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INTRODUCTION

*What makes us free is the Gnosis
of who we were
of what we have become
of where we were
of wherein we have been thrown
of whereto we are hastening
of what we are being freed
of what birth really is
of what rebirth really is.*
—VALENTINUS (GNOSTIC)

If we really want to know who we are, we must first know who we were. In this integrated book-and-CD learning experience, I want to invite you to explore a specific, highly effective path to self-knowledge and the freedom it brings. This path, which I call Deep Memory Process™, is a practice I've developed over the past twenty years by blending past-life regression therapy with the active imagination techniques of Jungian psychotherapy, but it has its roots in a much more ancient tradition of remembering “who we were” and understanding “what we have become.” It offers a set of tools for delving into the deep recesses of your unconscious mind—what we call the *soul*—to discover where memories of past existence are stored and bring them to light. The exercises and practices you will work through here are surprisingly simple and easy to learn, but they can open you to a profound new self-awareness, help you heal old wounds, and show you your

precise place in the scheme of the universe. They can open to you, in short, the transcendent reality of the soul.

WHAT ARE PAST LIVES?

If you imagine your psyche as a computer, you can think of past lives as old, corrupted programs that interfere with its running. Like unwanted files you cannot delete, they run over and over in the deepest recesses of your psyche, depleting its resources and making it operate ever more slowly, even to the point of shut-down. The simple meditation practices you'll learn in this book and CD work like disk scans to find and repair those malfunctioning past-life "programs" so you can restore your psychic computer to top performance.

The computer of the psyche is a complex system, with many programs running both close to the surface, at a level we're aware of, and deeper, at a level that's invisible to us (much like an operating system such as MS-DOS, which depends on masses of files and code we never see until we hit the wrong key by mistake). We might call the superficial level the *personality program* and the deeper level the *soul program*. When problems arise in our day-to-day functioning, they may be the result of mistakes we make in our own running of the program at the personality level—user error, if you will—and such problems are easy to fix. When, for example, we are overanxious about being late or blame ourselves excessively for not being tidy enough, we can usually adjust our behaviors by imposing new habits. But problems at the soul level—such as depression, compulsive cleanliness, or irrational phobias about fire, high places, being robbed, and so on—in which patterns from past lives lie embedded deep in our psychic history, can cause the equivalent of a computer's "fatal error": severe physical and emotional problems in our present lives and serious karmic consequences for the evolution of the soul.

I confess that I came late in life to computers and, like many of my generation, lack the facility that my children have with them. I hope you'll forgive the traditionalist in me, who is more at home with terms like "soul" and "unconscious" than with computerese—and, as we go on, I hope you will feel free to translate my terms into your own preferred lingo. Whether we talk of genetic coding or cellular memory, of the psyche's operating system or the soul's deep history, the essential point is the same: we are all ruled by forces and powers far larger than we know,

and greatest of these is what we may simply call “the past,” a vast psychic pool of prior conditioning that we all share, created by human experience, error, and misdemeanor over millennia. As the philosopher George Santayana succinctly put it, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” —but when we learn to remember, using tools like those you are about to discover, we begin to free ourselves from the power of the past.

A SKEPTIC’S JOURNEY

Working with past lives is for me just one step on a greater personal journey. I have been led to study different religions throughout my life: Hinduism and Vedanta drew me in my teens, and later I began to practice a form of Buddhist meditation. My focus in graduate school at London University was religious mysticism. For my professional training, I went to the C.G. Jung Institute in Zurich to immerse myself in Carl Jung’s psychology of archetypal symbolism and the collective unconscious; later I studied directly with shamans and spiritual healers in South America. From them I learned how many of our blocked feelings and deeper issues can be released by rebalancing the subtle bodies, and that we have many spiritual resources available to us from the “higher worlds” of the ancestors and other spirit beings. Brazil, in particular, has a very advanced spiritual psychology of past lives derived from the widespread spiritualist practice called Kardecism. In recent years, I have continued to work in Brazil, training therapists in Deep Memory Process, and I remain quite close to that country’s Umbanda and Spiritism traditions. Music and poetry have always nourished me—Tallis, Bach, Shakespeare, Rilke—as well as the great Sufi mystics Rumi, Hafiz, and Sanai, my constant companions.

All these encounters and practices—along with my own quite-shattering past-life experiences—have convinced me that there is a reality of the soul to which all mystical phenomena belong. It cannot be proved by science, because it is not a material reality; it is a spiritual reality, accessible only through spiritual and psychological disciplines, such as past-life remembering, that open the gateways to the soul.

As a therapist and teacher who has worked with past-life regression for more than a quarter century, I’ve been asked over and over, “Why bother with past lives? Don’t we have enough to worry about in this lifetime?”

