



# The Origins of my Fatigue

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*As a very young child I had past-life memories of a deeply traumatic nature, but I could not talk to any adult about these. In this article I discuss the reasons for my self-imposed silence and its impact on my development. By adolescence I was suffering from severe depression and identity confusion, and was treated by conventional psychologists; I also began to study psychology. Western psychology could not address the real issues behind my distress and I went on to develop a severe illness. Eventually, prompted by exposure to Buddhism, I began to confront my past-life memories for what they were, and began to heal. One of my main concerns today is that undergraduate psychology students are still not being taught about CORT—cases of the reincarnation type. This gap in the curriculum can lead to iatrogenesis, as in my own case, where therapy may do more harm than good.*

## Introduction

**I have a condition known as ME/CFS<sup>1</sup>, which leaves the sufferer so fatigued as to be literally crippled at times.**

I also have past-life memories and have had these since my earliest childhood. Their nature is very traumatic, being from the Holocaust. As a young child I was confused by trying to sort out what was 'real' versus what was inside my head. I could not talk to any adult about my past-life memories and this was deeply problematic. By the time I was seventeen I had gone from being a straight As gifted child to an underachieving, suicidal wreck. After two overdoses, I was hospitalised for depression. And so began my perilous journey with psychotherapy.

## Childhood Recall of a Past Life

Recently I have been reflecting on the very first instance of extreme fatigue which I had in childhood. I was perhaps five, and had already been dealing with flashbacks of bomber planes and air raid sirens, plus memories of torture. I was not yet at primary school but was already quite insomniac and was a shy child. Yet I was generally quite happy, and felt loved by my parents. I most definitely was not sexually or physically abused.

I was fending off the memory of the gas chamber. At night, as I started to fall asleep, this terrifying but invisible thing would sneak around the edges of my mind and startle me awake. This went on for what seemed a long time; it could have been a few months or more than a year. One night, feeling that I could no longer avoid it, I let the memory flood back in all its horror. The sound of screaming reverberated inside me for what seemed like forever.

I fell asleep eventually, and the next morning I awoke with a crystal clear awareness. I knew I had been an adult and had died in the gas chamber. I knew I had lost my family and that I was now living with a family of strangers – who not only did not know who I was, but would not believe me if I told them. It was then that I first experienced crippling fatigue. It did not stem purely from the trauma of the memory itself; a very big factor was the realisation that I could not talk to anyone. I lay in bed staring at the pretty little dress which

was hanging near the foot of my bed, waiting for me to get up and start the day. My situation overwhelmed me. Eventually at my mother's behest I managed to drag myself out of bed.

The second type of fatigue in my childhood was less dramatic but more pervasive. My parents kept us kids busy with many extra-mural activities, and on one particular Saturday morning we had to attend a swimming gala. The sense of fatigue hit me hard, and suddenly I felt deeply annoyed that I had to do this on a Saturday. It was supposed to be my day of rest. Not having any conscious knowledge at that stage about the importance of the Jewish Shabbat, once again I found myself very badly at odds with my family, my entire little community and even myself. From then on my inexplicable resentment about Saturdays increased and chipped away at my sanity.

I still could not talk to anyone and by now was so alienated from the source of my distress that I could not have done so even had the opportunity arisen. In high school, my exhaustion and depression became more profound each year until I had a total nervous breakdown at the age of seventeen.

## Self-imposed Silence

ME/CFS is not well understood by modern medicine. Many experts concur that it has two main components: virus and stress. I had viral problems since birth. My mother recorded each episode in a scrapbook which she kept of my early years, and the doctors were entirely unable to help me. Severe life stress played a major role in the development of my later illness. But even in childhood I had more stress than I might have, simply because of not being able to tell anyone about my past life.

Even if I had been able to talk to my parents about what was troubling me, the problem would not have gone away. The burden would merely have been shifted to my parents. I realised this recently when speaking with a mother whose child also had Holocaust memories. The child had good support from her mother, despite the mother's initial incredulity and shock. The child probably did grow up emotionally more intact than I. But the mother came under

fire from several people close to her, who accused her of brainwashing her infant daughter about the Holocaust! Somewhere along the line, people will express their disbelief and hostility about reincarnation.

