



Awakening
Past Lives







Awakening Past Lives

A Step-by-Step Guide to Self-Exploration

John Z. Amoroso, PhD



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by John Z. Amoroso, PhD

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Introduction

Mary's life had been challenging for the past two years. She had been in a romantic relationship with a man who was emotionally not present. He would consistently pull her into the relationship and then find some reason to push her away. In many respects it had been similar to her fifteen-year marriage. That had ended three years ago when she found out that her husband had been carrying on a series of affairs with other women. She came out of these experiences disillusioned and damaged. Her sense of self-esteem and confidence had once again been compromised. In addition, the dynamics in her marriage and this recent relationship had dramatically interfered with what she was realizing as a passion and a new direction in her life. For years she had thought about pursuing a career in nursing, especially now that her children were living out on their own.

After two years of psychotherapy with a reputable therapist, Mary was beginning to realize a pattern that was clearly reflected in these last





two romantic relationships. The issue of betrayal and the experiences of being emotionally abandoned and criticized were familiar to her. Her father had been a critical and overbearing character in her life. Her mother, in the face of her father's hostility, became submissive. When Mary was eight years old, her family changed dramatically. Her mother died of cancer, and her father became even more emotionally unavailable. The two years of therapy had uncovered these repeating dynamics in the experiences of her relationships, but her life was not changing. Mary continued to struggle with depression and a sense of hopelessness.

Not long after the breakup of this last relationship, Mary heard about my work in past-life regression therapy on a local radio program. During the first three regression sessions, she uncovered past-life experiences that perfectly corresponded to what had been going on in her life recently. She went to a life where she was the chief of a Native American tribe in which she had been betrayed and persecuted by rival factions. In another life she was the mother of three small children. She had left them alone to find food during a blizzard only to return to find them frozen to death. The guilt of having abandoned her family stayed with her until her death in that life. There were several other past lives during which she was either abandoned or the one who abandoned. Mary's discovery of this abandonment theme in prior lives was the key to her recovery. Her regression work uncovered the roots of this negative theme in her current life. In the course of awakening each of these traumatic episodes in past lives, she gained deeper insight about these negative karmic themes—the abandoned/abandoner. And by reprocessing these traumatic experiences in those lives in a positive way, she was able to "finish that unfinished business" of the past. She could then reach a state of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of her perpetrators. Mary started to feel the depression and hopelessness lift.

Mary was also surprised to discover several lifetimes where she was a caregiver and healer. In these regression sessions we focused on the positive fulfilling feelings and experiences in those lives that formed into positive talents and ways of being. These positive past-life karmic patterns had been carried into this life and formed into a sense of soul purpose that she was just beginning to recognize. As a result of her



past-life regression experiences, she was able to validate and enliven those positive aspects of herself that formed her sense of soul purpose. By also de-energizing those karmic patterns that had interfered with her relationships and true calling, she had cleared the way for a new life. Mary found herself attracting new relationships that were unburdened by her abandonment theme out of her traumatic karmic past.

It wasn't long before Mary finished nursing school and got a job in a local hospital. Soon after that, she found a romantic relationship unlike any she had ever experienced. Mary is now remarried and happily pursuing her passion for nursing and caregiving.

Mary's story is a perfect example of how past-life regression works. It explains how exploring and processing past-life experiences can give one a deeper insight into the dynamics of both positive and negative themes/complexes that are carried into one's life. It was through this approach that Mary was able to finally release herself from these persistent dysfunctional themes and to successfully refocus on and energize the positive. Although she started out skeptical of the idea of reincarnation, she was still able to use the principles of karma and the experience of exploring past lives to gain insight and to change her life for the better.

The objective of this book is to provide you with the tools to start the process of awakening past lives on the path of healing and growth. Through the use of discussion, self-reflection, journaling, and Integrated Imagery exercises found throughout this book, you will have the opportunity to:

- Explore and de-energize the negative karmic themes from other times.
- Uncover and accentuate the positive karmic themes.
- Discover and enliven your unique sense of soul purpose.

This excursion through past lives and your biographical experiences may simply help you to validate what you already know about yourself. But don't be surprised if you discover new insights that will contribute to your mission of healing and growth.



