

# Reincarnation Intermission Memories

The intermission is the period between death and rebirth in reincarnation. About 20% of children who remember previous lives recall events from the intermission as well. These memories show clear signs of cultural influence, but there are also important cross-cultural consistencies. Although the bulk of intermission memories concern events that cannot be confirmed, some include veridical (verified) perceptions of, and interactions with, living people and the material world.



## Introduction

[Ian Stevenson](#) coined the term ‘intermission’ for the period between death and rebirth in a reincarnation case.<sup>[1]</sup> He called recollections of the intermission ‘intermission memories’.<sup>[2]</sup> Poonam Sharma and [Jim B Tucker](#) found that 276 (23%) of 1,200 reincarnation cases in Stevenson’s collection at the University of Virginia included intermission memories.<sup>[3]</sup> [James Matlock](#) and Iris Giesler-Petersen found intermission memories in 85 (21%) of 400 published reincarnation cases from twelve countries, seven in Asia and five in the West.<sup>[4]</sup>

Sharma and Tucker concluded that case subjects with intermission memories had better memories than subjects who recalled previous lives without remembering the intermission. Cases with intermission memories were better developed and stronger overall, in their behavioural and physical features as well as in the accuracy of the past-life memories. Subjects with intermission memories made significantly more correct statements about the previous life, they remembered more names from the previous life, they were more likely to recall the death of the previous person and they recalled more past lives than did subjects without intermission memories. In other respects, however, cases with intermission memories were very similar to cases without them.<sup>[5]</sup>

Sharma and Tucker identified three stages of the intermission experience, based on an analysis of 35 Burmese cases. The first stage is a transitional stage following death, generally lasting until the body is buried, cremated or disposed of in some fashion. The second stage is more stable and often passes in a fixed location. The third stage involves choosing parents for the new life.<sup>[6]</sup> Drawing on surveys of prebirth as well as past-life memories in Japan, Masayuki Ohkado identified a fourth stage, life in the womb, and a fifth stage, birth and its immediate aftermath.<sup>[7]</sup> Matlock and Giesler-Petersen confirmed the five-stage model of the intermission experience with their global sample, although they found that most intermission memories relate to the first three stages.<sup>[8]</sup>

Intermission memories have been reported from around the world, but Stevenson noted that 'they correspond closely either to the habits of the previous personalities or to expectations of what should happen after death based on the local religions or other cultural traditions'.<sup>[9]</sup> Matlock and Giesler-Petersen found important differences between intermission memories reported from Asian and Western countries. In Asia, subjects tended to recall the intermission passing in a terrestrial environment (perhaps a pagoda or a tree), whereas in the West, they imagined it passing in heaven. Spirits of deceased family members, friends and other humans, but also nonhuman figures, appeared in intermission memories in both world areas, but the nonhuman figures were interpreted differently. Asians perceived them as the King of Death, minor deities and devas, whereas Westerners saw God, Jesus and angels.<sup>[10]</sup>

Intermission memories have also been reported from indigenous tribal societies in North America, with general similarities to those from other places but also with variations. Stevenson observed that an Alaskan Tlingit Indian might recount how after death he was ferried across a lake in a canoe, then was sent back across the lake to be reborn.<sup>[11]</sup> Matlock presents historical intermission memories from the Tlingit in which the land of the dead is depicted as lying on the same plane as the material world.<sup>[12]</sup> In contrast, Richard Slobodin describes a case he heard from the Kutchin (Gwich'in) of Canada's Northwest Territories, among whom Christian missionaries had been living. A six-year-old girl told her mother that after she died before, she walked up to the sky on a steep and narrow trail until she reached the gate to heaven and was admitted by St Peter. She went on until she met Jesus, who told her that it was not her time to die, and sent her back to earth to be reborn.<sup>[13]</sup>

In addition to the spirits of deceased humans and nonhuman entities, some case subjects recall perceiving and interacting with embodied individuals or the material world. Perceptions and interactions have been reported during all stages of the intermission experience. Some are confirmed to have happened as the subjects recall. Even when they were not demonstrably veridical, the perceived events might well have transpired as described. In no cases have intermission perceptions and interactions been shown to be erroneous or implausible. This ability to perceive and interact while discarnate may appear unlikely but Matlock and Giesler-Petersen point out that it could be handled through extra-sensory perception and psychokinesis on the part of a disembodied mind.<sup>[14]</sup>

