

***Many Lives, Many Masters* and Ruminations on Life and Karma in Popular Literature: An Analysis**

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the re-invocation of the reincarnation myth in contemporary popular literature, especially in the non-fiction text by Dr. Brian Weiss, *Many Lives Many Masters*, which was based on clinical records of Dr. Brian Weiss's patient Catherine. Distilled through the realm of science and reason, this text attempts an exposition of reincarnation as reality and presented as capable of proof. It delves into the fundamentals of man's existence reaffirming the soul as the carrier of an individual's psychic life through countless lifetimes. Appearing as an answer to the riddle of incurable psychosomatic diseases in individuals as is demonstrated by the disappearance of neurotic fears and anxieties in Catherine, one of Dr. Weiss's patients, through hypnotic regression, the doctrine of reincarnation, thus, becomes a validated reality. The intertwining of reincarnation myth and modern psychology in this text indicate the assumption of a mythopoeic psychology whereby human emotions belong to the realm of the supra-rational. The mythopoeic descriptions of the author's communications with the highly evolved spirit entities called Masters provide a subtext for the speculation on the deepest human experiences, needs and aspirations. Thus, the author's endorsement of an alternate set of values, backed by the enormous popularity of this book, echoes the changing perception in contemporary Western society of what constitutes the essence of human existence.

Key Words : Reincarnation, *Karma*, Mythopoeic psychology, Supra-rational, Transmigration of souls

Reincarnation, as a word, has several connotations and this paper employs the term 'reincarnation' in the sense of 'rebirth in a different body'. The Reincarnation Myth articulates the hypothesis of pre-existence and, thus, the implication of the continuity of a living entity even after the physical demise of a living being which is usually referred to as the Soul. The term 'myth' in popular usage is a synonym for 'illusion', 'legend', or 'false propaganda', or, in an earlier literary sense, of decorative or illustrative material. In a critical sense, however, 'myth' becomes a heavy synonym for 'belief' or sometimes 'convention' or 'higher truth'. According to Hindu philosophy, the doctrine of *Karma* and reincarnation are inextricably linked to each other. The basic argument here is that the environment that a man is born into is a result of his actions in his past life. In the West, the doctrine of reincarnation had its

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origins in Ancient Greek Philosophy and termed as ‘*Metempsychōsis*’. Its most famous philosophic exponent is Plato who embodied it in some of his greatest works, influenced by the Pythagorean and Orphic philosophies on transmigration of souls. In Plato’s view, birth did not mean the creation of a soul as the number of souls was fixed but only a transmigration from one body to another. Plato’s Theory of Transmigration expostulates the idea that souls of both the good and the evil come together to draw lots, and choose their bodies according to their tendencies and the bent of their characters. Some prefer to be born as animals, such as lions and eagles or some other animals while others try their luck in being human beings. Thus, the Reincarnation Myth incorporates the many moral presuppositions that sanction the moral values of a society and grapples with the essence of the human psyche. This paper attempts to examine both reincarnation as a belief system in contemporary society and reincarnation by a person who claims sincerely to remember experiences from a “previous life” and to be the person who underwent those experiences. Here remembering experiences from a previous life includes memories of “past life” which occur spontaneously during childhood or might be induced by a psychiatrist through past life regression. In this context I would examine Dr. Brian Weiss’s *Many Lives, Many Masters*, a non-fiction text based on clinical records of Dr. Weiss’s patient Catherine. Dr. Brian Weiss, a prominent psychiatrist, met his patient Catherine while working as the Chief of Psychiatry at the Mount Sinai Medical Center in Miami and Catherine is the protagonist of *Many Lives, Many Masters*.