The Philosophy of Reincarnation

Reincarnation thinking is a belief grounded in the idea that we have lived before and that we will live again. It explains that our current life personalities, patterns of behavior, skills, interests, sensitivities, difficulties, and even physical conditions tend to have their roots in past lives. It espouses that the purpose of life is soul growth which requires the resolution of negative disruptive patterns and the enabling of the positive enlivening aspects of one's soul.

Reincarnation thinking also infers that we come into a life with a specific soul purpose or life mission. Based on our personal karmic or past-life history, it can involve a vocation or avocation, an interest, or simply a way of being in the world. In any case, it is personal and unique for each of us, and it encompasses those positive themes or aspects of ourselves. It is the negative disruptive themes from past lives (the unfinished business) that can block or disrupt the ability to realize one's soul purpose. Mary was able to pursue her new career as a nurse only after she released herself from those patterns of behavior and relationships that stifled her self-confidence. Consequently, she began to attract healthy intimate relationships into her life.

There is no better example of the workings of karma and past-life influences than the intuited psychic readings of Edgar Cayce. The vast majority of these readings focused on medical ailments and recommended treatments for those conditions. However, in nearly two thousand of the more than fourteen thousand readings, Cayce specifically referred to past-life experiences as the root of these ailments and the implications of soul purpose. In Chapters One and Two we'll talk more about those readings, the philosophy of reincarnation, and the history of past-life regression.

As indicated in the Cayce readings and by reincarnation thinking in general, we can think of ourselves as spiritual beings on an evolutionary path of growth and learning that spans many lifetimes. The process of soul growth can be compared to progressing through high school, college, and graduate school with each life corresponding to a different course of study. Mary's mission in this life is to deal with the theme of abandonment and to learn to accentuate her positive themes on the



way to realizing her full potential and soul purpose. If she were to fail to learn these lessons, she would have another opportunity to review this same experience in a subsequent lifetime—she could retake the course, so to speak. This is exactly what we all face in life: to complete the unfinished business of the past and to continue the positive experiences of former lives. Therefore, as the Cayce readings so clearly indicate, we go on incarnating until there is no longer a need—until we graduate to higher consciousness. For this reason we'll be using the metaphysical system defined in the readings as an important set of guidelines for the regression exercises in this book.

The History of Reincarnation Thinking

Reincarnation thinking certainly was a dominant principle in the Cayce readings, but this philosophy of rebirth has a much deeper history. It has been a central theme not only in the Eastern religious traditions, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, but also in the ancient philosophies dating back to the Greeks as well as most of the primitive religions. The idea of rebirth is also seen throughout the Aboriginal cultures, the Inuit people, most African tribes, and the Native American religions. Virtually all of the esoteric spiritual philosophies from Theosophy and Anthroposophy to the intuited readings of Edgar Cayce and most other psychics and channels attest to the principles of rebirth, karma, and soul development. Theological scholars have also discovered evidence of reincarnation philosophy in the mystical sects of our Western religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It is estimated that more than half of all the people who have ever lived have believed in reincarnation.

In our modern times, a 1969 Gallup Poll in ten western countries—including the US—indicated that from 18 to 26 percent of the people believe in reincarnation with the US population at 20 percent. Other polls more than twelve years later showed that these numbers had grown to 23 percent in the US with 67 percent of the population believing in life after death. Amazingly, 78 percent of Brazilians were found to believe in reincarnation in similar polls. By 2005 polls stated that three out of four Americans held some belief in the paranormal including



astrology, clairvoyance, and reincarnation.

Past-Life Regression Therapy

Considering this increase in the belief in past lives, it is not surprising that past-life regression therapy has gained validity as an effective psychotherapeutic technique in the last thirty years (especially when looking at the spiritual or transpersonal dimensions of life). An interesting point is that this idea of regressing to past lives for healing and growth has been researched and used as a therapeutic technique as far back as the late 1800s. Past-life regression therapy has essentially grown up alongside of modern psychology and psychotherapy. More psychotherapists and counselors than ever are learning the techniques of regression therapy. Articles and books continue to be published confirming the effectiveness of this approach.

