

THE THERAPEUTIC APPLICATIONS OF PAST LIFE REGRESSION

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I admit it. If a client asks for a past life regression (PLR) because they believe the source of an issue lies in another lifetime, I will guide them back to explore such ideas. I join such notable psychiatrists and therapists as Drs. Carl Jung, Winifred Lucas, Ernest Pecci, Ronald Jue, and Roger Woolger in believing that, whether you believe in past lives or not, there is great therapeutic application in regression work. This bears repeating. Whether your belief system, or the belief system of your client, allows for reincarnation, karma, heaven, or hell is irrelevant for the therapeutic application of PLR. Even if past lives are a fantasy wholly created by the unconscious mind or it “fills in the gaps” with manufactured images, the unconscious tries to protect the individual the best way it can. It is our job as hypnotherapists to work with the unconscious mind to bring about healing in whatever way is appropriate for the unconscious. Florence McClain states: “If it brings about positive results with a happier, healthier and more productive individual as the end result, then it seems a tragic waste not to use past life regression as a therapeutic tool whatever the belief about reincarnation.” (McClain, 1997, p.137)

There are some that say, if a client asks for a past life regression, you should not accommodate them. Because my style of hypnosis is client-centered, I always start where the client is in their healing process and work from there. If a client comes in because they believe the source of their problem is in a past life, then we start there. If they don't know the source, then we start to explore, search, and heal. The unconscious possesses an uncanny means of protection. Numerous stories have been told of multiple personalities, many unaware of the others, created in an individual because of traumatic events. This can certainly indicate the suppression of current-life memories of source events, but it also indicates that the unconscious can resist revelation of the source event to protect the individual. The unconscious will try to protect the whole person. If this means to hide the initial source event in the current life, then it will.

There are those who believe that if a client comes in for PLR work because they believe a past life is the source of their problems, the client's conclusions are likely flawed. Perhaps these hypnotherapists would better serve these clients by referring them to another hypnotist who does not judge their clients as mistaken. The key to hypnosis is undercutting resistance, and considering someone else's opinion as flawed will bring failure to the hypnotic process due to this resistance. You will consciously or unconsciously communicate the belief that the client is misguided and set yourself up for a great amount of resistance from the client on both a conscious and unconscious level. An increase in resistance reduces your ability to effectively give hypnotic suggestions and to heal. Every new client who comes to see you has an assumption about the source of the presenting problem. In fact, there must be assumptions made on the part of the hypnotherapist as well. The object of any therapist is to become a Sherlock Holmes. We must gather clues as to which course will lead to a solution. Assuming that a past life is the source of an issue is indeed hazardous; it is equally hazardous; assuming that it is not.

It is not my objective to proselytize the benefits of past life regression or future life progression. I do believe, though, that knowledge is power. As hypnotists, we battle misconceptions about our profession at all times. Of course, there are misconceptions concerning past life regression therapy as well. One of the major misconceptions of past life regression is that it is necessary to possess a belief in reincarnation, heaven, hell, karma, souls, or other similar, religion-based topics. There are a number of mainstream religions that each these concepts, but people are surprised when they are told that it is not necessary to believe in any of these topics to utilize past life regression for therapeutic healing. Although belief in these concepts might help in remembering the past or future, the fundamental purpose of experiencing

regressions can be therapeutic even if the images are completely created by the imagination. In fact, the primary benefit of any regression is understanding. Understanding the self, those around you, and the world in general can bring a new perspective to the events that occur in life. Even if past life stories are created by the mind, the therapeutic and healing aspects are valid. Placebos have a place in medicine. Exploring past lives allows people to let go of fears and phobias, deal with death, and, the most important in my opinion, understand and forgive. Although Carl Jung did not know whether karma is the outcome of past lives, he states in his autobiography, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*: "I could well imagine that I might have lived in former centuries and there encountered questions I was not yet able to answer; that I had to be born again because I had not fulfilled the task that was given to me. When I die, my deeds will follow along with me—that is how I imagine it. I will bring with me what I have done. In the meantime, it is important to ensure that I do not stand at the end with empty hands." (Jung, 1961, p. 318)

The validation of the existence of past lives comes from Dr. Ian Stevenson, the head of the department of psychiatry at the University of Virginia School of Medicine, who documented and confirmed thousands of these memories. Dr. Stevenson systematically gathered data regarding past lives, especially in the case of children. In 1961 he traveled to India to investigate a single case of past life remembering, but once he arrived, word quickly spread that an American professor was interested in researching past life memories of children. He was interested in young children for evidence of reincarnation because they are relatively uncontaminated by television, movies, books, or hearsay. Dr. Stevenson examined thousands of these cases and thoroughly researched each story to an extraordinary degree.

