field of prenatal and perinatal psychology.

Sections, with titles such as “Prenatal themes, Birth themes, Attachment, and Character Styles” are clearly organized under headings that cover theory, skills, and treatment in prenatal and perinatal psychology. While this can seem a rather obvious formatting, it is a highly complex task to weave the many facets of this field into the concise organization presented here. She includes a breadth of research, clinical expertise, and literature that is impressive. From early birth trauma specialists to the fields of osteopathy, somatic psychology, body-based therapies, current and cutting-edge trauma experts, energy medicine, and attachment literature, Dr. Brook has given form to the field. When people ask me for a book where they can read more about prenatal and perinatal psychology, I can hand them this book with enthusiasm and confidence.

When reading *How Birth Influences Behavior*, it is clear that Dr. Brook is rich with experience and expertise in this field of study. Her years of work and study in PPN are evident in the insight, depth of understanding and clarity with which she writes. It was enormously satisfying to read her descriptions and explanations as someone who has also worked in this field for years. Dr. Brook hit the nail squarely on the head for this reader!

Particularly impressive were the exercises and questions to help the reader identify issues related to prenatal and perinatal developmental periods. She places good questions for the reader to ask in simple and accessible boxes with relevant drawings to help bring into awareness the period to which she is referring. For example, in referring to the egg journey, she presents the questions, “How do I wait?” and “Do I accept my destiny?” and also “Do I trust the outcome?”. Dr. Brook suggests in clarifying and well-written side bars that “Clinicians will recognize when these various themes will present” and that “they are not linear” and finally that we learn to identify the “instinct for health” which provides the “access points for entry to treatment” (p.55). She names many important themes of prenatal and perinatal psychology and this pattern of woven articulation is

consistent throughout her book. *How Birth Influences Behavior* could be considered a reference guide for both professionals and people new to the field.

Dr. Brook's highest achievement in this book is the skillful, well-paced, and well-resourced way she presents challenging material. Like the waves of energy described by people like Peter Levine, or osteopath Robert Fulford, Ray Castellino, William Emerson, or Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, Dr. Brook creates a balanced rhythmic flow in her work that allows for integration and avoids over-activation. So often this reader has been in a place of needing to step away from what is being presented because the material triggers a descent into the trauma vortex. Prenatal and perinatal material is challenging to present and Annie Brook has used her expertise to navigate this area successfully in her work. It is an amazing accomplishment.

*How Birth Influences Behavior* is a book that deserves a place on every prenatal and perinatal psychology expert's shelf to be referenced often. This book gives such a beautiful form to the field prenatal and perinatal psychology.

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