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## THE MYSTERY OF INCARNATION with RICHARD GROSSINGER, Ph.D.

JEFFREY MISHLOVE, Ph.D.: Hello and welcome. Our topic today is "The Mystery of Incarnation" -- how we, human beings on this planet, evolved, incarnated, from the dust of the planet, in Biblical terms, from the atoms, from the molecules, from single-celled organisms, into the complex, thinking, breathing creatures that we have become. With me is Dr. Richard Grossinger, author of *Planet Medicine*, author of *Embryogenesis*, and publisher of North Atlantic Books in Berkeley, California. Welcome, Richard.

RICHARD GROSSINGER, Ph.D.: Hello.

MISHLOVE: It's a pleasure to have you here. You know, there's a sense in which, under the veneer of civilization which we carry about us -- our clothing, our titles -- we are still so very biological. We hold within our cells the history of evolution. There's a wonderful phrase that you use, that the very silence within us is the silence of all the other species that are not us. And yet it seems as if so much of our civilized world is an effort to deny that part of ourselves, to think of ourselves as somehow spiritual, somehow not really part of the animal kingdom.

GROSSINGER: Well, I think that an exploration into biology, the use of biology as, in a way, a meditation on who we are and on our origins, is in itself a very spiritual activity, because instead of inventing a spirituality we say, what is it that the process has incarnated in us, and how is the process become incarnate through us? I could see biology in a certain sense, especially when it becomes experimental and begins using animals in a manipulative way, as being non-spiritual and corrupt. But just the information itself has a very spiritual quality to it, because we have to ask not how would the God we imagine, or the forces we imagine spiritually have created us, but how did they, and what is the evidence? One of the things we realize is that it wasn't done, so to speak, ex nihilo. It was done by starting with material and building other material out of that, and then other material upon that, and gradually, through using this material and sort of incorporating it continuously within itself, we finally arrive at what we are. So what we are now must contain, in some form anyway, everything that went into making it, and that not only includes the things that it contains positively, like our limbs, the way our brain is located in relationship to our nervous system, but it contains in it negatively, as a silence, all the creatures who have died and become extinct, informing us. The way that we have been shaped has been in response to them as well; it's just that their concrete form isn't in us. So we really contain a tremendous amount of unconscious information.

MISHLOVE: It almost seems like a paradox, in the sense that I know I'm forty years old, but my body has evolved over billions of years.

GROSSINGER: Yes, and it's a question of what is it that's forty years old. It's, I guess, the self, some aspect of the self. I don't question that something starts fresh with conception -- I mean, that's the whole interest of our individuality. And to carry that a step further, individuality becomes individuation, so that's the psychological process of our becoming. But I don't think we can overlook the fact that there's a biological substratum through which that happens that's absolutely incredible, remarkable. In fact it would not be too much of an exaggeration to say that the most incredible things that happen to us, the most fundamental part of our existence, precedes birth -- that we are rearranged, assuming that we're us then, that in some form we exist -- that we are rearranged almost daily in dramatic ways that we never duplicate again in our life in the world.

MISHLOVE: It seems as if the younger you go, the faster things change. A newborn infant learns an incredible number of skills within the first year of life, but even before birth we literally go from a single-celled organism up to the stage of being a human.

GROSSINGER: And think of the psychological implications of that -- I mean, because psyche itself must emerge in that at some point.

MISHLOVE: Hundreds of millions of years of evolution in nine months.

GROSSINGER: In a certain sense. That's a little bit a metaphor, but it is partially true. But even aside from that, millions of millions of cell arrangements and rearrangements and flows of tissue in relation to each other, all happening, not because, at least according to science, anything is directing it, but because it's repeating a pattern that it can't escape, because it contains just enough energy to carry out that pattern, and it's directed through it by the materials that make it up. And somewhere in that process the thing we think of as the psyche also comes into being.

MISHLOVE: It's interesting to me, when we think of who we are, that if one goes back even prior to conception, we originated, in effect, from the union of two different organisms.