There has been little critical or sceptical commentary on intermission memories, perhaps because they are not as widely known as past-life memories. Reincarnation sceptic David Lester, in fact, assumes them to be absent, and considers this 'puzzling'. 'Spirits should remember these times as well as times from a previous incarnation', he says. 'This is particularly important because the evidence for life after death from near-death experiences concerns life in the spirit world. The reports of reincarnation experiences indicate nothing about this spirit world. The two sources of evidence are, apparently, in conflict'.<sup>[15]</sup> However, neither of these things is true. Not only do many reincarnation case subjects recall the intermission period, there are strong similarities between the depiction of discarnate existence in intermission memories and near-death experiences.<sup>[16]</sup>

# The Five Stages of the Intermission Experience

## Stage 1: Death and its Immediate Aftermath

Sharma and Tucker described intermission Stage 1 as a 'transitional stage' following death. Nine (26%) of their 35 Burmese subjects recalled events of this period.<sup>[17]</sup> Thirty (35%) of the 85 cases in Matlock and Giesler-Petersen's multicultural sample included Stage 1 content.<sup>[18]</sup>

All thirty of Matlock and Giesler-Petersen's Stage 1 cases included perceptions of the material world.<sup>[19]</sup> Thai Army Private Keaw remembered that after dying from cholera when he was twenty years old, he had tried to speak to his relatives and friends, but they had not responded. He saw his relatives giving food to monks.

One day the monks held a ceremony in his former home. As they were leaving, he noticed a strangeness about his body, and for the first time realized that he was dead.<sup>[20]</sup>

Stage 1 perceptions often include disposal of the body. A Sri Lankan girl, Disna Samarasinghe, recalled witnessing her funeral and said that she had been buried near an anthill, which was true, but had not been contemplated before her death. She pointed to where her grave was, although it had no marker that could have told her its location.<sup>[21]</sup> Ratana Wongsombat of Thailand recalled having had her cremated ashes spread around a bodhi tree (a sacred fig tree), rather than buried by it, as she had directed in her will.<sup>[22]</sup> Another Thai subject, Pratomwan Inthanu, recalled that her infant body was buried outside the village cemetery rather than within it, as it should have been. No one except the undertaker knew he had done this, but he admitted it when confronted by Pratomwan.<sup>[23]</sup>

Stage 1 ends when the spirit of the deceased person moves away from the site of death or disposal of the body, either on to Stage 2 or directly to Stage 3. Movement directly to the selection of new parents may occur when one of the parents comes near the body or the site of death, what Stevenson termed a 'geographic factor' in reincarnation.<sup>[24]</sup> An Indian boy named Sunder Lal recalled having been a man who had died of plague. The man's body was thrown into a river near to where Sunder Lal's mother-to-be happened to be bathing. He saw her and went home with her.<sup>[25]</sup> A Burmese boy, Maung Kalar, remembered being an Indian soldier with the British army in Burma in the 1940s. He and a group of his fellows were set upon and murdered by villagers, after which, he said, his father had come and carted their bodies away, dumping them off a cliff. He followed his father home and was reborn in his family. Kalar pointed out the place where the murders had occurred, confirmed by his father, who indeed had thrown the bodies off a cliff after carting them off.<sup>[26]</sup>

## Stage 2: Discarnate Existence

Purnima Ekanayake of Sri Lanka recalled being struck by a large vehicle (a bus) while she was riding her bicycle. After the accident, she floated in semi-darkness for a few days. She saw people mourning for her and crying and watched her body until her funeral. Then she saw a light and the next thing she knew, she was in her present life.<sup>[27]</sup> Purnima did not recall anything of discarnate existence after her

funeral, but many other case subjects have talked about this period. Sharma and Tucker found Stage 2 memories in nineteen (54%) of their 35 Burmese cases.<sup>[28]</sup> Stage 2 memories figured in 66 (78%) of Matlock and Giesler-Petersen's 85 cases, and in 32 (48%) of those 66 cases, there were perceptions of the material world.<sup>[29]</sup>

