

Some Considerations about the Dynamics of Biology in Reincarnation

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If intuitive healer Caroline Myss is right and “biology is biography,” meaning that the body encodes not only early life physical events but also significant psychological events, then for many transpersonalists, the body encodes significant other life (past, present, and future) events that have been brought into the present life for a reason. Once we accept that in some form reincarnation is a reality, then the question arises, what really is transferred from life to life or, put another way, what are the common features between existences of the soul? There is considerable evidence that biological information may transfer from one reincarnational body to another. Not only is this interesting in its own right but has been used as supporting evidence for the fact of reincarnation.

Many transpersonalists, particularly past life regressionists, are familiar with the transfer of the dynamics of a past life issue into a symbolic biological representation in the current life. For example,

- The case of someone who falsely accused another in a previous life, which led to dire consequences for the accused. The accuser may have a deformed arm in the present life which symbolically hinders that person from pointing out another.
- In the same example and if the accusation was done vocally, there can sometimes be a problem with speaking such as stuttering and the like so it is symbolically difficult to do that in the present life.
- Therapist Thomas Paul reports a client who had problems with premature ejaculation and another with impotence issues. Both reported a past lives as a black male slave who were selected for a breeding program. Because the slave master’s did not want them to have pleasure during the act, they were routinely whipped and forced to finish fast, “You’ve got to come quick if you want to stay alive.”¹ In these cases the biology may or may not be directly impacted but personality and personality dynamics certainly are.

Occasionally, the transfer from previous trauma is much more literal. Therapist Gayla Reiter shared the case of Reggie who manifested a life threatening illness.² During therapy he revealed under regression no less than four lives where he died from head trauma. Reiter says,

one involved his death when his current life father (and an enemy soldier in the recalled lifetime) threw a spear which entered his eye and exited the base of the skull. That was where the tumor was....wrapped around his left optic nerve and extending to the base of his skull.

Reiter states that Reggie had “not released trauma to his head (left side) in prior lives resulted in his manifesting a tumor in the same spot as the physical injuries/traumas in past lives.”³

In this case it is not so much biology that seems to transfer to the current life, but specific

¹ Past Life Therapy Center. (2006). Male Sexual Problems resolved w/ Past Life Therapy. Retrieved 5 Jul 2009 from <http://www.pastlifetherapycenter.com/releases/release/4460447/12926.htm>

² Gayla Reiter published aspects of this case and conducted a television interview of it. She can be reached at gayla@mindspring.com.

³ Personal communication 17 January 2011.

trauma that appears to be replicated in the current life.

There are some who argue that the biology of reincarnation is much more literal. Walter Semkiw is a medical doctor and trained regressionist who has dedicated his transpersonal career to establishing this linkage. In his book, *Return of the Revolutionaries*,⁴ Semkiw describes in



Laird, left and Monroe, right

great detail and with many examples, cases he feels demonstrate that not only is the morphology of the face a template for further incarnations but, “Facial architecture, the shape and proportions of the face, appears to be consistent from lifetime to lifetime.” Physical habits such as postures, hand gestures, and the type of jewelry worn can also be consistent from lifetime to lifetime. Personality traits also appear to persist, including writing style, and Semkiw asserts that “spiritually and intellectually, we seem to pick up where we have left of”

from the previous life.

Psychiatrist Adrian Finkelstein, onetime Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at UCLA and Los Angeles health practitioner, has done extensive research on reincarnation cases of prominent personalities such as Canadian pop singer, Sherrie Lee Laird, who he believes is the reincarnation of Marilyn Monroe.⁶ The evidence is remarkable and is laid out in his book entitled, *Marilyn*. In that book, he records extensive data on the similarities of Laird and Monroe, not only revealing remarkable details of the two lives, but also information that Laird revealed, which could only be known by those closest to the deceased actress. The evidence for the reincarnation in Laird of Marilyn Monroe is compelling, but also persuasive are the similarities of the two in facial structure and other aspects of their lives, which support Semkiw’s thesis. The photos reveal a strong similarity on the facial characteristics of the two.⁷

⁴ Semkiw, W. (2003). *Return of the Revolutionaries*. Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing Co., Inc. Also see his website at, <http://www.johnadams.net/>, which shows many prominent personalities and their proposed antecedent lives.

⁶ Graphics used by the gracious permission of Dr. Adrian Finkelstein.

