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Total Recall

Discovering your past lives

By *Chuck Darrow*



Who you once were centuries long ago – a poor Irish peasant, an exiled Persian prince – may explain the circumstances of your life today. Hypnotic regression has helped people visit their past lives and fix their present struggles, some therapists assert. Skeptics, of course, think otherwise. But patients who can describe remarkable past lives say they've learned the journey of their soul, which helps explain where they are today.

Spend even a few minutes with Tejal (pronounced TAZE-shull) Patel and you will find it hard to believe there is anyone who could not get along with the 30-year-old former divorce lawyer. A petite brunette with a warm smile and engaging personality that instantly puts strangers at ease, Patel defines the phrase "people person."

But there had always been one individual with whom Patel could never peacefully co-exist.

"Throughout my entire life I had a very difficult and tumultuous relationship with my mother," explains Patel, who, together with her family, owns several businesses in Washington Township.

"As I got older, I realized that dynamic was causing me to suffer in my other relationships with my friends, with my spouse. I recognized there was something that was emotionally holding me back and that it stemmed from this relationship."

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Patel's natural curiosity, fueled by her lifelong frustration with the relationship she shared with her mother, ultimately led her to experience past life regression (PLR), under the guidance of Moorestown-based hypnotist Barbara Angelo.

PLR is the process by which a person is mentally transported back in time via hypnosis to witness who and what he or she was during one or more previous lifetimes. In thousands of documented cases, people have resolved emotional, psychological and physical issues through PLR. The thought is that PLR helps them understand some problems can be the result of the subconscious mind recalling events from previous lifetimes – tricking the conscious mind, if you will.

Psychologist Frank Spera, who is also an addictions counselor and licensed hypnotist, has used PLR to treat clients in his Blackwood office. “If you have a trauma...what happens is, you have to go to the root cause. When you do a regression and you go to the root cause, it can take you one life back, two lives back, three lives back. That life will be reality to you.

“What could have happened in that life, maybe you fell and broke your leg, and maybe you don't know why you have pain in your leg [in this lifetime] once in a while. It could be you've carried that pain through each life.”

Thus, Spera says, PLR is often effective at explaining that otherwise inexplicable pain. And as often happens in such cases, once the problem's root is identified, the problem ceases to exist.

Although Patel is of Indian heritage – a culture steeped in belief in reincarnation – she says the concept was not a part of her upbringing. She admits her introduction to the idea of past lives came through a mid-1990s “20/20” episode that told the story of Jenny Cockell.

Cockell, then in her 40s, was a resident of Great Britain who, under hypnosis, recalled a previous life as a woman in Ireland named Mary Sutton. The Irish woman died in the 20th century, leaving behind several young children.

Cockell ultimately met the Sutton siblings; the children confirmed a number of intimate and obscure facts Cockell knew about the Suttons and their relationship with their mom, and accepted her as the reincarnation of their long-departed mother.

It would be almost 20 years before Patel would undergo PLR herself. By that time, she says, the decision to take such a dramatic step was a no-brainer.

“I already understood there is a specific reason for why you are with every person in your life,” she says. “Every relationship is an assignment. The most challenging ones are the ones you are supposed to learn from the most. I knew there was some connection my mom and I had, and maybe I could understand our relationship more if I could regress back to what our connection was in the past. That's exactly what I found.

“I knew [PLR] was one of the puzzle pieces to me figuring out how I can become more whole,” she says.

As it turns out, Patel's mother, Kokila, appeared in two of the three lives she conjured under hypnosis.

During one regression, Patel was “Roggy,” an Irish peasant living sometime in the 1500s.

“My wife was my mother,” says Patel pointing out that, as is customary with those who have experienced PLR, she has been both male and female. “We had a similar relationship to the one in this life.”

Specifically, there was a shared inability to express feelings. Patel also sensed Roggy's wife had a “neediness” and “clinginess” that, she insists, has carried over to this lifetime.