An Indian boy named Veer Singh said that during an eleven-year intermission he had resided in a peepal (bodhi) tree in the yard of his former family's house. He knew that the family had purchased a camel and had been engaged in lawsuits, and he stated the names of (and later recognized) two children born after his death. On one occasion, he became annoyed with two women swinging from a branch of his tree and caused the plank on which they were seated to break. All of these incidents had occurred as Veer recalled. Veer also said that he had left his tree to follow any members of the family who went out alone, which accorded with a dream his previous mother had had in which her deceased son appeared and informed her that he was accompanying another son when he went out at night.<sup>[30]</sup>

Veer Singh's memories of his time in the peepal tree are typical of the terrestrial post-mortem environment described in Asian intermission memories. Most Westerners say that they go to heaven after they die, but Asians usually remain close to the earth. Of Matlock and Giesler-Petersen's 66 cases with Stage 2 memories, thirty (45%) referred to a terrestrial environment and 27 (41%) referred to a heavenly environment. Five cases (8%) referred to both terrestrial and heavenly environments. The nature of the postmortem environment was not clear in another four cases (6%). Of the thirty terrestrial cases, 28 (93%) occurred in Asian countries, whereas of the 27 heavenly cases, nineteen (70%) occurred in Western countries. Subjects referred to both terrestrial and heavenly environments in four Asian cases and one Western case. The difference between Asian and Western Stage 2 experiences in those cases in which the postmortem environment was clear was highly significant statistically.<sup>[31]</sup>

When both terrestrial and heavenly environments were described, case subjects said they spent most of their time in heaven but sometimes visited the earth. Ratana Wongsombat said that she went first to heaven but came down to look for something she had left in a meditation hut.<sup>[32]</sup> An Indian girl, Pratima Saxena, said that she 'went up' after she died but whenever her (previous) son needed her, she 'came down' to help him.<sup>[33]</sup> A Dutch girl told her mother, 'I was with the angels in the sky and I looked down upon the earth.... I flew to the earth, walked into a house and looked around'.<sup>[34]</sup>

In addition to the terrestrial Stage 2 environment, Veer Singh's case illustrates two ways that spirits may interact with living people and the material world during the intermission – they may communicate through dreams, and they may act in ways that are perceived by the living to be poltergeist activity. There are other means of interaction, besides these. In the famous Italian case of Alexandrina Samona, Alexandrina appeared in her mother's dreams, the family heard knocks on the wall, and she communicated with them through a medium.<sup>[35]</sup>

Discarnate spirits may appear as apparitions as well. A Burmese boy, Maung Yin Maung, recalled that after dying when his light plane crashed he had wandered about as a spirit, approaching his brother's home just as someone emerged from

the privy. He recognized his sister-in-law and walked towards her, stopping when he felt that he could get no closer. She saw him and told him that if he wished, he could 'stay' (reincarnate) with them. Later that night he visited her in her sleep. His mother and sister also appeared in the dream, asking him to return with them, but he declined to go with them. The sister-in-law (Yin Maung's mother) recalled seeing the apparition and inviting him to stay with them and also having had a dream in which the deceased man appeared along with his (living) mother and sister.<sup>[36]</sup>

Besides perceiving and interacting with the material world and living people, many case subjects recall engaging with non-human spirits during Stage 2 of the intermission. A variety of non-human spirits are mentioned, but Matlock and Giesler-Petersen found that a few key roles – Gatekeeper, Escort (or Guide), Entity in Charge, and a diverse category they labelled Other – turn up over and over again. Gatekeepers appeared at the start of Stage 2 and checked records. Escorts met the discarnate spirit at the start of Stage 2 (sometimes at the end of Stage 1) and guided the spirit for at least part of the Stage 2 experience. Entities in Charge oversaw the Stage 2 environment and sometimes made decisions about the fate of the discarnate spirit. Other non-human spirits had no distinctive, recurring roles.<sup>[37]</sup>

Matlock and Giesler-Petersen noted that spirit entities in the major roles were perceived differently in Asia and in the West, in line with cultural precepts and values. In Asian cases an Escort typically was described as an old man or sage, often dressed in white, whereas in Western cases, it was a generic man or woman. In Asia, entities in the Other role were perceived as devas and patron deities, whereas in the West, they were angels. The Entity in Charge is interpreted variously as God, Yama or the King of Death in Asia, but as God or Jesus in the West.<sup>[38]</sup>