My interest in reincarnation and past-life regression was sparked in my late thirties when I read *There Is a River* by Thomas Sugrue, talking about the life and intuited readings of Edgar Cayce. Over the next several years I became absorbed with the history of reincarnation thinking, karmic influence, and the use of past-life regression as a therapeutic technique. By the late 1980s I was enrolled in a PhD program in clinical psychology where I was able to continue my research in past-life regression therapy while studying the established principles and methods in modern psychology and psychotherapy.

I had discovered a new direction in my life and work which resonated with my soul purpose. At this time Dr. Harmon Bro became one of the most significant influences in my life. He was a gifted scholar, author, and spiritual mentor who had known Edgar Cayce during the last years of Cayce's life. Harmon encouraged and mentored me through this midlife transition that would become my life's work. While completing my doctoral studies, I was able to study Ericksonian hypnosis, Gestalt therapy, psychodrama, and Core Energetic therapy. In addition, I was also fortunate to learn the approach and techniques of Dr. Morris Netherton and to work with Dr. Roger Woolger—both major contributors to the field of past-life regression therapy.

I have used this approach of past-life regression for more than twenty



years in my own psychotherapy practice. I am convinced of its effectiveness. In the course of conducting thousands of regression sessions, I have developed an approach that I call Integrated Imagery. Through the use of hypnosis and guided imagery in combination with current psychotherapeutic methods, this is an experiential process that enables clients to regress to prior times and altered states of consciousness in order to uncover and deal with the details of the unfinished business that are the antecedents of negative themes (or complexes) that persist in their lives. At the same time, what is unique about this method is that it leads them to examine, enliven, and refocus on the positive themes that also form in their prior-life experiences. This is very much a process of accentuating the positive and de-energizing the negative while awakening insights regarding one's unique sense of soul purpose.

Integrated Imagery is also different from most other approaches in that during the course of the regression process, the subject is guided to awaken not only past lives but between-life states, before-life states, and the nine-month perinatal experiences between conception and birth. The experiences and insights from these other dimensions or from what I call the "energetic chains of experience" are then integrated into the biographical life.

In past lives we uncover the traumatic and enlivening experiences that formed and reinforced the positive and negative karmic patterns. In the between-life state the client is able to gain insights regarding the relevance of those experiences to his/her biographical life. The before-life state provides the opportunity to observe the soul-level decision process regarding the lesson plan for the forthcoming life while the perinatal experience reveals the early manifestations of the karmic past-life patterns in this life. The result of this holistic, integrated process is that the subject is able to uncover and to deepen self-understanding in the context of soul purpose and spiritual development.

Another distinguishing feature of Integrated Imagery is that it makes use of and defines a new psychological model for understanding human behavior—complex psychology. This model is an expansion of Carl Jung's idea of complexes, and it provides a much clearer insight as to how and why past-life experiences affect our current lives.

As part of my work with clients in counseling, therapy, and group



sessions, I developed an extensive set of exercises based on the techniques in Integrated Imagery so that they might continue their personal journey of self-discovery between sessions and after finishing formal therapy. These are the exercises you will use throughout the rest of this book. They start with a careful examination of your biographical life experiences before moving on to the regression exercises in the last section.

How to Use This Book

In the first section, I will introduce the ancient roots of reincarnation thinking and the principles of karma that provide some insight as to how and why past-life regression or Integrated Imagery can be so effective. I'll also talk about the philosophy of past-life influence and soul purpose as described in the intuitive psychic readings of Edgar Cayce. The metaphysical system in the readings has become an important foundation for the technique of Integrated Imagery. We'll also trace the perhaps surprising history of past-life therapy that grew up alongside of modern psychology and psychotherapy. Finally, to set the stage for your own journey of awakening, I'll present details regarding Integrated Imagery in the process of soul development. This first section will help prepare you for your personal journey of self-discovery.

The second section presents a detailed explanation of the mechanism within the human psyche that forms both the positive and negative themes we all bring into our current life. These positive and negative themes form into complexes that harbor the feelings, images, scripts, physical sensations, and behaviors that we carry into this life. Most important, it gives some insight as to how these karmic themes function and interact with each other. As you proceed through these first two sections, you'll have exercises to start the process. I also encourage you to be aware of how these ideas and examples stimulate insights about your own life.

