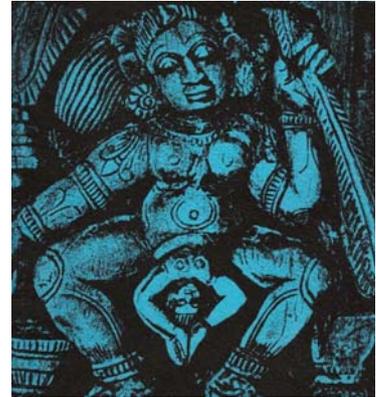




Current Global Birth-Giving Research Project

Birth Trauma and Beyond

Trans/personal (Spiritual) Events During Birth-giving



Researchers:

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Our Orientation

Among many peoples of the world child-bearing is (or was) often seen as a deeply spiritual (trans/personal) event. Many women experience altered states of consciousness during birth-giving that can give them a deep sense of connection with life. For others the experience of unusual states around birth-giving can be frightening and chaotic.

During previous research Gregg collected narratives of extra-ordinary events in birth-giving from mothers and their partners. Among these events was a felt sense of connection, an encounter with death, visionary experiences i.e. connecting with all women who have ever given birth, encounters with deceased grandparents, a sense of spiritual assistance, visions catalysed by pain or near-death experiences, out of body experiences, encounters with angelic presences. In this research we would like to intentionally expand the research sample.

Our Purpose

We believe that a thorough exploration of the transpersonal dimensions of women's and men's experience in childbirth is vital to the contemporary discipline of midwifery, for medical practitioners and for parents. These visionary states may have an inherent 'healing' dimension to them tied to the dramatic physiological transformation of women into mothers; men into fathers. However, experiencing transpersonal states of consciousness unexpectedly, or without a supportive container and social sanction, could potentially be fragmenting or frightening to some vulnerable women and men, especially if their attendants are themselves uncomfortable

with these phenomena. Women and men need to be able to articulate and make meaning of their experience in the company knowledgeable, understanding and insightful caregivers. Especially understanding and identifying women's visionary events during labor, birth and postpartum could therefore be an essential part of the support offered to women by all parties concerned with the multiple dimensions of childbirth and human personhood.

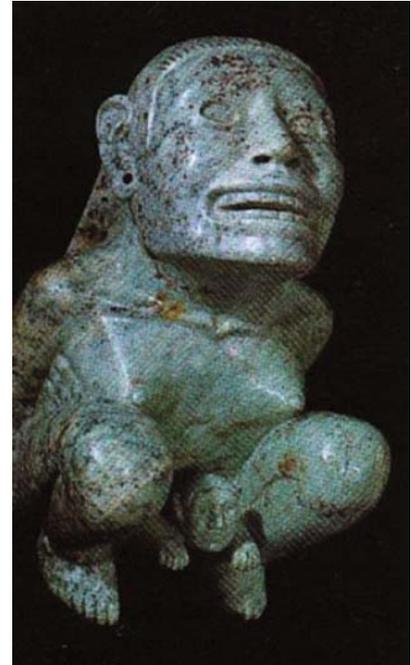
If you have had a transpersonal experience during child-birth, we'd like to hear from you.

Our Call for Participants

We are calling for written narratives describing 'extraordinary', 'spiritual' or 'transpersonal' experiences of consciousness during birth-giving. Note that not all events need to be 'positive' - some people experience frightening states (such as a sense of nearly dying). We would very much like to hear from people who have also had traumatic episodes.

We would like to hear from mothers, fathers and midwives if you have experienced any one of the following categories (or if you have a category not named here feel free to contribute)

- Visionary experiences catalysed by the pain or fear in labour
- An amplified sense of connection to with the nature, ancestors, family, life-itself, or spiritual personages (such as angelic forms or feelings).
- Blissful or 'religious' experiences a sense of 'god's or spirit's presence i.e. a connection with a higher power, Great Goddess, Christ-mind, Buddha Nature, Sacred Midwives etc.
- Felt experiences of a transcending nature
- A sense of meeting with ancestors, spiritual helpers, angels, deities.
- Felt experiences that make sacred the body, sexuality, nature and birth-giving — or a feeling of divine immanence.
- Felt experiences that seem to transcend or transform human nature, more 'animal like' perhaps as in the shamanistic the connecting to animal power.
- An experience of 'universal' suffering i.e. an identification of 'all women birthing' the 'pain of all childbearing women', the pain of all children being born, the pain of children dying.
- A sense of possibly dying or a frightening encounter with death
- Near Death Experiences or NDE's a sense of dying and leaving one's body, often associated with emerging into light.
- A sense of leaving one's body as in an out of body experience.
- A felt sense of participating in the evolution of the species or consciousness evolution
- A sense of strange and powerful energies coursing through one's body
- A felt sense of becoming 'one' with the universe.
- A 'peak' sense of initiation, of passing through a dangerous situation and coming through.
- A sense of contacting spirits, spirit realms, spirit guides, spirit landscapes.



