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THE “PLACE OF JOY”: A COLLABORATIVE METHOD OF INDUCTION IN PAST LIFE REGRESSION

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Introduction

Past life regressions can add many dimensions to psychotherapy. They may release traumatic roots of current-life symptoms that have puzzled therapists and patients and have resisted more conventional psychotherapeutic approaches. They can be rapidly and profoundly transformative – not only in dealing with psychological issues but also in opening patients to spiritual awarenesses that are in and of themselves transformative. As with any abreactive therapies, regressions may involve strong emotional releases. These can be distressing and sometimes even traumatizing to patients. Establishing a Place of Joy is a way to help patients deal with these and other traumas.

Many patients start their past life regression therapy with an urgent desire to ‘find the culprits,’ be it they themselves or others. Yet, they are not prepared for the depth of sensation and knowledge that confronts them once they have commenced their journey through the veils of time and hidden knowledge to potentially stressful and traumatic past life roots of current issues.

For many years, there has been a prevailing myth in the therapy field: “Therapy should be long, hard work, and if it isn’t painful, it isn’t working.” Well, perhaps, it “ain’t necessarily so!” After all, why should our patients be subjected to misery? When patients have found their ‘Place of Joy’ to help them through their past life regression, they can travel through difficult times knowing that they can retreat to their peaceful, spiritual haven at any time. Regressions may be emotionally intense and deeply moving, bringing about rapid and profound transformations. They need not be as painful in ways that emotional and cognitive shifts are often experienced during conventional therapy.

Another myth is that the therapist knows best and should always take and remain in control. The hypnotic induction technique, ‘Place of Joy’, can be introduced to facilitate regressions, conduct them in a truly collaborative manner, with the patient working in a productive partnership, and prevent them from being traumatic. It is not surprising, given the terror induced by many performance hypnotists, that our patients approach the regression experience with dread and confusion. They are terrified of exposing their hidden-most fears and of getting to places from which there is ‘no return.’

Because of this mythology, I always start with what I describe as a ‘Place of Joy’ (Landau, in press). This induction technique allows them to go to a place and time earlier in this lifetime, or in a past or future lifetime. The only proviso is that they visit a place and time where they felt, or believe they would feel, peace, comfort, love and joy. Unlike many hypnotherapists, I use a very light level of trance to leave them in control and therefore able to access their resilience and maintain complete memory of the entire experience.

It is very helpful to explain to them that hypnosis is simply an increase in concentration and to reassure them that they will not do or say anything against their wishes. Once they realize that they are practicing self-hypnosis whenever they are lost in an exciting movie or novel, or

fantasizing about the outcome of an upcoming race or new relationship, they start to realize that hypnosis is not something to fear. They understand how easily they are lost in the moment, and also how easily they can be “woken from it,” or return to it. They start to understand that working at a level of light trance will allow them to remain in control and to retain their memory. I also explain to them very early on that if the experience becomes too intense at any time that they will be able to float out of their bodies and observe the events from above, or return to their safe haven, their ‘Place of Joy’.

The ‘Place of Joy’

I have found that it is preferable and far more enjoyable for the patients to start their regression searching for a place of beauty, joy, comfort, love and peace. This also reassures them and gives them a sense of calm and control. They can go to a place and time earlier in this lifetime, or in a past or future lifetime, focusing on a place and time where they felt joy, comfort, love and peace.

If they start their experience with the knowledge that they have a sanctuary to which they can retreat at any time, they are far better able to face the horrors that may await them in their journey of discovery. Once they have visited this place, I have them practice moving in and out of it, until they have learned and know beyond a doubt that they can return to it at will. I also have them practice rising out of the peaceful scene frequently enough that they know they have another alternative to bearing the pain of current life experience if things get too tough.

As a patient of mine, ‘Stella,’ recently reported, after having found her place of joy, “The whole process was far less intrusive than I had imagined it. It was safe and pleasant and allayed my fears. The feeling of absolute peace, beauty and truth has stayed with me and was such a pleasant surprise, rather than the terror and torture that I’d expected.”