GROSSINGER: Biologically, yes. And yet, we never double in that sense. I mean, we're homogenous at least in our consciousness -- leaving aside for the moment cases of multiple personalities, which are a different issue. I think that there would be some question, though, as to whether who we are is associated with the sperm or the egg or both. There are Hindu traditions, for instance, which claim that the human being is only associated with the sperm, although it derives genetic characteristics, at least when those are put through modern science, from the egg. There are others that claim that we exist in the egg, and the sperm simply fertilizes it and provides genetic material for it. And there are other traditions that claim that who we are, the psyche, doesn't exist in either, that it enters it at a point in time, depending on the tradition.

MISHLOVE: It must be very difficult to reconcile any of these traditions with what we know biologically. For example, the tradition of reincarnation -- that we live a full biological existence, shed the body, and then jump into a fetus or an embryo.

GROSSINGER: Yes, well, that's a separate concept from, of course, the embryological one, because there the issue of self-definition is handled by saying there must be something other than the body that's formed embryologically; there must be a spirit that can exist apart from that. I think that from any spiritual perspective you play off that and work towards it, and try and understand it, but I think in the

deepest sense you don't want to deny the physical reality that lies at the basis of it, because even assuming such a spirit, in the most naive sense, what's it doing getting messed up with this body? Why is it getting so intimately involved in this body, as to even go through the masquerade of you and me here talking about it? What's it doing here, if it didn't have anything to do with it -- if it was just a spirit that's passing by or becomes associated with it?

MISHLOVE: It's not like putting on a pair of clothing, is what you're suggesting.

GROSSINGER: No, I'm suggesting that in fact the biological function is a spiritual function, and one of my reasons for exploring it and for writing about it is that I saw an opportunity to understand spiritual issues outside of spiritual language by simply understanding and describing the formation of an organism from the embryo.

MISHLOVE: Let's just take a look at harsh biological reality for a moment. There are writers who have suggested that if we really look at nature around us, it's a jungle. It's one species devouring the next. It's cannibalistic, in effect, and that's what we've inherited as part of our nature, and our own species seems to be amongst the most aggressive of species on the planet. How can one reconcile that at all with any sense of spirituality?

GROSSINGER: Well, it's not how can one reconcile it, it's that the attempt to reconcile that is in fact a present spiritual process, and I think a spiritual process which biology suggests and which is worth following. And certainly some of the more enlightened spiritual teachers have noted that and written about it -- Trungpa, Da Free John.

MISHLOVE: For example, what do they say?

GROSSINGER: Well, in one way or another they address the issue of the violence in nature as a reflection of the condition that we must have to be in at this stage of our spiritual evolution -- that it's not just accidental that we occur in the midst of such violence; that it's necessary to where we are in the absolute sense. Thus we incarnate through it, but it incarnates through our desire for it. I'm being very simplistic and general here.

MISHLOVE: So is there a sense in which the social problems that we are faced with -- pollution is just one example -- are part of the death urge which is inherent in our own biology?

GROSSINGER: Well, I don't want to deny that, because there's interest in saying that, too, but I don't know that I call it a death urge as much as you act and there are consequences. That's what natural selection, for instance, tells us about evolution. It doesn't tell us first that nature is violent; it tells us that working from the instincts and energies that are present in the system, certain kinds of events will occur, and they'll cause reactions, and then the reactions to those events will cause other kinds of events to occur. I don't think you can jump quickly from a sort of microbiological level to large social problems, without losing something in the translation along the way that blurs the issue a little bit. I think that social biologists now -- you know, certainly from the days of Robert Ardrey and The Territorial Imperative and so forth -- have tried to make the argument that the state that the world is in today should not be unexpected, because it's simply a reflection of the underlying biology. I would agree to a certain extent, and say that yes, it must be a reflection of the underlying biology, but also there seems to be a process by which consciousness reflects upon that and transforms it, even as the science of biology is a self-reflection. It's a reflection on the human shape and on the shapes within the human shape, and although it's not explicitly addressed to the idea, "If I understand who I am, then I will know better how to act," unconsciously it has to be that. Apart from its technological uses, on an unconscious level that's what we're doing. And ultimately it does lead back to the large social questions.

