

Past Life Regression

Past life regression is a form of guided hypnotherapy that appears to elicit memories relating to previous lives. In a large number of documented cases, subjects have recalled characteristics appropriate to the life they are recalling (when these are known), and the period in which it occurred, in surprising detail, and apparently far beyond their conscious knowledge. In combination, the obscurity of the information, realistic presentation of character and emotional identification on the part of the subject have convinced many people of the reality of reincarnation. Alternative parapsychological explanations include ESP and exposure to the memories of deceased humans. Some narratives have been traced to printed sources, suggesting the presence of cryptomnesia – unconscious recall of facts in books and films, or of past events, to which the subject has been exposed, however fleetingly and however long ago. There remain serious reservations about the authenticity of memories recovered under hypnosis, especially given the phenomenon of false memory syndrome. Some hypnosis therapists regard past life regression as helpful in uncovering emotional conflicts and traumas, whatever the true nature of the memories.



'Bridey Murphy'

Hypnotic regression came to public notice with a case published in 1956 by a Colorado businessman and hypnotherapist Morey Bernstein.^[1] Bernstein had worked with Virginia Tighe, a subject who proved especially susceptible to a deep trance state, in order to investigate the possibility of regressing a patient beyond birth to previous existences. In her first session, Tighe starting speaking with an Irish accent and gave details of a life in which she was born in 1798 in Cork, named Bridget Kathleen Murphy and married a Belfast barrister. During this and subsequent sessions Tighe provided colourful details about nineteenth-century Ireland, referring to songs, farming methods, books, coins and furniture of the period. She named two Belfast shops that were later found to have existed, and used terms that were now redundant but had then been current.^[2]

The implication that Tighe might be remembering a previous life was clouded by subsequent press claims that as a child she had lived in Chicago with an aunt who was part-Irish, and had close contact with the Irish community there, circumstances that might have accounted for her knowledge of Ireland. In particular, she was said to have been infatuated with the son of a close neighbour, an Irish woman named Bridey Corkell whose maiden name was Murphy.^{[3] [4]} These claims were in turn found to be variously untrue or exaggerated, having been motivated by newspaper rivalries,^[5] and even if true would not necessarily account for Tighe's knowledge of Belfast in the early nineteenth century.^{[6] [7]}

Following the Bernstein case, past life regression therapy was taken up by other hypnotherapists and has now become a commonly offered service.

Characteristics

Psychologist professor David Fontana (1934-2010), a Fellow of the British Psychological Society who also served as President of the Society for Psychical Research, engaged in hypnotic regression for experimental purposes. He writes:

The results have been striking. When regressed, the subject's voice and manner of speech change. They speak haltingly (as always in deep hypnosis) but with apparent certainty of past events and places, of past emotions, difficulties, joys, and tragedies. After the regression is over, they may remark that the experience was one of the most extraordinary of their lives. As part of my own experimental work I have also been regressed, and I can testify that the experience is entirely realistic, lifelike and, perhaps most surprisingly of all, full of unexpected events that lessen the possibility that expectation could explain all that occurred.^[8]

Therapist Carol Bowman describes past life regression is 'an amazing, full-sensory experience':

You might experience the memory as a vivid movie, or see only vague flashes of images that prompt the narrative. You might hear gunshots or explosions on a battlefield, or music at a dance. It is possible to recall smells too: smoke from a fire, leather from a saddle, or the sweat of a dirty body.

As the story unfolds, you feel real emotions appropriate to the story. You may cry when you re-experience deep sadness at the death of a beloved child, feel despair in the pit of your stomach as you witness a massacre, or elation at a long-awaited homecoming from war. And just as you can recall strong emotions, you feel the pain of an arrow piercing your body as you are dying, or the heaviness of a load you're carrying on your back. These physical sensations and emotions are very real in the moment, but pass quickly as you move through the past life story and death.

Practitioners, Experiencers and Critics

Past life regression therapists whose work has been regarded by some as evidence of reincarnation include Arnall Bloxham, Joe Keeton and Helen Wambach (*see below*). Others who have written about their past life regression work include HW Hurst,^[9] Brian Weiss^[10] and Edith Fiore.^[11]

Robert L Snow is a rare example of a regression subject who has investigated his own memories (*see below*).