Generally, the places they find are simple, uncomplicated and, as ‘Jacob’ put it, “I was expecting troubled lives and instead I found this ordinary, uncomplicated time and was only aware of the absence of pain and anxiety and the presence of a simple and calm joy and feeling of comfort. The sun was shining on me and I basked in its warmth and the encompassing safety of my father’s love. It was as though there never needed to be any intensity — no peaks and valleys. There are no more questions — it all just is.”

Another patient chose a quiet slate gray day with gentle rain on the roof while he cuddled in a large cozy chair on a porch; while yet another relaxed on the beach with the regular rhythm of the breaking waves. Another lay flat on pine needles listening to the gentle bubble of a brook and the sound of a breeze through the trees.

Frequently, I find that family members like to work together and really enjoy this form of regression, finding that it brings them relief in the middle of their grief and depression. Husbands and wives, parents and children often find the same places of calm, serenity and joy, and are able to reinforce each other’s experiences. Then, later in the work, when things get more difficult, they are able to be there for one another in a very special way that only someone who loves them could consider. This connectedness reinforces the family’s awareness of their resilience and the strength of the human spirit and reminds them that their families have endured across time and that if they draw on their mind-body-spirit continuum they too will survive and endure.

This ‘Place of Joy’ induction technique can be used for many purposes in dealing with trauma. For example, I use it with patients who are dealing with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, along

with a technique of mine very similar to Benor's WHEE. (Benor, 2000). It is also very useful for self-hypnosis for people struggling with insomnia.

The initial session: prior to starting the past life regression hypnosis

Prior to commencing with any hypnosis or regression, I take a complete history and work with the patient(s) to construct a transitional genogram and complete transitional field map. This is done to give me sound working knowledge of the prior history of the patient and his/her family, ensuring that I'm aware of any prior treatment, major or chronic illness in the patient or family and also whether any special diet or medicine is being used. It also allows me to get a sense of who the players might be in the drama that is about to unfold: Which of the current family members, close friends or colleagues have played an important role in past lives, or will in future scenarios? What were the relationships like? Were they left with unfinished business? Are there allies or advisors who will be helpful?

I spend some time eliciting the past experiences of the family members in their current lifetime, having the patient list the themes, strengths, values and stories of past generations that allow us to understand the current family situation in terms of family patterns, past family events, and impacting past events in the political, geological and economic environment. Understanding of the past spiritual and cultural contexts of the family also helps to illuminate the patients' experiences and allow them to gain an understanding of the areas and relationships that might be worth exploring.

My preference is to work with the identified patient together with his/her family, constructing a 5 to 7-generation Transitional Genogram to help gain an understanding of the past spiritual and cultural contexts. Many families can't go as far back as 5-7 generations, so we do it with metaphor—what might have happened? Could you go to the history books? The library? What went on in your town? Your country? Was there war? A flood? A famine? This allows the family to identify patterns across time in their family of origin—to uncover the resources of their family strengths, themes, scripts, values, ritual, traditions, and how their family has overcome trauma in the past and survived across time.

When members of a family have been severely traumatized, they invariably find that there are repeating patterns of trauma in their Transitional Genogram. The primary purpose of my Past Life Regression technique is to help them realize that their families of origin have survived trauma in the past and that they too have resources to resolve their current difficulties.

With past life relationships that emerge in the hypnotherapy, I have found that the same cast of characters tends to show up each time. A husband in this life may have been son or daughter to the past-life person who is the wife in this lifetime. I have stopped being surprised or questioning, "What is real?" I invite my patients and their families to decide whether their experience is of reincarnation, Jungian collective unconscious, metaphor, or some other explanation.

Setting Goals

In this way, I am prepared to start a journey with a new fellow traveler with an understanding that we might be finding patterns that match – both across multigenerational family of origin

relationships in their current lives and through the clusters of people with whom they have been reincarnated, many of whom are likely to be the same players. In addition to constructing a family genogram, I also work with the patient and family to identify a list of clearly defined goals, including which of the family strengths and signs of resilience the family would value seeing passed on to future generations.

