

FANTASY REGRESSION

By Lincoln Stoller
Part 1



Lincoln Stoller is a NASA astronomer from Berkeley, CA (1978); with a PhD in Quantum Physics from the University of Texas at Austin (1985). His education also includes Neurofeedback Training (2006-2009). LENS at Stone Mountain Center, Tilton, New York; 2006 and EEG Institute, Woodland Hills, California; 2007: The Enhancement Institute, Houston, Texas (2009). His hypnosis education includes successful completion of the hypnosis courses taught at HPTI and IC BCH

"I resolved upon the decisive step... I let myself drop. Suddenly it was as though the ground literally gave way beneath my feet, and I plunged into the dark depths."
— Carl G. Jung

A Brief Future—Hypnosis

Hypnotherapy has more roots than most therapeutic approaches combining medicine, science, memory, consciousness, language, human behavior, spectacle, spirituality, and religion. In spite of this, or because of it, hypnosis remains marginal, though it has periodic revivals and, among experts in these fields, it's always been respected. It just can't seem to make it into the mainstream and, perhaps, we shouldn't want it to.

This crisscrossing of pathways and pedigrees are hypnosis's richest veins, and those of us who practice it should mine them. Among these is the connection to spirit, religion, and mysticism that's offered by Past-Life Regression, here referred to as PLR.

This article presents PLR in an accessible form that fits gently into current practice and past forms, such as Active Imagination and emotional intelligence. I hope readers will learn about it and explore the pioneers of the field.

A Quick History—Past-Life Regression

We read various descriptions of the origin of Past-Life Regression therapy. Many of us who have followed clients recount experiences while in trance have heard stories that don't correlate with any events in the client's life. Many proponents of PLR, who were not previously advocates for it, first encountered it this way. That is, they encountered past-life stories without prompting or expecting them to occur.

Past-Life Regression comes from a non-academic lineage and does not have a goal that a traditional therapist would identify as therapeutic. PLR does not require or even make use of diagnosis; so, in traditional terms, nothing is being cured. That's partly because there is no official dysfunction that could be correlated with it, but, more important, it's because PLR is a transcendent approach that aims to take clients beyond their normal state.

PLR does not remediate—it elevates. In that sense, it's not disease-oriented—it's growth-oriented. One of the reasons PLR lingers outside the mainstream is that clients in the West come to therapy to return to what they know as comfortable, rather than explore what might be uncomfortable. The remedial approach is supported and its costs are reimbursed by the medical-insurance establishment. The anti-PLR, medical-diagnostic approach is not only encouraged, but licensed health-care providers who deviate from the medical-diagnostic approach risk losing their licenses.

No Small Thing—Past Lives

PLR is not a thing that has a small effect; it does not have clear boundaries, and it does not reduce to mechanics. In fact, the previous description of its being non-remedial is not strictly true. It often does relieve current symptoms by, presumably, healing past-life diseases.

This unscientific bridge across unverifiable territory is reductionist. It can give an etiology for the presenting symptom, except the causes are closer to spiritual than medical and, if any effect is to be had, the symptoms are psychosomatic. David Quigley has developed PLR in this direction, as a means to address specific current-life diseases and dysfunctions. In *The Art of Hypnotic Regression Therapy* (listed below), Roy Hunter and Bruce Eimer consider different explanations for the past-life recollection experience. In *Becoming Lucid, Self-awareness in Sleeping & Waking Life*, I discuss how new awareness emerges from, and takes one out of existing awareness.

PLR proponents are psychologists, hypnotherapists, and counselors who offer their own techniques and explanations. Brian Weiss and Michael Newton are the most well known, as are the two schools they founded. Others came before them who, in my opinion, were more objective in their descriptions and developments: Roger Woolger, Delores Cannon, Edith Fiore, and Helen Wambach are authors whose work I value.

