

Remembering My Teacher

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When Ian passed away in February 2007, traditional-format obituaries honoring him, and his unique contribution to scientific understanding, were published in several major newspapers and elsewhere. A Google search will readily produce the most salient, historical specifics of Ian's life and career from those several pieces. The fact that his passing was so prestigiously noted speaks volumes about the recognition his research has attracted from so many widespread audiences. Any dedicated reader of this journal needs no introduction to Ian or the focus of his work. What follows has been written almost entirely from a very different perspective than the above-noted obituaries; rather it is my best effort at a fitting eulogy for the most important teacher I've ever had.

I have made only one pilgrimage in my life. The year was 1991 when, in the middle of a very busy engineering project, I stole the last two days of a work-week to travel to and attend what was left of that year's SSE meeting (my first) in Charlottesville, Virginia. My sole focus was to hear a scheduled address there by Ian. Over the previous several years, I had become a devoted fan of his research, and at long last had the opportunity personally to see and hear the man behind it.

It is very difficult to describe clearly and effectively the life-changing impact that the implications of his research have had on me. In the simplest terms, he gave me my first true "handle" on life, a tangible grasp on the intangible. "Handles" of that quality are not trivial things to engineers like me. It is little wonder that his work is often referred to as the "gold standard" of reincarnation research. Even in what is, for most people, the esoteric landscape of philosophy, here was something to really hold onto.

I am acutely aware that each of us must find his own path through the dogmas of organized religion, the abstractions of formal philosophy, and the wonderland of current physics and cosmology, but here, in the midst of it all, was a handle, the rational appeal of the concept of reincarnation, backed up by a repeating phenomenon "from the mouths of babes." But it is a handle available only to those willing to listen, and willing to actively reinforce what they learn from Ian with the supporting perceptions of other researchers.

Initially, Ian was not easy to get close to. By the time I had belatedly discovered him, he was already attracting more attention, both positive and negative, than he could personally handle with his unusually busy schedule.

Still, he responded politely by mail, but with regrets that the one-on-one meeting which I had proposed would not be possible. I still smile when I am reminded of his statement therein: that if he accepted all such invitations, there would be no time left for the research that attracted his admirers in the first place. However, I am nothing if not persistent, and eventually I received his invitation to the SSE meeting to hear his address.

Nor, as our relationship grew and developed, did we agree on everything, especially the potential benefits of hypnotic past-life regression (and the stature of one of its leading proponents); but I believe that our related disagreement was primarily a matter of individual perception. Is hypnotic past-life regression a reasonably reliable research tool? Per Ian's perception: Certainly not! – and I agree (generally). However, as a reasonably effective therapeutic tool, and from my engineer's perspective, "If it works (and it really seems to, much of the time), use it!" We didn't have to fully understand fire in order to use it to great effect – although, as my Dad taught me, "Fire is a good servant, but a cruel master."

Ian, rest in peace, old friend and revered teacher. You were granted the time to make your message abundantly clear. It is up to others to listen and understand. It was an honor to know you, and I look forward to our next meeting.