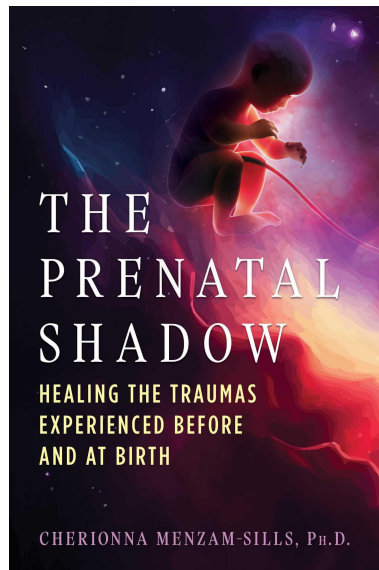


BOOK REVIEW

The Prenatal Shadow Healing the Traumas Experienced Before and At Birth

by Cherionna Menzam-Sills

Kate White



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he publication of *The Prenatal Shadow* by Cherionna Menzam-Sills is an important event in the growth of the field of prenatal and perinatal psychology (PPN). Like *The Secret Life of the Unborn Child* by Thomas Verny (1981), a seminal work that established that babies have experiences that can last a lifetime, this elegant book by Menzam-Sills lights our way toward truly understanding how earliest experiences may express themselves and how to work with them. Professionals in the field of PPN have strived for recognition of their passion, beliefs, and practices. This book has an easy-to-follow but deep approach for the newly interested and the finely experienced.

Each chapter describes early experiences, and how they impact our lives as “shadows” emerging into the light of our consciousness. Menzam-Sills states that the “*shadow*,” a term coined by Carl Jung, refers to unacceptable aspects of ourselves that we have pushed

down into the unconscious mind” (p. 2). While our first taste of the baby’s experience began 100 years ago with the publication of *The Trauma of Birth* (1929) by Otto Rank, we as a culture, or what Menzam-Sills calls a “collective,” persistently deny the experience of babies. It is only recently that earliest experiences from preconception onwards have begun to be more accepted, despite data showing how early life in the womb has lifelong implications.

Menzam-Sills has studied PPN most of her adult life and taken many trainings that contribute to the facets of healing, and her earned wisdom is apparent. She immediately sets up the reader for success in navigating the shadow material with therapeutic suggestions, including resourcing, journal prompts, and guiding questions. She deftly describes how the baby’s experience may create survival responses, and how they can linger in adults, influencing life choices and further development. The history of the development of the field is laid out, as well as current theories of trauma. Case studies illuminate the author’s points, and reflections are offered at the end of each chapter for further understanding and integration.

Menzam-Sills carefully lays out a path for the reader, gently taking them through what these shadows might be, and what to do about them. In Chapter One, she introduces the notion of earliest human experiences as shadows, and how much they influence behaviors, worldviews, perception, and more. She also includes historical descriptions and professional development. Chapter Two explores the earliest layers of prenatal life, particularly implantation as an example, and how that “imprint” or impression impacts our development. Here, the baby’s experience is shown, and how babies tell their story through behavior and response to words and stimuli. Menzam-Sills draws from many great thinkers and practitioners in the PPN field to support her writing and clinical experience. Chapter Three celebrates the health in early human life through education about our “original embryological potential.” The embryo has a powerfully positive place in our lived experience because of how our bodies form. This chapter also describes biodynamic craniosacral therapy and some of the important principles that apply in understanding how the baby’s experience unfolds, and the health that supports human development from early forces such as fluid tides, pulses, and movements. A Continuum practitioner, Menzam-Sills leads the reader through a practice to help build sensory awareness. Finally, she helps the reader connect to the Earth as a practice of connecting to self and others.

Chapter Four describes the challenges of birth, and its potential traumas that we may experience. If unresolved, these birth traumas may manifest as further challenges later in life. Here, the practice is finding layers of support. The chapter details several different kinds of early trauma, such as prenatal experiences, birth, and modern birth practices, and includes a list of common birth traumas and their effects. Babies have distinct experiences of birth without interventions. This process is also described from what we now understand as a sequence of movements and positions that may linger in the body. Menzam-Sills further addresses how to help babies with birth trauma. Chapter Five explores common themes related to after birth, especially parent-child bonds and attachment. This early relationship may have a significant shadow that lingers not only in present relationships, but also ancestrally and in subsequent generations.

The final chapter talks about how to heal the relationship with the shadows Menzam-Sills describes, and how we can return to our potential. Chapter Six is called *Shining the light, prevention and healing: Healing the collective*. It presents how “throughout this book, we have been shining a light on prenatal and birth trauma, and how it might resonate with our lives, bodies and consciousness now” (p. 178). The descriptions in the previous chapters are meant to “shine the light on shadow.” Perhaps readers have won-

dered if their early lives might still be influencing their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Menzam-Sills invites consciousness and healing with her writing. She asks, “How do we embrace the monsters within? The tools I find most effective are the triad of awareness, acknowledgment, and appreciation” (p. 179).

Thank you, Cherionna Menzam-Sills, for bringing us and the world a little closer to wholeness. Readers may integrate their early experiences through reading this book, or at least expand their awareness of how early life experiences can have lifelong effects, and how to heal from their influences.



Kate White, MA, BCBMT, RCST[©], CEIM, SEP, PPNE, PLC, is the Founder and Director of the Center for Prenatal and Perinatal Programs, Prenatal and Perinatal Healing Online, and the Prenatal and Perinatal Somatics Institute. As a prenatal and perinatal somatics practitioner who trained with many pioneering teachers in birth psychology, she founded the Department of Education for the Association for Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Health and now trains practitioners in the unique field of preventing and healing earliest trauma. She is an award-winning educator and has a private practice.

Website: ppncenter.com or ppnsomatics.com

Email: ppncenter@gmail.com