MISHLOVE: So there's a sense, perhaps, in which our consciousness, being the product of evolution, is now a force within evolution itself, so that decisions which we make may affect our evolutionary future.

GROSSINGER: And maybe on an unconscious level that was always true. Certainly there are even scientists that have argued that. I mean, it's again the case of where does mind enter into this, and at what level, and what does it mean? If we take the most limited post-Darwinian sense, then it's going to be argued that mind is simply a chemical event that's rather frail and feeble in its potential and possibilities, and that it simply reflects itself evolutionary conditions which led to it. I think that that's a half truth; I mean, it's an interesting history, and it's worth looking at, right through the development of the primates into the first humanoid species, and so forth. However, it's also, I think, worth examining that, for instance, the human intelligence is not like insect intelligence. It isn't simply a genetic imprint -- well, some people would claim it is; but I at least will make the point that it isn't, that it somehow is transforming the material of nature. And I don't think that it has to be seen just in the simplistic sense of creating pollution, of developing machines, of participating in the process of evolution; it also is, I think, doing so in some profound sense.

MISHLOVE: There's a sense in which some of the mystical or occult writers in the field of biology talk about the human body being a microcosm of the larger macrocosm, and that even celestial influences affect the body, that it's somehow one with it. I guess that one would have to acknowledge that the very fabric of our tissue is of celestial origin. There is a much larger sense -- even if we look at the scientific facts, there are deeper threads that can be exposed.

GROSSINGER: There are, although most so-called good scientists will make light of that. I mean, they'll say, "Well, atoms are atoms, and molecules are molecules, and so what that they were there in outer space? That doesn't connect us to the stars, particularly. It's a neutral event, and nothing is carried through."

MISHLOVE: They might make the same argument about the human body recapitulating evolution, that it's trivial.

GROSSINGER: Well, there is that. Years ago the argument was raised that ontogeny -- that is, the development of the embryo -- recapitulates phylogeny, which is the evolution of the species. It was sort of taught mindlessly for a great number of years, and even is still taught in some places today. It is generally refuted in the pure sense by biologists, who point out that the process is actually more complicated, in that you don't get anything like pure recapitulation, you get something like a recapitulation of the natural selected events

-- well, we don't have to go into the mechanical details of that. I do think, though, that once you've refuted that, you have to sort of say, well, of course it recapitulates it, because where else could it have come from? There's no other place, there's no other origin for ontogeny for us -- that is, physical origin or biological origin -- except in the evolution of tissue from simple cells through organisms with layers of tissue, gradually incorporating each other, up to us. We may not recapitulate the exact series that leads up to us, and we may not actually be a fish when we're in the womb, or be the first land animal as the gills disappear and we start to breathe. But we are recapitulating an incredibly intense dynamic process, whereby we were forms -- that is, parallel in some sense to that. Now, in the nineteenth century, from Haeckel, who advanced the idea that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, you get some of the more occult like Steinerite views, that somehow if ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, maybe both recapitulate cosmogeny.

MISHLOVE: The origin of the universe itself.

GROSSINGER: The universe itself. So that you end up with a funny modern version of the Hermetic law -- you know, "As above, so below." Rudolf Steiner went to great pains, in fact, to show how there was an esoteric evolution of the universe which is recapitulated stage by stage in each phase of the development of the organism -- that is, the meeting of sperm and egg reflects an event which happened with moons and planets at one time. In fact, there is a certain similarity, at least in a metaphorical sense, between them

-- the sperm entering the egg is like an asteroid, a meteorite, entering a planetary field. Steiner actually carried that through, so that he suggested there was a real event once which was transposed into this. Of course it couldn't be transposed into it the way biological events are transposed. You'd have to argue some kind of profound archetypal connection, some sort of morphology at the core of the universe which merges mental events and physical events and brings them to the same fruition. But anyway, that's going back to your raising the question of the celestial relationship. I think the Western spiritualists, the Anthroposophists and Theosophists, would probably argue it not so much on the basis that we're made of star stuff, as they would on the similarity of embryogenic events to planetary events -- the degree to which the different stages of the embryo, the blastula and the gastrula, and so forth, represent movements of whole worlds.