- A sense of attaining a 'higher' level of consciousness
- A felt experience of being robbed of authority and power
- A felt sense of birth amplifying sexual or physical abuse, or conversely, healing sexual or physical abuse during birth-giving.
- A sense of becoming whole and empowered by birthing.
- Participation in a chaotic or troubling 'spiritual emergency'
- Identification with sperm, ovum, or fetus
- Experiences in which ordinary 'clock time' is condensed or even collapsed.
- Holotropic breath-work participants experiences of healing birth-giving trauma



Research Examples

And somehow my experience of a woman giving birth to a child put me in touch with the woman's movement. Up until that time I was a real medical student, intern, resident kind of a person who felt quite different from other women because my path was different from most women's but once I was in labor and delivery and was experiencing at the deepest ritual level and at the deepest life level, what it is to be a woman and how it hurt...and how it was also a miracle and how none of my training prepared me for this and what I was doing at that moment was what every woman who had ever given birth to a child has been doing through all time. I felt linked horizontally and through time with every woman that ever was.

Jungian analyst **Jean Shinoda Bolen** in *The Goddess Remembered* (1988)

Lying on the delivery table, I glanced up at the immense surgical lamp and the kind, curious faces of the doctor, the assisting intern and nurses, and my husband. After only a few hours of labor, my son was suddenly and rapidly making his way into the world as I enthusiastically cooperated. As the people around me encouraged me to "push...push...nice and hard, remember to breathe...", I felt an abrupt snap somewhere inside of me as powerful and unfamiliar energies were released unexpectedly and began streaming through my body. I started to shake uncontrollably. Enormous electrical tremors coursed from my toes up my legs and spine into the top of my head. Brilliant mosaics of white light exploded in my head, and instead of continuing the Lamaze panting, I felt strange, involuntary breathing rhythms taking over. It was as though I had just been hit by some miraculous but frightening force, and I was both excited and terrified; the shaking, the visions, and the spontaneous breathing were certainly not what I had expected after all my months of preparation. As soon as my son was delivered, I was given two shots of morphine, which stopped the whole process. Soon wonder faded and I became embarrassed and fearful. I was a restrained, well mannered woman who had a strong sense of authority over my life, and now I had completely lost control. Very quickly, I pulled myself together.

Christina Grof author of *The Stormy Search for the Self* (1990)
and founder of the Spiritual Emergency Network

More **Birth Research Examples** can be viewed at:

<http://gregglahood.com/index.php?section=30>

Viral Research

Research is to be conducted over the internet. Participants should read the Research Examples (see above) and our Ethics and Confidentiality statement (view at <http://gregglahood.com/index.php?section=29>). Participants can then email Gregg and Judy their consent along with a written narrative between 500 and 1500 words long describing their blessed, spiritual, transpersonal or frightening event.

We ask you to please email the website address to friends and ask them to send it on to their friends to help us gather a healthy sample: www.gregglahood.com

Acknowledgements

We offer our heartfelt gratitude to the following institutions and individuals for their support in this project:

- The Association of Transpersonal Psychology
- The International Association of Near-Death experience.
- The Trauma and Birth Association of New Zealand.
- The British Transpersonal Association
- The British Birth Trauma Association
- The Oasis School of Human Relations
- Robbie Davis-Floyd
- The International Association of Holotropic Breathwork

Researchers

Gregg Lahood PhD is a 'ritual specialist' and childbirth educator. He has done ground-breaking studies into the transpersonal dimensions of birth giving and reproduction among women and men in Western societies combining transpersonal psychology with medical and cultural anthropology.



Jude Cottrell has worked for many years as an Independent midwife. She is now a Midwifery Educator at Auckland's National Women's Hospital New Zealand. She has particular interest in the role men play at births and the psychological impact birth has on women and their families. She has two nearly grown up children, one born in hospital with all there was to have on the menu, and the other at home naturally.

