

This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine.
(William Shakespeare)

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From Individual to Collective Shadow Work in Past Life Regression Therapy

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Abstract

This paper examines how past life regression therapy can help to progress the evolution of human consciousness to the next, truly integral stage, with special emphasis on shadow work. It will be elaborated that the concept of reincarnation is understood differently at different stages and therefore, at each stage, different types of therapeutic techniques can be applied. At the highest levels, past lives are seen as the evolving continuity of consciousness or even as the eternal expressions of a singular consciousness. On these high levels of psycho-spiritual understanding, past life memories can be used as a training ground to become aware of evolutionary patterns and accelerate development in the present life (e.g. by becoming aware of moral blind spots or detect the positive intention behind negative behavioural expressions). Shadow work, for it to unfold its full potential, must be applied in all ‘four quadrants’: taking into consideration its exterior as well as interior, its individual as well as collective aspects. These various expressions are demonstrated with case studies from the author’s own hypnotherapeutic practice. It will be concluded that in order to overcome our collective shadow, which currently keeps us in a state of dissociation and denial, we must make every move we can to bring upon the collective consciousness, even if our minds cannot yet comprehend, only intuit what that means.

Note: If not otherwise indicated, all past life regression cases and examples are from the author’s therapeutic practice. Where required, names and identifying details were changed, to protect the privacy of the clients.

Introduction

In this paper, we shall examine the value of past life regression therapy for conscious evolution, in particular working with (negative) shadow material from both the individual and collective unconscious.

Past life regression – which can be defined as any spiritual-therapeutic technique using hypnosis or other altered states of consciousness to recover memories from apparent past incarnations – is generally dismissed by mainstream psychology and psychiatry as an invalid approach. Not much attention has so far been paid to the supportive evidence suggestive of reincarnation (see below) and therefore, material emerging from past life sessions is mostly construed as a product of confabulation, active imagination, cryptomnesia (consciously forgotten memories arising from the present life) or as the result of manipulative hypnotic suggestions.

This rejection can, of course, be seen as a manifestation of a current ‘paradigm war’ between the ‘old,’ materialist paradigm, which assumes that matter is fundamental and consciousness derivative of it and a ‘new’ paradigm which works with the assumption that consciousness is fundamental and cannot be accounted for in terms of matter. As Thomas Kuhn (1962) pointed out, incommensurability is in the nature of a paradigm shift: findings of the new paradigm cannot be proven or disproven by the rules of

the old paradigm and what may be logical in the new paradigm, is absurd within the old. If we assume that consciousness is an epiphenomenon of matter (the brain), it is absurd to think that after the brain dies, consciousness could move on into another form of existence. Only, when we assume that consciousness is fundamental, can we seriously begin to study phenomena such as out-of-body-experiences, life-after-life or reincarnation.

Yet, this apparent ‘paradigm war’ between the materialist and consciousness-based assumption is anything but new: it has been raging already when Plato published in his *Republic* (10.614–10.621) the world’s first recorded near-death experience 25 centuries ago. Today, however, instead of the need to take stands and see enemies, we can try a more integral approach and recognize the validity of both. Beyond doubt, the materialist paradigm has been spectacularly successful for technological advance and we have every reason to believe that it will continue to be successful without having to change its basic assumption. However, we have also seen that the materialist assumption has been spectacularly unsuccessful when it comes to saying anything of value about our human nature. According to the World Economic Forum’s 2017 Global Shaper’s Survey (2017), millennials identified the following as the top 5 greatest problems in the world: religious conflicts, poverty, inequality, wars, and environmental destruction. None of these are material in their nature and could be solved through technological advance alone. They all root in erratic, idiopathic, and out-of-control human behaviour. In our current times, ‘superior technologies are being used in the service of primitive emotions and instinctual impulses’ (Grof, 2000: 295).

Therefore, we shall adopt a consciousness-based paradigm for our present investigation because of its possible *usefulness* and scrutinize whether the reincarnational approach could be valid in therapy after all, especially to advance our inner evolution to match up with our technological advancement. According to integral theory, there is a current chance for a ‘monumental leap in meaning’ (Graves, 1974): if a critical 10% of people reach the tipping point of the integral (holistic, systemic, ‘teal’ and ‘turquoise’) state, values and (partial) truths of all the preceding levels of development can be integrated, with the power to cause a revolutionary shift in consciousness. In the words of Ken Wilber (2017) ‘the human race, for the first time in its history is heading toward at least the possibility of a world beyond major and deep-seated conflict, and toward one marked more and more often by mutual tolerance, embrace, peace, inclusion, and compassion. And all we have to do for this to happen is just continue to grow.’

In this paper, we shall ask: what can such an exotic thing as past life therapy contribute to the advancing of human consciousness to this next, truly integral stage and beyond? What are its inherent powers, especially regarding its particular access to shadow, which can help humans to take all the experiential legacies of the past and learn its lessons? What can it do to help overcome all the shadow manifestations we are currently experiencing in the global body politic, causing environmental and human disasters still?

Past Life Regression Therapy in a Developmental Context

For those who look, the evidence suggesting that there could be a continuity of consciousness from one life to the next is remarkable. Borrowing the words of Erwin Schrödinger, there seems to be a ‘long chain of intellectual ancestors’ and that is to be understood as ‘not a mere allegory, but an *eternal memory*’ (Schrödinger in Moore, 1994, emphasis added). The intriguing body of research conducted by

Ian Stevenson, Jim Tucker (currently his successor at the University of Virginia), Erlendur Haraldsson (University of Iceland), and others has brought to light a surprising array of cases regarding children who claim to remember a previous life. These children produced concrete details about those lives (names, locations, personal relationships, event sequences, sometimes even descriptions of mortal wounds which match current birthmarks) – which could be verified, excluding normal means through which these facts could have been obtained (see e.g. Stevenson 1974, 1997; Tucker, 2013; Haraldsson/Matlock, 2016). This type of research suggests that some sort of ‘eternal memory’ exists: somehow data can transmit from a by-gone life to a present existence. Such memories may also emerge in any therapeutic or spiritual setting which is ‘capable of penetrating to particularly deep levels of the psyche’ (Bache, 1994: 44), such as hypnotherapy, rebirthing (e.g. Orr/Ray, 1977), sensory deprivation (e.g. Lilly, 1972), holonomic integration (e.g. Grof, 1988), and psychedelic psychotherapies (e.g. Grof, 1980).

