

"Religious Delusions"

Professor Andrew Sims

"Religious delusions are of fundamental significance in forensic psychiatry, and they played an important part in the birth of British psychiatry."

The birth of British psychiatry

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In November 2011, BBC1, in 'Garrow's Law', revisited the case of William Hadfield, who shot at George III, intending to miss, on 15th May, 1800. Hadfield's madness was associated with, or precipitated by, severe brain damage from sabre wounds to the head sustained in Flanders in 1794, when he was one of the Duke of York's bodyguards. He had outbursts of extreme violence, during one of which he had threatened the life of his own child because, he said, he had been **commanded by God** to do so. He had a delusion that he must die to save the world but, because of his religious beliefs, this must not be from suicide. Therefore, in order to be hanged, he staged an elaborate mock-assassination attempt on the King at Drury Lane Theatre by firing a pistol at close range; an expert marksman, he missed by 12 inches! He was disarmed, arrested and charged with high treason. Thomas, later Lord, Erskine defended him, and Dr Crichton of Bethlehem Hospital gave medical evidence; the enlightened Lord Chief Justice 'stopped the trial and directed the jury to find Hadfield **'Not Guilty: he being under the influence of Insanity at the time the act was committed'**'. The case of Hadfield changed thinking, and hence the law, on criminal responsibility. Later that same year, the law was changed so that Hadfield, as an insane person, and therefore not guilty of murder, could be detained indefinitely at Bethlehem, and so his religious delusion effectively initiated the practice of forensic psychiatry and subsequent framing of the Mental Health Act.

My Experience

I remember when I experienced my 'Religious Delusion' vividly! I'd painted myself on a stationary white horse wearing a white flowing robe like was worn in Biblical Times. My long-term Jungian psychologist made no response at all when I'd described the painting I'd done in Art Therapy

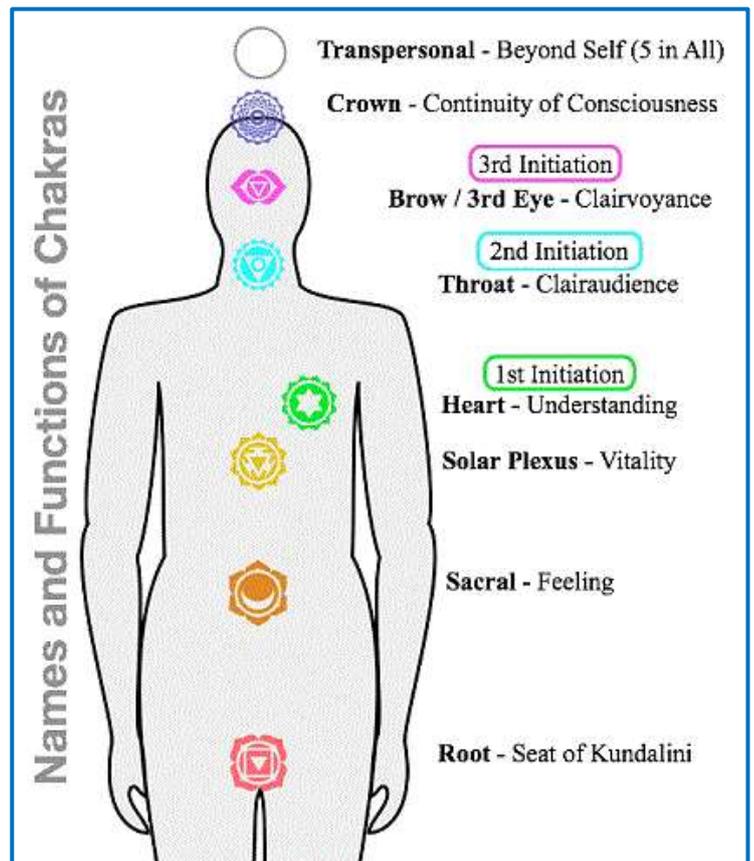
Class. She just froze and after a little time the next person from me began to speak about their painting. Anyway at the end of the class I went around to my Therapist and repeated what I'd said during the Art Therapy Class – **"I know that I'm not Jesus – but it's like I'm him."** Again there was no response and it was about 30 years later that I realised that it was most unusual that the other psychologist, present at the Art Therapy Class, did not become involved because my Therapist was obviously having difficulty!

The presence of the **second Therapist** at this Art Therapy Class was necessary because two Masters, two Mistresses or one of each are required to be present (or involved) in each Initiation.

When the **Heart Chakra**, as shown in the diagram alongside, is sufficiently enlivened the **1st Initiation** can proceed.

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[birth of Christ consciousness in the cave of the Heart \(Chakra\) - 1st Initiation](#)