

# Past Life Memory – a key to understanding the self

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*'Your vision will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams, who looks inside, awakens' - Carl Jung*

## Preamble

When invited to speak on this subject, I assumed it was because of my background in psychotherapy, first of the analytical kind and in later years, transpersonal, so I felt I might have something to offer. Then I realised that this was a rather big assignment. To start with, what is the self? Should I be discussing its psychology, pathology, phenomenology or epistemology? And what indeed is a 'past life?' I cannot claim to be an expert. It's true that I have experienced several of my own and taken a number of people through theirs. At most, I have written some papers about the strange things that can happen in altered states of consciousness, some of which have come my way as a psychiatrist. Indeed, all my adult life I have been keenly aware of how paper-thin is our perception of 'reality'; indeed how profoundly subjective it all is.

Compared with the work of cartographers of the mind like Ken Wilber, my conceptual map is elementary. Yet I have a curious reaction when I read Wilber. For a moment, it seems that everything is explained. Then I put the book down and I feel nothing has been explained that I most want to know. Is this due to the limits of my ageing brain or simply that as I grown older, I turn more and more to my own experience? Either way, I increasingly feel the longing for simplicity.

## Acquiring a self

The human mind has an extraordinary propensity to search for meaning, to assemble a picture of the world that makes sense of what would otherwise be a kaleidoscope of sensory impressions. In fact, we go mad if we are unable to attribute meaning to what we experience, as the writings of Franz Kafka chillingly portray.

Starting with birth, we cannot really know what its like to be a baby. Reconstruction through re-birthing, primal therapy and hypnotic regression take us close, but the adult brain processes data in a way that is different to the infant's. Observational studies, on which a good deal of child developmental psychology relies, show us the surface of things rather than the inward experience, which only we can know for ourselves. But many would agree that there is kind of wisdom to be seen in the eyes of the newborn. To paraphrase William Blake, it's as though the baby sees not *with* but *through* the eye. The soul is visible, naked, wondering and curious about the strange world it has entered.

There's no space to elaborate here on how the child develops a coherent sense of self through a process of repeated projection and introjection, discovering first of all its mother's body and then its own, building up a representational internal object world through the mirroring of others and at the same time a body-schema that one day will be corroborated in a real mirror. The micro-universe of the child's self reaches into the mind of others, becoming aware of their beliefs and intentions. Theory of Mind suggests that we are hard-wired to exercise this astonishing ability and to respond appropriately, except that people suffering from autistic spectrum disorders are tragically unable to do so.

Every child develops a sense of its unique self, sealed within the envelope of its own skin. It's a fact that toddlers learn to say no before they say yes. There are deep implications. My truth can never be anyone else's, since my reality belongs to me alone. However, I can hope that what is real for my self will be at least recognizable to others. When that connection seriously breaks down, and my personal reality loses touch with consensus reality, there is a risk of being diagnosed mentally ill.

### **The enquiring self**

Here is a favourite quatrain of mine from Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam <sup>1</sup>, the 11<sup>th</sup> century Persian poet, mathematician and philosopher, as translated by Edward Fitzgerald <sup>in</sup> the first edition:

*Myself when young did eagerly frequent  
Doctor and Saint, and heard great Argument  
About it and about; but evermore  
Came out by the same Door as in I went.*

Fitzgerald, once started, could not stop revising the Rubaiyat. It ran to five editions and occupied him for the rest of his life. He considered Omar Khayyam to be at heart an unrepentant Epicurean, raising a glass to the ephemeral moment, a defiant gesture in the face of oblivion:

*Oh come with old Khayyam, and leave the Wise  
To talk: one thing is certain, that Life flies;  
One thing is certain, and the rest is Lies;  
The Flower that once has blown for ever dies.*

Yet Khayyam is also said to have studied Sufism and many quatrains are suffused with hints of eternal renewal:

*I sometimes think that never blows so red  
That Rose as where some buried Caesar bled;  
That every Hyacinth the Garden wears  
Dropt in its Lap from some once lovely head,*

and:

*Ah, fill the Cup: - what boots it to repeat  
How Time is slipping underneath our Feet:  
Unborn TO-MORROW, and dead YESTERDAY,  
Why fret about them if TO-DAY be sweet!*

Old Khayyam held in his poet's hand a mystery that many of us feel about the essence of consciousness. All I can truly know in this split second is that 'I am'. I say split second, but actually, it is beyond time, because the 'Now' is unconditional and unconditioned. This is why the present is said to be eternal, as taught by exponents of the non-dual wisdom tradition. It is the nature of the Ground of All-Being.

