Empyrean Rebirthing: Miracle or Menace?

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this article is to alert human services professionals to the potential psychological and physiological harm which may result from participation in rebirthing, a process sponsored by the Science of Mind Church. The author provides a personal account of a rebirthing workshop as well as an analysis of the physiological determinants of the experiences she had. Questions are raised regarding the ethics, safety, and responsibilities inherent in the promotion of an activity such as rebirthing.

Although the Science of Mind Church has been in existence for over twenty years, it is experiencing dramatic growth and recognition at the present time. This remarkable rate of expansion is due in part to the following trends, which are currently evident in the United States:

1. the increasing number of people valuing and participating in a variety of religious experiences;
2. the interest in, and acceptance of, "new thought" or metaphysical religions by a broader segment of the population;
3. the expanding role of churches as providers of coping strategies for dealing with secular problems;
4. the presence of articulate, dynamic, attractive leadership in many religious organizations.

Based in California, Science of Mind Church offers a variety of seminars, classes, musical shows, and special events in addition to regularly scheduled worship services. The goals of many of the seminars and classes include personal and spiritual growth through positive thinking, improved interpersonal communications, and heightened awareness of the presence of God within each person. As a licensed counselor, assistant professor of counseling, and aficionado of metaphysics, I was fascinated to learn about a workshop entitled "The Miracle of Rebirthing: A Celebration of Life and Love." As described in a promotional brochure:

Rebirthing is a purification process allowing you to release your negative, limited ideas about yourself. As this occurs, the Presence of Love that you are spontaneously manifests [sic]. . . . You will learn proven techniques for overcoming fear and anger. You will clear your mind of doubt and uncertainty. You will increase your vitality and pleasure in life. You will expand your personal charisma. You will feel the presence of God within you.¹
Initially, this description struck me as grandiose, and I was skeptical about the purported benefits of rebirthing. However, I have long realized that my most useful, powerful learning takes place when I open my mind to possibilities rather than limiting myself by skepticism. My curiosity was piqued; I decided to investigate rebirthing on a firsthand basis, as a participant in the process.

**Personal perspective**

About one hundred people gathered together for the two days of the conference, which was conducted in San Diego, California, by the Reverends Paul and Layne Cutright. The Cutrights are a very attractive couple who promote empyrean (highest heaven) rebirthing in a poised, soft-sell manner. At the start of the workshop, they shared their personal histories as testimonials to the powerful, positive effects of rebirthing. The major component of the rebirthing process was defined as a specialized breathing technique, which would enable participants to reexperience their own biological birthing as well as develop a closer spiritual relationship with God. Reexperiencing the biological birthing was touted as a means of discovering and reconciling conflicts with important others in one’s life. Simultaneous spiritual rebirthing would take place as participants, through deep inhalations and exhalations, breathed in the spirit of God and exhaled negative thoughts and feelings. The Cutrights reinforced their assertion that deep breathing was a powerful spiritual stimulus by pointing out that the Latin roots of the word “inspire” (as in “breathe”) are the same as those of the word “spirit.” Many of the participants had been rebirthed previously and enthusiastically cited its merits as introductions were made. Several of the participants were obviously in highly emotional states, crying and trembling as they remembered previous rebirthing experiences or anticipated the coming event. In addition to the Cutrights and the participants, about thirty empyrean rebirthers were on hand to serve as assistants during the rebirthing process. Participants were informed that empyrean rebirthers are individuals who have been rebirthed many times, have committed themselves to rebirthing as a profession, have received intensive training, and are few in number owing to the specialized nature of their work. We were also told that we were very fortunate because some of the best rebirthers in the world were present at our workshop.

As if anticipating resistance by skeptical participants, the Cutrights directed a pre-rebirthing exercise designed to allay misgivings about, and foster confidence in, the process. The Cutrights introduced the exercise by saying that fear was simply an illusion of which we can rid ourselves. They also encouraged participants to engage in total honesty and openness during the workshop and thereafter. With a partner, participants were instructed to answer the following questions.