

CHAPTER FIVE

Struggling for Love

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“Even though no one can go back and make a new beginning, anyone can start now and make a new ending.”

Francisco Cândido Xavier

I went into regression therapy through an unusual route. At an earlier stage of my life, I had wanted to be a researcher because I was interested in investigating the function of the brain. However, I was advised to first study Medicine as a stepping stone towards achieving that goal. I took the advice, but upon graduating from medical school, I changed my mind and specialized in Clinical Neurology instead.

Several years later, while practicing as a neurologist, I observed that many of my patients had psychological rather than neurological problems. Added to this was the pleasant surprise that many of them had also asked me if I could be their therapist. I understood this to be because they liked the way I talked to them.

While I was toying with the idea of taking up psychotherapy, I came to learn about the principle of reincarnation through my contact and interaction with some spiritual groups. The idea seemed plausible to me although I remained skeptical for a while.

Eventually, when I read Dr. Brian Weiss' first books on past life therapy, *Many Lives, Many Masters* and *Only Love Is Real*, my perspective changed. Dr. Weiss was a renowned physician whom I respected. He had never heard about Spiritism¹ nor any Afro-Brazilian religions² and yet he produced clinical evidence that matched the reincarnation principle as taught in these religions.

My Journey as Therapist

My initial experience with regression techniques was a positive one. I was pleasantly surprised at the ease with which people could be brought into a hypnotic state, and thereafter guided into a past life experience. I was equally surprised with the good therapeutic outcome obtainable with this approach. Soon, I took up studies in psychology and hypnosis, and went on to develop my skills in regression therapy.

Regression therapy turned out to be a very effective and efficient form of therapy in my experience. I continued to obtain good results in my patients with a variety of clinical problems. Soon, I discerned a pattern. In my psychotherapy practice, people usually come asking for help with symptoms such as headaches, anxiety, panic attacks, insomnia, depression, etc. They rarely related those symptoms to their relationships or their feelings of not being loved. Yet, when I used the regression approach to delineate the root of their symptoms, relationship issues often surfaced as the primary problem.

Of interest, I had observed that a significant number of my patients who were married women claimed that their husbands

¹ Spiritism is a spiritual doctrine codified by Allan Kardec in 1859. It embraces the concept of reincarnation as a way of perfecting one's moral self until it fits into God's presence.

² Afro-Brazilian religions are syncretic religions. Brazil has a rich spiritual society formed from the confluence of the Catholic Church with the religious traditions of the indigenous African people.

were good men and that they were happily married. However, under regression therapy they changed those statements. They admitted that they had been fooling themselves, and concealing their unhappiness at home by distracting themselves with complaints about work, family and children. On a positive note, some of them rediscovered their love for their husbands, and started turning a dull marriage into ones full of love, affection and complicity.

In the following section, I am sharing the story of a patient who has struggled for years with her parent-child and romantic relationships and was helped by past life therapy. In contrast to other cases in this book where the therapy duration was brief and outcomes swift, the duration of treatment in this case was long drawn.

THE CASE OF ALICE – INCAPACITY TO LOVE

In modern society the establishment of a couple relationship through emotional bonding is considered fundamental to happiness and wellbeing. However, in the presence of guilt feelings and affective disorders, specifically anxiety and depression, the ability to love another person can be severely hampered. In the case of Alice the use of regression therapy has helped her to unveil the root of the problem, and managed her life situation better.

Alice was a twenty-nine-year-old high school teacher, with blond curls falling along the side of her face. When she first came to my office, I noticed that she was always looking downwards with a mixture of anxiety and a sad look. She could have looked pretty had her appearance not been distorted by sadness and anguish. She told me that she had been experiencing depression since the age of fourteen. She had experienced some

major depressive episodes and was now concerned with her chronic dysthymic mood³ associated with chronic generalized anxiety. During her anxiety crises, she would feel desperate, not knowing what to do, and be suffused with deep anguish and somatic sensations, like shortness of breath and palpitations. She had tried many different medications and psychotherapy regimens, and was presently taking one antipsychotic and two antidepressant pills each day. This was in addition to the psychoanalytic therapy that she had been undergoing in the past two years.

In the first month, we managed her with medication and talked about her problems, while she continued to receive psychoanalytic therapy. She explained that the main difficulty she was facing was her interpersonal relationship with her mother, but more so with men in general. Somehow, she felt incapable of establishing any kind of relationship with adult men, not even ordinary or work-related friendships. The only man she managed to establish and maintain some long-term contact with was an uncle who lived in another state in Brazil, about 1800 kilometers away. However, even with this uncle she had disagreements, and that boosted her anxiousness.

Alice attributed her relationship difficulty to two earlier events in her life: her mother's reaction to divorce when she was four years old, and her frustrating experience with her first boyfriend who had erectile dysfunction. This latter event had led her to place on herself the feeling of being "impotent" in her failure to satisfy a man.