And then there is the other side of PLR, which has roots in spiritist, spiritual, psychic, and religious practice. In these areas it's sometimes a therapy, but just as often part of a cosmology. The spiritist tradition, founded by Alan Kardec in the 19th Century, reports much success in treating mental illnesses Western science considers incurable using techniques of transcendence and exorcism. See Emma Bragdon's work for references to work in the spiritist tradition, and books by William Baldwin and Raymond Moody for spiritual perspectives.

It's ironic that the West's scientific advocates are content with their failures in this regard and indifferent to the demonstrable success of the non-scientific spiritists. So much for being "evidence-based." As a physicist, I consider psychology's love affair with evidence-based methodologies to be an abuse of the scientific method. It's certainly better than the subjective, deluded, and sometimes concocted anecdotal reports, but cherry-picking evidence does not a science make.

I don't think PLR will be accepted by mainstream psychotherapy. Most likely the advancement of PLR in the West will come from hypnotherapy, which is to say, through the efforts of readers like you.

The Aggressive Approach

Let me simplify the approaches to Past-Life Regression by putting them into two camps. There is an aggressive approach, which is what most PLR practitioners apply, and there is a fantasy approach, that I apply and which I think is easier for other therapists to apply, as well.

What I'm calling the aggressive approach makes the creation, or re-creation, of a past-life experience its first priority. In this approach, the client and practitioner work together to evoke a past-life story. Both client and practitioner agree on making this a goal. Past-life-oriented language and methodology are combined with a hypnotic state, so it should be no surprise that past-life stories emerge.

I have no objection to this in principle, and this was the approach I took to gain experience. This approach is necessary if you want to explore past-life territory. That's because when you relax these constraints and don't set PLR as the goal, then you often don't get past-life stories. If you're a staunch believer in reincarnation, then this should give you pause. If reincarnation is fundamental, then what is this non-reincarnation story? If you don't limit yourself to the past-life narrative, then you'll often get something else, or something more.

My objection to the aggressive approach is financial. I find most people interested in past-life regression do not take it seriously enough. They are interested in exploring it, maybe for an hour or so, and maybe at the cost of one hundred dollars, but not deeply and therapeutically. I feel that's a problem because PLR is a serious affair with great therapeutic potential. It shouldn't be toyed with.

This objection is handled in the spiritist schools of Brazil by making spiritist therapy free, which is to say, subsidized by other means. But here in the West, there are no other means. I find that unless a person is willing to pay a trained practitioner for committed support, they'll get an untrained practitioner without support.

Part of the problem is a lack of public understanding, but given the prejudice of Western medicine, this ignorance will be slow to dispel. Without a higher level of education and information one can't blame clients for hesitating in making a larger investment. For the most part, they wouldn't know how to distinguish a trained from an untrained practitioner.

The public's education comes mostly from PLR presented as hobby and spectacle, the responsibility for which I lay at the feet of many who have capitalized on it, but, at present, there are few alternatives. You won't hear about it from your doctor or therapist, but you might hear about it in the tabloids.

The Fantasy Approach

I have taken PLR into my practice with a light touch. I invite people into a conversational trance and encourage them to create a story that traverses the emotionally charged landscape of their current life. I encourage them to fictionalize, invent characters and landscapes, and evoke energies and feelings in whatever way emerges from their entranced mind.

Close to Jung's "Active Imagination," this fantasy approach is undertaken with greater suggestion and, of course, with hypnosis. Jung, on the other hand, viewed active imagination as a non-hypnotic act combining intuition, reason, reflection, art, music, and movement. In short, Jung's approach is a conscious bridge to the unconscious. Under hypnosis, one feels more to be the puppet

and less of the puppet-master. In Fantasy Regression, like PLR, one is largely in the subconscious.

"You yourself must enter into the process with your personal reactions: ... as if the drama being enacted before your eyes were real." —C.G. Jung

The Shallow End of the Subconscious

As I mentioned, if you don't constrain a story to a past-life framework, then you will often get a story that doesn't look like a past-life. I may not look like the present life, either, and sometimes it doesn't look human or even earth-based.

