

# ET CUSTOSI TUTELAE PAPER

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## New Approaches to Past Life Memories

By Shomer Diarmuidh

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The concepts of reincarnation, karma and past lives have been around for a long time. They have been around so long that they have inevitably gained the attribution of being time honoured and credible? Along with such other time honoured beliefs as the belief that the earth is flat or the belief that a certain polish geriatric virginal billionaire cleric is infallible in thought, word and deed.

Reincarnation, also known as the transmigration of souls, posits the idea that there is an immortal soul that leaves the body when the body dies. This soul is then more or less free to enter another physical body at or sometime shortly after its moment of conception.

Some schools of thought give the concept a little extra spill by supposing that the choice of just which body the soul re-enters is determined by the conduct, good or otherwise, of that soul in previous lifetimes. This is one of the concepts that have come to be known to us as karma.

A philosophy which is very convenient for those in the dominant social and economic positions; as their place is ordained by their 'good karma': "Hey, can you spare me a dime?" "Fuck off you shouldn't have been such a schmuck in your last life."

The 'law of karma' is not a law in any meaningful sense. We cannot test it in a laboratory or court of law. Like the belief in reincarnation, it might more accurately be described as a Belief System (or more accurately described as BS for short!)

**Dupes and liars?**

If the notion of reincarnation turns out to be logically meaningless, i.e. un-testable, what are we to make of the ninny reported instances whereby sincere and relatively sane people report experiences that seem to belong to earlier periods in human history? Are they all dupes or liars? - Probably not.

Undoubtedly a lot of so-called past-life memory amounts to little more than wishful thinking, futile day-dreaming, or New Age name-dropping. 'I might look like a menswear salesman to you but I used to be an American Indian warrior-chief, an Atlantean high-priest, a Tibetan monk and, oh yes, an ancient Egyptian God-King.'

There are also an alarming number of occult coattail-riders who claim to be the reincarnation of Aleister Crowley, who himself claimed to be the reincarnation of Eliphas Levi.

All the above notwithstanding, there is still no reason to discount out-of-hand all reported instances of recall of 'past-life' memories, but neither need we blindly accept the idea of reincarnation, based on the available anecdotal evidence.

### **Man bites Dogma!**

The dogma of reincarnation raises as many question as it tries to answer: Given that the concept of linear time went out the window when Einstein elaborated his theories of relativity, why is it that most reports seem to involve memories of past lives and not future ones as well?

Was I a Roman centurion in a past life or am I merely a future incarnation of that Roman soldier? Whose life is this anyway? If I was an Egyptian priest, how come I cannot make head nor tail of hieroglyphic writing? If I come back as a weta in my next life, how might I make amends for my reprehensible behaviour in this life which is to earn me so many cosmic demerits? If I was a temple whore on the lost continent of Mu in a past life, who was she in her previous incarnations, and are these mine as well?

Do only certain people reincarnate or does everybody? If everybody does, why do so many people have no memories of past lives at all? If reincarnation is compulsory, do we all originate from some primordial multi-billion souled amoeba or amino acid complex? Where do all these souls come from originally? Where do they go? There are at least two other models or Belief Systems that might account for so-called past life phenomena but which do not require any belief whatsoever in reincarnation.

### **DNA Library**

One model suggested by outlaw neuro-chemical researches of the 60's and 70's is that DNA, that marvellous molecule that mediates the inheritance of physical characteristics might also meditate the inheritance of behavioural and experience qualities as well.

Naturalists have long talked about instinct; some salmon migrate by instinct from Norway to Scotland then return again by instinct to their spawning ground in the upper reaches of freshwater Norwegian streams. Leaving aside the question of just what is this 'instinct' or

how they find their way without map, compass or any observable means of telecommunication, how do the salmon hatchlings know to go to Scotland?

Perhaps this behaviour is inherited along with all the other characteristics that go to make up the average wild-adjusted salmon. If it is inherited, perhaps it too relies on DNA. Perhaps the salmon arriving in Scotland says some piscine equivalent of 'Wow, spooky! I have this incredible Déjà-Vu feeling that I've been here in a previous lifetime!'

Perhaps if I am assailed by inexplicably Hindu mythological imagery during some dream or psychedelic experience, I am reliving the memories encoded in mine surviving remnant of Indian DNA floating about in my cells.

### **Morphic Resonance**

More recently, Rupert Sheldrake (PhD) an English biochemist and researcher developed and proposed his theories of formative causation and Morphic resonance to account for certain unsolved problems in animal and plant development. The reader of this paper is referred to his books 'A New Science of Life' and 'The Presence of the Past'.

It is difficult to do justice to the concepts which Sheldrake elaborates so eloquently in these two books. The key concepts to grasp are the concepts of morphic units, morphic fields and morphic resonance. Anything that is organised in any sense, for example an atom, a language, a social structure or an organism; is in that sense considered a morphic unit.

Morphic units are themselves organised into nested hierarchies of other morphic units. Each morphic unit exists says Sheldrake because it is organised into that configuration by a morphic field unique to that particular morphic unit. The morphic field originates from the existence of similar morphic units a previous period of time.

The influence of morphic units upon each other and subsequent morphic units is said to take place through a process called morphic resonance. The effects of morphic resonance do not diminish over space or time. But the influence of morphic resonance is said to be directional in time. The past might influence the present, but not vice versa. On the subject of reincarnation, Sheldrake says the following:

'A person might tap some reason tune in by morphic resonance to a person who lived in the past. This might help to account for the transfer of memories without our having to suppose that the present person is the other person whose memories he or she can pick up.'

- The Presence of the Past.

