



Experiencing Past Life Regression

Experiencing Past Life Regression: A Tribute to my Father.

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The first two parts of this paper were written within a month of each other in 1995. The third in which I describe my father's death was written in 1997. They were originally written for my colleagues in the Dorset Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists. I have reprinted the papers here as one, but have treated them as three chapters in order to preserve the immediacy with which I originally wrote each of them.

I remain agnostic regarding the possibility that we live more than one life; I hope that we do for I have never appreciated life more than at present. I attribute some of my enthusiasm to my sole experience of 'Past Life Therapy'. This however, is not to say that I believe I contacted an objective 'past life' through the hypnotic process of this therapy; I have no idea if there was ever a single person who experienced the fate I 'remembered' under the influence of hypnosis. At this stage of my life my impression is that I made a symbolic journey into the darker part of the psyche from which I emerged physically wounded but psychologically and emotionally strengthened.

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Part One: In which an agnostic encounters another self.

There is part of me that is quite primitive and superstitious. Another part is an adventurer. As a Virgo I am told that I am analytical and a perfectionist. I do not suffer fools gladly, nor do I allow foolish theories to influence my practice as a guide and helper. With this predisposition it was predictable that when Jungian Analyst and Past

Life Regression therapist Roger Woolger was presenting a one-day workshop in Dorset - I would be there to sample the therapy personally.

Roger Woolger has researched his subject thoroughly - for him the roots go back to Arthur Gurdham's hypnotic researches into reincarnation in particular during the Albigensian crusade in which the Cathars were systematically murdered. Woolger himself identifies a crusader from this period within himself as well as other characters.

His therapy suggests three levels of process. During the first stage the 'remembered' life is treated as literal - therapy concentrating on traumatic 'defeats' within the 'life' when complexes in 'this life' may have their roots. Catharsis is encouraged and the body gently guided to complete reflex actions rudely interrupted by such phenomena as fear or death. As Woolger says in his book "it is not a 'nice' therapy", (Woolger 1995).

In the second phase the 'past life' is interpreted symbolically. Knowledge from Eastern and Western healing and spiritual traditions is applied to provide meaning and structure to all the pain.

The third and final phase both literal and symbolic meanings are integrated so that in this moment the 'dreamer' and the 'dreamed' recognizes each other as one!

There were about twenty members attending this workshop. Most were counsellors in the widest sense of the term. During the morning Roger lightly outlined his theory illustrating his talk with case material drawn from ten years of practice in this field. He is an entertaining speaker who uses powerful methods of indirect suggestion in his presentation. The case studies become stories, which suggest that 'past lives are rarely glamorous'; 'pain is to be encountered'; 'there will be a catharsis and a release'.

His hypnotic technique extends beyond this. Subtly interspersed in the case studies are some of the inductions originally used to elicit 'past life memories'. Phrases such as 'back in a past life'; 'when you are in a past life'; 'suddenly find yourself in a past life'; inevitably occur in stories of past life regression. In Roger Woolger's presentation these are accompanied by subtle tonal shifts. I was reminded during the talk that the American Psychiatrist and master storyteller Milton H. Erickson frequently used this technique when employing hypnosis, (Erickson 1966). For example he once interspersed phrases about 'ease' and 'pain' into a story about tomatoes that he told to a sick gardener and the man's pain went away. Woolger not only is a master of hypnosis, he also mentions Erickson by name in his book, (Woolger op.cit.).

By lunchtime we were all waiting for some drama to be enacted. I for one wanted to encounter a past self, preferably tough, handsome, reliable and displaying modest saintly qualities. However, after the morning's stories of past life drowning, decapitation, strangulation, starvation and worse - this was unlikely to happen.

Over lunch the memory of a family therapy presentation from this life came to me. Two social workers Barry Bowen and Ginni Nimno practising on the Wirral in the mid 1980s would enable families to act out processes psychodramatically helping them to change problem scripts whilst operating in a metaphor. They outline the process as follows, (Barson J, 1985).

Analogy:- This problem is like - whatever!