In Section Three, you'll start your self-exploration process in earnest. The two chapters in this section provide the opportunity to reflect even more directly on the experiences of this life and on the positive, negative, and soul purpose themes that are prominent. Through the use of



an autobiographical time line, self-reflection, and journaling, you will start to clarify what you already know about yourself. Moreover the technique of Active Imagination—developed by Carl Jung—will further deepen this process of reflection. To start each Active Imagination session in section three, you'll use the progressive relaxation exercise on Track One of the enclosed CD. This is a recording of my voice guiding you into a state of relaxation and self-reflection.

It is in Section Four that you will have the opportunity to use the tools of Integrated Imagery to carry on your own personal regression and awakening process. In this last section you'll use the guiding sessions on the enclosed CD (Tracks Two through Five) to regress back through past-life, between-life, before-life, and the perinatal experiences on this path of accentuating the positive and de-energizing the negative.

One Important Point to Remember

Throughout this process of exploring your energetic chain of experience, it is not necessary for you to have an absolute belief in reincarnation. These tools and techniques can work whether you are a believer, a skeptic, or a non-believer.

The experience of George is a case in point. It was during the final stages of preparing this book for publication that a prime example of the effectiveness of Integrated Imagery came about.

I was doing a professional training workshop in Integrated Imagery for a group at Atlantic University in Virginia Beach. Atlantic University is a part of the A.R.E. (the Association for Research and Enlightenment—the Edgar Cayce organization) offering master's degree programs in Transpersonal Studies and Practices. I started the fourth and final day of the workshop with a lecture to be followed by a demonstration with one of the participants in the training. During the lecture the receptionist from the A.R.E. came in to announce that a man was here to look into to doing some hypnosis for a problem he was having. We realized he was in the wrong place—or so we thought. Apparently, he was exploring the idea of doing a hypnosis session with a hypnotherapist based at the A.R.E. clinic next door to the conference center. I told the



receptionist to ask him to come back within the hour to talk about his problem. At that point we were all curious about the synchronicity of this occurrence.

He did come back and we spent a little time talking about his problem. George was a pilot flying F/A-18 fighter jets based at the Naval Air Station in Norfolk. His problem was that he had been experiencing over the last several years severe bouts of nausea during routine training flights. It seems that for no reason—with no turbulence—he would start to vomit for up to two hours at a time while in flight. The medics couldn't explain these episodes, and George was concerned that he would be grounded unless he got a handle on the problem. To compound the situation, he was scheduled to be shipped out with the fleet within the next two days.

In the process of talking about his problem, I explained that I did regression work through hypnosis and that a session might address such an issue. George agreed to discuss the problem in front of the group and to go through a regression to explore the real problem at hand. As we discussed the bouts of vomiting in front of the training group, I asked him if he believed in reincarnation. To my surprise he said, "No, not at all." Then I asked if he had ever heard of Edgar Cayce. It was even more surprising when he answered "no" again. In spite of his disbelief, he agreed to do the past-life regression session.

I started the regression with the normal progressive relaxation exercise and eventually with the suggestion that he allow himself to explore the reasons for these episodes of vomiting that interfered with his flights. He almost immediately went back to a life during the Second World War. In that life he was a gunner on an American bomber flying missions over Germany. During one mission the plane was damaged by a German fighter plane and the bomber safely landed with all crew members aboard. George's past-life character felt pangs of guilt that he had not managed to shoot down the German plane. I then suggested that he move to the moments leading up to his death in that life. At that point he was on another bombing mission where he again missed a shot at an attacking German plane. This time the bomber was severely damaged, and the crew was instructed to bail out over Germany. As George's character bailed out, he was filled with fear and guilt that he had missed



the shot. He then realized that his parachute wouldn't open. As he plummeted to the ground and to his death, the severe feeling of nausea came over him and all he could think about were his mother and his girlfriend who he would never see again. That life ended with the karmic imprint of fear, loss, and guilt that formed into a complex and that manifested in this life in a purely physical reaction through his vomiting attacks.