Noted critics include Melvin Harris, a radio and television writer and member of the Society for Psychical Research, and Ian Wilson, a historian. Both have exposed numerous instances where historical details at first thought to be too obscure to be known to the subject could in fact be found in printed or other sources, some more accessible than others (*see below*).

Arnall Bloxham (b. 1881)

Arnall Bloxham was a British hypnotherapist based in Wales who specialised in anxiety therapy. In the early 1950s, he turned to past life regression, most likely having been motivated by the Bridey Murphy case. During the next twenty years he carried out more than four hundred sessions, which he recorded on tape for the purposes of private discussion among those like himself who took seriously the possibility of reincarnation.

Bloxham's work came to light as a result of the interest shown by Jeffrey Iverson, a BBC producer based in Cardiff, during the 1970s. Iverson was intrigued by the recordings, especially as few of Bloxham's subjects claimed to have been famous historical characters. Iverson published transcripts as a series in the *Sunday Times*, and in 1976 produced a BBC television documentary presented by broadcaster Magnus Magnusson. His book *More Lives than One?* was published the same year and became a best-seller.^[12] It described eight cases that were susceptible to historical verification, in which it differed from a case described in a 1958 book by Bloxham's wife Dulcie.^[13]

In these cases the subjects spoke in character as though they were re-experiencing a past life, while continuing to use modern English in order to communicate the images and sensations they were re-living. Some critics felt the impression of having lived a past life would have been more convincing had the subjects spoken a foreign language, as was reported by the psychiatrist and psi researcher Ian Stevenson, some of whose hypnotic subjects could seemingly converse in the language of the individual whose life they seemed to remember.^[14] Iverson did not consider this a weakness, arguing that it would be natural for subjects to use their present mode of speaking while recalling past events.^[15]

Iverson discarded from serious consideration sessions where the claimed past lives were of historical celebrities. One subject, believing herself to have been Queen Elizabeth I, described having once made love with Sir Walter Raleigh in the cabin of his ship.^[16] He was also unconvinced by some other of Bloxham's sessions, for instance a quantity surveyor who regressed to the life of a seventeenth century spy, among other things because of an anachronistic reference to the later term 'grog' for diluted rum and the lack of documentary support for the claim that he had been knighted. On the other hand, Iverson was impressed by the way the subject convincingly developed over the course of the two-hour session from a somewhat insecure loner, with anxieties about his professional work and the makings of a drink problem, into a 'morose and rheumatically' alcoholic haunted by his past.^[17]

Jane Evans

The most notable of Bloxham's subjects was Jane Evans (pseudonym), a Welsh housewife in her thirties, who in sessions in 1971 gave details of six previous lives. In 1975, Evans was filmed during a session for Iverson's documentary. She had a basic school education, and happened to have attended the same school as Iverson, who was therefore able to confirm that she had not studied history at an advanced level. This, together with the diversity of the personalities she described under hypnosis, made it unlikely that her 'historical facts' were invented.

Evans claimed memories as:

- Livonia – wife of Titus, a tutor to a son of the Roman governor Constantius, near York in the third century.
- Rebecca – a Jewess, wife of a moneylender in York in 1189.
- Alison (d. 1451) – Egyptian servant in the household of Jacques Coeur, a merchant and financier in Bruges.
- Anna (1485-1536) – maid of honour and lady-in-waiting to Catherine of Aragon.
- Ann Tasker (1665-1714) – a poor seamstress in London during Queen Anne’s reign.
- Sister Grace (née Ellis, died c. 1920) – a Catholic nun in 19th century Des Moines, Iowa, USA.

As Livonia, Evans gave the Latin names of people and places she had been involved with. She described family intrigue in the household of the Legate Constantius, his wife Helena and their son Constantine and his (Constantine’s) lessons in the use of Roman weapons. Of particular interest was the attention given by ‘Livonia’ to the year AD 286, which occurred during a seven-year period in the life of Constantius when his whereabouts was unknown and when he may have been in Britain. ‘Livonia’ also drew attention to the power struggle in Britain instigated by Allectus, the treasurer of the Roman admiral Carausius – a somewhat obscure historical event.