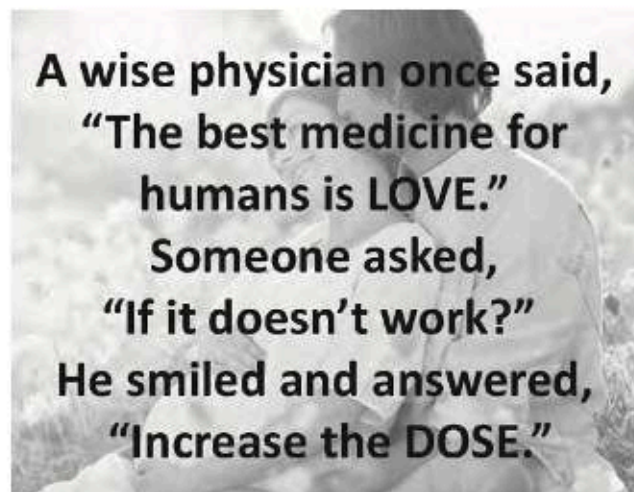
Die-hard reincarnation advocates have encountered stories such as these in spite of their attempts to remain in the PLR framework. Those in the Michael Newton school offer other-worldly explanations asserting that these other worlds are real. I find this is unnecessary. Actually, I find it ridiculous.

As far as I'm concerned, these stories are whatever the client wants them to be, and I don't apply my own metaphysics. I simply encourage them to explore the landscape of feelings and to search for personal release and deeper understanding.

I recently worked with an analytical client for whom the notion of past-life regression would have been uncomfortable. This client provided a complicated life-story, and the hypnosis that we did, such as it was, was entirely conversational.

In a subsequent session, we dispensed with the story and I led them into a narrative that contained only the emotionally charged aspects of their history. I invited them to slip into an alternate world and conjure or create the places and characters that expressed their fears, hopes, needs, loves, and sorrows. Then, I invited their characters to act independently. I didn't say anything about past lives, and I didn't care to.

They had no trouble with this exercise, and it presented no challenge to their identity. This new story did not threaten their elaborate historical story which, while it was based on selected facts, was still an elaboration of memory, fabricated for the purpose of protection from guilt and sorrow. They needed that protection and, in order not to minimize it, we just set it aside temporarily. They will rewrite the story that they believe to be true when they're ready to do so.



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Part 2

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Stepping Softly on Ego

I find the clients who resist hypnosis are those who are afraid of letting go. A lack of rapport is part of the problem, but their fear of letting go precludes developing rapport, so it's a Catch-22.

Clients are often afraid of the very thing they're working to overcome, which is why their progress has stalled. My first task is to build for them a sense of safety. This is the first thing you need to do in a situation where there is ongoing trauma, and it's the first thing you need to do when there is the prospect of reviving past trauma.

I let my clients tell their stories. The story is a smokescreen, it is their clothing, identity, protection, and excuse. No one is going to trust you if they don't first feel you know them. The irony is that the "them" that they present to you is the identity that they've fabricated and has backed them into a corner. Yes, it is one of "them," but it's not the "them" that's going to prevail. We're in search of a larger, stronger, wiser "them."

As soon as possible, we head toward hypnosis. They have already told me a few of their pleasing images and I'll weave those into a guided visualization. I'll employ any of the usual inductions without dissociating them to the point of losing track of my voice. I will periodically ask them for comments on the color of the water at their favorite beach, or the view over their favorite landscape.

I then employ one of the standard PLR mechanics of presenting them with a choice of doorways, paths, or passageways. At this point, I ask them to become more present in the story, to visualize and report the details of the generalities I describe, and, in this way, they take over the narrative.

There are many ways forward from this point. Generally, I'll build a story around the emotionally charged issues in their life. This can be specific and direct, such as seeing members of their family, or it can be allegorical, such as seeing a stereotyped personality in a fairy tale setting. I'll listen carefully to how they respond, coaxing them to take the authority for creating the story.

Typically, clients move between levels, disappearing into deeper levels of trance and then returning to report. On rare occasions, they will disappear for the entire session, being unable or disinclined to speak. In these cases, I'll watch their body language and explore ideomotor response. I will weave the narrative largely by myself along suggestive lines, visiting and strengthening their points of concern.