There does not appear to be a regular programme of activities during Stage 2, in either Asia or the West. Only two of Matlock and Giesler-Petersen's subjects reported having taken stock of their former lives when they died.<sup>[39]</sup> Nasir Toksöz, a Turkish Alevi boy, said that upon his death he gave God an account of his conduct.<sup>[40]</sup> Kazuya, a Japanese boy, said that after killing himself he had spent some time in a 'reflection room' before deciding to be reborn to his former mother.<sup>[41]</sup> Chanai Chhoomalaiwong of Burma said that he had been forced to remove his clothes and walk naked through a tangled lotus pond,<sup>[42]</sup> but no other subjects were subjected to judgement or punishment. An English boy named Stephan Ramsay said that he had been employed in a large library, where he was directed 'to put all the new bits into the books'. He had elected to work, but one was not required to work in heaven.<sup>[43]</sup> Kazuya said that he made a pre-birth compact with three other spirits to be reborn around the same time.<sup>[44]</sup> No other subjects mentioned making plans for their next lives, other than selecting their parents.<sup>[45]</sup>

Four of Matlock and Giesler-Petersen's subjects recalled having been offered a fruit or other food to eat before they were reborn.<sup>[46]</sup> Some reincarnation case subjects credit their ability to remember previous lives – and intermissions – to having avoided eating these foods, which Stevenson dubbed the 'fruit of forgetfulness'.<sup>[47]</sup> The fruit of forgetfulness is reminiscent of drinking from the River Lethe to wipe clean memories of past lives before reincarnating, as Er recounts observing in Plato's *The Republic*.<sup>[48]</sup> The technique does not appear to be very effective, however.

Ampan Petcherat, of Thailand,<sup>[49]</sup> and Santosh Sukla, of India,<sup>[50]</sup> said that they ate the fruit that was offered, yet they recalled their previous lives and the intermission before their present lives anyway.

### Stage 3: Selecting New Parents

About half of case subjects who recall events from the intermission say they remember how they came to be reborn to their parents. Of Sharma and Tucker's 35 Burmese subjects, eighteen (51%) did,<sup>[51]</sup> and of Matlock and Geisler-Petersen's 85 subjects, 42 (49%) did.<sup>[52]</sup> Some of these subjects also remember perceptions of the material world at this time. A total of eighteen (43%) of Matlock and Geisler-Petersen's 42 subjects with Stage 3 memories talked about people or scenes they saw. These perceptions occurred in both terrestrial and heavenly environments, although they were more frequent with the former. They were confirmed as accurate in five cases.<sup>[53]</sup>

When Stage 3 memories are related to terrestrial environments, they often involve geographic factors. A Thai boy, [Bongkuch Promsin](#), said that after spending some time in a tree close to the place his body had been carried after he was murdered, he had gone looking for his mother of his previous life. It was a rainy day, and he had become lost in the village market. When he saw his present father, he decided to follow him, and accompanied him home on a bus. In fact, Bongkuch's father had been in the market on a rainy day during the month his wife became pregnant, and he had taken a bus home.<sup>[54]</sup> Veridical perceptions related to the choice of parents may also occur from the perspective of heavenly environments. [James Leininger](#), who recalled dying when his fighter plane was shot down near Iwo Jima during World War II, told his parents that he seen them on a beach in Hawaii and correctly described the pink hotel in which they had vacationed there eleven months before he was born.<sup>[55]</sup> In other cases, the new parents were known to the previous person, who was drawn to them by what Stevenson termed a 'psychic factor', as opposed to a geographic factor.<sup>[56]</sup>

Some subjects report that they had assistance in choosing their parents. Katsugoro, a Japanese boy, told his family that after he died of smallpox, he had stayed in his previous house until an old man had come to take him away. The man had led him to his present house, and told him that was where he would be reborn.<sup>[57]</sup> Kees, a Dutch boy, said that after he died, he had been met by an angel who had taken him to God. He had stayed with God for a while, then angels had urged him to reincarnate. When he resisted, they assured him that they would stand by him.<sup>[58]</sup>

Sometimes both 'elective' and 'assisted' reincarnation are involved. A Burmese girl named Ma Par recalled being a British officer aboard a reconnaissance plane that ran out of fuel and crashed in Burma during World War II. She thought of England and found herself there, but the King of Death forced her to return to Burma. Later she went to England a second time, but again was pulled back to Burma and told she would have to be reborn there, although the choice of family was left up to her.<sup>[59]</sup>