According to University of Leeds professor Brian Hartley, a specialist in Roman history, ‘Livonia’ knew some ‘quite remarkable’ historical facts, and numerous published works that would have to be consulted if anyone tried to prepare the outline of such a story.^[18] However, many of the details were subsequently traced to a work of fiction (*see below*).

As ‘Rebecca of York’, Evans described details of the period, such as the moneylending trade and the persecution of Jews; the compulsory wearing of a circular yellow badge to denote their religion; and the church (St Mary’s, Castlegate) where she claimed she and one of her children were murdered. A previously unknown crypt was discovered there in 1975, after her regression had been documented. Barrie Dobson, a specialist in Jewish history at the University of York, observed that the detailed knowledge she possessed would have only been generally known to specialist scholars. Subsequently Dobson revised some of his statements towards a more cautious approach, a change of heart which a critic attributed to concern that they might impede his promotion prospects (within two years he had taken over the chair of medieval history at Cambridge).^[19]

‘Alison’ lived in the home of Jacques Coeur, which she described in some detail. Iverson visited the house and confirmed that descriptions of the fireplace decorations matched her accounts. Evans had no interest in French history, although she had once visited Paris, over a hundred miles away from Bourges where most of the events took place. Further investigations uncovered obscure facts about French history which Iverson believed Evans could not have known. For instance, she spoke of the king’s nickname as ‘heron legs’ and recalled that Coeur had been given a ‘beautiful golden apple with jewels in it’ by the Sultan of Turkey.^[20]

A local French historian, Pierre Bailly, told Iverson that while searching through contemporary archives he found a list of items confiscated by the Treasury from Jacques Coeur, among them a golden pomegranate (a fruit shaped like an apple).^[21] Other details were confirmed when Iverson consulted obscure books about Coeur written in 1847 and 1927.^[22]

Critics pointed out that many of the details of the ‘Alison’ life could be found in Thomas Costain’s 1947 novel *The Moneyman*, based on the life of Jacques Coeur, and that the assertion that Coeur had no wife or children was inaccurate.^[23] A comparative table of the book’s contents and Alison’s statements undermines some of these claims.^[24]

The highlight of the ‘Anna’ life was her journey to England in 1501, accompanying the Spanish Infanta Catherine of Aragon who was to be married to the eldest son of Henry VII, Prince Arthur. The personality gave correct if unremarkable historical details,^[25] along with precise descriptions of the Infanta, the journey to England and their reception on arrival. She described the court as a pious and gloomy place, adding that she had ‘many lovers’.

Similarities were found between Anna’s story and that to be found in Jean Plaidy’s novel *Katherine, The Virgin Widow*, which included the use of Spanish words and details of the journey.^[26]

The Anne Tasker personality appeared to be an early eighteenth century seamstress, who lived with her mother in Paddington and worked with five other girls. Being young, uneducated and bored, she represented a contrast with the other Evans characters. In this session, Evans answered Bloxham’s questions with an apparent lack of interest and fluency. She mentioned a ‘parade for the Duke of Gloucester’ and that her brothers were fighting with Marlborough in France, and spoke of sewing beads onto a dress for Barbara Villiers Duchess of Cleveland, a mistress of King Charles II. These and other statements were found to be historically viable.^[27]

‘Sister Grace’ was an American nun living in a Catholic convent in the 1920s. She identified Des Moines, Iowa, and a ‘Route Two’, which Iverson believed existed there in the twentieth century.^[28] Her family surname ‘Ellis’ was well-

represented there at the time; the convent name 'Grace' would have been acquired there as a new 'spiritual identity'. Evans had never visited America and had been brought up as a Nonconformist. However, the principal interest of the narrative for Iverson was its depiction of a sad progression from youth to arthritic old age.