We begin by looking at whether there is a particular symptom or problem that has not responded to other, more traditional means, and how the patient thinks hypnosis might help resolve it. The success of our relationship and the hypnosis experience depend on my understanding the patient's beliefs and hopes and fears and it is my responsibility to help him/her share those with me in a safe and trusting environment. I have found the following to be helpful questions to establish attainable goals in this work:

1. Which family strengths and signs of resilience would family choose to pass to future generations?
2. Which vulnerabilities would they choose to leave behind?
3. What tasks were not completed in past generations?
4. What traumas have not been resolved?
5. Are there relationships that need healing?
6. What are the family's spiritual beliefs and practices and what have they been across the generations?

Goals should always be clear

It is essential to set and maintain a clear focus in doing this work. We start with the simplest and most easily achievable goals and then discuss turning them each into workable tasks. (Seaburn, Landau & Horwitz, 1995).

1. Start with simplest and most easily achievable goal
2. Start with a tiny component of a goal, or minutest of symptoms
3. Principle is success breeds success.

The 4-step induction process for past life regression

I have several methods of hypnotic induction for the regression, which allow the patient to progress at a speed that is comfortable for them. I begin with one of these methods and then move on to the second step once they are ready.

Step I: The Place of Joy

a) *For those who are anxious and like a slow process: Guided imagery to a place of their choosing that they find truly beautiful, peaceful and relaxing, and which makes them feel safe and secure. Most of my patients choose either a beach scene or a forest and river/lake scene. I*

have treated a few people who choose quiet and comfortable rooms in familiar places and a few who selected isolated mountain tops, a snowy scene, or other bleak landscapes.

b) *For the more impatient*: either an *instant trance* induced by a pendulum with a count of 3 or a count of 3 and click of the finger or tap on the forehead (Weiss, 1990).

c) *For those who are acutely anxious: progressive relaxation*. On rare occasions, a patient might need to practice this several times prior to becoming ready for the hypnosis session itself. They then choose one of the first two methods of induction.

d) *For those who are not able to relax: a series of breathing exercises* (e.g., controlled progressive breathing; synchronized inhalation/exhalation; single alternating nostril breathing) before progressing to the induction.

Step II: Choosing a path

Any of the Step I induction methods are followed by Choosing a Path. This varies for example from a descent down steps (again of their choosing); walking along a garden path; floating in a pool or ocean until the waters divide or lead into a cave; swimming through a series of waves, or some other route that the patient determines.

Step III: Finding a concrete image

The patient is then invited to find a door or gate and to describe it and its handle in detail. This gives them a concrete image of something specific, like a handle to turn, in order to move into the new space.

Step IV: The readiness signal

It is at this readiness signal of actually feeling the concrete image (e.g., the handle) and being ready to turn or twist or open it that I invite them to pass through the gate or door.

At any point that they become anxious, I invite them to go back to the stage before and to take it more slowly.

Note taking and debriefing process:

I keep very detailed notes and encourage patients to do the same. During the period between sessions, most patients will continue to gain insights and vivid memories, allowing them to fill in the blanks in the regression memory. I ask that they write down these insights and recollections that they experience between sessions and share them with me. If they journal well, this allows them to build a complete picture that enables them to explore the lessons and their blueprints in a more systematic way. I encourage them to view their recall as an ongoing process that enriches as it unfolds. It seems to me that growth comes from the experience as it happens rather than from a finished story. This unfolding process also allows them to hold on to the experience as theirs rather than mine, maintaining their expertise on their own stories.

Many of my patients prefer to journal on their computers, since they feel that it speeds up the process. Several, however, feel that the creativity comes from the union of mind and pen moving across paper. I suggest that they write each addition to the original description in a different color so that it is clear how these sketches interface and grow, building to completion of the picture. On the computer, they may choose to insert sections so the story appears seamless or use different text colors to show clearly how the complex story has grown over time.