Both for practising therapists and consciousness researchers, interpreting the data which comes up in these contexts of children or clients remembering past lives, can be quite an intellectual challenge – so complex that some would downright call it an ‘intellectual nightmare’ (cf. Bache, 1994: 44-45). Reincarnation is only one possible interpretation, and even if we chose to adhere to it, the question remains: what is it actually that incarnates?

If we compare various theories which are developed to answer this question, we notice that we are dealing with different understandings at *different developmental stages*. There seems to be an evolution to the interpretation of reincarnation (cf. Grof, 1998: 159-185): there are various interpretations which can offer different therapeutic benefits for clients at different developmental stages:

1. The Metaphorical Stage

At this baseline stage, reincarnation as metaphysical reality is dismissed on rational grounds, in accordance with our current, materialist understanding of science. This stage would correspond to the orange stage of spiral dynamics (see Beck/Cowan, 1996) or Piaget’s formal-operational stage. Even though reincarnation is dismissed on objective-rational grounds, the notion of past lives can be used in therapy at this stage. Past lives are then seen as metaphorical stories, which can help with changing behavioural patterns. For instance, some clients may have issues which are too close to comfort to face directly: exposing the truth would hurt their self-regard in a way they cannot handle. Past life sessions can give their unconscious mind the opportunity to bring stories (whether historically true or not) into awareness, which slowly and gradually illuminate the issue. Similarly, when having to deal with fear or a phobia, one can work with that in a past life context. Whether or not that past life existed historically or not, the session can have a positive therapeutic effect: visualising the fear-inducing stimulus in various contexts has the same effect as systematic desensitisation: it teaches the mind via repeatedly imaged exposure to withstand the stimulus without adverse reaction.

2. The ‘Skin-Encapsulated Ego’ Stage

At this next stage of understanding, reincarnation is taken *prima facie*: life is cyclical, death is followed by a new birth, the personality or – using Alan Watts’ phrase – the ‘skin-encapsulated ego’ returns at a new time, in a new form. This understanding, as Grof (2000: 240-241) pointed out, is far

more superior than ignoring the evidence, but is psychologically not unproblematic in its application. It may cause massive ego-inflation, and serve as just another attempt within the *Atman Project* (Wilber, 1996) to escape the personal fear of death. This type of understanding may be typical for the green stage of spiral dynamic: reincarnational processes are seen from a rather flat perspective as if the same would happen to every individual who died and who is therefore meant to be reborn. If one case report says that a soul was planning its new life before rebirth, it is quickly concluded that all souls are planning their lives before birth. If one case report says that the soul was choosing their parents for karmic learning, all souls are choosing their parents for karmic learning. Past life regression can, however, be distinctly useful at this (and the previous) stage, for treating otherwise incurable symptoms. Noordegraaf published a remarkable case about a 12-year old Belgian boy Ludovic, who suffered from incurable symptoms: he was shaking and so afraid of falling that he used crutches. Doctors, not knowing what his condition was or where it came from, labelled it 'Minimal Brain Disorder,' and left it untreated. Past life regression revealed an uncanny memory of something coming from the sky, skin burning, body burning, Earth trembling, and finally: a great blackness. It turned out that Ludovic was apparently accessing a past life during which he died in the atomic bomb attack on Hiroshima. After two regression sessions his legs stopped trembling and he no longer needed the crutches (Noordegraaf in Blake Lucas, 2012: 354-366).

3. The 'Higher Self' Stage

At a higher level, the evolutionary nature of the reincarnational process becomes more evident. It is assumed that there is a higher entity of consciousness which collects and integrates the experiences of each individual life. The perspective of this *Higher Self* or *Oversoul* (Jane Roberts) can be used in therapy to highlight that one's life is happening in a larger system context. Issues which arise from past lives are scrutinised against the crucial experiences of the current life (what Stan Grof calls *condensed experiences*), in order to find a path which connects all previous dots and leads to finding transpersonal higher meaning. This approach corresponds with the revolutionary leap which occurs when spiral dynamic turns into its 'teal' stage, allowing for a truly systemic view, integrating all previous views and experiences.

4. The Stage of 'Consciousness as Singularity'

Finally, at the highest stage, consciousness is seen as a singularity. All past, present and future lives are seen as experiences of the one consciousness. 'Only the *I am* incarnates,' says Ken Wilber (2012), very much in line with the understanding of *Brahman* in Hinduism, the creative principle itself.

At this level (turquoise and higher), past life work can unfold its most powerful potential: when an individual is willing to see his or her (past and present) lives, as well as *all* past lives as belonging to the same single consciousness of One Self, healing can extend from the individual to collective levels. In this paper, we will explore this potential, taking shadow work – as one of the most impactful areas in past-life theory – as an example.

Shadow Work: A Dark Dance across All Four Quadrants

When C G Jung first described his seminal concept of the shadow, it was very much conceived for the individual. The shadow – described as the sum of all unconscious elements of the personality which the ego did not want to identify with – was detected in personal dreams and visions, typically even appeared of the same sex as the dreamer (von Franz in Jung, 1978: 175). It was the patient's job on the path to *individuation* to bring the shadow elements into the light of consciousness and integrate them into an increasingly more and more authentic personality (including elements of the 'golden' shadow, i.e. positive, but suppressed elements of the personality, such as undeveloped talents).