Ancient Greek Philosophy and the Transmigration of Souls

According to ancient Greek philosophy, the soul of a person transmigrates to the body of another being after the physical death of the former. The believers of this theory termed it *metempsychōsis*. Its earliest proponents were believed to belong to the cult of Orphism supposedly founded by the mythical poet Orpheus. Gabriele Cornelli states, “I still believe that Plato is a reliable source for the existence of a proto-Pythagorean theory of the soul and for a close relationship between that same theory and its Orphic origin. This relationship was described as a *mytho-logic* exegesis by Pythagoreanism of the Orphic traditions, in the manner of the *Derveni* papyrus. In short, Plato revealing his debts to Orphism, ends up pointing directly to the philosophical *blending* that Pythagoreanism must have developed from the former” (pp. 4-5). Plato referred to *metempsychōsis* in his *Dialogues*, the earliest of which is *Meno* where Socrates is supposedly trying to enlighten Meno, a rich young Thessalian on a visit to Athens, when Meno asks him whether Virtue can be taught. The meaning of *metempsychōsis* is not demonstrated here as an object of *phronesis* but as a “likely opinion” (Long, p. 150). The next dialogue is *Cratylus* where Socrates examines the etymologies of a series of words – God, demon, hero, man, soul and body. In the passage on the “body”, Socrates states that the etymology of the word “body” is derived from “tomb” as some people believe that the soul is buried in the particular body which it seems to be encased in as in the case of a tomb. The *Phaedo* dialogue elaborates on the incompositeness of the soul which makes it indestructible and this indestructible soul is likely to undergo strange experiences after death. He believed that a pure soul like that of a philosopher’s soul ascends to a higher level and lives a blessed life while an impure soul is weighed down by the material desires and clings to the body and lingers in the vicinity of the grave for a season to

atone for its sins. When the desire arises again in such a soul, it is draped in a new body chosen according to the kind of life it lived previously. Plato elaborates further on this topic in both the *Republic* and *Phaedrus*. In the *Republic* he claims that the choice of one's own incarnation is an act of great importance and one must strive to muster the kind of knowledge that will lead him to make a good choice. In *Phaedrus* Socrates describes the nine forms of human life – "(i) seeker after true wisdom, seeker after true beauty, friend of the Muses or true lover, (ii) just king, or warrior and commander of the host, (iii) manager of a city's affairs, or steward of a household, or merchant, (iv) gymnast or physician, (v) prophet or priest, (vi) poet or some other copier, (vii) workman or husbandman, (viii) sophist or demagogue and (ix) tyrant" (Long, p. 153). The *Republic* represents only one cycle of transmigration of souls but the *Phaedrus* deals with a whole cycle of transmigrations. Plato while postulating the theory of *metempsychōsis* was insinuating probabilities not certainties. He was influenced by this philosophy while on his sojourn to *Magna Graecia* and it became an integral part of his eschatology. In the words of Herbert S. Long, "Plato's writings everywhere exhibit complete assurance that good and evil deeds will receive their due reward, a truth of such importance to his mind and heart that his words, when he is discussing retribution and the life after death, overflow the bounds of reasoned discourse and become the sort of poetry in prose that is called a "myth" (Long, p. 154).

Aristotle in Chapter II Book II of his work *De Anima* critiques the contemporary doctrines regarding the nature and characteristics of the soul and points out the inadequacies of all the theories of his predecessors. He argues that "the philosophers" fuse the soul to the body by "conjugation" (*synēptousin*) or "juxtaposition" (*tithésin*) without detailing the reason of the union or of the bodily conditions required of it. (*De An.* 407b, pp. 13-17) He states that the soul requires its own instrument and that is a suitable body and disputes the old myths regarding the transmigration of souls whereby any soul can enter any body. He elaborates on this further by stating

The body cannot be the actuality of the soul; it is the soul which is the actuality of a certain kind of body. Hence the rightness of the view that the soul cannot be without a body, while it cannot be a body. Infact, it is not a body but something relative to a body, that is why it is in a body, and a body of a definite kind, but not as former thinkers did think, who merely fit it into a body without adding a definite specification of the kind or the qualities of that body, even if it is evident that any one thing cannot receive any other thing (*De An.* 414a, pp. 18-25).