MISHLOVE: And when one sees these events under the microscope, they do indeed look as if you might be looking out of a telescope.

GROSSINGER: That's one of those phenomena which is easily explained on the one hand and done away with, and then not at all easily explained on the other hand. For instance, you could go back to the simple laws of gravity which form circles, or I should say spheres, spheroid shapes -- cells, planets, stars.

MISHLOVE: Or the spiral shapes of snails, and nebulae.

GROSSINGER: Right. Probably you're thinking, because we were talking before the show earlier about Wilhelm Reich's perception, in which while searching for the origin of orgasm response in simple one-celled animals, he had a perception that similar energetic patterns occurred in the formation of galaxies, and that maybe there was one energy -- one energy which was at once erotic and -- what else would you call it?

MISHLOVE: Cosmic.

GROSSINGER: Cosmic and cosmological. That the energy that we psychologically associate with Eros, and that Freud named libido, is also the energy of hydrogen that is related to galactic formation and the spirals that lie behind planetary systems.

MISHLOVE: Yes. There's a sense as well in quantum physics today, that the very underlying ground of being within us, at a subatomic level, is one that permeates the whole universe -- that even the vacuum of outer space is these probability waves of quantum physics, and that somehow we are unified with it; that the notion that we are separate because we are a biological organism, that that it in itself may be an illusion at a deeper level, which is in agreement with the teachings of mystics, of course.

GROSSINGER: I think that's been a much-paraded-around notion. Probably different versions of that idea have gotten more press than any other so-called science- mysticism syntheses. However, I think that the real issue of that idea is that it hasn't been absorbed fully enough. In fact, it's been so advertised, in a sense, it's lost some of its bite -- if you know what I mean. I mean, you've heard so much about the relationship between quantum physics and mysticism, that you almost forget what it would look like if we integrated that into our world view.

MISHLOVE: Well, it goes against the grain of common sense completely. It seems as if there's a biological need to think of ourselves as separate. How could we hunt otherwise? Although I suppose in the great unconscious of the animal kingdom, it doesn't stop hunting.

GROSSINGER: Well, you could go a lot of ways with that, but one response I would have is that probably we know who we are, and that we may deny it on some level, and avoid it, and spend a lifetime or lifetimes, depending on your beliefs, trying to evade it or translate it into something else, but the underlying drive of our lives reflects it. And in some sense, to go back to the earliest theme we talked about, we must, by looking at cells and microbiological processes, have some intuition or perception of that process. We must be looking, in a sense, at desire in its primal form, although the Freudians, who reinvented the word desire for the twentieth century, don't acknowledge that it comes in at any stage earlier than primary development, for the most part -- I mean, you have the odd Freudian who feels otherwise. I think unquestionably you're looking at the raw forms of the instincts on a cellular level.

MISHLOVE: It may even go back further, perhaps, to the proton and the electron.

GROSSINGER: That's a jump that I would call an interesting metaphor at this point. And that's the Reichian jump, right? He made that by going from amoebas and worms to galaxies -- and I have been accused in my writing of over-mythologizing that aspect of Reich. But it is appealing; it's an unusual vision for him, who was so grounded and pragmatic in his work, but I think it's also a tremendously powerful vision. But on the other hand, I think that without even making that jump to the atomic level, just going to the cellular level, you

end up asking very interesting questions about our own nature. For instance, the basic feelings of life, the things that we feel are most crucial to who we are -- the things we desire, the things we fear -- at what level are they shaped? And does, for instance, the force that operates microbiologically with sperm and eggs, with cells that operate to form tissue, is that translated into the erotic on a psychological level?

MISHLOVE: That's a deep and a profound question, and I guess it's a note we'll have to end on now, because we're out of time. Richard Grossinger, thank you so much for being with me. I really enjoyed this opportunity to kind of reflect back and forth between our mental, our spiritual concepts of who we are, and the very tissues out of which we are made, our biology. It's been great having you with me.

GROSSINGER: I enjoyed it, Jeffrey. Thanks.

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