Sometimes I play along. “Indeed,” I reply, “why bother about the past at all? Why waste so much money on therapy focused on childhood? Surely we’re adults now?”

“But that’s different,” the questioner may say. “Bad things really happened to me in my childhood and they affect me today.”

Then I play devil’s advocate: “Can you prove they really happened?”

“No, I can’t prove it,” my questioner says, “but I remember them vividly. In fact, I’d like to forget them.”

I take questions like these very seriously, because when I began to be interested in past-life regression, I asked the same questions myself—so much so that my first book on the subject, *Other Lives, Other Selves*, was originally subtitled “A Sceptic Discovers Past Lives.” I will do my best to address them in the chapters that follow. But I must emphasize that for me—as for many others—it is not “proof” that convinces, but personal experience.

The experience that convinced me came nearly thirty-five years ago. I was lying on the sofa when images began to form, at first dimly, then very vividly, and I found myself in thirteenth-century France, in the thick of the holy war that would come to be called the Albigensian Crusade. I saw the unspeakable horrors of a massacre in a walled city where countless innocents, deemed heretics by the Church, were slaughtered and burned. What was worse, I saw that in the character of a crude mercenary soldier, I was doing the slaughtering myself. I painfully relived an attempted suicide—a leap off a precipice that left me in agony, with shattered limbs. I saw my own fearsome death by fire.

A Hollywood re-creation? No movie I have ever seen comes close. Glamorous? By no means. It is a common, clichéd criticism that past-life regressions always turn up Egyptian princesses, Conquistadors, or wives of Henry VIII—prestigious identities to pad a New Age résumé—but my experience held so much shame and violence that I could hardly talk about it. I wanted to disown it, not boast about it. How could this memory be mine? If this was a “past life,” I felt, I would do better to keep clear of the subject. Yet as I recovered my soldier’s full story and reflected on it more and more (and confirmed the facts in a visit to the hilltop city of Béziers, France, where as many as 20,000 people were massacred in 1208), I came to see how the story explained many things in my life: my inborn fears of fire and heights, a guilt I could never shake, a deep revulsion to most organized

religion and militarism, and fragmented images of torture and killing, seen in dreams and meditations over the years, that no amount of psychotherapy had ever really touched.

In the light of these memories—and others, just as vivid—I slowly let go of my prejudices and came to accept, like Hamlet after seeing his father’s ghost, that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy. Since then, I have helped or watched literally thousands of people go through similar experiences—life-changing journeys into psychic memory that help illuminate—and heal—the traumas of the present.

VOYAGES OF TRANSFORMATION

There is no end. There is no beginning.

There is only the infinite passion of life.

—FEDERICO FELLINI

Skeptics or believers, those who undergo Deep Memory Process are nearly always moved. The lives they recall tell a vast range of stories, and they are not all Egyptian princesses; they are real people, many of whom could never be identified in history books. They are indigenous people facing invasion, predation, or migration. They are heads of state manipulating great nations. They are feudal lords and genocidal tyrants; emperors, power-mongers, and popes; workers, slaves, and slave masters. They are mothers dying in childbirth, and children lost, enslaved, or sacrificed to the gods. They are victims of every kind of disaster, and survivors of every kind of oppression, whether political, religious, or sexual. They are heroes, cowards, and saints; liberators, benefactors, and martyrs; scheming priestesses, cunning shamans, failed teachers, and dedicated reformers. They are rabble-rousers and camp followers, depressed academics and drunken surgeons, minor poets and mediocre artisans, puritanical judges and professional killers. The list is endless, as is human life.

But in every session, however sad or violent, unfulfilled or unrecognized the past-life self has felt—however frustrated, wasted, or bleak—the rememberer eventually finds himself or herself floating up from the past-life body and knowing that that life is over, that those troubles and wounds can be left behind. He or she has a chance to make a conscious review of the life; to recognize and release patterns

(or programs, if you like) that may still be replaying in the present; to forgive or ask forgiveness; and, above all, to seek out lost loved ones or teachers in the world of spirit, where the suffering soul finds healing, wisdom, and peace.

In guiding so many people through the heights and depths of so many lifetimes, and following them on the great crossing into the realms beyond death, I have naturally thought deeply about what takes place on these fantastic voyages into extraordinary visionary spaces—and I have come to question all my assumptions about what memory and imagination really are. Though trained in the Jungian tradition, which values imagination as the language of the soul, I no longer feel that the images we encounter in these regressions are mere images (or even archetypal images), and it no longer helps me to explain them as occurring in some altered state of consciousness. So many of the visions are so vivid, and have such transformative effects on the rememberers, that they seem to speak of other, greater realities than our own.