Aristotle's expostulation of this theory can be understood in the context of the soul as the *entelécheia* of a body through which it performs actions and the matter of the body should ideally possess the potential. Aristotle's criticism is directed at the Pythagorean *metempsychōsis* and at stake is the principle of subsumption whereby higher forms contain within itself lower forms, "as a quadrangle contains the triangle" (*De An.* 414b, p. 31). Aristotle uses the term *mýthoi* to define them which implies that he considered them old but not necessarily devoid of all truth. His critique gives us the knowledge that there was, infact, a belief system in the transmigration of souls by earlier philosophers. Cornelli states that, "The semantic scope of the terms *mýthos* or *mythologein* is often connected, within the work of Aristotle, with that of *theologoi* and *palaowoi*, indicating not so much a decline in

the theoretical value of the doctrines, but more precisely obsolescence' (Cornelli, p.9).

The Hindu Philosophy of *Karma* and Reincarnation

In Hindu religious philosophy it is believed that the merits and demerits of the actions performed by a man accumulate over time and acquire such a vital potency that they determine the life of the man. Every good deed has its own reward and every evil deed its own punishment. Unfortunately, in common human experience it is often seen that a good man often suffers in spite of his goodness and an evil man prospers, and the influence of his wealth and power overshadows all that is evil in him. This apparent falsification of the moral law has led to the explication that what we call a human life is but an anecdote in a long chain of births and deaths which may cover millennia and even eternity. Thus, within the law of *Karma* is embedded the idea of reincarnation - the idea that what is called death implies only the death of the physical body while the soul is eternal and maybe reborn in another body which might be human or animal. In the course of history, with the ascension of the great monotheistic religions like Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, this belief system was gradually relegated to the margins as primitive, irrational and disputable.

Hindu religious philosophy begins with the *Vedas*, and the *Vedas* exalt the concept of *Karma* and the Vedic sages adhered to the belief in *rta* – the cosmic law of harmony and order. This law was recognized as proceeding from a superior moral and beneficent force, symbolized by the God Varuna. In the *Vedas* are also found the *vrata* of *rta* followed by the Gods. There are references to the powerful exploits of Indra which had a great influence in both the physical-terrestrial and metaphysical levels. *Tapas* is another concept embedded within *karma* and originally meant fervor and physical heat but gradually its meaning expanded to include the endeavours in the direction of moral restraint. In the *Atharva Veda* it is stated that through sensual restraint and disciplined life (*tapas*) a Vedic *brahmachari* student can attain immortality¹. Thus, *tapas* is considered as the source of the entire cosmic manifestation and is a creative force of singularly great potency. *Tapas* is a kind of *karma*, as expounded in the *Upanishads*, and it includes physical restraint and austerities as well as moral rigour and philosophic contemplation. According to the *Yajur Veda* a man can testify to his sincere belief in cosmic moral harmony through the cultivation of the vows (*vrata*) in one's life alone². In the *Upanishads*, the theory of reincarnation is explained in greater detail where the great sage *Yajñavalkya* espouses on its working and different manifestations. The individual determinism of the theory of *karma* was modified to some extent in the *Upanishads* through some agency attributed to divine grace. The later *Upanishads* which have a profoundly theistic orientation exalt the concept of grace, for example, the *Katha Upanishad* explicates that the *Atman* is not attained by intellectual acumen or scholastic profundity but by grace. This gives primacy to the notion of a Divine Will which would choose whomever it pleases for final emancipation. Another divergence from the concept of individual determinism is the view found in some of the *Upanishads* is that the last thought of a person before he/she dies determines his/her future station. This view is also found in the *Bhagavatgītā* and the later *Bhakti* movement which constantly stressed the belief that in

1. Atharva Veda, X.p. 7- 11

2. Yajur Veda, XIX, p. 30

his last moments a man should keep his mind and soul attuned to the personal God.