Patel was also regressed to a life in 17th-century London where, as a girl named Elizabeth, her parents in this lifetime were likewise her mother and father. However, she notes, in that life, her parents' personalities were reversed, with her mother being the loving, nurturing parent and her father, distant and demanding.

Thanks to the insights she gleaned from PLR, Patel says she and her mother have taken huge steps toward bridging the emotional chasm between them.

“My relationship with my mother has changed,” she says. “There was an emotional blockage that I realized had come from these previous lives. I was able to let go and be compassionate. And I was able to realize that sometimes people don't know why they act the way they act. And I think her hearing

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What our [past-life] dynamics were has helped her understand the way she's been acting hasn't necessarily been the right way. I've seen a change in her perspective.

"I've noticed I've changed, because I've been able to forgive her. I think my understanding we have a relationship that [encompasses] more than one lifetime has helped me. And I appreciate that this challenging relationship has helped me grow in more ways than I think any other relationship has helped me grow."

While Patel's PLR experience may seem extraordinary – and unbelievable to some – hers is quite a typical story as far as her hypnotist is concerned.

A certified member of the National Guild of Hypnotists, Barbara Angelo is a long-time proponent of the therapy. She has seen PLR be successful for numerous clients, whom she describes as being from across ethnic and socio-economic spectrums.

Past lives are "what and who you are. It doesn't go away," she says, adding that 75 percent of her clients come to her for relief of physical or psychological issues, with the rest indulging their intellectual curiosity.

"It's something they really thought about," she continues. "They say, 'I just know there's something I'm going to find.'"

Angelo believes these people have an innate drive, wanting to know "Who am I? What is my purpose in life? It's all walks of life," she says. "When you're driven by that, nothing else matters."

Among Angelo's other clients is a woman with numerous physical problems that could not be explained, much less resolved, by traditional medical therapies. Angelo regressed her to a past life during which, she claims, the woman was part of a Roman resistance group that sought to overthrow the government. She was captured and beaten daily for 10 years for her alleged crimes against the state.

"She said, 'I came back too soon, my body was not healed yet,'" recalls Angelo, explaining how PLR helped the woman understand her current physical maladies. "She's doing a lot better."

For the skeptical, such a story may sound like the product of a fertile imagination. And there have likely been countless instances of a person under hypnosis conjuring a false tale. But then there's the case that Joanne Wazny, PhD, was involved with in the late 1970s.

At the time, Wazny, an Audubon-based counselor and life coach, was assisting another hypnotist with the regression of a man who, during a session, recalled a life in the late 18th century as a man named John Long in the fishing town of Gloucester, Mass.

According to Wazny, research was subsequently conducted at the genealogical archive of the Denver, Colorado Public Library, and evidence of the existence of "John Long" was found. "The time period was correct, and the place they lived was correct," she says.

Because this happened almost two decades before the introduction of the Internet, Wazny is adamant there was "absolutely" no way the subject could have been exposed to any data concerning John Long. "The information was so obscure," she says. "It wasn't anything he could have read about in a history book."

The man described by Wazny was a non-believer who, she remembers, underwent PLR out of curiosity, as opposed to Patel or the woman whom Angelo regressed to a brutal life of daily beatings.

But mere interest or specific trauma aren't the only reasons people undergo PLR.

Recently, Angelo held a session with Paula Anderson, a 57-year-old, Moorestown-based acupuncturist and "new-age healer" who primarily wanted to explore the roots of her relationships with her closest friends in this lifetime.

Ushering Anderson into her cozy, functional office, she had Anderson sit in a leather recliner as Angelo turned off the garish fluorescent lights, leaving more gentle illumination in the room. She also pressed the "play" button on a small, portable stereo from which emanated soothing harp music.

For the next 10 minutes or so, Angelo, speaking softly, prepared Anderson for her journey into the past by asking her to imagine a "white light" of relaxation descending slowly down her body from the top of her head.

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As Anderson's eyes stayed tightly shut and her breathing became more measured, Angelo suggested she imagine herself on a special boat on a river that moves backward through time. Finally, Angelo told Anderson the boat had stopped and asked her where she was and who she was.

