

An Interview with David Sawyer

Founder of Integrative Aquatic Therapy and the Prenatal Journey.

Ophelie Goffart interviewed David in Buggenhout, Belgium with follow-up questions by email.
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Ophelie Goffart: Why do you like working with prenatal and Birth topics?

David Sawyer: As a healer, I enjoy working with the prenatal and birth themes because a great deal of change can occur, on a very deep level, in a short amount of time. All of the tissue in the body originally came from fluid. The muscles, organs, and bones of the adult have their origins in the undifferentiated fluid of the pre-nate. In the adult structure, our emotional wounds and fears are stored and locked in the body tissue. A life time of beliefs and reactions are held in the armoring of the muscles, connective tissue, organs, and even the bones. As such, verbal therapy alone can take a long time to bring about genuine change.

Working in the prenatal time, in the weightlessness of warm water, it's as if the tissue "remembers" its fluid origins. This is much like the caterpillar returning to a semi-fluid state in the cocoon to later emerge as the butterfly. Many people discover a purity of spirit, a tenderness of heart, and a connection to life that is was previously unknown. This is a very moving thing. The work then is to release the trauma patterns that led to the holding in the first place and to provide the support to bring this essence into the flesh and back to the world of the adult.

OG: When you talk about support, can you say a little about how your work differs from traditional Watsu?

DS: Watsu, how it is traditionally taught, is very good at releasing the tension in the body. Many Watsu sessions, I believe, naturally bring one back to a prenatal experience. What is often missing is how to make sense of these experiences and to bring them forward again. Understanding the psychology and consciousness of this early time period is very helpful. Each stage in the prenatal journey has a different psychological feel. It is very healing to see how these fit together and support one another.

On a physical level, I also work with a developmental movement model. Energy and movement is first experienced as vibration, then as a pulsating sphere such as the egg or blastocyst that is gently breathing, then as an undulating tube like a worm or sea cucumber, then as a sea star as the arm and leg buds appear. A baby first sucks and pushes, then crawls one side at a time, then cross-crawls, and finally walks. This sequence of movements is rediscovered in the water. In health, without trauma, we are able to go from stage to stage without leaving the purity of spirit, and the tenderness of heart, behind. Our energetic essence is able to stay with us as we learn to crawl and walk. In my training programs, students learn these movement patterns first on land. These are not learned from the head down, but

they are rediscovered from the inside out. This brings potency and presence to the fluids, then to the organs, muscles and bones. Fluidity, aliveness, openness of heart and balanced power become the new tissue memory. It becomes the new default or what we do automatically when we are not thinking about it.

From another perspective, when trauma is released from the body tissue, the energy that was bound in the trauma is also released. This energy yearns for expression and movement. Knowing the map of the developmental movement patterns is very helpful. Even the basic Watsu moves are done differently with this knowledge. I often ask myself, "What is the missing support? How can I provide this? How can I help the receiver to provide this for herself and to learn this in the body tissue?" Part of the work is going backwards in time but it is equally important to have the maps to go forward. This is often the greatest healing.

OG) Can you speak a little about adult relationship patterns and the prenatal and birth themes?

DS: Yes. This is a large part of my work and probably one of the things that people are most grateful for. Over and over, I hear how people are able to have healthier relationships after doing this work. One student, whom I met 6 months later, said that her husband thanks me. From his perspective, the communication was easier and the relationship was more fulfilling. For her, she was more present and relaxed in herself and empowered with him.

Many of our basic relationship patterns are learned in the womb. One example of this is the theme of umbilical toxins. Nourishment and oxygen comes in through the umbilical cord. But so do toxins such as alcohol, nicotine, and even the mother's emotions. There was a recent study showing that the neurotransmitter serotonin, and likely dopamine, is produced in the placenta and carried through the umbilical cord to the fetus (Journal Nature, 20.4.2011). Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is another example of this transmission from mother to child. If toxic chemicals, hormones and emotions of the mother are experienced by the fetus, the tendency is to physically armor in the belly. These muscles tighten to keep the poison from coming in, and once it has entered the body to keep it from spreading. With this armoring, there is also dissociation from this part of the body. It is unsafe to be in the belly so we energetically leave. This leads to digestive issues, a lack of grounding, and a lack of familiarity with healthy boundaries in relationship. What is learned in the womb is often reinforced with the trauma of birth, and then later in life. Even situations that are not traumatic may be experienced as such based on the bias of these early patterns.

In contrast, if there is no trauma in the womb, we energetically take up more space. The boundary between self and mother extends further out to the amniotic sac or beyond. The fetus energetically feels bigger and safer. Muscle tension relaxes and the association with relationship is that it is safe to be present with ourselves and it is safe to be in contact with the other. This then becomes the template for our relationship patterns as an adult. Healing this pattern, and feeling in the body what a healthy boundary in the womb is like, shifts the adult relationship patterns on a very deep level. It is a domino effect that runs forward in time. This is one example. Everyone's story is unique. There are many

prenatal and birth themes. These are covered in the classes. A common thread, however, is bringing wholeness and empowerment to self and relationship.

OG) Your work has a great deal of psychology in it. Do people talk during the sessions?

DS: Yes, often there is talking though each session is unique. The sessions are an organic weaving from the physical to the psychological. I think it is important for integration and learning to happen on all levels. This way, the healing can go deeper and the receiver can take the work home with them. Sessions have a natural tempo. There is the rhythm of each Watsu movement and then the slower tempo of 3 or 4 moves put together. In cranial sacral therapy, this is called the breath of life. If one listens to this tempo, you can shift from movement to verbal sharing without interruption. The tempo and flow is the continuity throughout.

OG) Can you say a little bit about your training program?

DS: My introductory class is titled the "Prenatal Journey". Following this is the "Birth Journey". For people who want to continue their studies, I have an advanced training which is a series of 5 classes over two years. The advanced training is taken as a whole. To be certified in the work, I then ask people to take the Prenatal Journey and Birth Journey a second time. These beginning classes are very rich. People keep coming back to them. Some have taken the first class 3 or 4 times.

David is teaching the Prenatal Journey the 12.11 – 16.11.2011 in Buggenhout, Belgium. He is teaching the Birth Journey the 23.2 – 28.2.2012 also in Buggenhout. Please contact Basia Szpak Borst to register Basiab77@gmail.com. David lives in Boulder, CO, U.S.A. and can be reached at d.sawyer@comcast.net

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