Metaphor :- Incorporates many possibilities

Refine Metaphor:- A discussion takes family members deeper into one chosen metaphorical experience

Enactment: - Kinaesthetic & Proprioceptive representation (Catharsis)

Positive Prescription: - Something to do at home to keep therapeutic resolution alive

Review Not therapy:- just how have you got on?

Back in the workshop a brief group induction followed lunch. This was a permissive process the structure of which was likely to find a location somewhere in the world where some unpleasantness had occurred in a past life. I found myself in central Russia during the civil war in the 1920s. As a young peasant conscript I was enjoying a breakfast of potato and fatty stock with some troops in a slit trench. There was no end to the peasant soldier's story by the time we were invited to share our 'past life' discoveries in the wider group. It occurred to me that my unconscious had come up with a powerful manoeuvre likely to ensure I would have the group's support if I volunteered to be the subject of further past life probing.

This happened during the last part of the afternoon. I lay on a mattress and entered into a vivid 'memory'. My teeth were bad, my uniform barely adequate for the Russian winter, my feet and hands cold, (I sometimes suffer this way in this life) but despite the cold it was wonderful to look out across the snow covered landscape comforted by a warm mug of poor food. "*It is a good day to die*", I thought as the soldier.

Roger 'moved' me forward in time. Now there was smoke so thick I could not see. The ground was moving and the noise painful. Roger asked what I did next. I covered my

face adopting a foetal position. This was disconcerting because I could smell the clean clothing and flesh of my body as a participant in the workshop. I moved my arm over my head so as to lose this distracting smell and re-enter the experience of being in Russia. "*This is it*", I thought - but it wasn't. The noise stopped and the smoke cleared. I was alone. All around the landscape had changed - silence for what seemed like ages; anxiety-laden relief to be alive and then voices from a position further down the hill. I did not dare move so just kept my head down, waiting for help to arrive. Roger must have sensed that we could be waiting for some time so he moved me on.

Other soldiers join me and we are making our way cautiously away from the battle. We have succeeded in gaining open ground away from a blazed woods and are crouching behind a wall. Workshop member me expects that when I look over the wall I will be shot, but this does not happen. Three of us go over the wall and approach some farm buildings. A dog barks and I swear fearing detection because of its alarm. Cautiously we enter a farmyard only to be seized. We have walked into an enemy patrol.

I am paralysed in fear. In another room I can hear a comrade being beaten for no reason other than the pleasure of the captors. I am next. Suddenly I am dragged into the room. Resistance seems hopeless - a rifle butt winds me, my head cracks and I am floating above the scene. My head has been broken; my legs have fallen at a strange angle. When I look up there is a vortex spinning above, it is like water going down the plughole but bigger and going upward.

Roger asks if I have died. I say that I don't know and look down again at the broken soldier's body. "*Yes, I think so*", I say. "*Soldier you died in fear*", he says: "*It is not the death itself but the fear of dying that causes `Samskaras`, (past life programming). Is there anything you would wish to do differently as the soldier?*"

As the soldier I go back to being dragged into the room. This time I resist, pushing back with my feet. Roger asks, "*What would you like to say to your attackers?*" For a split second as the polite middle class workshop participant I want to make speeches about 'forgiveness', but then the peasant soldier's personality comes flooding back again. "*I want to spit on them*".

"Yes the spit of defiance", says Roger, passing me a tissue - I spit into it with venom and gesture for another 'Kleenex' so I can 'flob' on another attacker. Now I am passing upward away from the scene. I am glad to leave this place and this life, I say - "*it has all been spoilt*", (by the war).

My eyes open and I am shocked to see the ornate ceiling of the room in which the workshop is taking place. All around members are looking concerned. As an encounter group veteran from the 1970s I know this re-entry routine well - make eye contact, smile, wait centre stage until the 'master' has paraphrased the therapeutic process. Be checked in as 'integrated' at late 20th century passport control and get out of the limelight quickly.

But there is more to this past life than I have shared. This peasant soldier may have been an innocent when conscripted but he carried out his own share of killing, torture and abuse in this dark life. It is this aspect of the 'past life' he is glad to leave behind. I recognise the soldier and I share the potential for fear, violence and abuse, however I can now be grateful he had this experience then and not me NOW.