Although Stage 3 entails the selection of parents for the next life, it is noteworthy that the choice is made for emotional reasons and does not involve foreseeing

anything of the life to come. Nor is there much talk of setting goals for the next life. The only example of this occurs in the German case of Jasper Steiger reported by Dieter Hassler. Jasper talked about choosing his mother, who he said was his mother in his previous life, but added that one had tasks to fulfill in one's Earthly lives. Several people might be entrusted with the same task, which might concern one's entire society, not only one's personal goals.<sup>[60]</sup>

#### **Stage 4: Life in the Womb**

Matlock and Giesler-Petersen found four cases with memories of life in the womb, in addition to other stages of the intermission experience.<sup>[61]</sup> One of the cases was Thai, the other three American. In the Thai case, Thiang San Kla recounted viewing his body after he was killed. He had wanted to return to it, but there were so many people around, he was afraid to. He visited his friends and relatives, but none could see him. He wanted to return to his former mother, but she 'rejected' him (she was then too old to bear children), so he went to the wife of his younger brother, entering through her mouth. During the intrauterine period, he moved in and out of his mother's mouth.<sup>[62]</sup>

Ryan Hammons recounted that after his death, he had gone first to a 'waiting place' on the way to heaven. He said that he had seen his parents from heaven and had picked his mother, whom he had known in an earlier life. He wanted to know why his mother had wanted him to be a girl. When she asked why he thought that, he explained that he had 'seen it from heaven'. A doctor had done a test and told her she was carrying a boy, which so upset her that she cried for a long time during his father's birthday dinner in a restaurant. Her reaction that night was something Ryan's mother had soon regretted and did not talk about, but Ryan's account of it was entirely accurate.<sup>[63]</sup>

Another boy, William, said that he had died on a Thursday and gone to heaven, where he had seen animals and talked to God. He told God he was ready to come back and got born on a Tuesday. 'When you die, you don't go right to heaven', William reported. 'You go to different levels—here, then here, then here'. He moved his hand up higher and higher to indicate ascendance through the levels. He said that animals as well as people were reborn. William indeed had been born on a Tuesday, and his grandfather, with whom he was identified, had died on a Thursday. When William saw a picture of his mother when she was pregnant, he commented that when he was in her tummy, she always held it when she ran up the stairs of their house. She asked him how he knew that, and he said he had been watching her.<sup>[64]</sup>

The third American boy with memories of life in the womb, Bobby Hodges, also recalled his birth.

#### **Stage 5: Birth and its Immediate Aftermath**

Four-year-old Bobby Hodges recalled fragments of two previous lives and had clear memories of events beginning with his time in an aunt's womb. When he was there, the family had lived in a house that had uncarpeted stairs and was near water, he said.<sup>[65]</sup> He had had a twin brother who was now his younger brother. He demanded

his brother tell him why and how he had terminated the pregnancy and taken them out of their aunt's womb. Bobby said that he had tried to go back to his aunt, but found her womb already occupied, and was unable to dislodge its new occupant. Because he was eager to return to embodied life, he went to his present mother instead. He described having watched his parents' wedding, which had taken place whilst his mother had been pregnant with him. He talked about having had difficulties being born and finally being delivered by Caesarean section.

All these events had transpired as Bobby described. During her incomplete pregnancy with twin boys, his aunt had lived in a house on a bay. The house had had uncarpeted stairs. She had miscarried toward the end of the pregnancy, apparently when one twin had rolled over on the umbilical cord they shared. Another pregnancy had followed soon after, and Bobby's cousin was born eighteen months before him. Bobby's description of his parents' wedding was accurate, as was his account of his problems birthing. His body had presented supine and in an effort to turn it over, the doctors had tried to push it back in the womb. When his mother explained that this is what they were doing, Bobby replied, 'Oh, I didn't know that. I would have turned over, but I thought they were pushing me back in. Anyway, then I saw the light, and then the doctors took me out of your tummy, and then they cleaned all that slime off, and then they put me in a bed, and then I could get some sleep'.<sup>[66]</sup>

## **Intermission Experiences vs Pre-Birth Experiences**

The term 'pre-birth memory' sometimes refers to recollections of any experience before birth, and so includes past-life memories as well as Stage 1 intermission memories, but more strictly it refers to memories of birth, the womb, and a period of discarnate existence, along with the selection of parents (Stages 2, 3, 4, 5), without reference to previous incarnations.<sup>[67]</sup> It is in this latter sense that 'pre-birth memory' and 'pre-birth experience' are employed here, in order to distinguish pre-birth memories from intermission memories.