The theory of *karma* has steadfastly remained a vital part of the Hindu religious belief system as it explicated rather reasonably the problem of evil, injustice and retribution. It seemed to explain why men are born unequal, why one beautiful woman leads a happily wedded life and another beautiful woman becomes a destitute or prostitute, why a man afflicted with an incurable disease lingers on in life while a healthy young man dies suddenly in an accident. The Hindu religious belief has a ready answer “*Karma*” – every action has an aftereffect; life is but a continuation of some previous existence, with its joys as rewards of some past good deeds and its sufferings as punishments for past evil deeds. Regarding the question of inequities in a man’s station in life, especially in the context of the *jati-varna* ridden Hindu society, it affords an answer to why a man is born a *brāhmaṇa*, a *kṣatriya*, a *vaiśya*, a *sūdra* or an untouchable. When faced with the trials and tribulations of life, a modicum of justice seems apparent when one believes that this is the result of one’s own *karma* and not the result of the will of an unjust and whimsical God. Every question fits into a neat slot and seems satisfying. Thus, a person’s past *karma* determines the environment in which he/she is born but it is up to the person concerned to build up his/her new *karma* within the limits of his/her environment. It implies that *karma* is a two-edged theory – it is an effect and it is also a cause. The core concept of the law of *karma* is predicated on the belief that physical death does not erase the power of the past actions done by an individual to produce their results. Hindu sages prescribed a way out of the eternal cycle of birth, suffering, desire and death and expanded on the concept of *mokṣa* (emancipation). There are three traditional paths to *mokṣa* – through pursuing knowledge *i.e.* realizing the oneness of *atman* (individual soul) with *Brahman* as the ultimate and only reality; the second path is through *karma*, action, sacrificial and moral – a life of high moral purity; the third path is through *bhakti*, devotion to God – the *bhakti marg* enables even the ignorant to attain *mokṣa*.

Contemporary Worldview of the Reincarnation Myth

The two most influential belief systems of contemporary Western society, ‘conventional’ Christianity and rationalism, undermines the reincarnation myth as a regressive belief. The ‘conventional’ Christian belief that an individual’s suffering on this earth would be compensated by a place in Paradise after death is in opposition to the Hindu Philosophy wherein suffering was explained in terms of past life actions. Rationalism debunks the doctrine of reincarnation on the grounds of insubstantial empirical evidence. Despite the overwhelming influence of these two belief systems, a substantial number of westerners, nevertheless, entertain some kind of belief in reincarnation. In a study conducted by Tony Walter and Helen Waterhouse titled “A Very Private Belief: Reincarnation in Contemporary England” and published in the *Sociology of Religion*, they sought to ‘explore what reincarnation means to some of those who believe in it, why they find it attractive and how it relates to other aspects of their life...’ (p.187). It was a small intensive interview study of a group of English people who take seriously the possibility of reincarnation. The study concluded that ‘...reincarnation is, indeed, for them a very private belief, detached from religious and other affiliations, from the New Age, from popular literature on the subject, and from everyday life’ (p.187). Also, it

stated that

Re-incarnation (or re-birth) is a belief that is taught in several eastern Religions and is part of many tribal belief systems, but is not formally part of either Christianity or secularism. Given that the figures for belief in reincarnation in Europe and North America far exceed Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists (in the UK these amount to no more than 2 per cent of the total population), one might be tempted to suppose that reincarnation is an alternative to Christianity and secularism, or might be broadly categorized as part of the New Age, that is to say, held by those who have a sense of inner spirituality but who do not wish to confine this to Christianity (p. 188).

This microcosmic study is in many ways representative of the complexity of religion and personal beliefs in modern life. In recent decades a renewed interest in reincarnation has been noticed among the Europeans and North Americans despite belonging to a societal belief system that negated such beliefs. Even medical scholars have researched and recorded the issue of reincarnation. Psychiatrist Ian Stevenson from the University of Virginia conducted more than 2500 case studies over a period of 40 years and published his findings in *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*, and Jim B. Tucker in his *Life before Life* published reports of children's memories of earlier lives. It thus appears that the general notions bound up with the conception of reincarnation has gained wide acceptance in the West with the simultaneous rise of the modern/post-modern individualistic spirit. With conventional Christianity floundering to provide an answer or solace to individuals caught up in the complexity of modern life, especially in times of personal crisis, the reincarnation doctrine solved intellectual questions, notably about suffering and justice. The New Age popular literature on the subject of reincarnation in the West is about exploring the immense possibilities of being human and not to be tied down by conventional religious views of life and death..