Helen Wambach (1925-1986)

From 1966, Helen Wambach conducted workshops in which she regressed over a thousand people to apparent previous lives. In a hypnotic state her subjects provided detailed information which they recalled sufficiently well to be able to fill in data sheets of their past life experiences. Wambach analyzed these and published them in several books.

Wambach was born in Chicago and obtained a doctorate in psychology. She lived in California and worked as a psychologist and clinical psychiatrist at the Monmouth Medical Centre in Long Branch, New Jersey. In her work there as a therapist she learned from patients about occasional inexplicable experiences such as prophetic dreams, feelings of déjà vu and ESP impressions occurring under the influence of LSD. At the time she had been somewhat interested in JB Rhine's work in ESP; she included a section on parapsychology in an introductory psychology course she gave, and this was later expanded into a separate course in the college's adult education division. However, she believed the Bridey Murphy case probably had a rational explanation.^[29]

In 1966, Wambach experienced a déjà vu incident that she could not account for scientifically. This caused her to become interested in past life experiences, and as part of her parapsychology course she started to employ hypnotic regression techniques with subjects in the state of California, reaching a total of 1088 over a ten-year period. Following sessions, she carried out research to discover how well the details matched the period to which the subject had been regressed, such as clothing, housing, money, common objects and people they knew at the time.^[30] In the 1980s, Wambach undertook further hypnotic sessions with some 2500 people, this time uncovering details of future lives.^[31] Here, subjects were not required to describe what they were experiencing during the regression session, but instead were given a posthypnotic suggestion to talk about them immediately afterwards.

The details given during sessions were so abundant that Wambach devised a method of statistical analysis to organize them in a reliable way. To make the data more manageable, she restricted her questions during the sessions to certain types and defined ten time periods over the last four thousand years to which subjects would be regressed.

Wambach considered her subjects' recollections to be impressively accurate, finding only eleven discrepancies out of the 1,088 data sheets collected. She researched details of clothing, footwear, food and utensils that were consistent with specific statements made in the regressions which, moreover, were often described in more detail than historians could provide. She also investigated types of death such as disease, old age or violence. She reported that 50.6% of the past lives reported were male and 49.4% were female, a proportion that corresponds with biological data. Distribution of class was similarly accurate. Most subjects chose periods when the population was known to be high, as would be expected. Unusually for regression experiments, 21% of her subjects experienced lifetimes before the Common Era, although the information tended to be of a non-specific nature, for instance:

Place: Babylonia-Mesopotamia

Appearance: Hair is done up in braids on top of head

Dress: Sandals, long simple dress

Landscape and Terrain: Adobe buildings, semi-desert-Sumer

Food: Dates, sesame-seed cookies, cucumbers, fruit, grains^[32]

As mentioned above, some subjects appeared to enter a future life: 6% reported being alive in 2100 CE and 13% in 2300 CE.

A particularly prolific subject was Robert Logg, a San Francisco businessman, who gave details of fourteen past lives. They included:

- high priest, Egypt, 2000 BCE
- cart driver, Egypt, 1300 BCE
- female trader, Egypt, 400 BCE
- orphan, Greece, 100 CE

- captive woman, Central America, 1300
- woman, Portugal, 1450
- woman, Wales born in 1590, died in 1618 giving birth
- infant, Baltimore, Maryland, born in 1900, died aged two

An Egyptologist analyzed some of the hieroglyphics pertaining to Logg's lifetimes in ancient Egypt, finding that 80% were in fact used in ancient scripts.^[33] Wambach said she could find no instances of errors or anachronisms in the details, but stopped short of considering them proof that the subject had actually lived these lives.^[34]

Historian Ian Wilson noted that the lives of Robert Logg, in particular, did not suggest any kind of order in terms of temporal, racial or geographical terms, which he took to be an argument against the phenomenon being indicative of reincarnation.^[35]

Reviewing various explanatory theories, Wambach stated her personal conclusion that 'mind' is the creator or evolution, while conceding that an acceptance of such a hypothesis would require 'a new unified system of thought'.^[36]

Joe Keeton (1920-2003)