Phenomenologically as well as structurally, pre-birth memories are very similar to intermission memories.<sup>[68]</sup> All 21 children in Ohkado and Ikegawa's study said that they were not alone in their discarnate state. Fourteen saw a god or godlike-entity, and twelve were with spirits who became their siblings or friends. Seventeen children said that they chose their parents. Three said they had assistance from a nonhuman entity. Twelve remembered going to their mother's womb. Fifteen said that they saw events unfolding in the material world, although their memories of these events were limited, restricted to their parents and households. In three cases, the remembered perceptions were veridical.<sup>[69]</sup>

Matlock and Giesler-Petersen chose not to include pre-birth memories in their analysis of intermission memories, but had they included them, they might have had more examples of womb and birth memories, but had they included them, they might have had more examples of womb and birth memories. Ohkado and Ikegawa<sup>[70]</sup> and Ohkado<sup>[71]</sup> discovered that womb and birth memories were far more common than past-life memories in their Japanese surveys. Anecdotal accounts of womb and birth memories appear in published collections of Western pre-birth



memories<sup>[72]</sup> and in online forums such as [PreBirthExperience.com](http://PreBirthExperience.com)), but in-depth, interview-based investigation of the sort that is the norm in reincarnation research has not yet begun with pre-birth memories. Much more work needs to be done before there is a good understanding of how many reliable pre-birth memories there are, how alike they are cross-culturally, and how best to interpret similarities and differences between them and intermission memories.<sup>[73]</sup>

Pre-birth experiences are probably a subset of intermission experiences, but this is not certain.<sup>[74]</sup> The idea that the soul may pre-exist birth without having had earlier embodiment is an old one in Western thought,<sup>[75]</sup> and it is still around today. In his book *Life before Life*, Mormon writer Richard Eyre says that pre-birth memories tell us that ‘our spirits lived long before they inherited our bodies—not in other persons, but in another place, in a pre-mortal realm where we each developed and became who we are and from where we foresaw this physical life as a continuing phase of our experience and our spiritual progression’.<sup>[76]</sup> However, as Matlock notes, the currently-available accounts of pre-birth memories often lack detail. The argument for pre-existence without prior incarnation would be stronger if there were good memories of all but the first stage of the intermission experience. As things stand, it is probably best to regard pre-birth memories not as a category distinct from intermission memories, but as cases in which only the later parts of the inter-life experience are recalled.<sup>[77]</sup>

## Intermission Experiences vs Near-Death Experiences

There is an obvious difference between near-death experiences (NDEs) and intermission experiences: NDErs return to the same body in the end, whereas those who remember the intermission claim to have left their old bodies and adopted new ones. Nevertheless, in structure and content, NDEs have much in common with intermission experiences. Intermission experiences seemingly pick up where NDEs leave off.<sup>[78]</sup>

Many NDEs begin with an out-of-body experience or OBE stage, during which the experiencer views his or her body, as if from outside it. NDEs then transition into a ‘transcendental stage’ that passes (in Western cases, at least) in an unearthly, non-material realm typically described as heaven. During this transcendental stage, the experiencer may meet both human and nonhuman entities. Some of these entities act as escorts or guides, and often they tell the NDEr he or she can go no further, but must return to the body.<sup>[79]</sup> During all stages, experiencers may perceive and interact with the material world and people in it, and these activities may be veridical.<sup>[80]</sup>

The OBE stage of the NDE greatly resembles Stage 1 of the intermission experience, and the transcendental stage is like Stage 2. The return to the body in NDEs, and the selection of parents and move into the womb in intermission experiences, are complementary, and in fact, the same types of entities which tell NDErs it is time to return to their bodies, in intermission experiences draw experiencers on and may show them to their new bodies (Katsugoro is an example). Perceptions of the material world and interactions with the living are reported during NDEs, just as during intermission and prebirth experiences.<sup>[81]</sup>

Features like passing through a tunnel, seeing a light, and reviewing one's life – which have become widely associated with NDEs – are also reported in Stage 1 of intermission memories, albeit rarely.<sup>[82]</sup> Interestingly, these features have turned out to be characteristics mainly of Western NDEs and are not part of what is now recognized to be the cross-culturally universal NDE, which in addition to the basic structure, includes no more than apprehending spirit beings and non-material realms on the brink of death.<sup>[83]</sup> In their essential qualities, intermission memories are thus closer to the universal NDE pattern than they are to the Western NDE pattern.