So either the child is going to suffer and become a misfit within the family, as I did; or the parents, if they are able to support their child emotionally, will similarly risk becoming misfits in the wider society. It may depend partly on the family's educational and religious background. One of my Jewish friends also had Holocaust past-life memories in childhood. Her mother, being both Jewish and interested in spiritualism, was well-placed to help her daughter while receiving her own support from friends.

But my parents are secular and agnostic, non-Jewish, and of the rationalist-humanist school. They are academics and teachers; my father was a university professor and anti-apartheid publisher. Today – because I am 'out of the closet' about my past life – it is almost impossible for them to believe that their daughter has a Jewish soul, which made its way into their family and arrived deeply traumatised even before birth. My academically oriented sister has added her own utter disbelief into the mix. My rabbi, who has handled my conversion to Judaism over the past two years, is a Reform Jew and thus is also very rationalist and humanist. He refers to the whole business as my 'internal dialogue'.

### Healing

For almost twenty years I could not accept the past-life interpretation myself. I accepted the idea that whatever difficulties I was having were psychiatric rather than spiritual in nature, and were caused purely by dysfunction in the current lifetime. That is what modern Western psychology says. The soul, in psychology, does not really exist. It's all about brains and social conditioning, and these things are supposed to disappear when the body dies. It's not supposed to come back into another lifetime, asking to be healed.

I was in therapy and I was also studying psychology. I was steeped in that worldview. It took twenty-odd years for me to realise that psychology was taking me nowhere. My life had fallen apart and I had become seriously ill. My body's symptoms matched the repressed past-life traumas exactly, down to the small congenital defect that now required urgent surgical correction. It was cellular memory on an awful scale. But no amount of Western psychology was going to help me.

Because of my poor health, I ended up living at a Buddhist retreat for six years, where exposure to beliefs about rebirth seeped into my consciousness and finally began my healing process. But even amongst Western Buddhists there is a lot of scepticism about reincarnation, which becomes outright cynicism and hostility at times.

In recent years I have linked up with many people with Holocaust past-life memories. There is an extraordinary high level of health problems among us, including severe conditions like cancer and depression, plus ME/CFS and its

cousin fibromyalgia. For all of us, healing is inextricably bound up with coming to terms with our memories. Most of us could not talk about it as children. I suspect that those who did are not out there looking for support groups as adults.

### The Academic Challenge

We have a major problem here. Highly academic research has been done by Drs Jim Tucker and the late Ian Stevenson into cases of the reincarnation type (CORT). Reading these books was a turning point in my own life and this research is widely recognised by many therapists and transpersonal psychologists. However, it is not being taught in mainstream psychology classes. The next generation of psychologists is being raised without any appreciation of the difference between, for example, dissociative identity disorder stemming from childhood abuse versus the shaky sense of identity which results from having vivid memories of being 'someone else' in a previous life, whilst also being fully aware of who one is today.

If therapists, teachers, ministers and rabbis, doctors and psychiatrists are not educated about CORT, how will ordinary parents ever recognise and accept a child who is dealing with this? The case studies show that CORT often involves traumatic memory (such as the Holocaust, though of course many cases involve different trauma). We are talking about vulnerable children, children with special needs and special abilities, children who need the help of adults around them to develop normal emotions and identities. The academic world has a responsibility towards these children—and the adults they become. They cannot just be ignored in the hope that they will all go away and kill themselves.

Enough research has been done to show that CORT is a genuine, if rare, phenomenon. It needs further study and may call for a new diagnostic category. CORT should be included in the core syllabus for psychologists, even though we do not yet have a satisfactory theory about how exactly it works. You don't have to know the exact formula for gravitational forces to acknowledge that an apple falls downwards from the tree. This is the same. We have to start somewhere. Once the academic world accepts the existence of CORT and the fact that such cases show a fairly predictable pattern, we can focus on developing a more coherent theory.

*Sue Randall was awarded an MA degree in research psychology by the University of the Witwatersrand (South Africa) in 2006. Her three degrees were all gained cum laude. She has a love of narrative therapy and a flair for quantitative research. Sue is known amongst family and friends for her 'healing hands' and intuitive insights. She is also a professional freelance writer and editor, and is busy writing the story of her past life.*

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