⁷ Semkiw likes to show the faces up-side-down (Laird is on the right and Marilyn is on the left) to make it easier to compare facial structure and morphology lessening the focus on the overall gestalt of the face.

The Reincarnation of Marilyn Monroe



Finkelstein believes in the similarity of certain biological characteristics. He asserts that retinal patterns, used as a biometric marker for some security identifications, may also be the same between the two and he hopes one day to be able to scientifically prove that.⁸ Semkiw goes one step further and feels that DNA analysis and blood analysis will in the future be used to test the veracity of a reincarnated individual. He makes a distinction between “linear reincarnation,” which for him is “true” reincarnation, from all other types which are not true and only represents some kind of pseudo-identification between two individuals. Semkiw maintains that if the forensics, the biological and personality markers do not match, then it cannot be a true reincarnation of the same soul.

The evidence seems to support Semkiw’s thesis that certain characteristics are shared from one life to another, at least occasionally. What are the implications if Semkiw is right? If reincarnation is viewed in a linear fashion, then the implications of that view are that if each succeeding reincarnation is a replica of the last, then we share the same or similar characteristics from the very first reincarnation to the last.

As reported at the Regression World Congress in India (2004), Russian medical doctor and regressionist, Pavel Gyngasov,⁹ employed a regression research technique to ascertain whether human linear reincarnation includes interludes of non-human existence or if reincarnation and the evolution of the soul follow the phylogenetic scale (the reincarnations inexorably progress in biological sophistication and complexity). Or is there no such linear progression and the soul creatively selects an existence according to its needs at that time? After multiple regressions with 400 subjects Gyngasov concludes the soul’s reincarnation is not in a linear progression and after one or several difficult human lives, the soul may select a more simple existence as a plant, animal, or other simpler level of consciousness as a break and opportunity to recharge soul energy. Some other researchers disagree with Gyngasov, holding the contrary view that the evolution of the soul does indeed follow this progression of complexity.

If we accept that the progression of consciousness in the soul is toward ever more complexity and once human, it remains human, does the replication of characteristics only apply to human reincarnations or does it go further back to pre-human existences? The thesis of continued progression is not supported by Gyngasov’s research and in that view the passing on of characteristics between reincarnations is harder to understand.

⁸ Personal communication, 23 Sep 2006.

⁹ Gyngasov created an English language PowerPoint of his presentation, “Human and Non-human Reincarnation: Sequential or Random?”, which may be available at his web site, <http://pastlife.tsk.ru/en/index.php>.

Psychiatrist Stanislav Grof's method of holotropic breathwork™¹⁰ goes even further and details no limits to consciousness or the order in which it can experience reality. Those experiences include such existences as viruses, energy structures such as storms and hurricanes, large physical structures such as the Earth, sun or the entire solar system and also mythological characters and groupings, to name a few.

Through our consciousness, we can transcend time and space, cross boundaries separating us from various animal species, experience processes in the botanical kingdom and in the inorganic world, and even explore mythological and other realities that we previously did not know existed.¹¹

This is clearly not to say that reincarnational congruent morphology cannot operate in certain cases from one human life to another. It becomes problematic if we see that happening between every linear reincarnation. If we take into consideration the world of many quantum theorists that shows linear time to be a creation of the sentient mind, then time becomes simultaneous, which is also embraced by many regressionists, yielding a past, present and future that is all occurring in an expansive now, a time that radiates out in all directions. This is expressed by Einstein himself, who wrote to the widow of a friend who had passed:

Now he has departed from this strange world a little ahead of me. That means nothing. People like us, who believe in physics, know that the distinction between past, present, and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion.¹²

Semkiw touches on this in his book but dismisses it. Needless to say, if simultaneous time is true, it complicates the theory of reincarnational isotropic morphology. Is there more direct evidence in both lives of this congruency?

Psychiatrist Ian Stevenson, who founded the Division of Perceptual Studies at the University of Virginia School of Medicine,¹³ is renowned for his decades of direct research into the problem and evidence for reincarnation in general. He painstakingly researched instances of childhood reports of other lives. The children had no apparent way to get this knowledge experientially and he reported their description of these past lives was essentially accurate. For those who are critical of the suggestive nature of hypnosis to gather past-life information, Stevenson never resorted to developing a non-ordinary state of consciousness (NOSC), including hypnosis, in the subjects to gather the past-life data. There are individual cases that have been researched, which simply allow for no other reasonable conclusion than the experience came from the child's memory of real events in other lives. If the past life of the child is not real, then at a minimum there is a mechanism for the child's gaining such knowledge that eludes any scientifically based explanation.¹⁴

¹⁰ <http://www.stanislawgrof.com/>

¹¹ Grof, S. (1993). *The Holotropic mind; the three levels of human consciousness and how they shape our lives*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, p. 18.