However, later therapists – albeit less famously so – have found structures within the psyche which point toward a strongly collective connotation of the shadow. Within the somewhat forgotten works of Otto Rank – as recently rediscovered by Robert Kramer (2019) – we can find an interesting genesis of the *guilt* feeling: it does not only arise from committing wrong against another, or residual sexual feelings, and the like but is inherent in the willingness to individualize ourselves – as that might put us at odds with the community. Guilt, which ultimately leads to the formation of shadow material, is described by Rank (1996: 158) as a *boundary* phenomenon, which arises at the eternal oscillation between the need for individuation and the need for attachment, between the desire to separate and the desire to unite, between the individual, creative solitude of freedom and the acceptance within the community, between independence and dependence, aloneness and intimacy, will and love (see Kramer, 2019: 70-74). Erich Neumann (1990) put it bluntly: 'All those qualities, capacities and tendencies' he writes 'which *do not harmonize with the collective values* – everything that shuns the light of public opinion, in fact – now come together to form the shadow' [emphasis added].

The individual shadow is intimately related to the collective. Ken Wilber's well-known 'Four Quadrant Model' can help us analyse the underlying mechanisms (for an overview see e.g. Paulson, 2007), for it is a map which allows any dimension of any issue to be analysed along two axes: the internal-external axis and the individual-collective axis. Thus shadow issues can be viewed from the perspective of any of the four quadrants, which are formed by the crossing of these two axes:

- An exterior-individual manifestation of the shadow occurs when a person sees the shadow in the behaviour of someone else (projection) – this belongs to the *Upper Right Quadrant*.
- An internal-individual detection of the shadow occurs when a person begins to see the shadow within their own personality and forms willingness to confront unwanted impulses and suppressed material – this belongs to the *Upper Left Quadrant*.
- There are dramatic shadow manifestations in both collective quadrants. Genocidal states are exterior-collective manifestations of the shadow and thus belong to the *Lower Right Quadrant*.
- The racial pain as well as collective guilt left behind by the genocide and other collective tragedies are interior-collective shadow manifestations and thus belong to the *Lower Left Quadrant*.

<p style="text-align: center;">Interior-Individual (Upper Left Quadrant)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Intentional:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Shadow work as confrontation with one's own conscience and/or victimhood</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Exterior-Individual (Upper Right Quadrant)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Behavioural:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Seeing the shadow as external behaviour (projection)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Interior-Collective (Lower Left Quadrant)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Cultural:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Collective guilt and "racial pain bodies"</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Exterior-Collective (Lower Right Quadrant)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Social:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Genocidal states, human rights violations</p>

Shadow Work in Four Quadrants

Successful shadow work requires the repeated and ongoing changing of the perspectives: observed shadow behaviour requires going within and understanding the intention behind the action, personal shadow needs to be scrutinized against the expectations of society, and so on. Past life regression therapy is particularly applicable to do this, as it allows the individual to switch personal perspectives multiple times. It is a dark dance from the external to the internal and back, from the individual to the collective and back, always back and forth... until all manifestations are detected, cleaned up and integrated.

We shall now have a look at how past life regression therapy brings up and deals with the shadow, how it facilitates the change of perspectives and how it may contribute towards a greater understanding of the global psyche, thus hopefully to a decrease in global conflict and an increase in interconnectedness.

Descending into Darkness: Commencing with Shadow Work in Past Life Hypnotherapy

In my practice, conducting past life regression sessions has never been a *l'art pour l'art* endeavour, rather a purposeful attempt to shed more light on what Stan Grof calls *condensed experiences* of the client: issues which at the present form their challenges and hold their potential. The notion of an *existential program* (cf. Vieira, 1997) is central in this approach: it is assumed that individuals can find – and build – their personal purpose by connecting the dots of the past with the present and thereby envision the trajectory of their highest-path evolutionary future.

To venture into the karmic-personal-mythical past, two elements are required: 1) a relaxed, focused state of mind (per definition a light hypnotic trance) and 2) a level of dissociation from current-day reality and identity.

For this purpose, I developed the *Mist of Time* induction which takes the client through all the states of consciousness s/he has already experienced or at least is capable of experiencing. It begins with the acknowledgement of the gross waking state: one's surroundings, feelings, thoughts, finally breathing – the observation of which gradually moves into mindfulness, preparing for an immersive

internal representation (guided meditation) which evokes the subtle state. The client is encouraged to speak at certain parts of the process, to get used to communicating in an altered state of consciousness. The most important part comes when the client enters the *Mist of Time*, which is a metaphor for the primordial Emptiness, which has existed before all creation and is outside of time and space (causal state). Clients with experiences in meditation have an advantage at this stage. Some are capable of experiencing non-duality, but that is not necessarily of any advantage for this particular exercise. They only need to dwell in the primordial Emptiness. From here clients receive the instruction to leave the *Mist of Time* at another shore, at a different time, in a different life.

Exterior – Individual Shadow Experiences (Upper Right Quadrant)

At this point, the inner journey can ‘drop’ the traveller anywhere (seemingly regardless of what the intent for the particular therapeutic session was): into any sort of expected or unexpected, sometimes bizarre, frightening or bewildering scenario. I had clients who suddenly found themselves being sold by their own parents or killing their children because an enemy was approaching. Others found themselves tied to the ground, with eyelids cut off, dying slowly, while force-staring into the sun, or in the middle of a Vietnam war combat zone, or dying abandoned in a hot, middle-Eastern village. One client could not even speak properly while he experienced himself being kidnapped as a child by an unknown tribe, while another was shocked by fear, as she was alone underground, in some seemingly prehistoric hiding place.

In the first case we shall visit in-depth, Hayashi, an advanced spiritual practitioner in his current life – a senior Buddhist monk as well as an 8th Dan karate master – found himself in a typical situation of external shadow manifestation. There he was in a jungle setting, tied to a post and wounded by others:

TORTURED TO DEATH

Therapist (T): Can you see or feel your body?

Client (C): Yes. I'm bleeding from wounds on my body, on my chest and at my side. I can see blood going out. I'm tied to a post.

