

BOOK REVIEW

Life Before Life: Is There Life Before Birth? 750 Cases of Hypnosis by Helen Wambach. White Crow Books, 2020. 182 pp. \$17.99 (paperback). ISBN 978-1786771414.

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This book was originally published in 1979. This reviewer is not certain why it has been re-published in 2020—possibly because a very popular, relatively current, text by Dr. Jim Tucker (2008) of the same name has been on the market since 2008. Of course, a reprint of a past life research classic is always welcome. The current book by Helen Wambach being reviewed is also quite different from Tucker’s and consists of a compilation of answers from individual questionnaires (750) filled out by participants who gathered for a group workshop in Chicago with Dr. Wambach. Nearly all of the data that Wambach analyzes were acquired through these questionnaires which were distributed to the participants of the workshop after they had undergone extensive hypnosis.

The book begins with an introduction where Wambach shares a bit of her history as a psychologist and researcher in the field of past life regression hypnosis. The reader must keep in mind she wrote this book in 1979 regardless of the 2020 copyright and the “new release” feel of the book. 1979 was more than 40 years ago, and quite a few advances have been made both in medical science—she mentions her interest in doing work in the area of biofeedback “so we can begin to relate specific EEG recordings with subjective phenomena experienced . . .” (Wambach, 2020, p. 7)—and in past life regression work. Although not a serious hindrance in assimilating the material she presents, it is something worth keeping in mind while reading *Life Before Life*.

Wambach then explains why she used Chicago as a source for her data. She wanted to see if the data she received from her previous work in California matched up in some way with the Chicago data, to dispel any possibility that the answers her participants gave her on her questionnaires were influenced by their geographical and cultural backgrounds. The first hypnotic induction she conducted was for the “birth trip.” She describes how she also slips into trance while inducing her participants to follow her on the hypnogogic journey. Here is a bit of an example of the flavor of the experience:

I would get a feeling that in a certain corner of the room someone was experiencing difficulty. I couldn't pinpoint exactly what this was, as I am not sure when I am experiencing telepathic communication from others. Like most of us, I require some kind of objective proof before I can accept telepathy as a fact. But still, I felt that in the right-hand corner of the room there was someone who was experiencing some anxiety. I sent a thought to this person that all would go well with them and they could trust me. (Wambach, 2020, p. 2)

This comment reminded me of Carl Jung's “transference grid,” where not only do we convey information through our voice to the ears of whomever we are communicating with (conscious to conscious) but also in a variety of other ways, one being “unconscious to unconscious.” Certainly we can apply this concept to any form of communication with any sentient being (or possibly non-sentient as well!). In hypnosis it would seem the “unconscious to unconscious” route would be more prominent, as well as conscious (hypnotist) to unconscious (subject) (Jung, 1946/1969, pp. 163–323).

After the hypnotic induction, Wambach asks her subjects a number of questions such as:

Now I want you to go back into your memory and find a picture of yourself that was taken between the ages of six and twelve. Look closely at that picture. Where were you when that picture was taken? You will remember more and more details of that place where the picture was taken. (Wambach, 2020, p. 3)

Throughout this series of sessions with her subjects conducted in one long day, her own personal experience is recorded: different

images that come up for her, some abstract and some relating to the questions she is asking, and they are interjected into the book. She ends up asking quite a few questions (dozens) including questions about her participants' choice of birth parents, partners, whether they wanted to be born or not, etc. When she is finished (after about four hours with her participants sitting on the floor the entire time), she takes them out of trance and has them all fill out a detailed questionnaire.

