

GUIDELINES FOR SELF-INVESTIGATING AND EVALUATING PAST LIFE MEMORIES

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In the following I describe how academic reincarnation researchers investigate cases of children with past-life memories and why I believe that many of these procedures can be used by those of you trying to self-investigate and evaluate your own past-life memories as adults. It does not matter in principle whether the past lives are of famous people or not—the same standards apply and the same questions should be asked whoever the previous person was. These guidelines are written for spontaneous (involuntary) memories or flashbacks but they may be used for evaluating regression experiences as well.

Academic investigators like Ian Stevenson have focused on the cases of young children for many reasons, among them that it is easier to know what a child has been exposed to before he or she starts to describe his or her memories (since the great majority of children with past-life memories are male, I will henceforth use the masculine pronoun). The researchers interview the child's parents and anyone else who has heard him talk about the previous life. If the child will talk with them, they interview him also. They write down everything carefully and if the case has not yet been solved (the previous person identified) they go about tracking him down. In Asia, this can be done surprisingly often, and frequently has been done before researchers learn about the case. If there has already been an identification, researchers interview everyone on the previous person's side relevant to solving the case. They also hunt down written documents, such as identity cards, police and medical records, etc., and from all of this data are able to evaluate how well the child's statements match the identified previous life.

Our memories—including our past-life memories—seem to be recorded in our subconscious minds, so when our minds reincarnate, they bring the memories of our past lives along with them. After that, they remain in our subconscious until something pushes or pulls them into our conscious awareness. In almost all cases, children with past-life memories get some things wrong, especially in regards to the way the previous person died, so one of the first lessons I would like to get across is that it is not necessary to find 100% accuracy for a claim to be accepted. Past-life memory is no different from this-life memory in the way it works, and few of us have memories that are 100% accurate. We all get things wrong sometimes, forget things, merge together different events, think we remember things that did not actually happen, etc. So it should be no surprise to find these same defects with past-life memory and in fact if we don't find them, we might want to think of another explanation, like maybe the person heard or read the information somewhere or perhaps got it through ESP from living people or written records.

Another important thing we have learned is that it is not flashbacks alone that need to be taken into account—where there are memories, there usually are behavioral and physical signs which go along with them and support the identification. These appear so routinely that if none are present, we should question whether we have the right identification. Now, the expression of the different signs is related to the age of the previous person at death and to the age of person experiencing the flashbacks. Behavioral signs tend to be strongest when the previous person died in the middle years of life and when memories are recalled very early in life. Some even show up at birth or soon after, well before a child starts to talk about this memories. They may also appear when there are no memories, or when memories surface first in adulthood. Adult cases may have physical signs as well, so it is important to know what signs to look for in investigating and evaluating cases. If none of these signs are present, you should ask yourself whether you have the right identification, especially if the previous person was famous.

So here is a checklist of things to ask or look for in trying to identify the person one was before.

- When did your memories first arise? In what state of consciousness, waking, dream or other? Did they start in childhood and persist until today, or perhaps lapse and then return to you more recently? Can you identify any triggers to the memories? Children are more likely to recall things in their normal waking state, but with adults, dreams or other altered states are likely to be involved. Adult memories are more often triggered by something seen, heard, etc.—at least the triggers are often more obvious with adults. Write down everything you remember, ideally as soon as you can after you recall it, in as much detail as you can. This is important so that you don't forget details and can show later exactly what you recalled when. You also want to make as sure as you can that the things you seem to remember were not things you read or heard somewhere else and have forgotten consciously.
- Did you tell others about your memories, your parents, siblings, friends, teachers? If you told someone else, see if they remember what you said in the same way you do, especially if you did not write down what you remembered at the time.
- Was there anything about your behavior as a young child that stands out in your mind or stood out to your parents as unusual? Did you have strong fears or phobias in childhood, even if you did do not still have them? Did you act out in your play anything that seemed unusual then or now? Did you demonstrate skills for doing things you had not learned to do in your present life? These things can supply important clues to previous identities and can help to confirm an identity made on the basis of flashbacks alone. Phobias related to the way the previous person died appear often in these cases and children often express the previous person's vocation or avocation in their play. Unlearned skills also appear sometimes and turn out to match skills acquired by the previous persons.
- Do your parents remember anything peculiar about the way you used language when you first started to speak? Did you use any strange words, speak in a strange accent, perhaps even say things in a foreign language? These and other types of xenoglossy are not unusual and appear often in cases where the previous person was of a different ethnic group or nationality.
- Did you behave in any way like someone of the opposite sex when you were small, like cross-dressing, preferring toys or games usually associated with the opposite sex, etc.? Cross-gender behaviors are very common in cases where the previous person was of the opposite sex. They

appear most strongly when that person died between their 20s and 50s. If they are absent when you would expect them, you might want to question whether you have made the right identification.

- Do you have any birthmarks or other physical signs that might relate to the previous life? Birthmarks are not always past-life related, but if they are strangely shaped or peculiar in some other way, they may be. Often they are related to the way the previous person died, though they can resemble just about anything of importance to the previous person. The emotional significance to the previous person appears to be more important than anything else in determining whether they appear. Many people look for similarities in faces, but academic reincarnation researchers do not start with this or even use it as a major criterion in deciding on an identity. After an identification has been made on other grounds, one can check to see if faces are similar, but faces alone should never be used as one's initial clue. In addition to birthmarks and facial similarities, there may be a variety of other physical carryovers also, such as congenital diseases and other abnormalities. Anything like this that does not have a known genetic cause should be noted and compared to the identified previous person. The more correspondences there are, the stronger the identification will be.
- Did your mother experience any unusual things when she was pregnant with you? Did she have any unusual dreams or food cravings, for instance? These things have turned up in many cases and they can supply good clues and corroborating evidence, although they alone do not go all that far. Dreams in which a spirit announces its intention to be reborn to the mother have been reported from many different cultures. Pregnancy cravings sometimes turn out to be for foods preferred by the previous person. There may also be aversions for foods during pregnancy that turn out to have been foods disliked or avoided by the previous person.