Compare the consciousness of the 'Now' with the mentality of what I shall be calling the mundane self. The moment I set in motion the movement of thought, I become a protagonist in my world drama, in possession of a complex life history, with filing cabinets of all I have done, felt, thought and said. This portfolio is the work of my ego, which sustains the mundane self. Above all, my ego positively feeds on the personal pronoun, 'my' - my body, my self, my past, my life, my future. Of course, the ego doesn't stop there. It soon becomes my car, my house, my money and so on.

Yet despite these great ambitions of the ego, my body from adulthood onwards is a constant reminder of entropy and decline. 'The flower that once has blown for ever dies' in the words of Omar Khayyam. The arrow of time is relentless in its flight, and seeks out beggars and kings alike – which is a great antidote to any tendency to conceit. The poet drives the point home:

*Think, in this batter'd Caravanserai  
Whose Doorways are alternate Night and Day,  
How Sultan after Sultan with his Pomp  
Abode his Hour or two and went his way.*

The precognition of death deeply alarms the ego and it fights this with everything it's got. The pain of loss brings an armoury of defence mechanisms into play – splitting, projection, denial and repression, which lead Sigmund Freud to suppose the death instinct to be itself unconscious – by the death instinct, I mean the irresistible current of that underground river that sweeps us from our birth to our death. Carl Jung's view was different, of course. He saw the self as transcending the limits of the ego, embracing both life and death in turn.

### **The mundane self**

By mundane I am denoting our 'down to earth' psychobiology, meaning personality, in which the ego plays a big part, along with one's basic disposition, the sum total of all one's traits, habits of mind and style of thinking. The personality I feel that is mine is not a given; how I am recognised by others feeds the experience of who I take myself to be. The mundane self is constantly in relationship; in fact, it cannot exist without relationship.

This raises a further point: everyone I relate to draws out of me a unique response that is finely tuned to the other, just as I am to him or her. In fact, my self is like an ensemble. When musicians play well together, the music is greater than the sum of the parts, and a rich whole it is too. On the other hand, a wounded self that suffers from splitting is less than the sum of its parts. From the psychodynamic viewpoint, split-off aspects of the self can lie dormant in the recesses of the psyche for years until re-activated by a precipitating event. The problem for the wounded psyche is that as long as the splits are unaddressed, the psyche cannot heal. I'll say more when I come to past life therapy.

Since the present is beyond time, the ego roots itself in the past and the future. Although the past doesn't actually exist except as a mental construct, it nevertheless furberishes me with a constant stream of data supporting my mundane self. Based on who I think I am (something most of us unhesitatingly take for granted) I also invest heavily in my future. It is equally as illusory and as non-existent as the past, but it serves to give me a sense of direction, even a sense of control over what will happen to me next. Again, this is of great comfort to the ego. Although I may be run over by a bus tomorrow, I will at least die thinking that I would have had such and such a future, if only I hadn't been run over by the bus.

In this way, the ego identifies with the laws of classical physics, situating itself in a physical world governed by predicable events that follow one after another. We can expect the sun to rise tomorrow, as it did today, yesterday and all the days before. Such is the inherent egoism of the mundane self that we experience ourselves at the epicentre of not only our individual life dramas but of the whole universe.

Yet there is poignancy about this Newtonian, ego-driven self securely nested in space and time, for it relates to other such selves like ships that pass in the night. The closest we can get to each other physically is when we make love, and mentally when our thoughts and feelings coalesce with another's. If we are very lucky, we find both in the one relationship, but many never do. The mundane self is founded in the polarity of separation, which is why incidentally, every relationship tells us more about ourselves than it can ever tell us about the other person.

I am not disparaging the ego. We could not function in space-time without it, and the ego has been used to achieve great things in the service of humankind. But as depicted in the Buddhist ox-herding pictures from China and Japan, the ego has to be harnessed like the ox before the cart. When it is running out of control, especially when imagining itself to be attacked, the ego is highly dangerous. For instance, when the ego is attached to a piece of land, people are prepared to kill and die in the fight to own it. Sovereignty is mistakenly being attributed to the physical world instead of understanding it to be a quality of Soul.