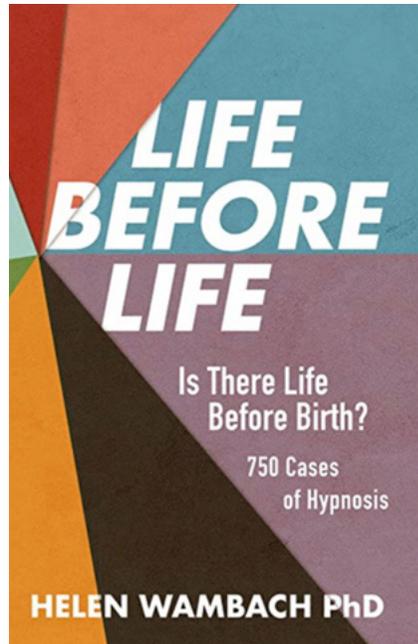
The next chapters detail the answers, her impressions of the answers, and an overall analysis of the session(s). It is again emphasized that her goal in conducting these sessions in the Midwest (Chicago) was to compare the results to her results in California where most of her previous work was performed. She says in the early part of this chapter that she did not see much difference between California and Chicago.

Essentially the rest of the book focuses on analyzing the answers in her questionnaire, moving from topic to topic, which are (as chapter headings): "Choosing to Live Again", "Choosing the Twentieth Century and Choosing One's Sex", "Why Are We Here on Earth? Have We Known Our Family and Friends in Other Lifetimes?", "When Does the Soul Enter the Fetus? Is the Soul of the Infant Aware of the Feelings of the Mother?", "Taking the Big Step. Getting Born", and "Adopted Children. Premature Births. Caesareans" (Wambach, 2020, p. v). These are fascinating questions, and the answers from her hundreds of participants are even more fascinating and intriguing.

Imagine a quantitative research article with many charts, with columns containing percentages of specific types of responses: sex of participant, age of participant, whether the participant has been under past life hypnosis before, etc. And then take all that data, and rather than keep it in "chart format" verbalize it all in a narrative. It is a qualitative presentation of a quantitative study. The book is not quite that sterile. Wambach does include her own personal interjections about her own life and other experiences she knows about from other participants that are relevant to a particular participant's personal response. She also allows for the subjective, heartfelt, responses to her questions, presented in the participant's own words, which a quantitative report would have little use for.

Wambach also makes much effort to straddle the fence between a serious quantitative analysis and a more qualitative approach by

inserting percentages throughout: “Only 11 percent of the sample reported being aware of being inside the fetus any time between conception and the six-month gestation period” (p. 92) and “When all the 750 cases were analyzed, 89 percent of all the subjects responding said that they did not become a part of the fetus or involved with the fetus until after six months of gestation” (p. 78). Although Wambach enjoyed giving percentages, she also, seemingly just as often, referred to ambiguous phrases such as *many participants* or *very few subjects* without any numerical indication as to what those descriptions meant.



The insight she gleans from her informal studies is quite fascinating. But the conveyance of information, essentially being in the same format throughout the book, does get a bit tedious (not, however, as tedious as pages and pages of charts!). If a reader is interested in Wambach’s data and results from her participants’ answers to her questionnaire (as described above), this book would be of some interest to them. Otherwise, to this reviewer, it consists of a lot of data, most of it rather subjective, without too much else to consolidate it into anything too compelling.

That said, Wambach’s methodology was quite interesting. She framed her inquiry into a large number of participants’ past lives by asking questions while they were under trance, and then seeking written answers from the participants in a questionnaire after they were out of trance. The questions were specific, and “active-imagination” focused, pertaining to specific times and personal actions—similar to: “I’ve asked you to visualize the house you lived in when you were four; if it is a brick house, what color is the brickwork?” “If you are making something, describe how you are creating what you are creating, and

what tools you are using?” (These sorts of questions were asked while her subjects were hypnotized, but not, of course, answered verbally by the participants at that time.) For another example, she asked details about the birth of participants, what they felt as they were going through the birth canal, were they frightened?, could they tell what their mother was experiencing? Considering the time period she conducted her research (sometime prior to 1979, when the book was first published), this was innovative research on a topic that was not considered a scientific discipline.

Helen Wambach more than likely was one of the first researchers in past life regression therapy to study large numbers of participants through her practice of group hypnosis. For that, her work should be revered as the results of a true pioneer attempting something that is exceedingly difficult to do, to link hard line science with metaphysics.

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