Write all these things down in one column of a list and use another column or columns to note how well they match a candidate previous person or persons. There is no formula to use in deciding whether an identity is correct or incorrect. Look for a cluster of different signs—details of memories from flashbacks, behaviors and physical signs—pointing in the same direction, with a minimum of errors or items that do not fit. Moreover, it should be possible to explain the items that do not fit in some sort of plausible way.

It is possible for there to be influence from more than one previous life going on at the same time, but usually when there is influence from more than one life, one predominates. Adults are more likely to recall things from more than one life than children are, although some children do speak of remembering more than one life. However, in all such cases known to us, only one of the lives has been strong enough to be solved, with the other one unsolved. It may not be possible to identify all of your previous lives and if you try too hard to do so, you may mislead yourself.

The life recalled most strongly—the one with the greatest influence overall—need not be your most recent life, although usually it is one of the last two. This may be because it is recalled because there are still unresolved issues to confront. With children, the memories often seem to arise out of the need to communicate something about unfinished business of some sort, but with adults, it more often seems that there are conflicts in need of resolution. Especially if you are troubled by your memories, therefore, it would be a good idea to work with them and try to let go of whatever trauma they seem to be expressing. I would say that this is more important than trying to figure out who you were before, but if you can make a definite identification, that may help in understanding what is going on with you.

If you recall several lives, and think you have made identifications for them, you may want to order them in a series. This can provide a way to do further checks. Besides looking for connections between you and each of the people in the series, look for influences carrying over from one life to the next. If you don't see the sort of signs I described above between any two given lives, you might want to ask yourself whether you have made all the correct identifications. Also, in evaluating series of lives, pay attention to the progression. There should be a logical flow from one life to the next, something that explains why one incarnation followed on the previous one. Research with children has shown that we do not usually hopscotch around the world between lives. Very often we come back in the same family. We are least likely to do so when death is violent, but most often then reincarnation is in the same region as the previous life, not somewhere else entirely. In all the solved international cases we have, there was some sort of psychological link to the other country which would explain why the reincarnation occurred there. In short, where we reincarnate is not random, and your series should reflect that.

There is no good evidence that lives can overlap, so if overlaps appear in your series, they are the reddest of flags. There is no necessary length of intermission between lives. The interval can range from nothing (immediate rebirth) to hundreds of years. The length of the interval varies somewhat from culture to culture, with the median in Western culture being a few decades, but there are many Western cases when it was no more than a few months or years.

Academic reincarnation researchers work with spontaneous past-life memories, which we have found to be much more reliable than memories retrieved under hypnosis. Studies done both in the laboratory and real life have found that hypnosis is not a reliable memory enhancer, which is why testimony based on it is not allowed in court. Hypnosis can unleash the imagination and many regressions have been shown to contain historical implausibilities, impossibilities and other mistakes. It seems that we have psychological blocks against remembering things from past lives ordinarily, to protect ourselves from knowing things that might make it difficult for us to live our present lives, and the problems with hypnotically-induced memories are very likely part of this psychological dynamic. Sometimes details in regressions check out, but the name given for the previous person does not. In a few cases—totaling in the teens—it has been possible to trace the life recalled to a person who actually lived. In over half of these cases, there are also spontaneous memories of the same life, and that means that you can use the guidelines given above with them. Be wary if the lives that come up in regression are different from those you recall spontaneously, if there are no behavioral or physical signs supporting them, or if they are too accurate and too easy to solve. Several regression experiences have been traced to things read or heard but forgotten, a process called “cryptomnesia.”

Psychic readings can sometimes help with leads, but the best psychics are ones who read your mind, not claim to retrieve things from a celestial repository such as the Akashic Records. There is no independent evidence for such a thing as the Akashic Records. If it exists either it does not include a very reliable record of the past or human beings are not well equipped to access it, because the quality of the information attributed to it is very poor. Also be careful in using a psychic to confirm an identification you have tentatively made. If you do that, do not to tell the psychic who you are thinking about as your previous identity. If you tell the psychic the identity of the person you are thinking of, you are asking only for the psychic to tell you yes or no, and that is of no real value. Psychics are best used to get around your psychological blocks in order to access things lying deeper in your psyche, but remember, there are limitations to what they can achieve, and if you are too conflicted about the past, they may not be able to retrieve anything of consequence.

From all we can tell, reincarnation is essentially a psychological process over which we as individuals have a good deal of control. We see no evidence that it is governed by an external force such as karma and no reason for there to be a deep, impersonal structure to it. Therefore, it is unlikely that numerology and other such occult considerations can give much insight into it and they are best left out of consideration when trying to identify who you were in the past. By the same token, coincidences and synchronicities in life patterns are unlikely to mean much in and of themselves and have no diagnostic value. The best evidence of a connection between past and present lives are the signs I outlined above, and you should emphasize those in your research.

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