Alice's mother was a disturbed woman who had shielded herself from her own guilt feelings by deciding that no man could

³ Dysthymia – the word is of Greek origin. It is a mood disorder with the same cognitive and physical problems as in depression, but with less severe and longer-lasting symptoms.

be trustworthy. She believed that a clever woman should stay away from men. At the same time, she exhorted her two daughters, Alice being the elder of the two, to find a good man each and marry, as a kind of “solution” or even “obligation” for a woman.

After four months of initial treatment, Alice made up her mind to start therapy with me, using hypnosis and regression.

Session 1: Witnessing Parents’ Wedding

In her first session, Alice went into a relaxed state easily, and thereafter I guided her to establish a safe place for herself. For a troubled individual like her, a sense of safety and the process of building a secure frame in which therapy could take place were of paramount importance. She needed a secure environment to develop the necessary self-awareness and self-esteem to make sense of her experiences. This secure environment contained by our therapeutic relationship was the psychic space in which healing could take place.

Next, she established a “protection figure”, which was really a symbolic personality whose role was to guard her safety and to whom she referred as her “angel friend”.

Soon after entering a trance state, Alice regressed back to her childhood. She started to experience feelings of loneliness and unexplained guilt for her parents’ divorce, as well as being responsible for her younger sister’s wellbeing. I continued to guide her to go further back in time, until she could visualize her parents’ marriage ceremony.

Alice visualized herself as a four-year-old girl witnessing her parents’ wedding at the church. She felt anguished because no one in the church could see or hear her; nor could she get anybody’s attention. When the ceremony ended and her parents were leaving the church, she stood on the stairs crying.



At the next scene, she was at her home's gate, and the wedding car with her newly married parents arrived. They got out of the car, passed by her, and again they neither saw nor heard her. This exaggerated her feelings of loneliness and abandonment.

As we integrated this regression experience together after she came out of trance, she was skeptical of this visual imagery. Coming from a background of Protestant Christianity⁴, what she visualized was incompatible with her belief system. She argued logically that since she was conceived only after her parents married and born nine months later, it would be impossible for her to be physically present at the wedding ceremony.

Later, when she checked with her mother on the facts and went through the parents' wedding album, she saw some of the photographs matched with the scenes she had visualized under hypnotic regression. With this, she was then able to accept cryptomnesia⁵ as a possible explanation for what she had seen. I then attempted to help her reframe her lonely and guilty feelings, but at that time her "angel friend" revealed that it was still impossible for her to get rid of her guilt.

Next, we spent some time discussing her present relationships. Soon, it was evident that whenever she got interested in a man, she would hastily jump into a physical and sexual relationship. Every time, that would turn out to be disastrous. The man would get what he wanted and quickly leave her alone thereafter.

Session 2: Past Life Leticia – Romance and Betrayal

The second regression brought Alice back to the life of a woman called Leticia who lived in a medium-sized city in south-eastern Brazil in the mid-twentieth century.

She visualized a scene of herself as a girl swaying in a garden swing, and a boy was noted to pass by frequently. One day, the boy stopped by, talked to her and appeared friendly. She was then excited with what she thought was the beginning of a romance.

⁴ The dominant religion of Brazil was, and still is, Christianity.

⁵ Cryptomnesia is a memory bias whereby a person experiences a previously forgotten memory as a new idea, thought or inspiration.

From that moment onwards, she waited every day for him to come. However, the boy never returned. Disappointed, she became wary of getting involved in romantic love ever since.

In that lifetime, Leticia lived only with her grandfather, who died while she was still a teenager, leaving her alone in the house.



After growing up, she got herself a job as a kindergarten teacher, and her days passed monotonously with the same daily routine. She would leave her home with her books in the morning with her head looking downwards, and walk to work without talking to anyone along the way. At the workplace, she would barely exchange a couple of words with the headmaster. She only took care of the kids, and even with them she hardly spoke. By afternoon, she would pick up

her books, walk home with her head looking down again and without talking to anyone.

On her way home one day, with her eyes fixed on the ground, she ran into a bicycle rider. As she reached out to help the young man whom she had knocked down, she was astonished that she immediately fell in love with him. While she did not know who this man was at that moment, the same individual appeared at a subsequent regression (Session 4), and was somebody whom she could identify with in her current life. With the start of the romance she changed her outlook. She was happy to be in love with him for some time, and eventually they decided to get married.

At the next scene, she visualized herself at a church ceremony with a beautiful wedding dress. Unfortunately, her fiancé never showed up. She waited for a long time until the people attending

the ceremony started to leave. It was heart-breaking. Feeling lonely and dejected, and with no one to give her the needed emotional support, she went home, tore her wedding gown off violently and stepped on it. She shouted aloud that she would never trust any man, nor ever marry again. Then, speaking to God, she swore she would never go to church anymore. With that, she cried bitterly, took her car out and drove right in front of a moving truck and died instantly from the crash.