## **Spontaneous vs Regression Intermission Experiences**

Accounts of the intermission period emerging during age regression under hypnosis have become well known through the best-selling books of Michael Newton, *Journey of Souls* and *Destiny of Souls*.<sup>[84]</sup> Newton paints a detailed picture of the intermission, which he says he has heard repeated in many regressions, but this picture is very different from the picture that emerges from intermission and pre-birth memories and from NDEs.<sup>[85]</sup>

Some of the features that Newton describes are healing showers, staging areas, waiting rooms with soul cluster groups and tribunals before which spirits evaluate how well they met the goals they set for their last human lives and formulate plans for their next. The five-stage structure of the intermission experience is absent from Newton's account. He describes meeting with spirit guides rather than the array of spirit entities encountered in spontaneous experiences and most of the role types identified by Matlock and Giesler Petersen are absent. Newton does not mention perceptions of the material world or interactions with the living and in fact does not describe anything that is objectively verifiable or veridical in any way. His analysis rests entirely on patterns he has identified during the regressions he has conducted.<sup>[86]</sup>

How may the radical differences in the portrayal of the intermission in spontaneous experiences and under hypnosis be explained? If Newton's findings were typical of what is reported during regression by other practitioners, one would have to wonder if hypnosis is tapping a deeper level of psychological reality than people are able to remember spontaneously. However, other practitioners have not found the same things.<sup>[87]</sup> Matlock believes that the answer lies in the suggestible nature of the hypnotic state. Subjects under hypnosis will often produce what the hypnotist expects. Hypnosis is not a good memory-enhancer, which is why testimony based on hypnotically-retrieved memories is not allowed in courts of law. There are other things about the regression material that should raise suspicions too. For instance, regressed subjects do not describe psychical or geographic links between lives that would explain why one life follows another with whom and where it does.<sup>[88]</sup>

## **How Can We Explain Intermission Memories?**

How is it possible to remember one's birth, much less time spent in the womb, and before that, discarnate existence and previous lives? If memories are formed by and stored in the brain, as many materialist psychologists and scientists assume,

veridical memories of this kind should not occur, and yet a good number of them have been reported. The obvious answer is that memories are not stored in the brain. Indeed, decades of research has not found memory traces in the brain. Researchers see parts of the brain become active when memories are retrieved, but this does not prove that they are stored there – the brain activity could be related to the memories retrieval from somewhere else.<sup>[89]</sup> In Matlock's view, that somewhere else is the subconscious part of the mind.<sup>[90]</sup>

Matlock adheres to the 'transmission' model of brain/mind relations, according to which the mind or consciousness exists independently of the brain, but interacts with the brain during life.<sup>[91]</sup> If he is right, memories could be formed and stored in the subconscious even when the mind is not associated with a body. They would not be dependent on the brain, although because the brain controls everything to do with the body, the brain would be activated when memories are retrieved from the subconscious during embodied life.