A hypnotherapist specializing in anxiety and phobias, Joe Keeton undertook more than 8000 regressions over a period of twenty-five years, making him the most prolific of regression practitioners.^[37] Keeton was open to various paranormal interpretations, including reincarnation, spiritualism, universal/genetic memory and telepathy and the unconscious.^[38] The following examples are taken from his 1979 book *Encounters With the Past*, co-written by historian Peter Moss.^[39]

Michael O'Mara, a senior business executive from Philadelphia, regressed to a life as Stephen Garrett, a drunken layabout in nineteenth-century Dublin. This revelation was unwelcome to O'Mara, who despised drunkenness and held a strong work ethic.^[40] Among other convincing details, O'Mara gave what Keeton considered 'a remarkably accurate picture of the embankment and the terraces of elegant Georgian houses with their pale brick and tall windows'.^[41]

Sue Atkins, a professional lexicographer and practising Anglican, regressed to the life of a seventeenth-century Jesuit priest, Father Antony Charles Bennet, and a later life as an illegitimate street-urchin called Charlie. This sharp juxtaposition produced extreme contrasts in language and personality traits: 'Charlie' used expressions unknown to Atkins, while 'Father Antony' possessed knowledge of history that appeared to be beyond her own.

Thelma Palmer, an American teacher with strong European links, became Tom Brown, an eighteenth-century printer's apprentice who lived in Philadelphia and worked under Benjamin Franklin (she was dismayed to learn that she had been a man). Palmer used an unfamiliar printing term and gave the address of a Franklin property that had later been changed. Other details seemed incorrect at the time but were shown to be accurate by later research.

An unpublished Keeton case was described to psychical researcher Melvyn Willin in October, 2015 by David Stevenson, an Honorary Fellow of the University of Edinburgh. Stevenson had attended Keeton's sessions over many years and said he found them 'impressive and thought provoking':

One particular lady... remembered a life in British India, in what is now Pakistan (Lahore). She was born about 1900 or 1902 (? in Ireland) with her family in a cantonment in Lahore. She denied knowing any Asian language. When I tried to question her in the session she identified me as Captain Bryn David Meredith of the 12th Sikhs, a doctor in the British Indian army. Her deathbed scene in that memory was about 1918, dying probably of 'Spanish Flu' - the worldwide epidemic of which killed millions in that year. I think she was about 16 years old. She called for her Ayah ('Nanny' - many British children in India were probably closer to their ayah's than to their parents). She asked for 'pani' (= water). I asked 'Chiso pani?' meaning 'cold water'. She replied 'Mitho pani'. I knew the word 'mitho' as 'sweet' - as with sugar. I asked an Indian student about her usage of the word and he said that 'mitho pani' meant 'fresh water'. So she used that phrase correctly (and could not have picked it from my mind as I did not know 'mitho' could be used that way)...^[42]

Robert L Snow

Few regression subjects research the details of their own cases. An exception is Robert L Snow, a former captain in the homicide section of the police department of Indianapolis, Indiana. Snow's regression in 1992 revealed a number of details apparently relating to the life of Carroll Beckwith, a landscape and portrait painter in New York a century earlier. These included Beckwith's affectation of carrying a walking stick, his preference for wine over whisky, his dislike of painting

portraits, and details of his childless marriage and wife's activities. Attempting to disprove the paranormal provenance of these images, Snow traced unpublished diaries by Beckwith, which he certainly could not have encountered before, finding that 26 out of 28 such details closely matched the painter's life, leading him to doubt any normal explanation.^[43]

Others

Reena Kumarasingham

A 2018 book by past life regression therapist Reena Kumarasingham, *Shrouded Truth: Biblical Revelations Through Past Lives*, describes past-life memories given by eight individuals who recalled details of a life at the time of Jesus Christ. The accounts are said to show a remarkable consistency with the latest biblical research.