Employing long pauses to ascertain the answers to Angelo's questions, Anderson couldn't clearly identify at what year she had arrived. Nor, at first, could she say where she was, geographically. With a series of prodding, but neutral, questions from Angelo, Anderson began talking, in an emotionless monotone, about Harina, a woman who led a solitary and ineffably sad life. It eventually became apparent that she was probably somewhere on the Greek coast.

Her first memory as Harina was of her being ignored moments after her birth as people around her struggled in vain to save the life of her mother. From there, Anderson – who, like many PLR subjects, did not speak as if she was reliving that life but rather as if she was watching a movie and relaying what she was seeing on the screen – related tales of a wretched and lonely life made worse by several infirmities including a club foot and possibly a hearing problem (which Anderson has had all of her life) caused by a possible lack of oxygen at birth.

Throughout the 20 or so minutes she spent as Harina, Anderson never mentioned the three friends she was seeking. But when Angelo brought Anderson to a later life, the facts – and souls (if not faces) – were far more familiar to her.

In that second regression, Anderson saw herself as a late 18th-century English farmer whose first name was either Henry or Harry, with a last name of either Bourne or Bourner. (The name “Bones” also came to Anderson, but she couldn't place it. Angelo suggested because Anderson described Henry/Harry as tall and lanky, perhaps it was a nickname.)

In this life, said Anderson, Henry/Harry lived in either Chester or Chesterfield, both rural communities. During the regression she recognized her friend Susan. In the previous life, Susan was the object of an unrequited crush by the young Henry/Harry, but ultimately became a trusted friend of his.

Anderson also spoke of having a wife – “Ena” or “Elena” – whom Anderson identified as her current friend, Rose. As a bonus, Anderson identified one of Henry/Harry's sons as Dave, her husband in this life.

Afterward, Anderson said while she'd like to revisit her life in England, “The main insight I got was that I recognized...whom I'm calling my closest friend [in this life] isn't the one I feel I can talk to the most. It gave me insight into my actual relationships.”

Anderson also had a revelation from the first regression, when she was the tragic Harina.

“The main thing I realized is the common theme between this life and that life,” she says. “Even though I may not have had the actual physical impairment with the hearing loss, it was more the sense of isolation that I had in that life that I also have now because of my hearing loss.”

Obviously, belief in reincarnation flies directly in the face of most non-Eastern religious thought, which generally holds we all live but one physical life, after which we are sent to some other, metaphysical, realm for divine punishment or reward. Interestingly, Angelo has not found that ostensible conflict an issue.

“I would say a lot of my clients were brought up religious, but they're saying to themselves, ‘There has to be something more,’” she says.

Because, some therapists say, PLR can solve peoples' problems in as little as one session, it may be a rival to more traditional psychological and psychiatric counseling, which can often involve years of therapy. (A representative of the New Jersey Psychiatric Association in Bedminster, Morris County, refused to comment on PLR.)

There is yet another, potentially beneficial result of PLR: Many people cited in articles and case histories have suggested that realizing the physical body is merely a temporary physical container for the immortal soul has affected their feelings about death, with the fear of dying often disappearing entirely.

So, is PLR for you? While that is a most private determination, you might want to consider the words of Brian Weiss, MD, a prominent Yale Medical School-trained psychiatrist who – accidentally – discovered PLR in the early 1980s and who today is considered America's leading PLR proponent. (His best-selling books include “Many Lives, Many Masters” and “Miracles Happen: The Transformational Healing Power

of Past-Life Memories”).

Appearing with Oprah Winfrey on a recent episode of her weekly “Super Soul Sunday” program on her OWN cable network, Weiss spoke of how, by recalling past lives, people can “dramatically...get rid of physical symptoms, emotional symptoms, [and troublesome] relationships.

“How nice that is,” he mused, “when you’re able to do that without taking medicine for four years or going through some huge therapeutic process.”

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