In a second article I will describe how this one experience of 'past life regression' provided unexpected insights into my present life, not simply as Roger Woolger describes in his book but in other ways too. I will also go on to expand upon the therapy model devised by Barry Bowen and Ginni Nimno and its implications both practical and philosophical for Past Life Therapy.

Part Two: In which experience repeats itself and two old soldiers do some gardening

As I came through the door I saw a youth standing some six feet away. He turned his head toward me and smiled, and then, without warning and with tremendous speed he punched me in the mouth with great force. The back of my head hit the doorframe and I immediately tasted blood and could feel one of my front teeth was now loose and displaced.

Only moments before I had written a letter to a colleague with whom ten days earlier I had attended a psychotherapy workshop. Roger Woolger, a Jungian Analyst and Past Life Regression Therapist gave this. In this workshop I had been 'regressed' to the life of a peasant soldier campaigning in central Russia during the civil war. One of my memories of the soldier was his loose teeth and bad gums, which I had presumed was due to a poor diet. The soldier had been taken by surprise by an enemy patrol and had died in fear having witnessed the screams of a tortured comrade. The fatal wound was a blow to the head. In the regression the soldier offered no resistance to his enemies so complete was his terror. In the event his death was quick and painless.

Roger Woolger had encouraged me to replay the death scene and to resist the attackers and in this psychodrama I had kicked and spat and thus died a warrior rather than in the terrible paralysis of fear.

This workshop experience although moving had not seemed dramatic. As an encounter group veteran I had worked with my fear before. After the workshop had ended I went to stay with my father a ninety-two year old retired army major and my mother a long suffering eighty-two year old - cultivated, competent, cake-baking. They have a rather Edwardian value system with heavy colonial prejudices in which theories of re-incarnation do not sit easily. I did not tell them of my experience of the past life group.

That evening I slept soundly remembering no dreams and the next day I found myself building a small circular raised flower bed to my father's directions near the perimeter of the garden.

Prior to the workshop I had been preoccupied with concerns about my parents. How long could they continue to live independently? What was the secret of their longevity? Why whenever I was enlisted into helping with the garden would I find myself on a neighbour's property servicing a boundary fence? Why after owning the property for nearly forty years had they found it necessary to acquire a further tract of woodland on its boundary and proceeded to decimate it in the name of cultivation? In just two years many of the trees had been pollarded and undergrowth and wild places had been removed altogether! For me who as a lonely, isolated child had known the trees as friends it was not a pretty sight.

Woolger's talk was so engrossing that these concerns had to take second place. As the workshop progressed he talked about the process of past life regression therapy and I was struck by its similarity to how two social workers Barry Bowen and Ginni Nimno from Cheshire had worked with families during the 1980s.

They would explore analogies that might be similar to a family problem. Later the family would suggest a specific metaphor that all family members would agree was appropriate to the problem. From this moment the problem was never spoken of except in terms of the metaphor. The metaphor would be elaborated and refined until finally the whole family would enact the metaphor psychodramatically incorporating a positive ending. This really completed the therapy - the family were usually given some encouragement and followed up six months later simply to determine if the work had been effective.

It occurred to me that a past life could also be a metaphor. Talking through details of such a life would refine the analogy, especially as Woolger concentrates on samskaras (past life traumas) because they seem to have parallels in present life illnesses. (An example of this phenomenon might be a child who experienced pneumonia, an illness where the lungs fill with liquid. Woolger believes such a person may have drowned in the past life at an equivalent age). In therapy critical past life incidents (often death) are 're-enacted' and the person is guided to change their affect, body movements and philosophical beliefs. Where death is the crucial incident there will be an experience of life continuing even though the body has become disconnected from awareness. In therapy the individual is re-oriented in the present life and given encouragement to incorporate 'past life' learning in ordinary, everyday experience.

Questions about the relationship between metaphor and reality pre-occupied my thoughts as I added another stone to the wall of the raised flower bed the following day. As I looked up from the wall I was building I became aware that the sad truncated trees looked like a blazed wood that had been an image in my past life experience the previous day. In that eerie moment I had the insight that encoded in my father's carefully contrived garden architecture shrubs, stones and fences symbolically denoted lines of psychic defence. So this was how he kept death at bay!