¹² Letter to the family of his lifelong friend Michele Besso, after learning of his death, (March 1955) as quoted in *Science and the Search for God Disturbing the Universe* (1979) by Freeman Dyson Ch. 17 "A Distant Mirror."

¹³ <http://www.medicine.virginia.edu/clinical/departments/psychiatry/sections/cspp/dops/home-page>.

¹⁴ Shroder, T. (1999). *Old souls, the scientific evidence for past lives*. New York: Simon and Schuster, and Stevenson, I. (1987). *Children who remember previous lives: a question of reincarnation*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company.

Stevenson spent much time researching these cases in foreign cultures where there is no systematic bias against reincarnation as there is in the West. In Lebanon, for example, certain ethnic groups believe that the soul must reincarnate immediately after death, and in these areas it is common to find children with inexplicable memories of lives in nearby villages. For example, children express at an early age that “you are not my real mother and father” to their biological parents. Typically, the children describe their homes in a nearby village and their “remembered” parents. Often they are able to explain their death and where and how it occurred, all this from a five year old!

Psychiatrist Jim Tucker carries on Stevenson’s work and in 2005 published a book entitled *Life Before Life*,¹⁵ which provides additional cases and alternate explanations for the apparent reincarnational information. It cites some of Stevenson’s famous cases that not only support reincarnation, but also the occasional passing of biology, personality and life style characteristics from the previous life as expressed by the child in the present life. Stevenson also published research that demonstrated sometimes strong correlation between birthmarks and disfiguration in a child and their remembered trauma (often leading to death in that life) in their previous life.¹⁶ Chanai Choomalaiwong is a Thai child that spontaneously started speaking about a life some distance away from his present family. When his family finally acceded to take him to the village area described by him, the locals tested him to determine if he was the reincarnated person he claimed to be (picking out belongings of that man, naming sisters before they were introduced, etc.), which he passed so convincingly that they considered him authentic. That man was a school teacher who was shot on the way to school. At the site of the entrance wound and the larger exit wound, Chanai manifested birthmarks corresponding to the wounds as confirmed by autopsy reports.

Another case is that of Turkish Necip Unlutaskiran in which the child had eight different birthmarks that corresponded to injuries and scars documented in an autopsy report on the woman he claimed he had been in the previous life. Other events and facts reported by Stevenson all supported the child’s case that he was that reincarnated person. That this can happen within the same family is supported by the U.S. case of a boy named Patrick. This is reported by his mother who notes that her first son, Kevin, manifested a tumor behind his left eye, began walking with a limp in the left leg at age two, was discovered to have cancer and ultimately received chemotherapy from a line inserted in the right side of neck. He died shortly after his second birthday. Patrick was her third child after Kevin and from a different father. Tucker states:

At birth, he had a slanting birthmark with the appearance of a small cut on the right side of his neck—the same location of Kevin’s central line [the site of the tube for chemo]—a nodule on his scalp above his right ear as Kevin’s biopsied tumor had been, and an opacity in his left eye, diagnosed as a corneal leukoma, that caused him, like Kevin, to have very little vision in that eye. When he began walking , he limped, favoring his left leg.¹⁷

In trying to provide alternate explanations for the biological similarities, Tucker posits a

¹⁵ Tucker, J. B. (2005). *Life before life: a scientific investigation of children’s memories of previous lives*. New York: St. Martin’s Press.

¹⁶ Stevenson, I. (1997). *Where reincarnation and biology intersect*. Westport, CT: Praeger Paperback.