To end the session I had him go back into the dying experience and reprocess the event by releasing the feelings that surrounded that traumatic event. In one pass I had him go back into the past-life experience and imagine that his parachute did open and that he and his crew members survived. In another pass, I guided him through an experience where he did shoot down the German fighter plane, and the bomber returned safely to home base. We then revisited the between-life state where George was able to further discharge the guilt and fear that he had carried with him on a soul level.

George was clearly shocked by his regression experience, but he did report a sense of peace that came over him during the process of integration. What was most interesting was that he reported he had purposely stayed clear of having a girlfriend while he was in the service. Unfortunately, I had no opportunity to do any follow-up sessions with George because he was scheduled to ship out with the fleet. With a client in therapy, I would have done several more sessions to be sure of the resolution of the problem at hand. It will usually take more than one regression to completely clear a karmic complex. I consequently had no contact with George for some time. It was six months later that I accidentally found his email address in my files. I was immediately moved to contact him to ask how he was doing. Within fifteen minutes he sent back the following message:

John,
Well, flying has been great for the military . . . haven't had one problem with nausea since the session and am soon to be doing
.....
Thanks for all your help . . .
George





Fortunately, that single regression session was enough to relieve George of the karmic pattern that he carried into this life. By awakening the past-life trauma surrounding that experience, we were able to de-energize the complex that had manifested as a physical reaction. In the case of George, we have a prime example of the effectiveness of Integrated Imagery and the impact that past-life experiences can have on our current lives, regardless of the subject's beliefs. George was clearly a non-believer, and it still worked. It appears that George is free of this pattern that had been such a problem in his career. Hopefully, George can go on from here and eventually find himself a girlfriend. At the very least, we can be certain that we have a talented, committed, and healthy pilot in service to our country.

An Exercise to Start Your Awakening Process

An important first step in this process of awakening is to prepare your *autobiographical time line*. Take whatever time you need to start to identify the stages, phases, and incidents in your life history that are the most obvious and significant. You'll use the time line throughout the rest of the exercises to follow.

Prepare for the Exercise:

- Find a quiet and comfortable place where you can relax and reflect on your life—a place where you will not be disturbed.
- Have 8 1/2" x 11" sheets of paper (one for each decade of your life), a notebook or journal, pens/pencils, crayons, and a ruler with you.
- Draw a line across the bottom of each of the 8 1/2" x 11" sheets of paper (turned horizontally) to represent ten years of your life. You can notate each year on the line with a mark. Do a separate sheet for each ten-year period.

Start the Exercise:

As you proceed with this exercise, it's best to focus on one ten-year period at a time. Take as much time as you need to reflect on your life and the experiences in that period before going on to the next period.

- Start by relaxing with a few deep breaths and letting go of any ten-



sion in your body. Take as much time as you need to relax into a quiet, safe reflective feeling.

- As you reflect and uncover memories, draw shorter horizontal lines to represent the significant periods in your life—for example, time spent in different levels of schooling; periods of involvement in hobbies, interests, and extra-curricular activities; periods of time when you lived in a specific location; times working at different jobs, and times when you were involved in significant relationships. These lines represent significant phases of your life.
- On these shorter time lines, indicate specific events that represent transition points (when your life changed) at the beginning, middle, or end of those significant phases. These could involve people you met, opportunities that came to you, insights you had, or decisions you made.
- As you reflect, remember specific incidents that occur to you that are significant.
- Remember how you felt, the people involved, what you were thinking as well as what was happening at the time.

For now, make any notations on your time line and in your journal regarding any ideas or insights that come to you. In the following exercises you'll be expanding on these notations and insights.

As you read through the chapters in Section One, be aware of any additional images or insights that come to you regarding the history of reincarnation thinking, karmic philosophy, or the technique of past-life regression and Integrated Imagery. Be sure to come back to your time line and record those insights, whether they make sense at the time or not.

Remember: with the exercises throughout this book, the more you practice, the easier it will be for you to access these memories and insights.

Finally, relax, take a soothing breath, and enjoy your journey of awakening past lives on the path of self-exploration.