Slowly, it has dawned on me that when I empathically accompany my clients and students into their inner worlds, following their “imagination” or “memories” on astonishing psychic voyages, I actually move with them into another world: a realm that in many cultures is called the “subtle world,” the *mundus imaginalis*, a world real in and of itself. Together, they and I are doing what the shamans call *journeying*, using a highly developed form of imaginative awareness—a visionary capacity closely related to the intuitive sense that psychics and mystics have. I have found, quite simply, that once we cultivate this powerful form of awareness, we can ourselves journey between realities, and directly encounter worlds beyond the physical world, where we have subtle access to the universal source of healing that is Spirit.

IS IT JUST IMAGINATION?

Our culture is used to dismissing anything that does not fit with consensus reality by saying, “It’s just imagination,” which is about the same as saying, “You made it up.” When someone sees a ghost, people dismiss it as a hallucination; when children see things in the night, parents say, “You’re imagining things; go to sleep.” In this view imagination is something deceiving, something less than real. Yet the millions of people who pray every day to nonphysical beings, from Jesus, to Mohammed, to Lakshmi, do so using their “imagination”—their capacity to

hold images of the deities in their minds. Is every religious person therefore hallucinating? Do we say that Isaiah, Ezekiel, Saint Teresa, William Blake, and Carl Jung were deluded individuals who “made up” their visions and philosophies? To use imagination in such a pejorative, reductive sense is a desecration (literally, “taking out the sacred”) of its meaning. Visionary imagination is the most powerful spiritual faculty we have; the power to envision is the capacity that lets us give spiritual shape to both our inner and our outer realities, for good or for ill.

In the Middle Ages, the Scholastics distinguished two types of thinking: *ratio* and *intellectus*. In their view, *ratio* (usually translated as “reason”) belongs to the lower, or reasoning, mind; *intellectus* (best translated as “intuition” and not to be confused with the modern term *intellect*) belongs to the higher mind that taps into universal truth. A form of spiritual or visionary consciousness, it is the source of all creativity, mystical awareness, and what is sometimes called *gnosis*, or pure knowing. The late British sage and mystic Sir George Trevelyan, whom I was privileged to know, always claimed that these two kinds of thinking corresponded to the two sides of the brain, the left governing the rational functions and the right acting as a conduit to intuitive, mystical knowledge—a direct channel, he would say, to the Divine.

When I talk about imagination here, this is what I mean: not made-up fantasy, but the visionary capacity that is in us all. This capacity is both the language of and the gateway to the soul, transcending time and space to let us access eternal realities only dimly known to our reasoning minds. It has always been available to visionaries, mystics, and charismatics—and regarded by them as a sacred faculty—but for many people it lies dormant until it is awakened. In the chapters that follow and in the exercises on the CD, you will find ways to awaken the visionary capacity within you and to use it to take your own healing journey into the deep memory of your soul. My purpose is to invite and enable you to make your own exploration and, from what you find, to draw your own conclusions. I cannot offer you proof positive; what I can offer you is stated beautifully by the visionary novelist Hermann Hesse (who was a friend of Jung’s):

*Only within yourself exists that reality for which you long.
I can give you nothing that has not already its being within yourself.
I can throw open to you no picture gallery but your own soul.*

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

—GEORGE SANTAYANA

WHEN THERAPY DOES NOT WORK

Many of the problems that we take to our therapists can readily be traced to childhood—events such as losses, abuse, tragedy, and so on—but there are many issues that years of therapy never seem to touch. So many of my clients arrive with deep feelings of grief or with totally inexplicable phobias—a fear of drowning in a boat when they have never been to sea, for instance—that are totally unaccounted for in terms of their present life experience. Over and over again, they will remark that they have had such-and-such a feeling ever since they could remember, or that they have always had fantasies about particular countries, or thoughts about certain unpleasant ways of dying, or strong convictions of having been a different kind of human being in another era.

Such thoughts are by no means to be dismissed. Indeed, the many accumulated cases of past-life remembering from both therapy and research make an almost

indisputable case for discarding the scientific dogma (for dogma it is) of the *tabula rasa*—the idea that the mind is a “blank slate” at birth. It is slowly dawning on more and more unprejudiced investigators and common readers that most of our troubles arise from issues we were born with, and that the soul has its own history. From this perspective, “past-life therapy,” as it has been called for some years, is very much a deep psychology, a psychology of the soul and the deeper tribulations it inherits from the greater history of humanity. As the great French philosopher Michel de Montaigne wrote in his *Essays*: “Each man bears the stamp of the whole human condition.”

So when conventional therapy, with its emphasis on our experiences in this life, does not work, the reason may be simple: the therapist is looking for the trauma, the event that caused the psychological disturbance, in the wrong place.

WENDY: A MOTHER’S ANXIETY

“I should never have left them alone!”