He would travel back to the villages reported to be where the previous lifetime was lived, and interview the family and villagers of those associated with the proposed past life. He would also interview the child's family and village for character verification. In the thirty-five years since he first went to India, Dr. Stevenson has collected more than 2600 cases from a wide range of cultures and religions around the world. Certainly, there is strong evidence of reincarnation in the sheer volume of cases that have been meticulously researched and verified by Dr. Stevenson. Notable psychologists, medical doctors, theologians, and housewives have clinically researched and documented thousands upon thousands of cases that verify our ability to remember past lives. Dr. Stevenson's work over thirty years has brought a scientific analysis aspect that reveals the existence of reincarnation.

If we can get beyond the "truth" of past lives, we can explore the therapeutic application of past life regression. Just as with hypnosis, exploring a client's past lives is a useful tool. Past life regression allows "the release of emotion, the reduction of anxiety, the increase of creativity, and the increase of psychic ability" according to Karl Schlotterbeck. (Schlotterbeck, 1987, p. 214) What is most important is self-understanding and letting go of the cycles that we find ourselves repeating. In Carl Jung's vernacular, this is termed the "compulsion to repeat." The regression experience allows individuals to therapeutically go back in time to understand how the problems they are having relate to the present life. For example, someone may be attracted to or married to the same kind of person through different lives or continue to get into similar problem situations in each life. Learning which events or issues are being repeated allows them to be dealt with appropriately so the cycle can be stopped.

Another therapeutic application of past life regression is the ability of the client to reframe an experience by seeing the dynamics of a problem within a past life context. When perception of a situation becomes reframed, its emotional impact is transformed or dissolved. Past life regression allows the experience of a healthy release of anger, frustration, and stress by presenting a different perspective on life. The issue can be perceived so differently that an alternate response is possible. For example, a client who is physically abused in this life might discover that, in past lives, they have been the abuser. It might not ease the pain of the situation, but it can bring understanding of the lessons being learned in this life.

Past life regression can also have a therapeutic effect on those who are terminally ill or dealing with some aspect of death. The biggest fear of all is death - the great unknown. When a person becomes severely ill, they tend to become very introspective. They typically have time to examine how they have lived their life

and, perhaps, want to atone for harm done to other people in their life. They start to ask the great, metaphysical question, “Why?” Why did I act the way I did? Why do I continue to hold on to the same issues? They also begin to ask the other great metaphysical question, “What?” What will my death experience be like? What is beyond death? These are all very good questions. Regression therapy can be used to give insight into the answers.

In *Children's Past Lives*, Carol Bowman had a similar experience dealing with death. Due to her severe illness, pain, and medication, Mrs. Bowman began to have dreams and visions of different people who were unknown to her. In the examination of these lives, patterns began to emerge that correlated with her current life. She began to understand, as did Carl Jung and Roger Woolger, that the patterns of the past tended to repeat themselves in the future. Dr. Woolger expands on the Jungian view of this “compulsion to repeat” to encompass past lives that “drive us to repeat the circumstances and scenarios of old defeats, betrayals, losses, humiliations, violations, deprivations, injustices, and so on.” (Woolger, Vol. 1, 1993, p. 142) Probably the most powerful experience in past life recall is the remembering of what happens during the death experience. Because death and birth are synonymous, there is no reason why regression will not work to experience the death process and the after-death activities. Typically, lives led have been fairly ordinary and uneventful. The death experiences in these lives are usually the same - uneventful. In transitioning through the death experience to the day after death one can explore the awareness of death, awareness of how death occurred, and the feelings towards being dead.

The emotionality of more traumatic deaths can be reduced after they have been “experienced” a number of times. Some people may be very anxious around reexperiencing the death event. If not handled in an appropriate way, stress and severe discomfort might occur when recalling traumatic past lives. A certain amount of disassociation may need to be suggested. If a client becomes agitated during the reexperience, they can be asked to view the event as if it were on TV. After the experience has been reviewed a number of times over a number of sessions, the emotionality and discomfort will be greatly reduced.

In conclusion, the goal of past-life therapy is not to get lost in the movies of the mind, but to free us from their influence. It is important to understand that past-life regression allows a person to be somewhat free of emotions and feelings of the actual events so that the events can be better understood and occupy a more healthy method of expression. The validity of past life regression is irrelevant to the process of understanding and healing. One does not have to believe in the reality of past lives. Even if the mind invents these stories, and there is no such thing as reincarnation, there is a therapeutic, healing value in merely understanding.

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If you would like to explore your past or future lives, or if you have other questions about how hypnosis can be applied in your life, contact Dr. Gomes at **(925) 485-9370** or on the web at www.kivaspirit.org.