Thus, for example, if in my present life I am experiencing religious persecution this might be enough of a similarity to tune me in, via morphic resonance, to the morphic fields of people in the past whose experiences of religious persecution have been similar enough in nature to mine. If the resonance is particularly powerful, I might pick up a great deal of information from someone who was, say, burned as a witch during the European Inquisition for example.

### **The Collective Unconscious**

Sheldrake's ideas might also relate directly to the Jungian ideas regarding the 'collective unconscious.' Jung considered that mind has two aspects: the 'conscious' and the 'unconscious'. The unconscious mind he divided further into two types: the 'personal unconscious' and the 'collective unconscious'.

The personal unconscious is made up of the collected thoughts and perceptions which the individual actually experienced in this lifetime. For example, while I can consciously remember the name of my first ever school teacher, perhaps, in some way of which I am not consciously aware, she traumatised me leaving myself with an irrational hatred of old women with short grey hair. Such traumatic experiences would form part of my personal unconscious mind.

The contents of the collective unconscious have never been part of an individual's personal history in this lifetime. Think of the collective unconscious as a kind of collective memory of all individuals throughout history. The contents of the collective unconscious are essentially what Carl Jung called archetypes.

The Archetypes are powerful forces, themselves undetectable, but whose presence can be deduced from the effect they have upon the cultural world. For example, there is an archetype that we might call the 'Malign Powerful Feminine' that expresses itself in many cultures in such forms as the Hindu devouring goddess Kali, the numerous 'wicked witches' and 'evil stepmothers' of children's 'fairy tales', Shelob in JRR Tolkien's Lord of the Rings. Perhaps the Malign Powerful Feminine archetype has also influenced my memory of my first primary school teacher!

Jung considered that the contents of the collective unconscious are genetically inherited. Perhaps Sheldrake's model might offer a more useful perspective. Jung's 'archetypes' seem to be almost identical to Sheldrake's morphic fields'.

Neo-Jungian thought considers that the collective unconscious might itself contain a nested order of 'group unconscious' aspects of mind, e.g. familial, local, national, racial, global, etc. This parallels closely the ideas outlined above regarding the nested hierarchies of morphic units. As to just what the archetypes are actually made of, or just what type of energy a morphic field is created from the answers might remain beyond our grasp for a long time yet; if indeed they can ever be found at all.

### **Profound experiences**

To Sheldrake's ideas I might add the idea that the more profound the original experience, the greater the imprint (or morphic field) it produces and the more likely it is to be picked up and noticed by some future individual. This might account for the prevalence of profound experiences in past life memory phenomena. We are more likely to resonate with experiences from the past that carry a greater emotional charge. Many past life memories are of deaths or similarly plangent moments from previous lives. I know of no reported past-life memories of dish-washing or other relatively boring activities.

### **A Testable Belief System**

An advantage of the Morphic Resonance over others is that it can be and is being tested scientifically. This means that one need neither believe nor disbelieve it. Indeed, logically one cannot do either. Competent scientists, like competent magicians, conduct experiments and examine the evidence for or against the theory being tested. There are experiments conducted already which seem to confirm some of the predictions based on Sheidrake's hypotheses. This is already more than can be said for the other Belief Systems discussed here which are un-testable and thus logically meaningless.

As to whether or not Morphic Resonance and Formative Causation will ever be accepted as scientifically valid, perhaps we will only know for sure when we come back in some future lifetime.

The Jungian model of the mind includes three aspects - conscious, personal unconscious and collective unconscious. The goal of individuation is said to be attained by a lifelong process of integration whereby the contents of the personal and collective unconscious are assimilated as they arise into the individual's conscious awareness.

If this is a valid concept it becomes clear that whatever the origin of so-called 'past-life experiences', they must have some value and relevance to the individual in this lifetime if for no other reason than that they represent aspects of Mind which were hitherto unconscious and which are now available for integration into the individual's conscious experience. They might be no more 'real' than dreams or hallucinations, but they are certainly no less valuable either.

### **Not meaningless**

Dreams, visions, everyday experiences, hallucinations, memories and 'past-life' memories are not just random meaningless phenomena. They can carry as much meaning as the fall and appearance of Tarot cards in a layout and are of great psychological interest to the Jungian analyst.

When the mind is presented with new raw material there is always the opportunity to examine the data and discover for oneself just how to fit the new material into the overall pattern of one's life.

The danger of accepting 'past-life' phenomena at face value is that the past is essentially past and we are powerless to do anything about it 'Past lives' can become convenient excuses for not reaching our potential in this life.

To accept 'past life' experiences at absolute time value is to run the risk of being cursed by them, forced to limit oneself in this lifetime for the sake of an outdated and logically inconsistent point-of-view.

To rubbish 'past-life' experiences as random fantasies or mere wishful thinking is also to limit oneself. The most empowering option available seems to be to explore past life phenomena with an open and enquiring mind looking for their (if any) relevance in this life.

### **Positive Enquiry**

If one accepts one is 'tuning in' to experiences lived by other individuals in the past, there are numerous avenues of positive enquiry to explore. Why, of all the experiences available, am I picking up this one? Why now? How does it relate to me where I am right now? If the experience is a 'bad' one (e.g. violent death or unspeakable cruelty), what am I doing in my life now that is making this 'real' to me? What can I do now that will enable me to place this in perspective, to integrate it into the totality of who-I-am? Are there aspects of myself that I am refusing to accept? How can I 'tune in' to experiences which enrich me as an individual, which inspire me with the possibility of waking up and becoming all that I have the potential to be? As said by Michael Freedman Senior Guardian:

**"Any fool can change the future,  
It takes a real Magician to change the past"**  
- Shomer Michael