## The spiritual self

The soul yearns for unity, which I think of as being at the heart of quantum consciousness, to use Amit Goswami's term. Born anew with each collapse of the wave function, indeed, like a wave breaking on the shore, we are, millisecond by millisecond, deposited on this grain of sand we call Earth, yet we arrive knowing we were *somewhere* before. According to Goswami<sup>2</sup>, mind and matter are a tangled hierarchy, so the grain of sand on which we are deposited is also one that we create. Mysterious indeed!

*...Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory, do we come...*

*From Stanza 5: Intimations of Immortality. William Wordsworth*

As I understand it, the virtual wave function contains all that was, is and ever shall be. However, since it is all in potentium, it doesn't contribute to the narrative of my mundane self. Yet there is, within the spiritual self, the knowledge of what it is like to be everywhere at once and to savour the connectedness of all things and the door remains open to this quantum realm through what is known as Samadhi, or the 'direct experience'. I'll be referring to this again.

Not being a physicist, I am indebted to quantum mechanics for a rich metaphor that provides me with a powerful antidote to material realism. Is this fair? As a musician I understand musical grammar, but I don't depend on it to enjoy listening to music. I would like to think the parallel holds with quantum mechanics. If not, then I am enjoying a splendid illusion, and it is only one more illusion among many thousands.

The curious thing is that when I identify with form (my mundane self), I might be persuaded that I *have* a soul, but if I give primacy to consciousness, it comes naturally to say I *am* a soul. As the saying goes, there is a world of difference between my being a human being on a spiritual path and myself as a spiritual being on a human path. My soul may seem to be located in the body, but then it would, of course, if only because of the location of my special sense organs, which suggest that my seat of consciousness lies somewhere behind the eyes and between the ears.

## The world is as one sees it

As a doctor, I was raised in the fold of material realism but the mind, which has always interested me, stood out as a thing apart. I spend years trying to understand how it works, using the reductive tool of psychoanalysis and which, I must say, is brilliant at uncovering the ruses, deceptions and distortions employed by the ego to stay in the driving seat. Not least, in the course of my own psychoanalysis, I learned a lot *about* myself, and I must

admit I found it very interesting. But did I discover *who* I am? I did not, for no amount of introspection that calls for the observing self (the subject) to study the observed (mental content) leads to the realisation of one's own Being.

My intuition, which has taken me most of my lifetime to learn to trust, always knew there was more to the universe than its constituent atoms, molecules, amino-acids, carbon chains and so on. Where was the intelligence that guided physical matter into its myriad forms? I eventually fell in love with the top-down vision; it answered the kind of questions I was asking *and* was beautiful to behold. Not only that, I had a very personal stake in it. It meant God was in me, so now I knew where my soul came from. It certainly was not manufactured by my DNA!

*'As a hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for thee, O God'.*

The hart referred to here is actually a deer, but I have always read this verse from Psalm 42 as the yearning of the human heart, and still do.

I was relieved to find out that top-down and bottom-up are, in fact, two sides of the same coin. But one side will usually appeal to a person more than the other and over the years, I have come to see that how we look at the world is largely determined by what we wish to see. 'We don't see things as they are, we see things as we are'. We go looking for the evidence that will affirm our worldview, and there is plenty to choose from. Since nothing can be proven *not* to exist, the argument between material realism and metaphysics will continue forever.

Yet this is all to the good, since diversity is a powerful spur to discovery; arguments are fine so long as no one takes them too seriously. It is a point of real importance to me: thoughts are for playing with – they are constructions, like Lego bricks. But when we identify with our thoughts, we forget who we are, that is, the one who creates the thought and then we mistake the thought for truth. And who, we all would like to know, *is* the thinker behind the thought? This question is yet another thought that unfortunately doesn't bring us any closer to the thinker!

### **Enthusing personality with soul**

Today's world crisis is the outcome of unbridled action of the ego. We are suffering the consequences of a tribal mentality that is being remorselessly acted out on the world stage. The paper I gave at Beyond the Brain V in 2003 entitled 'Love and the Near-life experience' <sup>3</sup> was an attempt to show how mundane love may be transformed as we shift our centre of being from the third chakra to the fourth. On the species level, this is going to be the make or break. Is Homo sapiens going to be able to shift from separatism based on taking (the natural impulse of ego) to unification based on giving (the natural impulse of soul)?