T: Who tied you there?

C: I encountered a group here in the jungle. I was comfortable here, but as it just happened down the path, I encountered this group... don't know who they are, but I don't have a good feeling about seeing them. I get a sense of panic because I don't think I'm capable of escaping. I'm not part of their tribe. They make it look like it's all ok, but they just want to get closer to me. My options aren't good: I'm running, terrified. This is all just a thrill for them! They don't care about my life a bit. They set a post, tie me up... one of them has a knife and sticks it into my right side, my lungs collapse. This is extreme terror, I just want to be somewhere else. Now I remember: I was tortured to death!

Hayashi found the experience emotionally touching: How does one deal with the ‘karmic’ memory of being tortured to death? Shadow encounters in past-life therapy typically undergo three

stages, the names and exact descriptions of which vary with different therapists (c.f. Blake Lucas, 2012: 36-38), yet describe a similar process:

- First, there is the *stage of identification* (or re-living): here the client experiences internally a re-living of past-life event(s). Powerful abreactions (crying, expression of fear etc.) are common at this stage, in which many therapists see great value. Re-experiencing the feelings is considered to ‘discharge the energy tied up with the memory’ (Fiore cited by Blake Lucas, 2012: 39).

- After that, however, therapy enters into a phase during which the client gradually *disidentifies* from the particular experience. This is a time for metaphorical exploration and the search for patterns. The client takes up more and more a *witness position* (Dethlefsen in Blake Lucas, 2012: 40-41), which allows for deeper change to occur on a cognitive learning level: patterns can be restructured, reframed and the client can gain an enormous amount of conscious knowledge (cf. Blake Lucas, 2012: 40-41).

- In addition, if the client is at the appropriate level, s/he can experience an even wider perspective and gain *transpersonal* insights from the point of view of a higher self or even the singularity of consciousness.

Hayashi quickly and almost automatically moved to the second and third stage, as his session progressed. After he re-experienced being killed at that improvised torture post, I suggested him to go to the actual moment of his death and asked the all-important question:

T: *What is your predominant thought or feeling in the moment of death?*

C: *I’m thinking that I don’t want that to ever happen again. Then I’m going far away. I want to be safe, I want to be free. I want to understand why such things happen. I have no sense of revenge or anger, I just want to prevent anything like this from happening again. I’m keeping to myself and observing. I’m replaying all my feelings: there must be a sensitivity that allows a person to avoid negative energy. Some part of me, throughout this experience, seems very detached, ancient, cosmic, supportive, despite the terror – it feels older than the experience.*

I can sense somebody here, in this bardo state, somebody here before me, who was praying to reduce my suffering.

T: *Go to that person now!*

C: *(Emotional.) I’m looking at this person from a distance of maybe a hundred feet. He is like a monk with a shaved head, wears brown robes and is kneeling, surrounded by scriptures and candles. He knows that I am there, he knew that I was coming, he knows who I am and... I am him!*

Reaching this transpersonal moment, Hayashi learned a truth which is not only relevant for him personally, but for the entire cosmic evolution of consciousness. The monk revealed to him:

C: *Those individuals who have experienced deep, traumatic pain, will offer the most powerful lessons for people to break away from all the trances of social conditionings. Such people know the effects of such trance states.*

Finally, Hayashi reaches the conclusion:

I was supposed to go through these traumas!

What we can observe here, is a powerful example of the *subject-object shift*: the subject of one stage becomes the object of the subject of the next stage (Kegan, 1994). To begin with, Hayashi identified with the subject of the tortured boy, but as he moved to a more transpersonal stage, the boy became the object of his scrutiny, and both he and the boy became the object of scrutiny from the higher self perspective of the monk. The subject-object shift is a well-observed process in human development, which happens naturally, but becoming consciously aware of it, accelerates the evolutionary process. Past life therapy provides an excellent *training ground* for learning about and making such a shift.

Sometimes the inner processes guide this shift, like in Hayashi's case, at other times the client may get stuck at the stage of identification with the victim. In that case, it is a calling for the therapist to bring forth a technique which can budge the client's thinking to a more resourceful level. A prime example of such a technique is called *getting into the mind of the opponent*.

Therapist Hazel Dunning describes a striking case of its application. One of her clients, Lois, remembered a past life in which she was burned at the stake for being an evil witch after she attempted to heal a baby with herbs and the laying on of hands. The priests who led the execution told her that she could never be forgiven and her soul would burn in hell forever. To overcome the trauma, her therapist asked her to use her intuition and get into the minds and feelings of these priests and see what prompted their actions at the time. To her surprise, Lois discovered that the priests did not hate her, but were genuinely afraid of her, as they believed she was indeed working with the devil. As a result of this insight, Lois could release the deep-seated feeling of guilt and could see her healing talent as something good and worthwhile to pursue (Denning in Blake Lucas: 204-205).

Getting into the mind of the opponent begins to shift the attention from the external behaviour to the internal landscape, and this happens even more so when clients begin to confront cases which manifest the shadow within. These constitute a qualitatively different set of cases, which belong in the interior-individual world of the *upper left quadrant*. In these cases, courageous clients perceive themselves not as victims, but as perpetrators.

Interior – Individual Shadow Experiences (Upper Left Quadrant)

When Milgram first published the results of his famous experiments on obedience in 1963, the revelation that the overwhelming majority of ordinary citizens was willing to administer painful, potentially even lethal doses of electric shocks to fellow humans when ordered by an authority figure, sent a shock-wave through the world of psychology (Milgram, 1963). What remained, however, a lesser-studied aspect of the infamous experiments, was the profound emotional stress the *participants* suffered, as they gained an unexpected inflicted insight into the dark side of their own nature. Similar effects await past life regressions clients, who may experience themselves not as victims, but as the aggressors. Yet, as with the Milgram participants – of whom 84% in retrospect reported that they were 'glad' or 'very glad' that they have participated (Milgram, 1974: 195) – most clients find such an experience hard, but rewarding, and an invaluable learning experience.