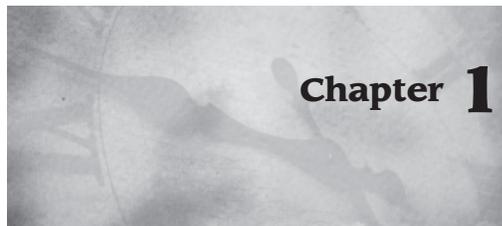
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Section One:

Reincarnation Thinking in Perspective

In this section, we'll start this journey of awakening and self-discovery with a short excursion through the history of reincarnation thinking and past-life regression and then deal with a definition of the laws of karma that seem to dictate the implications of our past lives. As you'll see, in one form or another, the idea of past lives and rebirth has been a dominant thought throughout recorded time. To put these ideas into a modern perspective we'll also look in some detail at the metaphysical system as explained in the intuited psychic readings of Edgar Cayce—the Sleeping Prophet of our times. Finally, we'll define the technique of Integrated Imagery that you'll be using in your personal journey of self-exploration.







The History of Reincarnation Thinking and Past-Life Regression

As you start this journey of self-discovery, it will be helpful to understand the extensive history of reincarnation thinking throughout the ages as well as the modern history of past-life regression therapy. As we'll see, the philosophy of reincarnation comes in many versions. The common thread in all of these versions, however, is the idea that we have lived before and we will probably live again in some process of soul growth. In one form or another we carry themes and issues from life to life in the process. It is this common thread that is the guiding principle in the technique of past-life regression therapy.

The Eastern Religious Traditions

When most of us think of the process of rebirth and soul growth, we naturally turn to the Eastern spiritual philosophies. There are very clearly written references to reincarnation going back to the earliest



scriptures of the Hindu religion. Although Hindu scholars have debated reincarnation, there are indications of this belief system as far back as the *Rig Veda* written around 1500 BC. Other classic Hindu scriptures, especially the Upanishads (600 BC), and the Bhagavad Gita and Mahabharata written centuries later, even more directly emphasize the philosophy of reincarnation and karmic process.

Although there are some variations regarding the workings of reincarnation within Hinduism, the general concept holds that human souls have emanated from a Supreme Being. Through many incarnations those souls forgot their divine origin or true spiritual nature. It is in the process of subsequent incarnations that souls may begin to realize their true nature as emanations of that Supreme presence. We have the opportunity to return home. As the philosophy dictates, man must essentially disengage from the ego attachments of the material life and become open to his already present spiritual essence while in the material plan. In this process of growth man must learn through experience and free will to release himself from the imperfections and distractions of the material life.

It was in the sixth century BC that the Buddhist religion started in India as a reaction to the rigid social and moral code of Hinduism. Over the years Buddhism spread throughout Asia taking on different forms based on the local culture. The common thread throughout the various forms of Buddhism—and with Hinduism itself—is the idea of rebirth and the workings of karma. Buddhism espouses the repetition of lives until *moksha* or the liberation of the soul from material existence—in Buddhist terms enlightenment. In spite of minor differences in the process of karma or the rules dictating which lessons and patterns are carried forward from one life to another, the major distinction from Hindu philosophy has to do with the personal nature of the soul. In Buddhism the soul lacks a permanent sense of self whereas Hinduism maintains the idea that the soul itself is evolving through the many incarnations. In either case the principle of soul growth is present.

The Mahayana form of Buddhism in the north of Asia presents another variance and principle worth noting. It maintains that Bodhisattvas who have achieved nirvana or enlightenment may continue to incarnate as helpers out of compassion for the still suffering

humanity. This form clearly emphasizes not only the idea of growth but also that of service to humanity. The concept of service to humanity which we'll see is very much the essence of living one's soul purpose.

Around the time of the emergence of Buddhism in India, another religion would spring up—Jainism. With a much smaller following Jainism would hold to the same tenets of rebirth and soul development but with a slightly different take on how past-life experiences carried forward. Jainists believe that karma is solely dependent on the consequences of an act in a past life with little to do with the intent of that act. In this way, for example, unintentionally causing death has the same results and future-life consequences as premeditated murder. Jainists, therefore, tend to be more conscientious about how they consciously and unconsciously engage in life with an intense focus on unremitting service to others.