Criticism and Controversy

Critics generally accept that the memories are real, and not a product of imagination or deliberate invention. But they argue that, far from being of actual past lives, the memories have their source in the process of cryptomnesia, the unconscious recall of forgotten books, films or real life incidents.^[44]

Edwin Zolik, professor of psychology at DePaul University in Chicago, hypnotized a young male subject and regressed him to a past life as Brian O'Malley (born 1850, lived in County Cork in Ireland, an officer in the Irish Guards).^[45] The subject described having relationships with a number of girls, but not ever being married; he died at age 42 from falling from his horse. Asked in a follow-up session where the details had come from, the subject at first could not tell. Then, prompted that he might have heard the story from his parents, he quickly agreed, revealing that his grandfather had talked of his acquaintance with a womanizing English soldier named Timothy O'Malley, who died from falling from his horse – a story he had heard as a small child.

Reima Kampman, a psychiatrist at the University of Oulu in Finland, carried out hypnotic regression experiments with older schoolchildren during the 1960s in order to investigate the claims of past life memories. Several produced memories typical in such sessions, often supported by details that seemed too obscure for the subject to know by normal means. However, Kampman felt sure the memories were based on items the subjects had previously read and forgotten. When he carried out a second session asking for the true source of the memory, the subject often at once described having long ago read or browsed a book which, when consulted, was found to contain the relevant details.^[46]

As mentioned above, research carried out by Melvin Harris and Ian Wilson identified many potential sources. Harris was particularly successful in discovering links to works of fiction and popular history, from which he argued that past life memories were a mixture of remembered stories and emotions. His most comprehensively explained case is Livonia narrative produced by Arnall Bloxham's subject Jane Evans. Harris found a likely source for the details in Louis de Wohl's 1947 novel *The Living Wood*, which told the same story and featured the same characters, including a Roman lady named Lavinia.^{[47] [48]}

Graham Huxtable, one of Bloxham's subjects, remembered an eighteenth century life as a naval gunner's mate in a British ship 'Aggie' (assumed to be a familiar term for HMS Agamemnon). Huxtable provided details of the fleet blockading the French off Calais and of losing a leg in battle. After listening to the tape recording of the session, naval historian Oliver Warner said he was convinced of the authenticity of Huxtable's recollections from 'the reality of the conditions described, the man's general attitude, and as much by his overall ignorance as by any facts of history he appears to be familiar with'.^[49]

Harris pointed out that many historical novels are based on navy life of this period and argued that the ship 'Aggie', as described by Huxtable, could not have been the Agamemnon, which was equipped with twice the number of guns.^[50]

With regard to Jane Evans's life as Rebecca, Wilson pointed to a fictional Rebecca of York in Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, played by Elizabeth Taylor in a 1952 film. He also draws attention to a historical novel about the Jewish massacre in York titled *The King's Persons* by Joanne Greenburg, and a radio play about the event that Evans might have heard. Wilson contested certain details of her account, asserting that Jews were not obliged to wear badges until the 13th century and that these were not yellow and circular but oblong and white. Furthermore, the area of York she spoke of was not a ghetto at the time but an area where wealthy Jews lived.^[51]

Wilson found many examples among Keeton's subjects of apparently obscure information that might have been provided by printed material. Edna Greenan, a late middle-aged Liverpool housewife regressed to a life as Nell Gwynn, the

celebrated mistress of Charles II, concerning whom she denied any previous knowledge or interest, while nevertheless offering a convincing characterization. Wilson pointed out that much about Gwynn might be gleaned from books, plays and films.

Anne Dowling remembered the life of Sarah Williams, a destitute orphan living in nineteenth-century slums in Everton, a suburb of Liverpool, giving what Keeton described as ‘a brilliantly illuminating picture of how life and the world must have seemed to a naïve, credulous and illiterate girl of the streets, whose only source of information was half-heard and quarter-understood gossip.’^[52] However, the apparently obscure details in this account, including a visit by a celebrated opera singer and the name of a long vanished shop, were found to be readily accessible in a locally-published history pamphlet.^[53]