¹⁷ Tucker p. 53.

mental transfer from mother to the developing morphology of the fetus. But he points out there are cases where the mother has no knowledge of the previous life. If science moves forward by providing a conceptual framework for scientific observations, it is difficult to include all the available data, such as that of the research cited herein, in any explanation that does not include reincarnation and, at least sometimes, transfer of biological characteristics. In these cases it is not so much the biology that seems to be past on but trauma associated with the past body, particularly if that trauma led the death. What Stevenson and Tucker do support is the passing on of certain personality characteristics and proclivities.¹⁹



Example of birthmark



Example of birthmark

It would be nice if there were a positive way to test the hypothesis and, in fact, there is data of this type available. It does not follow scientific protocol but the evidence is highly suggestive. Stevenson reported several Far Eastern ethnic groups have the practice of placing a mark on the deceased, often reinforced by prayer, so the deceased will be recognized when they reincarnate. The mark may be made on some visible portion of the body with some kind of paste, soot, or the like. Tucker reports that in Thailand and Myanmar the expectation is that the person

will be reincarnated in the same extended family. In this case a mere synchronicity is easier to rule out. Additionally, Tucker and his colleague, Jürgen Keil, researched the events and they found some cases of children with marks close or identical to the one made on the deceased. Many of these children also had memories of the previous life. Stevenson had found 20 of these cases and Tucker and Keil found an additional 18. In six of the 18 cases the children made statements about the previous life.²⁰

Greek therapist Thanos Komianos has put a new twist on this dynamic and incorporated it into his regression practice. In an article for the European Association for Regression Therapy (EARTH)²¹ Komianos²² relates his approach to eliciting past life

regression material by querying the client to recall the events that lead up to the existence of the

¹⁹ In a personal communication, 28 January 2011, Tucker shares Stevenson's concern with past lives that arise from hypnosis induced regression and says "I will say that I am vary skeptical about cases of purported reincarnation that do not include any clear past-life memories [without dissociation]. I would suggest being quite cautious in drawing conclusions from them."

²⁰ Tucker, p. 77.

²¹ His article is available at, <http://www.earth-association.org/articles/by-earth-members/and-now-please-focus-on-your-birthmark-by-athanasios-komianos.html>

²² Graphics of birthmarks were graciously supplied by Thanos Komianos and used by permission.

birthmark. In the interest of research and noting that his wife had two round birthmarks on her hip and thigh, he asked her to regress back to where these marks originated (he is a brave soul) whereupon she related a life of an American Indian. This tribe initiated the young males by burning the skin with a hot stick. In her recall of her Indian past life she was burned with a hot stick at the site on the body where she had the birthmarks. Komianos wondered how he might verify this was more than fantasy. During the regression she related that she was a skilled warrior and very good with an axe. Semkiw and many other regressionists believe it is possible for the present life to share characteristics and talents from a previous existence. Komianos put this to the test and had an axe throwing contest with his spouse although neither he nor his spouse had ever engaged in the activity in the present life.

The next day after the second session I took her in the forest, gave her a small axe and asked her to throw the axe at a cypress tree. Not only was her success rate overwhelmingly higher than mine with a mean average of eight hits for every ten attempts (mine was a disappointing three to ten), but her style was totally different than mine. I was throwing the axe as if I were trying to pin the dart. She on the contrary was using the momentum of her whole body to guide the axe, a process unlike any other that I have seen, even in the movies.

This is not the only case where these memories surfaced easily when the client is asked to go back to where the birthmark originated and he has routinely incorporated its study into his practice. His conclusion about the birthmarks is,

Why are they here in the first place? It seems that birthmarks are stamped on our bodies in this life to remind us of “unfinished business” in another lifetime. Like pain, body strains, migraines, phobias, allergies, etc., birthmarks are here to show us that there is a psychic residue, a leftover from the past. They encode messages waiting to be revealed. Could they be a lesson we should never forget? Could these bodily imprints be the physical counterparts of a psychic valence?

After reading his article I happened to notice that a young female colleague had a skin blotch that covered one side of her neck and when visiting a physician the female medical assistant displayed a prominent birthmark which covered a large part of one forearm. It was all I could do to keep from asking, “So, tell me about the origin of your birthmark.”

From therapeutic experiences across many therapists and therapeutic techniques, it seems that a variety of echoes of biological and personality can reach forward from a past life to the present life. Sometimes it is a symbolic representation and other times it is literal. Specifically in regards to trauma, the impact of a past life trauma can also come into present life with similar manifestations or in a symbolic fashion. A theoretical basis for this general class of reincarnational transfers has been articulated but an explanation of why one would happen over the other has not. It appears that at least sometimes the transfer of biological and personality characteristics is evident between reincarnational lives and can serve as a useful doorway into that past life. Clearly more research is needed and as DNA evidence becomes more prevalent and decipherable the hypothesis of biological congruency between lives will become more objectively testable.