Cycle of Life and Death in *Many Lives, Many Masters*

In *Many Lives, Many Masters*, Dr. Weiss narrates that when conventional methods of therapy failed to cure Catherine's anxiety, panic attacks and phobias, Dr. Weiss resorted to "hypnosis" to treat her. It is from this hypnotic state that Catherine started recalling her "past-life" memories and in the process dramatically altering the therapist's long held beliefs. This text is based on Catherine's recollections of her "past-life" memories across multiple lifetimes and the messages that she conveyed from the "spirit entities" on the secrets of life and death.

At the very outset in the Preface, Dr. Weiss narrates a brief history of his scientific qualifications and his background to hammer home the point that his belief in reincarnation is based purely on the revelations by Catherine and not on any previous leanings towards Oriental Philosophy or reincarnation as he himself states:

I was graduated Phi Beta Kappa, magna cum laude, from Columbia University in New York in 1966. I then went to the Yale University School of Medicine and received my M.D. degree in 1970. Following an internship at the New York University-Bellevue Medical Center, I returned to Yale to complete my residency in psychiatry. Upon completion, I accepted a faculty position at the University of Pittsburgh. Two years later, I joined the faculty of the University of Miami, heading the psychopharmacology division. There I achieved national recognition in the fields of biological psychiatry

and substance abuse. ...

Years of disciplined study had trained my mind to think as a scientist and physician, molding me along the narrow paths of conservatism in my profession. I distrusted anything that could not be proved by traditional scientific methods. ...

Then I met Catherine. For eighteen months I used conventional methods of therapy to help her overcome her symptoms. When nothing seemed to work, I tried hypnosis....

Nothing in my background had prepared me for this. I was absolutely amazed when these events unfolded.

I do not have a scientific explanation for what happened. There is far too much about the human mind that is beyond our comprehension (*Many Lives*, pp. 9-10).

Chapter Two of *Many Lives, Many Masters* contain the first narration of Catherine's past-life memories under hypnotic past life regression. This part of the narrative makes use of the mimetic mode which presents in a scenic way the unfolding of events:

"I see white steps leading up to a building, a big white building with pillars, open in front. There are no doorways. I'm wearing a long dress... a sack made of rough material. My hair is braided, long blond hair."

"I was confused. I wasn't sure what was happening. I asked her what the year was, what her name was. "Aronda... I am eighteen. I see a marketplace in front of the building. There are baskets... You carry the baskets on your shoulders. We live in a valley... There is no water. The year is 1863 B.C. The area is barren, hot, and sandy. There is a well, no rivers. Water comes into the valley from the mountains."

"After she related more topographical details, I told her to go several years ahead in time and to tell me what she saw.

"There are trees and a stone road. I see a fire with cooking. My hair is blond. I'm wearing a long, coarse brown dress and sandals. I am twenty-five. I have a girl child whose name is cleastra.... She's Rachel [Rachel is presently her niece; they have always had an extremely close relationship] it's very hot."

I was startled. My stomach knotted, and the room felt cold. Her visualization and recall seemed so definite. She was not at all tentative. Names, dates, clothes, trees – all seen vividly! What was going on here? How could the child she had then be her niece now? I was even more confused. I had examined thousands of psychiatrist patients, many under hypnosis, and I had never come across fantasies like this before – not even in dreams. I instructed her to go forward to the time of her death. I wasn't sure how to interview someone in the middle of such an explicit fantasy (or memory?), but I was on the lookout for traumatic events that might underlie current fears or symptoms. The events around the time of death could be particularly traumatic....