I won't talk more about chakras here, but I'll focus on how an understanding of 'past lives' can spur us to address the problems of our time, with the aid of the

magnanimity of Soul. As Proust remarked, the real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in seeing with new eyes.

Although the mundane self sees only the one journey of birth to death, everyone who cherishes the transpersonal vision will be familiar with the notion of this life as a scene from a never-ending play in which we are playwright, director, protagonist and audience – all of these. The purpose of it, not least the rollercoaster of emotions and experiences we encounter is, naturally, to challenge us to become the best that it is in us to be.

In early life, we are, with luck, guided and restrained by our parents or we should become little monsters. We internalise our parents' values, and the formation of the conscience, or super-ego as described by Freud, is indispensable to civilisation. The emerging ego has a hard time trying to find a balance between the injunctions of the super-ego and the clamour of instinctual demands. But for the most part, compromises are found that enable us to reach mid-life with at least some accomplishments, hopefully employment, maybe with family, and a modicum of wider social conscience. Progress on all fronts has been uneven, but then our civilisation is still very young. I've heard it said that if the timeline of Earth is compared to the height of the empire state building with its one hundred and two floors, the last five thousand years would be no thicker than the paper covering one ceiling of one floor. So, not surprisingly, we still have dictatorships vying with democracies. Even our democracies are based on large scale gambling, otherwise known as banking, and in that casino, where there are winners there will be losers.

In its behaviour, the human race is behaving very much like the new kid on the block, given that there must be countless intelligent life forms throughout the universe. Who can say how many emergent species like ours self-destruct? The sci-fi portrayal of ruthless extra-terrestrials is a projection of our own primitive mentality. It's far more probably that only those species that transcend auto-destruction, which means progressing from ego to Soul, gain admission to the evolved interstellar community.

If the spiritual evolution of our little world is to succeed, we need all the inspiration from Source we can get. Each world religion has its own 'take' on God and many people are uplifted accordingly. Others are not, since religious convention requires God to be located in some other place called Heaven, and if there is a heaven there must be a hell, so we live and die in fear of being found wanting and paying the price.

Since the Judeo-Christian faiths make death a one-off, there is no in-built means of continuing self-improvement. Given how far most of us have yet to travel, this is daunting. Re-incarnation, on the other hand, offers each person unlimited opportunity for further learning. According to the law of karma, in which every action is weighed in the balance, the privilege of being here as we are right now suggests that we haven't got it all wrong so far. It's just that a lot more spiritual infusion is called for. Alice Bailey<sup>4</sup> writes of the 'soul-infused personality'. Along the same lines, I'm taken with the idea of soul-enthused personality, the root of enthuse being *entheos*, meaning inspired by God.

## **The 'direct experience'**

Before I turn to how past lives can help us raise the bar, there is one more piece in the cosmic puzzle that I want to mention and it concerns the nature of the 'direct experience'. People who have had a direct experience, whether spontaneously or through meditation, do not report meeting spirits, travelling in other worlds, seeing past lives or going anywhere in particular. Yet the experience is deep and indelible, for in that moment, everything is 'known'. There are no questions to ask and there is no meaning to be unpacked. Typically, words fail to describe since for words to label, there must be objectification. Yet in a direct experience, the observer and the observed are one.

My own direct experience lasted probably a few minutes, but it could as well have been forever. Attempts to convey the experience include the Sanskrit 'neti neti' 'not this, not that, as in Advaita Vedanta, and Buddhists use the term anatta or anatta (not-soul – meaning not of the self). In Daoism, the Dao de Jing opens with the lines 'the Dao that can be named is not the Dao' while in the apophatic Western religious tradition, we have the via negativa. But all of these terms, while correctly pointing to the absence of any phenomenon, fail to convey the richness of the experience.

I'll attempt to convey something of my own experience with an image that occurs to me now, banal though it might seem. It was as though I had entered the projection room of a cosmic cinema, from which an infinite number of films were being shown; though I could not see them myself. I had stepped for a moment out of my movie and gone behind the scene. In that place was perfect harmony, like soundless music, and everything was entirely replete in itself.

When subsequently I came across the phrase 'a multiplicity of virtual realities' it struck a deep chord in me. When we exit our own movie, whether briefly, as in OBEs, NDEs or past lives, or irrevocably, when we undergo bodily death, other movies await in which we must play our part according to the agenda of the soul.