Being a Guide or Doorman

The practitioner's role in PLR is to create a container. The first container is "the safe place," and from that place other containers

emerge: the exploration container, the resolution container, the danger container, and many others. This is an exercise in what Milton Erickson called "artfully vague" direction.

I find I can do this best when I'm in a trance myself. I have my own eyes half-closed, allowing, waiting, and inviting images to emerge from my subconscious in collaboration with theirs. At the same time, I have to keep tabs on their physical state because most of their emotional signals will first appear as body language before it's evident in their story or tone of voice.

In addition, because of my experience with brainwaves and neurofeedback, I will attach an EEG monitor to my client and have their brainwaves displayed on a screen beside me. I use the unobtrusive MUSE headset that takes no time to attach and causes no distraction. In this, I am simply monitoring their brainwaves, which are displayed on a running graph. By watching them, I can monitor trance level and, sometimes, see the signature of tension that I have not picked up in their body language. I can also administer brainwave biofeedback simultaneously with the hypnosis session, but this is beyond the subject of PLR.

Death—The Critical Release

There is a stage in the standard PLR process through which I do not take my clients in my light-touch approach, and that is the death phase. Death is the Big Release and, when it is experienced as an inevitable part of the narrative, it has a major effect on the story.

Obviously, if there is a life it ends at that point, but it's what happens next that is just as or more important. If the object is transcendence, then death is an unmistakable doorway. It is an opportunity both to release the old self and to find something entirely new.

I have taken clients to and through the death phase only when it was clearly understood that we would pass through this phase. It is a phase that is usually uncomfortable and requires support, patience, and encouragement. It is a powerful doorway to insight and healing, and passage through it should be consensual.

There are several ways the death phase can go. It can be the end of the regression, after which we work back to the "real world," back into the present, and back into the body. This is often the case when the past-life has been a keystone event in dealing with current life problems.

In other cases, the end of that life simply moves to the start of the next, as if we're watching a full-season run of "The Twilight Zone." But one of the most fertile possibilities is when the client feels they are entering the Bardo, a space from Buddhist theology where the soul temporarily resides between incarnations.

This space is important because it has no story, imposes no requirements, and is manifestly transcendent.

Heaven Lite

While I have avoided a death experience in fantasy regression, I can still invite clients into a transcendent experience. It's very simple: we just leave the earth.

I can take over the story from wherever they are and ask them to rise up into the sky. As they rise, they leave the landscape of their story behind. The sky gets darker, the stars get brighter, their body gets fainter, until all that's left are fields of shimmering, immobile stars. From here, we're in a death-free Bardo, or "Bardo-lite."

We're not dealing with the issues of karma or returning to incarnation, though one could create those images. Avoiding death is a cheat, and it may be too much of one. The sense of liberation in this Bardo is incomplete. It lacks the sweat, sorrow, finality and that visceral sense of separation. On the other hand, anyone can do it—even children. It's simply a Shamanic journey.

Practical and Cheap

I offer Past-Life Regression sessions that are four or five hours long following the aggressive approach. This includes the introduction, exposition, relaxation, the regression experience or multiple regression experiences, return, and reassembly. It also includes a written transcript. This is a large commitment in time and money. Fantasy regression, on the other hand, can tread on similar territory at lower cost and lower risk. It doesn't go as deep and it doesn't get as dark.

On the other hand, if one wants, one has the option of going deeper, taking more time, and adhering more closely to the lines of the aggressive PLR. In fantasy regression you can avoid the label "Past-Life" if it's a problem, or recall it if it's a benefit. You can ask the client for a 1-hour or a 5-hour commitment.

Offering fantasy regression opens you, the practitioner, to the growing field and unusual techniques of PLR from different practitioners, schools, and cultures. In doing this, the whole field of hypnotherapy broadens to new perspectives, and deepens toward greater transformation.

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**Between stimulus
and response,
there is space.
In that space
is our power
to choose our response.
In our response lies
our growth
and our freedom.**

– Viktor E. Frankl

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