To test this hypothesis I referred to the raised garden to him as a gun emplacement for this is how I now saw it. At some level he accepted the definition for later in the day he used this description when describing the flowerbed to my mother. Throughout the morning the air had been rich in the metaphors of war and fortification; trench, wire, parapet, fell, burn and shield. Although the task had seemed trivial when we started building the flowerbed - now it seemed awesome!

That morning my father and I were perhaps as close emotionally as at any other time in my life. He the old major designed obstacles, screens and traps for the unseen enemy that silently stalks nearer. I the Russian peasant conscript willingly obeyed his 'orders' with my new 'inside knowledge' of the military way.

All this flashed through my mind the instant my head hit the doorframe. Then quite calmly I started to fight for my life. I held onto my attacker's arm so he could not hit me again and we span round in confusion. A receptionist in a protective booth attempted to sound an alarm, for apart from the three of us we were alone in this office foyer. The 'Klaxon' refused to sound adding a sense of drama to the struggle. My assailant

attempted to kick me, but I had hold of him firmly and at the wrong angle for his kicks to be effective. I grabbed his leg to frustrate a further kicking attack and unbalanced, he seemed to be catapulted backwards crashing into the receptionist's booth which buckled and splintered with the force. The receptionist screamed and unfortunately I lost my grip on my assailant's leg although I still had the arm in a vice like grip. We span round and round for some time. He was determined to gain an advantage, whether to attack or escape, I am not sure. For my part I was determined not to be hit again or worse, felled to the ground and receive a violent kicking.

Then the ordeal ended as suddenly as it had begun. The room filled with people and only now I relaxed. My attacker broke free. No words had been exchanged between us. I only knew this youth by sight and he did not know me. So was I just in the wrong place at the wrong time? Was this an experience sent to test my recent past life therapy? Could it be that in some way not just past lives, but this life also is just an metaphor connecting all the others? Positivists would have us believe that as self-reflecting beings our imagination makes meaning of whatever passes before us even when no connections exist. All I know for sure is that the `past life' soldier and I now share the experience of loose and painful teeth.

Part 3 In which father behaves impeccably and becomes 'enlightened'!

The old man lay unconscious, his mouth open, and his breath rattling in infrequent and shallow gasps. His presence seemed as powerful as ever in the hospital room. He was dying, and we, my mother, my brother, my sister-in-law and my young wife who had known him for such a short time had come from all the points of the compass to witness his inevitable death.

It is now over two years since I had attended a workshop with Roger Woolger and had explored a 'Past Life' memory as a peasant soldier during the Russian revolution. I had died violently and full of fear in that unhappy life. Through a process of re-authoring this death narrative I had found the strength to resist a mugger two weeks later, and although hurt, keep my presence of mind and even put him to a disadvantage during the affray.

My father had been interested to hear an account of the battle with the mugger in detail. We had grown close during the past years, but never more so when on the day following the Woolger workshop I discovered that he was using skills he had learned in the army to act as defence against the unseen enemies of old age and death.

In the trees, which had formed the front line of his battleground however, he had received a mortal wound. Whilst trimming a branch he had cut awkwardly and the branch had hit him. He fell and was winded and shocked. He seemed to recover after a minute or so but during the days that followed his right arm developed a bruise extending from the shoulder to the wrist. Moreover he developed difficulty in walking and was referred to a surgeon for examination.

Meanwhile my mother who has not figured in these essays continued to bake cakes and make plans of what they should do together after my father was 'cured'.

The appointment with the surgeon came and went. The good news was that father's legs could be made 'good as new.' The bad news was that it would require two replacement hips and two replacement knees. Meanwhile he would have to wait in inactivity. The trees seemed to sense the success of their counter attack for there was little growth for the rest of the year.

As Christmas approached my Mother started to look tired. Father was in remarkably good spirits for one experiencing such an ordeal as his. I had seen battle weary comrades brace themselves for one more triumphant but fatal push against an enemy before. There is a release of energy, which comes from accepting the inevitable. 'The Major' had decided that this was to be his last Christmas and to make the best of it!