## **What survives?**

Will my individual consciousness continue when this particular movie ends? My ego would like this very much – indeed insists that it shall be so, and perhaps it will. Since the Universe goes to such trouble to create such unique and subtle differences between us, it makes sense that our individual souls should be developed and refined rather than simply merging in the zero-point field.

Buddhists, on the other hand, believe our destiny is to return to the universe as a whole and that new life arises from the five psycho-physical aggregates called skandhas, comprising form, sensation, perception, volition and consciousness. The chief objection in Buddhism to the notion of a unique and

enduring soul is on the grounds that since the Skandhas are constantly changing, the self cannot be unchanging. Since they are transient, the self cannot be eternal. Since they are diverse, the self cannot be unitary. This leads to the notion of no-self.

However, what attracts me to Soul is *not* that it should be permanent and unchanging but that it should be evolving as it journeys through the multiplicity of virtual realities. We are used to paradoxes, and there is one here. Where there are dimensions of time and space, the universe is free to evolve. Yet without time and space, there can be no movement and no evolution. When I was about fourteen years old and I was being taught about angular velocity, I happened to observe a trivial event that struck me forcibly. A piece of fluff on the edge of an old style gramophone record moves quite fast. Halfway to the centre, it travels more slowly. Close to the centre, it barely moves and at the very centre, there is a turning point that stays perfectly still. This is still something of a mystery to me, but I like to think that in the smaller vision we see revealed the greater design.

Direct experiences aside, I feel our role is to live out the drama as best we can, for we wrote the script for our own benefit. When they arise, past life memories enable us to review the script and to deepen our understanding of the play. Yet the most powerful therapeutic lever that past life memories offer is not in the re-living of the memory itself but what it means to view that life from the afterlife, or Bardo as it is called in Tibetan Buddhism. When we cross over, we have the chance to access that former life with the greater vision and forbearance of Soul, finding understanding, compassion and forgiveness not always available to the mundane self during life on Earth.

### **Past life memories**

What really is going on when we enter a past life is open to debate. Sceptics will argue the case for cryptomnesia, of course. Then we should need to appeal to empirical evidence like the meticulous research of the late Ian Stevenson <sup>5</sup>.

Beyond that, it makes not much difference to me whether the scene I enter is one that was specifically lived by the same self I take to be me today, or whether sympathetic resonance draws me to a life once lived and which becomes 'mine', much as a visitor might enter a room and for an hour or two make himself at home. Do I live the movie or does the movie live me? Is this another tangled hierarchy?

I'm not going to go into the techniques of past life regression here. Full details, and many case histories, can be found in 'Other lives, other selves' by Roger Woolger <sup>6</sup>. However, there is one golden rule. When working with a past life, it is essential the therapist enables the client to complete the life by going through the death, especially when the circumstances have been traumatic, otherwise there will be a risk of further trauma. Either the moment of transition brings its own peace, or there will be an opportunity to find healing in the afterlife.

In the afterlife, there is veridical perception of the former life much as in the review stage of an NDE, except that the therapist actively helps the client deepen the understanding and, most importantly, to complete any unfinished business from that life. As Ego yields to the wisdom of Soul, deep learning takes place. This way you don't have to die first (for real) before getting the lesson you need. Furthermore, within a short time, you are back in the world with your new insight on board and being given numerous opportunities to put learning into practice.

To illustrate, I'll give three short accounts of past lives that I have experienced for myself.

### **Example 1**

I find myself in Nantes, in France. It is the 16<sup>th</sup> century and I am a miller, with a wife and two daughters. (I should add here that I am no historian and only later looked up the French Wars of Religion between the Catholics and the Protestant Huguenots, which ended with a truce, the Edict of Nantes, finally declared by Henry IV in 1598).

I'm at home when the door suddenly bursts open and soldiers arrest me on suspicion of treason. I'm accused of supporting a civil insurrection by supplying grain to rebel forces. I protest, for I'm entirely innocent, but I'm perfunctorily tied up, thrown onto a cart and taken to the jail. There I am arraigned by a military tribunal. I'm given no chance to defend myself. I am found guilty and taken to a dungeon where I am chained to the stone floor. There I suffer unceasing privation - there is no one to speak with, disgusting food is passed wordlessly to me once a day and no one comes to see me. I lose all track of time and I lose all hope. Years pass, and there is nothing but my suffering. I have been abandoned. Worst of all, my wife never once comes to see me.