First, clients tend to be confronted with a past life memory which makes them feel guilty from their present vantage point, but at the time of committing the deed, the perpetrators were largely unaware of its wrong. I had a client who abused and exploited a once-beloved pet elephant for profit,

and another, who killed his own (pre-historic) wife for she dared to share their food with others. Some were slave drivers, others organised gladiators for the Roman arena. In none of these cases were the perpetrators aware of any wrong-doing at the time of those lives, like in the following two cases, which both belong to one person living today:

LIFE AS A ROBBER

In that life, I was born in a simple feudal village. As a young man, I was engaged with the most beautiful girl in our village. She had long, thick golden hair and a slender figure with ample bosom. But then the feudal lord exercised his 'right' and slept with her on the first night. But not only that: at the end, he married her and turned her into a lady. I ran away and asked myself what it was that he had and I did not. Slowly, it dawned on me that he had a castle and I did not, so I became obsessed with the idea of obtaining a castle. With time, I gathered a growing fellowship consisting of vagabonds, who helped me to re-build a dilapidated ruin. Soon, we lived like lords ourselves and whoever approached our territory, we attacked first: we killed the adults, only kept a few tasty females as our concubines and strong children to grow up as our soldiers. We never even for a moment questioned the morality of this! Over time I gained too much power as an outlaw ruler that the feudal lords of the region came as an army alliance against me and formed a ring against the entire castle, systematically beginning to starve us out. One by one, my men surrendered. Only I remained, withdrawing into my own dungeon, where I died of thirst and hunger rather than giving up my fortress. If I ever felt any remorse, so it was in those last, dying hours, because I actually called for a priest to come and see me. But the priest was too afraid, so I died alone, hating myself and hating the Church.

In a more recent past life of the same individual, the same theme of (first at least) not noticing the wrong of one's behaviour, returns:

THE NAZI INTERROGATOR

I remember this make-shift office building, which consisted of a single corridor and some rooms on one side. I was working there as an interrogator. My methods were very efficient: I don't think that I ever had to rely on torture, I had excellent skills to penetrate the mind of anyone. Never did I question though what the obtained information was used for. Previously I had been working as a teacher and an athletic coach, organising summer camps for the boys. Hitlerjugend had its glamorous sides: those kids learned discipline, camaraderie and love for the outdoors. We were all in great shape. Personally, I was very much drawn to the idea of the Übermensch: that somehow we can be more than we currently are and one day we may become super-human. Later in that life, during the war, I was removed from the office, which I think happened because of a jealous superior. After that, I experienced the harsh reality of war. Vaguely, I can recall us herding a ragged group of severely undernourished people on a muddy road. We raped the women. I did, too, because we all did it. But there was this one woman, as I held her in my captive embrace, a sense of guilt overcame me. I tried to turn my violence into a comforting hug – not sure how she felt about it. I was relieved when soon after that, somehow I got shot and died.

Recollection such as these can have a profound, hard-to-deal-with, even scattering sort of psychological impact, but – fully in accordance with the quote attributed to Joseph Campbell ‘where you stumble there lies your treasure’ – at places of past moral disasters, great treasures for learning can be found.

Studying these type of cases, it becomes apparent that the moral wrongs, which clearly constitute unethical behaviour from the present vantage point, were committed largely unquestioned and with an almost complete lack of awareness at the time. The *ROBBER* committed murder after murder without thinking twice and the *NAZI INTERROGATOR* supported a war-criminal cause without ever checking where his actions were ultimately leading (i.e. to mass-murdering people). This is a mechanism which could be observed in virtually every past life case involving unethical behaviour: the moral wrong clearly visible from the present stage, was a moral blind spot of its time. To put it into one formula:

The moral wrong obvious at Stage X+1, is a *moral blind spot* at Stage X.

When clients become aware of the truth behind this simple, yet profound formula, it allows them to make their current life to an object of their observation also. This provides a further training ground to see the present life stage more objectively. To realise that each stage has its blind spots, may help to detect them in the present. (A current moral blind spot could, for instance, be: failing to condemn factory farming despite the tremendous suffering it causes to animals while being aware of the moral wrong animal abuse constitutes in a domestic context.)

Those who become aware of the moral blind spots which are inherent in every stage of our development and know of their innate capability of – intentionally or unintentionally – committing evil at any moment, are the only ones who can – moment for moment – search for and delete unethical elements in themselves. Those are the ones who may *not* comply in a *Milgram* type of setting. Once this awareness is reached, a large part of the overall *cleaning up* process is concluded.

However, shadow work has a complementary side to it, too: the positive element (cf. Wilber, 2017). Instead of stagnating in a forever feeling of guilt, resources need to be found, to move beyond the guilt and utilise the once shadow energy for a positive purpose. This is especially important, as the effect of having been a perpetrator in a past life generally is that the person experiences a rather restrained current life: not so much restrained by circumstances, rather by feelings of inner guilt and sadness. (One client called it the *Grundtraurigkeit*, a feeling of baseline sadness. Another client, who remembered a past life as a high profile SS officer, describes his life at the moment as very low-key: even though he has the material means and the educational background to make more of his life, he moves ‘as if the hand-brakes were on.’)

One central technique which has proven invaluable in this regard consists of *finding the positive intent* behind every action. If we look at the case of the *ROBBER*, there was violence, but there was also the positive intent of raising one’s social status through personal effort and to fight social injustice inherent in feudal institutions like the supposed *ius primae noctis*¹. Even in the case of the *NAZI INTERROGATOR* the initial intent was definitely positive: the idea of the *Übermensch* in its pristine form was an early expression of the idea of a conscious evolution (cf. Nietzsche, 1961), only in its ideologically polluted forms (involving the idea of a biologically superior race and using it to justify genocide and eugenics)

¹ Latin for the ‘right of the first night,’ or the ‘lord’s right’ to sleep with virgin brides from his villages. It is highly disputed whether the institution ever existed as a legal right, or was rather a historic myth describing the factual power a feudal lord had to seduce subordinate women.

does it become an instrument for evil. The case of the *INTERROGATOR* is particularly interesting as he has personally not done anything wrong (until the very end at least): his shadow consisted in complying with a criminal regime, which slowly sneaked forward and took over people's unaware minds. This kind of shadow no longer belongs to the individual realm but is a collective phenomenon, which requires our utmost attention, as it does not only lurk in the past but determines our present.