Wilson interviewed a Keeton subject named Jan, a twenty-three year old who remembered the life of seventeenth century life as Joan Waterhouse, condemned as a witch and executed by hanging in Chelmsford, Essex. Jan named the presiding judge as Southcote and her accuser as Agnes Brown, also of being pricked to try and find her witch’s mark – details that accorded with historical records. However, a specialist consulted by Wilson considered that the apparently convincing characteristics of speech shown during the regression had more in common with representations in contemporary books and films than in the genuine speech of the period. Wilson also pointed out that Jan’s insistence on the trial having taken place in 1556, earlier than might have been expected, was not only wrong, since the trial took place in 1566, but was consistent with a misprint in a nineteenth century republication of the original record, where the true date was miscopied as 1556.^[54]

As a general observation, Wilson argued that the pattern of claimed former lives differed from each other in accordance with the hypnotist’s preconceived ideas. He points to instances where the details of former lives accorded with popular/folkloristic information rather than true historical details: for instance, a subject remembering a life as a Viking warrior referred to the familiar horned helmet, which however was not what he would actually have worn into battle.

Wilson drew attention to similarities between the characteristics of regression sessions and those in cases of multiple personality.^[55] These include:

- The same variety of personalities within any one individual, some more convincing than others
- The same incidence of changes of sex, which in most cases remains the same as that of the subject
- The tendency for personalities in both types to possess their particular bundle of memories, behaviours and manner of speaking, and even allergies and skin complaints
- The ‘facial blank’, or freezing, that occurs when one personality shifts to another, along with strikingly altered facial expressions from one personality to another
- The same somnambulistic and passive observer states

Wilson also pointed to the curious phenomenon common to both conditions of mental traumas causing weals or abrasions to appear temporarily on the skin, similar to stigmata. He speculated that a multiple personality sufferer may be ‘locked in a form of self-hypnosis’ similar to that to which the regression subject submits voluntarily.

Many Christians, Spiritualists and followers of other religions disbelieve in reincarnation, and commentators in these groups have offered alternative suggestions to explain apparent evidence for it. A Spiritualist perspective is provided by James Webster, who argues in *The Case against Reincarnation* (2009) that even the best evidence can be explained by cryptomnesia (in the case of hypnotic regression), confabulation, possession, over-shadowing, unsuspected mediumistic abilities, and even genetic memories.^[56]

Psychologist and psi researcher David Fontana doubted that either the data from regression hypnotherapy or the research carried out into children’s waking memories of a previous life necessarily indicate reincarnation. He supported the alternative parapsychological explanation, in which the memories are unwittingly picked up from the minds of discarnate (deceased) humans. Fontana writes:

This explanation was suggested to me by some of the mediums with whom I have worked, and are in no doubt that were they not trained to avoid doing so they too could frequently mistake the data communicated by deceased individuals for details of their own past lives. In their view, inexperienced men and women, encountering similar data in dreams, in spontaneous occurrence, and in hypnotic trance, may not be able to make the same distinction.^[57]

Therapist Joe Keeton disputed the claim that all the memories he listened to during sessions could be traced to extant sources.

Where would an ordinary housewife learn that in the 1840s an observatory at Liverpool agreed to synchronize its chronometers with those at Greenwich, which meant 'losing' forty-eight seconds? How did another find out the subtitles of plays by the seventeenth-century dramatists Dryden and Heywood and reject the main titles when they were put to her?^[58]

Keeton also believed he was able to differentiate between examples of cryptomnesia and other sources of knowledge:

You cannot listen to someone over a period of a hundred hours or more, talking of another life in another age, and still hold the view that he is recalling the page of a long-forgotten history book or remembering the details of an historical drama.^[59]

Claimed Therapeutic Benefits

Therapist Carol Bowman describes the therapeutic benefits in terms of being able to

- see personal relationships in a new light
- energize talents and abilities from the past
- release fears and anxieties linked to past life traumas
- release past life traumas at the root of physical problems
- experience the transitional states of death and beyond
- understand and align with life purpose.^[60]

Psychiatrist James Paul Pandarakalam points out that patients with neuroses may gain immediate relief when they are able to recall a traumatic effect that first caused it. He suggests this can occur as a result of past life regression, but warns against a reliance on this method, which may be counterproductive, since memories of tragic events can be overwhelming.^[61]

Melvyn Willin

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Footnotes

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