These were memories of some sort, but from where? My gut reaction was that I had stumbled upon something I knew very little about – reincarnation and past-life memories. It couldn't be, I told myself; my scientifically trained mind resisted it. Yet here it was, happening right before my eyes. I couldn't explain it, but I couldn't deny the reality of it either" (*Many Lives*, pp. 27-29).

The author narrator's desistance from the diegetic mode of narration or summarization of the events of Catherine's past-life memories enhances the credibility appeal of an extraordinary tale which might not find many takers among the men of science. Dr. Weiss's

record of his immediate response of being confused and the startling unfolding of an unheard or unseen of act strikes an immediate chord and identification with the sceptics, as was Dr. Brian Weiss, then, with his scientific training and family background. His state of denial and his reluctant acquiescence creates a convincing impact on the skeptical reader that it is not an uncritical rendering of the reincarnation myth.

For Dr. Weiss, the ultimate validation of Catherine's past-life memories came in the form of revelations about his personal life from the Master Spirits through Catherine. Catherine revealed in her regressed state that Dr. Weiss's late father and his dead first born son's spirits are there to communicate a message through her,

'Your father is here, and your son, who is a small child. Your father says you will know him because his name is Avrom, and your daughter is named after him. Also, his death was due to his heart. Your son's heart was also important, for it was backward, like a chicken's. He made a great sacrifice for you out of his love. His soul is very advanced... His death satisfied his parents' debts. Also he wanted to show you that medicine could only go so far, that its scope is very limited.'...

(*Many Lives*..p.54)

..Here, in 1982, in my quiet, darkened office, a deafening cascade of hidden, secret truths was pouring upon me. I was swimming in a spiritual sea, and I loved the water. My arms were gooseflesh. Catherine could not possibly know this information. There was no place even to look it up. My father's *Hebrew* name, that I had a son who died in infancy from a one-in-ten million heart defect, my brooding about medicine, my father's death, and my daughter's naming – it was too much, too, specific, too true. This unsophisticated laboratory technician was a conduit for transcendental knowledge. And if she could reveal these truths, what else was there? I needed to know more.

"Who," I sputtered, "who is there? Who tells you these things?"

"The Masters," she whispered, "the Master Spirits tell me. They tell me I have lived eighty-six times in physical state."

(*Many Live*..p.56)

The veracity of the revelations needed no more testimony than the implicit admission of the truth by the author himself and his belief that there was no way Catherine was privy to this secret.

The first person narrative technique and use of the two narrative modes "mimesis" and "diegesis" (Gerard Genette) in tandem become effective tools for clinching the argument. The scenes where Catherine narrates her past-life experiences are presented in a mimetic manner, thereby, creating the illusion for the reader of hearing and seeing those experiences themselves. Dr. Weiss's comments on the unfolding of Catherine's past-life memories as both an onlooker and narrator gives the narratorial voice a credibility which then imposes a convincing impact on the reader. This is a style which speaks directly to the readers and appeals to their visual faculty, thus, creating the illusion for them to see and hear things for themselves.

Since the Renaissance, the modern Western world has been guided by centuries of individualism and, hence, according to the disbelievers in the theory of reincarnation, the notion of having led previous lives can be explained as a person's therapeutic search for the self. Due to the complexity of modern life, there is a greater need now to balance diverse

roles by individuals and, hence, the necessity for a stronger sense of self that Giddens terms as “the reflexive self” which is a lifelong attempt to understand “who I really am”. For the inhabitants of the modern world, the idea of reincarnation is an affirmation of the indestructibility and continuity of the self. The belief in reincarnation may take multiplicity of forms; some of these forms may not entail any significant ethical dimension whereas other forms of reincarnation beliefs are so thoroughly enmeshed with ethics that the ethical dimension can hardly be separated from the core description of the belief. The University of Virginia on its website in the Division of Perpetual Studies section quotes Dr. Ian Stevenson, the founder of this research division and the author of many books on the subject of reincarnation, where he is sceptical and critical of the practice of hypnotized past life regression to access previous lives by psychologists or psychiatrists,