A very short debriefing and grounding occurs after each regression, but I reserve every second or third session for a complete debriefing and re-exploring of the story. We review both my notes and theirs, and this process often takes the patients into light trance as they relive the experience, generally with an increasing depth of insight. This allows them to clarify their goals for the next session and guides the process in a highly organized and efficient manner.

The debriefing is the most important component of this form of therapy. It is here that the trauma healing occurs with patient and family. Under hypnosis they explore and recognize the connectedness of patterns and are able to forgive themselves and others, resolve painful memories and plan joyful futures.

Time and space between lives — the soul journey

The discovery of fascinating lives and experiences and far-off places is always exciting for patients even when the events are traumatic. In many instances, the patients' re-experiencing is extremely helpful and sometimes critical in guiding us to identify together the origin of a past injury or emotional block. We are then able to work towards healing, or gaining an understanding about, a repeating pain fixation or chronic illness.

However, I believe that the true healing occurs in the space between lives — the place where peace and wisdom prevail and our guides and fellow travelers can come together and compare notes and plans for the future and/or the past. I encourage my patients to go through the transition from a dying experience in a past life into the space between that lifetime and the one to follow. Patients often become frightened as they face their deaths. I encourage them to spend 1 to 2 seconds in their 'Place of Joy' to give them the courage to face the moment. If necessary, they can float out of their bodies to avoid physical and emotional pain. The time in their 'Place of Joy' strengthens them and gives them a sense of peace and courage.

It is only when the patient is able to journey from the relevant past life into the space between that one and the next, to meet with the significant people from that lifetime, make peace with them and learn what their journey together was about, that he/she is able to make sense of whatever difficulty led to the original search or symptoms. It is the beginning of understanding why they have chosen to be here this time, which unfinished tasks they have yet to complete, and with whom they need to work.

The peace and beauty of the space between lives allows a time of no self-criticism or blame, no judgment of others, no sadness or anguish over losses. It is a place of hope and clarity, of wisdom and decisiveness. It is the birthplace of our blueprints for future lives and the origin of our courage and determination to follow these with wisdom and integrity.

Many of my patients are able to call to those significant others who have traversed previous lives with them. They are able to discuss their experiences and clarify events that pained or troubled them. Sometimes they learn about events in other shared lives that they have not yet visited but

that played a crucial role in determining the relationship difficulties in the one they just have re-experienced. All of these insights are then helpful in comprehending and sorting out the challenges of their current lives.

One of the most commonly shared experiences is the knowledge that everything that has gone before, no matter how painful or banal, has been helpful. This gives a sense of calm perspective that patients are able to bring into their present everyday life. Although we all, being human, lose our center at times and become frenetically involved in something that ‘has to be done right now,’ I find that patients who have truly been ‘to the other side and back’ are able to regain their inner calm faster and with deeper tranquility than are those who do not reach that space – that soul journey – between lives. Perhaps some of the benefits of the ‘Place of Joy’ derive from its resonance with the space of peace between lives.

Joining patients on their journey

The places to which my patients travel may be ordinary or exotic, painfully vivid or palely dull. It is my privilege to be invited on some occasions into the past life journeys at times, experiencing the brightness of the light, the burning of the desert sun, or the stench of death. I have not yet determined what occasions these invitations – and there are certainly times when I’d rather they had not come! But I am truly grateful for the opportunity to enrich my own experience and to travel with them - adding an objective eye and ear, sometimes able to complete scenes they hesitate to examine, or pick up a stray visitor whom they might have missed. I take great pains not to reveal my own visual or sensory experience until they have completed their journey and sometimes feel that it is not appropriate for several sessions after. I feel it would be demeaning to maintain secret information about the traveler whose journey this is and who has far greater right to the information than I do.

My work with families doing past life regression hypnosis and ‘Place of Joy’ over the past twenty plus years continue to provide me with hope. They are a continuing testament to the inherent resilience of the human spirit and its capacity for joy, comfort, love and peace.

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