Exterior – Collective Shadow Experiences (Lower Right Quadrant)

Yonassan Gershom, an ordained rabbi based in Minnesota, published a series of highly remarkable books, in which he features people who remember having been victims of the Holocaust in previous lives. His mystical encounter with reincarnation began when a young Norwegian woman found her way to his home and confessed to the rabbi that she felt an unexplainable, deep connection with the Holocaust. During their conversation, she broke down in tears hearing the tunes of *Ani Maamin*, a hymn of faith sung by many thousands of Jews as they were led into the gas chambers (Gershom, 1992: 2). Since that evening, Rabbi Gershom connected cases of hundreds of people who regained memories through various means – dreams, visions, déjà vu, past-life readings, intuition, spirit guides, automatic writing, and hypnotherapy – of having died in the Holocaust (Gershom, 1992; 1996).

Many of the cases were of enormous personal significance and sometimes revealed challenging reincarnational links. Consider, for instance, a Swedish girl who had Holocaust flashbacks all her life and then found out that her hypnotherapist has been the commandant of the camp where she used to be incarcerated, and with whom she had a strange – abusive yet sometimes also loving relationship – at that time (Gershom, 1996: 22-32). Even more dramatically, an Australian Jewish woman found out that her daughter Leah was the reincarnation of the officer who pushed her and her baby-brother into the gas chamber. Remarkably, the daughter had remembered something herself. When the mother did not want to tell her about these Holocaust memories, she asked: ‘Mummy, I was on the other side, wasn’t I?’

Rabbi Gershom’s research is remarkable, not only for discovering past life cases from the Holocaust (and for finding a way to reconcile the tenet reincarnation with Jewish spirituality), but also for showing that such memories did not only come up among people who are (currently) Jewish, but who were from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Traditionally, in cultures knowing about reincarnation, there is often the concept of an ethnic soul: it is implied that rebirth occurs within the same people: a Druze is always reborn as a Druze (Dwairy, 2006: 30), the Dalai Lama and other *tulkus*² are expected to be Tibetan, or in many Native American tribes their members are believed to come back into the same tribe, even into the same family line (Mills cited by Jeffrey, 1992: 176) etc. However, Gershom’s research suggests that the trauma suffered from the Holocaust would not remain within strict ethnic boundaries – what Eckhart Tolle would call the Jewish collective pain body (Tolle, 2005: 159) – but reverberates into the collective pain body of the whole of humanity.

During World War II, Berlin-based journalist Charlotte Beradt collected and smuggled out of Germany dreams of people during the Nazi totalitarian era (Beradt, 2016). Her in-depth collection shows that it was not just Jewish (or else directly persecuted) people who lived with fear infiltrating their deepest unconscious, but everyone. The strongest expressions of fear were among the Jewish people:

² In Tibetan Buddhism, *tulkus* are reincarnated custodians of a specific lineage. Finding them usually involves a specific process which involves a search party from the monastery and a battery of tests the candidate toddler has to pass.

their dreams even foreshadowed the Holocaust killings years before they historically happened, feeling the need to flee the country (there were dreams about carrying papers everywhere, being held back at the border, looking for the last land on Earth where the Jews were still accepted and the like) – but dreams of the entire population were also filled with paralysing, Kafkaesque fear and powerlessness (she reported dreams like the lamp in the living room turning into Nazi surveillance equipment or people being forced to move the bottom of the sea, because all apartments became public and much more like that).

Collective trauma of such magnitude is like a continental-size earthquake which devastates everyone in its epicentre but sends shock-waves of devastation even to distant shores. Genocide harms the victims, first and foremost, but as Gershom's past life and Beradt's dream research demonstrates, it reaches further. The psychological implications of the overall insane violence of the 20th century we have not yet begun to understand.

While writing this paper, my dear friend Dorothy Stern-Kucha, herself from a Holocaust victim family, shared with me a chilling thought (personal communication, August 16, 2019), which came to her while watching a film on the Woodstock festival. 'For me,' she wrote from the Oregon coast 'it turned into a nightmare. I realised, seeing the hillside full of 400.000 kids that it was a mere fraction of the Jews killed in Europe. I was devastated and continue to be haunted at imagining what 8 million people altogether would look like.' How can we work through a tragedy of that scale?

So far, we could not. Thomas Hübl (2019) who works extensively with collective trauma, pointed out that we live with a collective trauma that has not been psychologically released, therefore as a collective, we suffer from denial and suppression. We cannot stare at the Holocaust; as we cannot even begin to contemplate the (combined) 100 million victims of communist regimes, the casualties of the two world wars, or Rwanda, or Bosnia... as we make our morning coffee and get ready for work. The result is an ongoing, 24/7 maladaptive coping mechanism consisting of dissociation, desensitisation (in a sense of 'normalising the abnormal') and avoidance. The same mechanism, in turn, causes us to dissociate from the fact that we are currently causing a catastrophic environmental crisis, we can look at news clips of starving children without having to interrupt our dinner, while we also automatically avoid asking where the meat on our plate comes from.

Interior – Collective Shadow Experiences (Lower Left Quadrant)

The need to heal collective trauma is urgent. Past life therapy uniquely lends itself to effectuate the necessary shadow work. If we look at – for instance – the integral way of working with shadow, like the 3-2-1 method of 'facing it, talking to it and being it' (see Wilber 2017: 257-262), we can see that its power lies in shifting perspectives. The process requires the shadow material to be shifted from the third person to the second, and finally to the first-person perspective. It is in the very nature of past life therapy that such shifts occur – albeit not necessarily in this order, sometimes client gets the first person perspective 'inflicted' on them straight away.