Many persons who attach no importance whatever to their dreams – realizing that most of them are merely images of the dreamer’s subconscious mind without correspondence to any other reality – nevertheless believe that whatever emerges during hypnosis can invariably be taken at face value. In fact, the state of a person during hypnosis resembles in many ways – although not in all – that of a person dreaming. The subconscious parts of the mind are released from ordinary inhibitions and they may then present in dramatic form a new “personality”. If the subject has been instructed by the hypnotist – explicitly or implicitly – to “go back to another place or time” or given some similar guidance, the new “personality” may appear to one of another period of history. Such evoked “previous personalities” may be extremely plausible both to the person having the experience and to other persons watching him or her. Experiments by Baker and by Nicholas Spanos and his colleagues have shown how easily different suggestions given by a hypnotist can influence the features of the “previous personality” in conformity with suggestions.

...A marked emotional experience during the hypnotic regression provides no assurance that memories of a real previous life were recovered. The subjective experience of reliving a previous life may be impressive to the person having the experience, and yet the “previous life” may be a fantasy, like most of our dreams. ..

The procedure of hypnotic regression to “previous lives” is not without some hazards. Instances have occurred in which “previous personality” has not “gone away” when instructed to do so and the subject in such cases has been left in an altered state of personality for several days or more before restoration of his normal personality (Concerns About Hypnotic Regression, www.met.virginia.edu).

Dr. Stevenson is not one of those scientific naysayers regarding reincarnation; on the contrary, he is one of those few medical men who had done a lot of pioneering research on children who spontaneously talk about a previous life within a different body and identity. What he points out are the pitfalls of regression therapy without clear goals that a layman or a patient might not be aware of. His intent was to create awareness among patients and fans as to what entails past life regression and to advise the practitioners to have a rigorous scientific basis and not skim the details in pursuit of the fantastic and the popular.

The genre of Dr. Weiss’s narrative operates within the New Age therapeutic framework of seeking and healing the self. The past life that is constructed by the patient Catherine is not only consistent with the present-day self, but sheds light on it, and even helps her in

changing towards a desired direction:

Whether due to the actual memories of major traumas or daily minitraumas or to the process of reliving the experiences, Catherine was virtually cured. Her phobias and panic attacks had just about disappeared. She had no fear of death or dying. She was no longer afraid of losing control. Psychiatrists are now using high doses of tranquilizers and antidepressant medicines to treat people with Catherine's symptoms. In addition to the medicines, the patients are also often in intensive psychotherapy or attending phobia group therapy sessions. Many psychiatrists believe that symptoms such as Catherine's have a biological basis, that there are deficiencies in one or several brain chemicals.

As I hypnotized Catherine to a deep trance state, I thought about how remarkable and wonderful it was that in a period of weeks, without the use of medicines, traditional therapy, or group therapy, she was nearly cured (*Many Lives*.. p. 92).

Dr. Weiss's goal as a therapist was to assist his patient in achieving mental equilibrium and become happier with their present self, but that journey of providing succor itself became a process of looking at life philosophically and viewing it from a broader perspective, however, conflicted it might be with his cultural and religious belief system.

Westerners who adhered to alternative belief systems during the late twentieth and early twenty-first century were usually expected to believe in reincarnation and were labelled as New Age believers and their usual paraphernalia were Indian skirts, crystals and New Age music. New Age magazines like *Kindred* earlier titled as *Kindred Spirits* popularised this new consciousness of compassion, empathy and sustainability on this earth as the core reasons why human beings are on this earth. It is a digital publication now and its web portal lists as its aim, "This New Story comes with its own language, phrases like Cultural Creatives, Grounded Expansion, Mindful Parenting and the Ecology of the Child." However, Tony Walter and Helen Waterhouse's study in England came to the following conclusions:

- Entertaining the idea of reincarnation has little to do with their membership of a church (except for two spiritualists)
- It has little to do with the New Age, unless one defines the movement so diffusely as to be unmeasurable. Our respondents were not notable for displaying the lifestyle trappings, Aquarian hopes, or holism of the New Age.
- Reincarnation is one way of tackling issues of suffering that Christianity struggles with, but this private solution need not entail leaving the institutional church... (Walter and Waterhouse, p. 196).