December turned to January and the strain of caring for my father became more apparent on my mother. Not least was the problem that he became reluctant for her to leave him alone. I recognised in him a fear of dying without the comfort of friends or family. My 'past life' experience of being killed in terror whilst a peasant soldier in Russia during the civil war following the revolution had taught me a lot about death.

One fateful morning as a result of an intuition I telephoned. "*Come at once*", my mother said. "*We are not well.*"

It was a sad sight that greeted my wife and my arrival. My mother was lying in bed with just her eyes & nose protruding from under the covers. Childlike she said tearfully, "*I have the flu, I can't move.*" My father was poised halfway across the room. One hand was on a walking frame, the other held a small tray upon which were two cups and saucers. "*I am trying to get some tea*", he said, adding, "*I'm stuck. I haven't managed to move forward or backward for half an hour.*"

There was no choice. If either was to have a chance of recovery my father would need professional nursing. He saw the problem once explained and reluctantly agreed to be admitted to the cottage hospital. He fortified his decision with a couple of stiff whiskeys, which he cajoled my wife to bring for him. He seemed very small when shrouded in white ambulance sheets as the crew stretched him away. His last words as he left the property were not to my mother, or to me. "*Bye bye Buster*", he said from the back of the ambulance." *His old dog seemed to catch the master's mood.*

I visited my father frequently. For the first week he was unhappy and ashamed of his incapacity. He found the process of being intimately nursed humiliating. During the second week he developed an awareness of another reality. He shared this with Buster, his grandmother and uncles long dead; rarely did we feature in it.

My mother now recovering started to visit the hospital with us. One day after describing how he could see huge clouds of 'black stuff' falling from the (objectively pristine) ceiling he remarked. "*I have just seen that man in the bed opposite lift up the bonnet of his car and take out the engine. It's very funny.*" Then he turned to my mother and summoning up all the sanity and enlightened presence of a Zen master he added: "*I've gone daft!*"

I was away in London when I received a call from my wife. The hospital had telephoned to say that my father had faded overnight. I mobilised the rest of the family to get my mother there as soon as they could. I felt very calm during the long train journey back to Dorset. Something immense was unfolding and I knew that I was to play my part in it. There was need for haste but no need to hurry.

As I entered the hospital room I saw my wife lovingly holding my father's hand. One of the miracles of the last year had been how I had introduced this woman into the family, and how she and my father had fallen deeply in love with each other. The old are not devoid of passion just because their bodies fail them.

My mother had left the room to talk to one of the nurses, but she approved of this young love. On the first day that my mother had been able to visit my father had told his doctor that she and my wife were the two women he loved. It forged a bond between us all.

"*Come quickly*", my young wife said, tears streaming down her face. I put my hand gently on my father's cheek. His breath rattled again but not offensively. My heart felt soft and open. I was conscious of the enormity of being alive and the vulnerability of the complex systems that bind each of us to human life.

"It's all right", I heard myself say, adding softly, "You have done very, very well."

The rattle stopped as my mother entered the room. Sitting by the bed she took my father's hand from my wife. As she did so he took a deep but silent breath. A pulse was clearly visible throbbing in his neck. I must have watched that pulse fade away slowly for a full five minutes just as before that day I had watched the sun set on countless evenings, yet each setting had seemed unique and miraculous. This was to be my father's last breath and so carefully timed as a tribute to his wife, my mother. The old man had saved his greatest lesson for the very end, how to die in peace.

The sun was bright outside and the bulbs revealing the first hint of spring. Somewhere a young officer no longer has the pain or care of those frail old legs. I also no longer have this worry either for he now has found a place in my mind where he may be as strong and energetic as he had been in my youth, and as present and whole as during the last days of his life. It was apparent that he felt no fear those crucial last moments of his dying. We were there and there was no separation from those whom he loved.

I can thank a fearful soldier from a different time for revealing what it was important for me to know and to communicate to my father during the last moments of his life. *"Everything is all right."*



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1904-1997

In the beginning
There was neither existence nor non-existence,
All this world was unmanifest energy . . .
The One breathed, without breath, by Its own
power
Nothing else was there . . .
-----Hymn of Creation, The Rig
Veda

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