The following case concerns Liz, an author in her current life, who researches the great metaphysical questions of life and death. Surprisingly, in one of her past life sessions, she identified with a life as a Nazi officer, who has been completely swallowed up by the collective trance of his time and even worked as a concentration camp officer.

MEMORIES OF A NAZI OFFICER

The Nazi officer lived out his life strictly and seriously to a degree that it tired him. He felt unsatisfied with his life, and at one point started to spend a lot of time at home alone, drinking.

- T: How old are you?
 C: 45.
 T: Where are you?
 C: At home. Alone. I have no family.
 T: Since when are you in your current job?
 C: Over twenty years. I've been with the military for over 20 years. My father had a mechanic workshop, but I wanted to go away from the country-side. I went to school and wanted to become something special. I joined the army. No more of that farmer's life.
 T: Do you like the military?
 C: Yes, here I could always prove myself. I worked myself up.
 T: What is your strength?
 C: Discipline. I do it like our Führer, his way, being so confident and strong. Yes. Hitler. He's doing it exactly right. Cleaning up, bringing order into things. Before him, people were just lost, frustrated and confused.
 T: What's your current work with the military?
 C: I'm a guard at the Konzentrationslager (concentration camp).
 T: What are your thoughts about this work?
 C: I'm glad to be part of it. Makes me feel empowered to control everything and to determine everything.
 T: Now move ahead in time. Is there any point in time later when you get doubts?
 C: Yes.
 T: Tell me about your doubts.
 C: I have a girl-friend. I start doubting her. Looks like she wants to leave me.
 T: Do you ever get a bad conscience about how you are treating people?
 C: Yes, I have yelled ... at my girl-friend a couple of times. I see it now, how I yelled at her.

At no point during the interview did the officer show any remorse over his function as a concentration camp guard. Later he was talking about meeting a little boy, the son of another guard, who started to question the morality of it all. Even then, the officer remained a proud and firm believer of the Nazi cause. He called the people they murdered 'Abschaum.'³

Like in the above cases of the *ROBBER* and *THE NAZI INTERROGATOR*, we are repeatedly stricken by the utter lack of remorse or even awareness of any wrong-doing. In addition, having been in the military for 20 years, made it especially easy for this *NAZI OFFICER* to bypass awareness and responsibility.

This is the point which makes it clear why shadow can become so titanic on the collective level. It is a psychological feature of group behaviour that in any large institution the individual simply tends to follow authority and assume the behaviour of the group is all right. It is the genesis of group evil: responsibility can endlessly be delegated, either vertically ('I'm just following orders') or horizontally ('we are not the competent department') within the institution (cf. Peck, 1990: 251). The group can act, but the group does not have a conscience.

A good example of this phenomenon is the modern business corporation. A corporation is a legal person – just as the genocidal state – and as such can act, enter contracts, acquire property, change the environment etc. Yet, psychologically speaking, it is a zombie, a non-human fiction that carries no

³ A German derogatory term which means *scum* or *human trash*.

faculty of rational thinking, self-awareness or consciousness. Its behaviour is governed by law (regulations and business contracts), not by conscience. Current US law, for instance (which is rapidly spreading across the globe) requires a corporation to maximize profit even if it has to perform immoral acts. (To illustrate what this means: if the CEO of a corporation is faced with a choice between a Plan A that is cheaper but harms the environment and/or violates human rights and a Plan B which is ethically correct but would be more expensive for the shareholders, s/he is obliged by law to choose the unethical, but cheaper option.) Thus, our very legal system is a manifestation of a collective shadow, which we have not yet brought to light: here we have our corporations, in lack of a higher purpose, running blindly amok in the world (cf. Mitchell, 2001). Thus the greatest need for shadow work is on the collective level, but the dilemma is: the collective (a group) neither has conscience nor holds the necessary awareness for conducting such work.

One of Liz's other sessions seemed to hold a key to this dilemma. We attempted to conduct an – epistemologically very problematic, but spiritually highly interesting – session into the period of in-between-lives. In this particular state of mind, she received information from whom she called her 'guides' regarding an experience in the *present* incarnation: in her early 20s, Liz contracted HIV. Rather than seeing it as a punitive or retributive 'karma' from her Nazi past life, the guides pointed out something interesting. They said that the virus unites. It unites different people of all cultures and continents, poor and rich alike. Thus HIV can be seen as *the shadow manifestation of a positive intent*, which she brought into this life, namely to find a remedial measure to counter the separation caused by the Nazis. As a disease it is a shadow manifestation: it stems from the suppression of people (from the outside, in form of social and governmental suppression of freedom in the culture and from the inside, in form of suppression of one's own needs and feelings). But the aim to find a cure for HIV can serve as a unified cause. Liz said:

C: In my mind and experience HIV separates and isolates people. It's interesting to see that is is supposed to unite us. I never thought of it this way.

Remarkably, Liz's guides seem to have suggested the same on the collective level that Viktor Frankl suggested on the individual level (see *logotherapy*, e.g. Frankl, 1997): in order to overcome trauma, gain resilience, and attain mental health, one must find *meaning* in life – and a group must find a *unified cause*. Schools of integral and positive psychology have advanced Frankl's idea and included further elements of well-being, such as positive emotions, engagement, accomplishment, and positive relationships (e.g. Seligman, 2012: 16-20), all of which, however, constitute meaning in a sense that they give life intrinsic value. *Meaning* is near-impossible to quantify and describe scientifically, but on a subjective, personal and transpersonal level its absolute power can be unmistakably experienced. The only dreams collected by Charlotte Beradt (see above) during the Nazi era, which weren't nightmarish, were the ones dreamt by resistance fighters. There was no Kafkaesque absurdity and paralysing fear in their dreams: there was a sense of adventure, also a sense of real danger, yes, but their actions carried meaning and turned suffering into hope. Here is a dream:

On a sunny day, I carried a child in a long white dress to be baptized. The way to the church was leading up a steep mountain. Yet, firmly and safely I carried the child. Unexpectedly, a crevasse opened in front of me on the glacier. I plunged into the abyss, but before that, I just had enough time to lay the child safely on the other side.