According to some scholars, Christian religious belief compensates present suffering in a future paradise as against Hindu religious belief which explains suffering in terms of past lives and, thus, Christianity has a weak theodicy.

Intertwining of the Theory of Reincarnation and Modern Psychology

Dr. Weiss delves into the fundamentals of man's existence and the belief in the immortality of the soul or a living entity that continues even after the physical death of an individual through the narration of experiences involving past-life memories in his practice of Regression Therapy. The author's search for a plausible scientific explanation for these occurrences leads him to ask, "Could the memories be carried in her genes?" and as a man of science he

himself reasoned the answer, “Genetic memory requires the unbroken passage of genetic material from generation to generation. Catherine lived all over the earth, and her genetic line was interrupted repeatedly.. And what of her survival after death and the in-between state? There was no body and certainly no genetic material, and yet her memories continued. No the genetic explanation had to be discarded” (*Many Lives*..p. 105). Then the author toys with the idea of Carl Jung’s idea of the “Collective Unconscious” which is not personally acquired but “inherited” somehow in the brain structure. But he reasons, “Catherine’s memories were too specific to be explained by Jung’s concept. She did not reveal symbols and universal images or motives. She related detailed descriptions of specific people and places. Jung’s ideas seemed too vague. And there was still the in-between state to consider. All in all, reincarnation made the most sense” (*Many Lives*..p.106).

Dr. Weiss infers that the root cause of many of the incurable psychosomatic diseases in individuals may not be due to any physical deficiencies or traumatic experiences in this life. The answer lies somewhere in the realm of the supra-rational. The reason behind the incurable psychosomatic diseases, he infers, lie in lives lived before the present. Thus, his texts are an exposition of reincarnation as a reality and capable of proof as is demonstrated by the disappearance of neurotic fears and anxieties in Catherine through hypnotic past life regression. Hypnotic regression, a tool of modern psychology, thus, becomes a conduit for the exposition of a supra-rational reality. The regression into the past-lives of the protagonists to cure inexplicable psychosomatic diseases and, infact, finding a cure reaffirms the belief that the soul is the carrier of an individual’s psychic life through countless lifetimes. It is a re-invocation of the reincarnation myth debunked by Christianity and Rationalism. The author, thus, harks back to a mythopoeic psychology to delve into the mysteries of the human psyche. The messages that the Master Spirits convey through Catherine and Elizabeth during their hypnotic regression and the author’s communication with the highly evolved spirit entities provide a subtext for the speculation on the deepest human experiences, needs and aspirations. A mythopoeic perception of human emotions, thus, calls forth for an alternate set of values for mankind whereby love, charity and fellow feeling should be the reigning order instead of the materialistic aggression of the age.

Conclusion

The reincarnation myth implicit in *Many Lives, Many Masters* emphasizes the continuity of an individual’s psychic life to be the consequence of unlearned lessons in one lifetime and the carrying over of human emotions from one lifetime to the next, thus, implying the creative/spiritual evolution of the soul through numerous lifetimes. This is a departure from and, also, a reiteration of the reincarnation doctrines of Eastern Philosophy. The Hindu and Buddhist philosophy of *Karma* expounds that an individual can create “good” and “bad” *karma* and, thus, reap accordingly, suffering or happiness in his or her next incarnation. This emphasizes the retribution and reward principle of the doctrine. The core idea conveyed through *Many Lives, Many Masters* is of learning and developing from one life to the next which is analogous to the western notions of self-determination and progress. Moreover, the idea that all individuals have some autonomy in choosing whether, or how fast, they learn, and hence how soon, and in what form, they reincarnate, echoes some of the western notions of free-will. Also, the

growing belief in the reincarnation myth in contemporary western society mirrors the changing perceptions of what constitutes the essence of human existence.

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