The Primitive and Preliterate Spiritual Philosophies

It's probably safe to say that most Westerners believe that reincarnation philosophy is the province of Eastern religious traditions. As stated by scholar and past-life researcher Hans TenDam in *Exploring Reincarnation*, a book published in 1987,

“The general assumption that reincarnation is a typically Indian idea is as persistent as it is wrong. Ideas about reincarnation are found in diverse cultures all over the world. . . . Anthropologically, belief in reincarnation is better conceived as an original category which has arisen independently in separate cultures.”¹

So Eastern religions do not have a corner on reincarnation thinking after all. In fact, most of the preliterate or primitive religions as far back as the Stone Age also consider the idea of preexistence of the soul and rebirth.

In Africa reincarnation is prominent in almost one hundred native

¹Hans TenDam, *Exploring Reincarnation* (London: Arkana Press, 1987), 29.

tribes. The Zulu tribes, for example, maintain sophisticated beliefs including the idea that gradual perfection is the result of many incarnations until return to the material life is no longer necessary. In West Africa, where the belief is the strongest, reincarnation is viewed as good for a soul, and people prefer to come back into the same family.

Among the primitive aboriginal tribes in Australia, historians have confirmed that reincarnation was a universal belief that spread throughout the Pacific Islands. Again, many of the details of the process of rebirth vary among these Asian cultures, but the common thread is that of recycling and soul growth.

In the Americas from the ancient Mayans, the Incas, and the primitive tribes throughout South America up to the native tribes of Canada and Alaska, reincarnation philosophy was a prominent belief.

Among the Native American tribes the philosophy and rituals around the return of the spirit to another body was especially deep-rooted and widespread, especially in the northeast. Throughout North America from the tribes of the Pueblos, Hopi, Dakotas, and Lakotas to the Iroquois and Lenape of Delaware, reincarnation was thought of as a positive aspect of their spiritual nature.

The Early European History

Considering the history of these ancient cultures, it should not be surprising that reincarnation thinking was prominent among the early European cultures. The Celts in northern Europe held a belief unusually similar to Eastern philosophies. They maintained that after many lifetimes one's soul would achieve a "white heaven" in the presence of God. Even those who lived badly had the opportunity to achieve this divine existence provided they corrected the misdeeds of the past. As in the Buddhist concept of the Boddhisattva, those who have achieved purification could come back to help others until everyone realized the white heaven. Throughout ancient Europe from the Danes, Norse, Finns, and Icelanders in the north down to the Bretons, Saxons, and Lombards in Italy, all demonstrated various versions of rebirth and soul growth. We can surmise, even without the benefit of past-life regression therapy, how these beliefs affected the way the people in these cultures lived their lives.

As far back as the early Greeks in the sixth century BC, scholars have confirmed the belief in transmigration of souls and reincarnation thinking. Herodotus, a Greek historian in the fifth century BC, even inferred that these beliefs dated back to the Egyptians. Throughout Greek mythology we see symbols and references to death, rebirth, and purification of the soul. The Greek mathematician and philosopher Pythagoras (500 BC) taught reincarnation thinking and even claimed to have remembered his own prior lifetimes. Plato very clearly expressed elaborate theories of rebirth and karmic laws—closely corresponding to Eastern beliefs—in his many written works. Even Aristotle around 384 BC described reincarnation in his early works. What is apparent throughout Greek history is that these beliefs remained in the domain of the philosophers and intellectuals of the time and were isolated from the beliefs of the general population.

As we'll see, the idea of reincarnation was completely eliminated from Christian philosophy in Europe by the fifth century AD. Even so, the Renaissance brought a resurgence of this idea with the revisiting of Plato's works known as Neoplatonism. These ideas from the 1400s would manage to stay alive at least among philosophers, writers, artists, and theologians right into the current times.

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

With such a pervasive history in Eastern and ancient traditions, how is it that reincarnation thinking does not appear in our modern Western religions? There is an explanation. Especially within the last fifty years, it has become clear that these principles of preexistence and rebirth were a part of the early teachings and especially the mystical sects of all three of our Western religious traditions.

In the early days of Judaism and around the time of Jesus, there were three major schools of Jewish philosophy. Of these, only the Sadducees believed in the death of the soul at the time of physical death. The Essenes, thought to be responsible for the education of Jesus, believed in the preexistence of the soul with indications in scholarly writings of a belief in rebirth. The Pharisees believed even more firmly in the notion of reincarnation up until the ninth century.