James G Matlock

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## Endnotes

### Footnotes

- 1.^ Stevenson (1974), 412.
- 2.^ Stevenson (2001), 111-13.
- 3.^ Sharma & Tucker (2004), 102.
- 4.^ Matlock & Giesler-Petersen (2016).
- 5.^ Sharma & Tucker (2004), 103.
- 6.^ Sharma & Tucker (2004), 107-8.
- 7.^ Ohkado & Ikegawa (2014); Ohkado (2015).
- 8.^ Matlock & Giesler-Petersen (2016).
- 9.^ Stevenson (1974), 412.
- 10.^ Matlock & Giesler-Petersen (2016).
- 11.^ Stevenson (1974), 412.
- 12.^ Matlock (2017a).
- 13.^ Slobodin (1994), 151.
- 14.^ Matlock & Giesler-Petersen (2016).
- 15.^ Lester (2005), 153.
- 16.^ Matlock & Giesler-Petersen (2016).
- 17.^ Sharma & Tucker (2004), 107.
- 18.^ Matlock & Giesler-Petersen (2016).
- 19.^ Matlock & Giesler-Petersen (2016).
- 20.^ Story (1975), 192.
- 21.^ Stevenson (1977), 105-06
- 22.^ Stevenson (1983), 21.
- 23.^ Stevenson (1983), 158-59.
- 24.^ Stevenson (2001), 239-43.
- 25.^ Sahay (1927), 17.
- 26.^ Stevenson (1997), vol. 2, 1746-47.
- 27.^ Haraldsson (2000), 18; Haraldsson & Matlock (2016), 5-6.
- 28.^ Sharma & Tucker (2004), 107.
- 29.^ Matlock & Giesler-Petersen (2016).
- 30.^ Stevenson (1975), 328-29.
- 31.^ ( $p < .000001$ ): Matlock & Giesler-Petersen (2016).
- 32.^ Stevenson (1983), 36.
- 33.^ Stevenson (1997), vol. 1, 594.
- 34.^ Rawat & Rivas (2007), 197.
- 35.^ Stevenson (2003), 23-27.
- 36.^ Stevenson (1983), 280-81.
- 37.^ Matlock & Giesler-Petersen (2016).
- 38.^ Matlock & Giesler-Petersen (2016).
- 39.^ Matlock & Giesler-Petersen (2016).
- 40.^ Stevenson (1980), 335.
- 41.^ Ohkado (2016), 529-30.
- 42.^ Stevenson (1997), vol. 1, 313-14.
- 43.^ Harrison & Harrison (1991), 106.
- 44.^ Ohkado (2016), 529-30
- 45.^ Matlock & Giesler-Petersen (2016).

- 46.^ Matlock & Giesler-Petersen (2016).
- 47.^ Stevenson (1983b), 7.
- 48.^ Plato, *The Republic*, X.613-21.
- 49.^ Stevenson (1983), 68.
- 50.^ Stevenson (1997), vol. 1, 556.
- 51.^ Sharma & Tucker (2004), 108.
- 52.^ Matlock & Giesler-Petersen (2016).
- 53.^ Matlock & Giesler-Petersen (2016).
- 54.^ Stevenson (1983), 109.
- 55.^ Tucker (2013), 87.
- 56.^ Stevenson (2001), 236-239.
- 57.^ Hearn (1897), 281-83.
- 58.^ Rivas (2003), 530.
- 59.^ Stevenson (1997), vol. 2, 1812.
- 60.^ Hassler (2023).
- 61.^ Matlock & Giesler-Petersen (2016).
- 62.^ Stevenson (1997), vol. 2, 1585.
- 63.^ Tucker (2013), 97.
- 64.^ Tucker (2005), 2-3, 178.
- 65.^ Bowman (2001), 177.
- 66.^ Tucker (2005), 164-68, 178; Bowman (2001), 169-179, under the name Sam.
- 67.^ Matlock (2017a).
- 68.^ Matlock (2017b).
- 69.^ Ohkado & Ikegawa (2014), 482.
- 70.^ Ohkado & Ikegawa (2014).
- 71.^ Ohkado (2015).
- 72.^ Carman & Carman (2013); Rivas, Carman, Carman, & Dirven (2015)
- 73.^ Matlock (2019), 243.
- 74.^ Matlock (2019).
- 75.^ Givens (2009).
- 76.^ Eyre (2000), 13.
- 77.^ Matlock (2019), 243.
- 78.^ Matlock & Giesler-Petersen (2016).
- 79.^ Zingrone & Alvarado (2009).
- 80.^ Holden (2009); Rivas, Dirven & Smit (2015).
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- 83.^ Kellehear (2009).
- 84.^ Newton (1996, 2000).
- 85.^ Matlock (2019), 222.
- 86.^ Matlock (2019), 222.
- 87.^ Matlock (2019.)
- 88.^ Matlock (2017b); Matlock (2019), 221.
- 89.^ Braude (2006); Gauld (2007).
- 90.^ Haraldsson & Matlock (2016), 262.
- 91.^ Kelly & Presti (2015).