In the session, we move forward year by year until I come to the last hour of the last day of my life. I see that my leg is gangrenous where the chain has cut into the flesh. I begin to lose consciousness. Then suddenly I am looking down at my body and there is no more pain. I turn towards the light and leave. I find myself in a place outdoors, bathed in light that I haven't seen in years. There is blessed freedom, yet I'm aware that I still harbour a deep grievance.

Now the therapist asks me whom I might wish to meet. I immediately say with bitterness, 'not my wife, for she deserted me'. The therapist suggests it could be important to tell her how I feel and I grudgingly consent. I wait there a little while (time in the Bardo is very fluid) and then she too crosses over. She catches sight of me and runs towards me with joy. I feel deep anger towards her and prepare to push her away. 'It's you', she cries, 'I came to the prison every day to see you, for all those years, and they never let me in!' My eyes fill with tears and I am flooded with remorse. I am so ashamed of my lack of trust that I beg for her forgiveness. She embraces me and we are together again.

We wait there in each other's arms until our two children come over, and so are united in love once more as family.

In this session, the theme is self-evident. To trust in the goodness of love is a risk worth taking a thousand times. Without that trust, I should be ensnared in karma of great suffering, for a broken heart is worse than any physical affliction. I might add that this theme is no less crucial to the global community of today. As long as there are countries stockpiling nuclear weapons, we can be sure that trust in the goodness of love has still far to go.

In past life therapy, crossing over into the Bardo is not all Love and Light. We carry with us the powerful imprint of the last emotion before death and if reconciliation and sometimes atonement are not found, that negative imprint will carry through to the next life where it will need to be faced again, for until healing can take place, the wound remains open.

## **Example 2**

There is an old Rabbinical saying 'What is Hell? It is to have God sit you on his knee and show you what your life could have been!' I recall another life in which I was a wealthy squire in the 17<sup>th</sup> century England. I had a beautiful country house, a lovely wife and a son and daughter. Then, while the children were still young, my beloved wife caught a chill and died of a fever. I was distraught. I withdrew from the world, became distant from my children and paced around my house and gardens like a ghost. I could not forgive God for taking my wife from me and lost my faith. I never recovered from this deep melancholy and the years passed silently and monotonously. Finally, when I became ill, I had no desire to recover. Instead, I welcomed death, which came to me one day while I was staring at sunlight streaming through the stained glass window in my chamber.

The first person to meet me on the other side was my wife Elizabeth, looking in the bloom of youth. I could hardly believe my eyes. There was such sweet joy in our meeting! Then, with sickening clarity, I saw that in my anger and despair I had thrown away the precious gift of my life. All I had needed to do was be patient and wait for us to be re-united. I had been given our children to love and cherish, and I could have cherished the memory of my wife through my love for them. Instead, I had been victim to my bitterness and it had eventually poisoned me.

There's an evident connection with the subject of loss given in the first example - there often is a common strand between lives, a karmic theme some would call it. But the prime importance of what I was shown here was never to turn my back on life again.

### Example 3

This life comes from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. I was a young man, the son of a cobbler, living in a village on the coast in southwest England. I was engaged to be married, was well liked and in rude health. But it wasn't enough for me that I had loving parents, a sweetheart and an honest job working with my father. Like a good many of the young men around, I was lining my pockets with sovereigns by joining a local group of smugglers bringing in French brandy from across the Channel.

One evening disaster struck. The boat was due to land with its cargo and I had been put ashore in an adjacent cove to go up the cliff path and rendezvous with the lookout. As I reached the cliff top I heard musket fire from the bay below. The militia had been lying in wait and were slaughtering the crew. I fled, and within a few hours had travelled farther afield than I'd ever been in my whole life. I was safe, but what should I do now? I couldn't go back home and I had no money.

Either I would starve or I must steal, and so began my life as a thief. In time, I graduated to robbing stagecoaches, living the squalid life of a highwayman. I was caught in a downward spiral and I knew that at some time, I would probably end up a murderer as well as a thief.

On day, when stopping a coach, I found myself staring at half a dozen muskets all trained on me. The militia had been hiding in the coach and had found their man. I was bound and taken to the nearest town. In the morning, a judge found me guilty to be hanged. A noose was put round my neck as I stood on a cart, which was driven away. I hung there until I died.