This was the dream Sophie Scholl dreamt on the night before her execution (Scholl cited by Beradt, 2016: 99, own translation). She interpreted its meaning to her cellmate as follows:

The child in the white dress is our idea. The idea will prevail in spite of all obstacles. We were permitted to be pioneers, but we must die early for the sake of that idea (Ibid.: 99-100).

Scholl's child, the idea of freedom indeed survived: one of the anti-Nazi leaflets she distributed with her friends and for which she got condemned to death, eventually reached the UK: the Allied Forces dropped them in millionfold copies all over Germany in mid-1943.

This is the ultimate human power and source of greatness: the ability to hold on to a higher meaning even to the cost of one's own self and life. At the same time, however, this is the Catch 22 of collective shadow work: while an individual can hold an idea, the collective cannot. While the individual can stay alive despite the hardest of circumstances for meaning, or even willing to die for it, history has demonstrated that the noblest of ideas become rotten when their custodian becomes the collective: religious truths, ideas of socialism and evolution all became excuses of mass-murder on the large scale. As we have seen, this happens easily because the collective has no conscience. The group cannot hold consciousness? Or can it?

Merging Minds:

Building a Collective Superconscious

According to the concept of tetra-prehension in integral theory, if an item in one quadrant is evolving, this occurs simultaneously in all of them (Wilber, 2018: 99). If human individuals learn to heal themselves through meaning, so must the collective. Else, this evolutionary step will not survive and not be transmitted into the future.

We have indications that a group can begin to form higher meaning through a higher group-consciousness. The following account comes from a client who has accessed the in-between-lives state. As mentioned above, this is one of the hardest to access states of mind: whatever happens after death, is famous for the ineffability of the experience. Yet, clients bring back valuable learning material and are therefore often willing to create a metaphoric narrative for the occurrence. One message I have repeatedly heard in one form or the other, tells about the value of human experience, like this one:

I have died and my consciousness is floating away in space. I feel like a piece of a 3D puzzle. All the pieces of the puzzle come together and form a place like the Death Star in the Star Wars movies – not that it's evil, but it is gigantic, like a planet, round and computer-like. When all the pieces come together, and I am only one of them, this system starts to compute all the life-experiences we accumulated. Life on earth, as it turns out, is not so much a school, more like an experiment or a research facility: we are – consciousness is – aiming at finding the existence of greatest beauty, happiness and value. When the computation is finished and the consequences of our actions have been drawn, the globe explodes and we go back into new lives, in search for new experiences.

The idea of the unity of consciousness on a higher plane is a well-known experience among mystics of all times. Yet, while incarnated on earth, it has mostly been unknown.

However, as consciousness evolves, a higher order of intelligence seems to be emerging and becomes conceivable. At the moment, it may exist mostly as a potentiality. Theoreticians have brought the idea forth, such as de Chardin with the concept of the *noosphere*, Burr with his blueprint for immortality, the *L-fields*, or Sheldrake's much-cited *morphogenetic fields*. In his book, *Spontaneous Evolution*, Bruce Lipton suggests that on the level we are evolving towards, human consciousness will merge into group consciousness(es), very much in a way as cells once upon a time first came together to form an organ, all the way up to a complex organism. Those humans, who share similar goals, form groups and these groups will serve as various organs of the higher consciousness.

C G Jung wrote extensively about the collective subconscious, but never postulated a *collective super-conscious* – I believe because, at his time, it did not yet exist. But today, we have some leading-edge observations which demonstrate that the combined intent of individuals can begin to form a higher, supra-individual form of consciousness. Bache observed the rising of group consciousness in a college classroom context, most notably in the form of rising synchronicities among the group members, which suggested the building of a higher intelligence. The positive effects of focused and combined intent of a group are known since the 1993 experiment, during which thousands of transcendental meditation practitioners succeeded in lowering the local crime rate. The president of the *International Association for the Study of Dreams*, Jean Campbell (2006), describes a series of experiments in which participants were intending to share dreams – and the experiments had to be abandoned, not because they were unsuccessful, rather because they were too successful, arising too much of the natural fear of the unknown which shared dreams evoked in the participants.

Despite the intriguing nature of this topic, the nature of a higher collective consciousness, which can give humanity unified purpose, remains unknown. Today, largely, it only exists as a potentiality of which we know little: science cannot tell us much about it, neither can academic psychology. We can only make a thought experiment and imagine that we placed three tips of three of our fingers on a table-top. Now, imagine that small, 2D beings lived on this table-top who saw the three finger-tips as three distinctly separate points. If we wanted to explain to them that they are indeed the same hand, which belongs to one body, they would have to take our word for it and believe us or not, but they wouldn't be able to imagine 3D space from where they are. Similarly, we cannot yet imagine a higher dimensional reality of higher collective consciousness, yet we must. Every attempt to do so, to find ways to work in groups and build exercises to form unified fields of consciousness, will contribute towards the positive side of shadow work and towards the evolution of our species.

Perhaps when we rise to a higher level, we will see things differently. Perhaps we will see that all past lives, as all humans who ever lived are not just interconnected, but all part of the same body of consciousness. Perhaps from that level, we will see that all past lives are but lives and experiences of the one consciousness which knows that *I am*. Perhaps it becomes evident that every life ever lived, *I* lived. Every time I killed another, I killed myself. Every time I tortured another, I tortured myself. Every time I showed kindness to another, I was kind to myself. Every time I forgave someone, I forgave myself. Perhaps it becomes evident that all the shadow ever was cast by the light of my consciousness. Perhaps it becomes evident that consciousness as a singularity knows only one indispensable truth that

I was. I am. And I always will be.

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