

# Rebirthing as a therapeutic technique

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In my early years of training in psychotherapy I went around the world learning about and looking at different types of counselling and psychotherapy. One of the places I went to was San Francisco in the USA and other places in southern California. At that time the human potential movement was rolling along like a freight train and I trained in various things such as Transactional Analysis, gestalt, bioenergetics and rebirthing.

The leaders of the rebirthing movement at that time were Leonard Orr and Sondra Ray. They said birth trauma was experienced by us all and this was the cause of many psychological problems. They devised a way of returning to the womb and redoing ones birth. One could either have a wet rebirth or a dry rebirth.

In a wet rebirth the client would be placed in a hot tub (spa) that was 98 degrees which is the same temperature as the womb apparently. The person was then surrounded by others who formed the womb, they would then simulate contractions and the person was born out of the hot tub, through the vaginal canal to the waiting mother. Nobody had any clothes on so as to get the skin on skin effect that happens during birth and in the womb.



Rebirths in the hot tub

This type of psychotherapy could not exist today. The professional organisations and the press would sexualise it and that would be the end of that. The rebirths that I saw were not erotic at all and were not a sexual experience. I never experienced a rebirth myself.

It is unfortunate how those watching for any aberration would sexualise such a therapeutic process as it can be a powerful technique that can help people in distress. This can not now happen. Any ways at that time I saw many varied styles of therapy which I am glad I did. I saw types and ways of human relating that went beyond the average. I suppose that is why it was called the "human potential movement".

Dry rebirths in group therapy

In our early therapy groups sometimes clients would do a dry rebirth. We debated whether the people would be naked during the rebirths and decided against it for the reasons cited above.

In the process the client would lie on the floor curled up often sucking their thumb. A few other group members would sit next to the person and form a womb around him. At the baby's head there was an opening left and two or three other group members would lie side by side to form the vaginal canal through which the baby was going to pass. The 'womb' would then begin the contractions. I remember at one point someone found an audio tape that was a recording of the noises inside the womb. You could hear the mother's heart beat, blood flowing and so forth. This was meant to be played to new-borns to help them go to sleep. This tape was played during the rebirth.

As the womb started contracting there was a midwife who would begin pushing the baby on their backside forcing the head to the opening towards the vagina. The group members were meant to resist the movement as happens in a normal birth and the baby is slowly forced out of the womb and into the vagina struggling as it goes. Eventually it would be born with the whole process taking about 10 to 15 minutes. When born the baby would sometimes have a prearranged mother to be there who would breast-feed usually for about 5 to 10 minutes. And then the rebirth was complete.

And my point is?

First, I think it is safe to say that this would not be considered a mainstream type of therapy and hence many will write it off as fringe and wacky. Maybe it is and maybe not, but what it gave me was a better understanding of people and their psychology. It allowed me to see people involved in unusual therapeutic techniques, how they reacted and responded. In my view it allowed me to gain a wider and more robust understanding of the human psyche.

In this profession I am surprised at how quickly people will discard a therapeutic approach as nonsense. To my mind they see the trees but forget to see the forrest. In one way it does not matter if the therapeutic technique is effective or not. To see people behave as they do in differing therapies as I said allows for a deeper understanding of the human psyche. I have found that anyway. Perhaps people are a bit too willing to cathect their Parent ego state when they see something new or different.

The other point that rebirthing techniques can highlight is Child ego state magical wishful thinking. As a therapist one needs to be careful of this. The rebirthing process described could be seen to imply that you can redo a birth, have it be a good experience and this somehow negates the bad experience of the first time around.



We all have magical Child ego state wishful thinking

Psychotherapy can add new experiences but it can never take away the bad ones and one needs to be careful that the client does not start to believe this. If one was abused as a child then one has memories of that which can never be taken away or some how extinguished or removed. The Child ego state in us all would very much like that to happen. One needs to be careful that the client does not start to believe that can happen.

Some clients can start to think, "If I do rebirth then I am sort of starting again and this time I can make it right". This cannot happen as one cannot start such a thing again. When we did our rebirths in group therapy we were doing something but we were not redoing a birth. What we did, seemed to give good results but it did not allow the client to start all over again. Each of us gets

only one chance to do birth and childhood. When the time has past it is gone forever. We can add in new contrary experiences through therapy but that cannot extinguish the past.

The other area where this type of magical thinking can occur is with the transference relationship. The wishful thinking of the client can be, "Through the new relationship with the therapist I can erase the old original parent-child relationship and have a new one". As I mentioned before such erasure cannot happen and at times it seems the therapist would need to check if the client is doing such magical thinking.