I left my body but found I couldn't leave the gibbet on which my lifeless body was hanging. People came to stare, crows pecked out my eyes and my body began to rot. Then some soldiers cut my body down and threw it into a pit of lime. I still could not leave that place. My desolation was profound. I felt deep shame for having wasted my whole life for a few gold sovereigns. My parents may have been humble but they were honest and kind, and had been proud of me. I had let down myself, my parents and all those dear to me.

My therapist asked who might come to me in that bleak place, and I waited, but no one came. Eventually he reminded me that I could pray to God for help. I hardly dared to do so, for I could not imagine I deserved forgiveness, but finally I called out, 'God, please help me'. The moment I did so, a light appeared to which I was powerfully drawn, soaring away from that grim place.

This past life taught me an important lesson – it is possible to make such a mess of one's life that no one can rescue you and that you must thereafter live out the consequence of your own folly. But it also brought home to me that it is never too late for redemption!

## Conclusion

I could add to these examples with others, but I hope that the main point is made. Jacob Moreno, the founder of psychodrama, once said that psychodrama is a place where you can learn from your mistakes without being punished. I would add that past life therapy is a place where you can revisit your worst actions, experience their devastating impact and find the healing for which the soul yearns. Then, still carrying memories as real as any to remind you of your folly, you walk right back into your life to try again,

This world is a melting pot of the good, bad and indifferent. Hitler and Jesus breathed the same air. That makes it a great place for self-improvement or self-destruction, according to our will, and that is presumably why we come here; we make of it Hell or Heaven according to our predilection. Yet it seems that the human race is not yet sufficiently evolved to be moved collectively by love, and I mean soul love – chakras four and upwards. We lack wisdom and common sense. It's like putting a child behind the wheel of a car and saying, 'Go, drive!' There have been some fearful smashes in human history and I'm sure there are more to come. Fortunately, since from the perspective of Soul there is no such thing as death, it is all one big practice run with gruesome injuries but no fatalities, except of the body.

I know this might sound glib, and people who have suffered torture, or witnessed genocide, could take deep offence. But I'll stick to my mantra – from the point of view of *Soul* there is no such thing as a bad experience. There is always the opportunity for redemption, compassion and forgiveness that enables us to grow a little taller each time round. We are given endless opportunities to see the folly of our ways. Like small children, we need our hands held, and the universe is kind enough to offer just that. We have some great souls here on earth as our exemplars. But we cannot run before we walk, and those great souls will have had their struggles too.

Why bother with past-life therapy at all? Why not leave it to the greater scheme of things to sort this out without pitching in with our good intentions? My answer to this is that while this is largely what happens in any case, we are all part of the greater scheme and that everything that takes place on Earth is for our potential benefit, including past life therapy.

Many feel that organised religion will not adequately serve the needs of the Aquarian age, with its movement towards self-sovereignty and individual responsibility for the journey of the soul. Knowledge of past lives can take some people further along this path. It is not knowledge that is immediately available to consciousness - the burden of it would be overwhelming and it would negate the fresh start that is given us with each new birth. And so, for the most part, it has to be sufficient to trust that the agenda the soul set itself before arriving here will find its challenges in the life we have chosen to enter.

Yet we are indebted to the universe for the knowledge that we do reclaim. On the wider front, it encourages human beings to choose a future that is not a repetition of the past, and more specifically, as a therapeutic tool, past life

therapy releases us from imprints of the ego, both physical and emotional, that can blight our departure from this life and our return to the next.

By now, I hope I've made it clear why I think we souls come to ride the carousel of life. Omar Khayyam wrote:

*For in and out, above, about, below,  
'Tis nothing but a Magic Shadow-show  
Play'd in a Box whose candle is the Sun  
Round which we Phantom Figures come and go*

Nearly a millennium later, we can go further. Let us leave the 'nothing but's' to Richard Dawkins and the like. The exploration of soul consciousness shows us this magic shadow-show is *of our own making*. This is no dream but an awakening, as we go round not in circles but in a spiral of infinite creation.

Should this paper have fallen short of expectations, it is salutary to remember that in the non-dual wisdom tradition, all the movies that we play are 'perfect', otherwise they would not be as they are. And if we are still inclined to find fault with them, it is good to remember that imperfection is also perfect.

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