One of my clients—a mother I will call Wendy—had terrible anxiety attacks every time she saw her children going off to school or even playing with other children away from the house. She could not bear for them to be away from her for very long, even to go to places like summer camp. She knew that this was unfair, and she did her best to overcome her fears. But as her children got older, the irrational fears remained. She was always anxious about them and called them constantly, even when they were adults with families of their own. She came to see me after a friend brought her own young children over for a visit, because the panic attacks had returned in force—only now someone else’s children were triggering Wendy’s deep feelings of dread.

Wendy had tried several therapies over the years, but her anxiety had never really gone away. Naturally, she had explored her childhood, but all she had come up with was a terrifying memory of her mother putting her on the school bus when she was about six. Nothing had happened then to account for the fear; it simply appeared that as a little girl, she had been terrified of leaving her home and her mother.

When we probed more deeply in a regression session, we found that in a past life, Wendy had been a Native American boy. In her reliving of the story, the boy went hunting with his father at age ten or eleven, during a time when the tribe was being

driven off its land by white men, and came back home to find the family camp on the riverbank under attack. Emerging from the forest, he saw his mother and his younger brother and sister being raped and killed right before his eyes. He and his father rushed down to try to fend the attackers off with knives and bows and arrows, the young boy courageously throwing himself on them, but the white men with their powerful guns mowed them down. The climactic point of the regression came as the boy died, feeling horribly responsible for the death of his family, even though he and his father were actually powerless. His dying thought was, “I should never have left them alone.”

Once this story surfaced in Wendy’s awareness, it was clear that her childhood fears and her anxiety around her own family had always been unconsciously associated with the Native American boy from the past. Until our session, she had still been afraid that that horror might somehow repeat itself. Just to know that that lifetime was an old tape playing in the background of her consciousness was enough to help her erase it and release a great deal of her fear. It sometimes takes further work to break deep habits of fear—but now, at least, Wendy could truthfully tell herself, “My family is safe today. That’s just an old story. I can let it go.”

SEEKING THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

We know that many people carry patterns of fear, guilt, and obsessive worry like Wendy’s. Clinically, these patterns are labeled “phobias” or “anxiety disorders,” yet the psychiatric literature can rarely pinpoint how they arise. What is most puzzling about such feelings is simply that they are irrational; their content does not make sense in and of itself, and there is nothing to connect the fear to our actual life experience. A man who has never been stabbed or badly cut may have a deep fear of knives; a woman who has never sustained a serious burn may have a terrible fear of fire. Casting about in childhood for explanations of such fears does not seem to dislodge them. Often, as in Wendy’s case, the problem is already present in childhood, fully formed.

From the perspective of past-life therapy, none of this is surprising: the things we fear—fire, drowning, guns, explosions, savage animals, enclosed spaces, crowds, airplane trips—are not childhood traumas at all, but psychically inherited fears, residues of previous lives still carried deeply in the psychic system we call the unconscious or the soul. The horrors we most fear really happened to someone else, but that “someone else” is still in us today, an imprinted memory from a lifetime that is over, even if the past-life personality does not know it.

When we recognize that irrational fear may come from the experience of another lifetime, then we can search for what I call the “story behind the story”—the old tape, like Wendy’s, playing in the background of consciousness. One of Freud’s concepts can help us in this regard: the notion of repetition compulsion, which he defined as an uncontrollable urge to replay old behaviors or stories we are no longer conscious of. When we expand this theory beyond a single lifetime, we can quickly see that a person’s neurotic behavior, though irrational in the present, may make perfect sense in the context of a story from a past life. The woman with the fear of fire may have been burned at the stake; the man terrified of crowds may have been trampled in a riot; the child frightened of loud noises may remember dying on a battlefield; the adult afraid of flying may have been shot down in a past life as a fighter pilot. Every one of these stories has been recorded in many variations in the annals of past-life regression. They show us that every complaint—however irrational it seems when isolated as a symptom—can be a clue to a buried story, the soul’s way of revealing its most deeply held pain.

CHERYL: FEAR OF THE PUBLIC

Residues of a Roman Lifetime

A very common anxiety is the fear of speaking or appearing before a lot of people. This crippling condition can come into play even in small groups, as was the case with my student Cheryl, a young professional psychotherapist who attended one of our workshops on Deep Memory Process. Cheryl was a very able therapist, but she had always suffered from crippling panic attacks when it came to speaking out in public. Until the third day of the workshop, she had successfully avoided such anxiety by deliberately burying her nose in her notebook and saying as little as possible. The topic that morning, however, was fear, and when the talk turned to terror in group situations, she found herself having an anxiety attack at the very mention of the subject. She realized that she needed to talk about what was happening to her, and finally she overcame her fear enough to speak out, albeit with her heart beating fiercely, her palms sweating, and her stomach in knots. The transcript that follows is typical of how we can probe for the “story behind the story”—in this instance, the story behind a story from Cheryl’s childhood.