After she emerged from trance, Alice was astounded with the regression experience. While we were integrating the experience, she exclaimed, “How could all this be possible when I don’t believe in reincarnation?”

“It could be a kind of fantasy which your own unconscious mind could have produced, to symbolize some things from your deep feelings,” I explained.

“I can’t believe it was a fantasy either, because it seemed too real!” she said.

Session 3: Past Life Lara – Low Esteem

Despite her disbelief, Alice continued with the therapy. In the next session, she regressed to a lifetime in Canada as Lara, a woman living with her mother and her aunt. It was a stressful lifetime. Both her mother and aunt were repeatedly putting her down, and incessantly criticizing her for doing things wrongly. Frustrated, she decided to shift out and move to another place that was chilly and snowy.

In that new place, Lara was involved with a married man and got pregnant. After her son was born, she became progressively depressed. So, she brought her baby to a place where her mother could find him. After that, she committed suicide by taking an overdose of medication.

While we were integrating this experience, she highlighted that the cold place and the moral issue of having an affair with a married man had added up to her feelings of guilt and uselessness, as a fundamental part of the depression.

As we continued, Alice visualized meeting her first boyfriend in her current life – the one that had the erection problem. This encounter made her very sad and desperate, and she felt unworthy of being loved. This feeling of being unloved remained unexplained though. She couldn't relate it to anything she knew, be it in her present life or in her previous regressions.

In the next regression scene, she saw herself differently as a rich, elegant woman, but harsh and lonely. The name of that woman that came to her mind at the moment was Maria Madalena. This name was associated with the impression of some deeply rooted guilt, of which she was unable to get rid. She did not know what the guilt was about, but she found herself incapable of forgiving herself. Hypnotically, Alice was unable to go further into that lifetime, and the session ended shortly afterwards. However, when she subsequently had the opportunity to explore her life as Maria Madalena again (in Session 5), she could obtain a better understanding of herself.

Session 4: Past Life Karina – Infidelity

At the next session three weeks later, Alice regressed again to yet another lifetime. This time she saw herself as Karina, a young woman living in the Brazilian colonial period. She was forced by her father to marry a much older man who was a rich farmer. She was unhappy, but she accepted it because that kind of marriage arrangement was common practice at the time.

After marriage, Karina established a good relationship with the black slaves, and after some years she started an affair with one of them. For this particular slave, she described him as being

“not as dark as the others”. She recalled some scenes in which she had secret meetings with her lover at a hidden place with a pond and a beautiful waterfall.

One day, her husband found out about her affair with the slave and sent his foremen to catch them while they were together. At the sight of the men coming, her lover promptly said sorry to her and indicated that he couldn't afford to stay on and wait to be caught. He ran away before the men came, while she stayed. The foremen brought her to her husband, who was furious and kicked her out of the home. From that moment onwards, she became very bitter.

Karina subsequently settled in another city, started working and eventually became rich. She became a landowner herself, and then started ill-treating her slaves. She died alone and unhappy at an old age. Still in a trance state, she suddenly recognized that the slave with whom she had an affair was the same man who had abandoned her (as Leticia) in a previous life at the marriage altar (Session 2). He was also the same individual as her subsequent boyfriend in her current lifetime. (Session 6)

This therapy session had brought on marked clinical progress. Alice appeared significantly improved when she came for her next session. She adopted a better attitude towards other people now, especially towards her friends and family members. Other people had noticed a change in her and her actions were more appropriate to the situations she encountered.

Two weeks later, she reported having spontaneous visions of the baby whom she had, as Lara in her past life, given birth to. Intuitively, she recognized the baby as one of her present life cousins, as if she was seeing him from the spiritual vantage point as Lara. For this reason, I took the opportunity to regress her back again to Lara's past life.

While reliving Lara's past life, she saw Lara's mother mistreating the boy and spanking him. This caused her to feel guilty and desperate, because she could not protect him. We went through a therapy process of releasing her guilt and sorrow, through reframing the experience and leaving space for her own good actions in the present lifetime.

After a further couple of months, Alice experienced further clinical improvement. However, at this point she had to bravely face some difficult situations at work and at home.

Session 5: Past Life Maria Madalena – Sexual Abuse

During this session, she went again into the lifetime of that rich, harsh woman called Maria Madalena.

This time she visualized the early life of Maria Madalena as a sweet girl until her teenage years. She re-experienced a disturbing conversation with a friend at that time. She strongly argued her view for the importance and existence of love, while her friend disdained of love, saying it was a farce.

Soon afterwards, still as a teenager, her foster father began to sexually abuse her, and she was kept for some time as his "lover". Feeling filthy and disgusted, she decided that love really didn't exist after all. Her attitude changed, and she subsequently got married to a rich and disgusting old man, focusing only on his wealth and social status. While she was successful in the material aspect, she became that bitter and harsh woman whom she saw earlier towards the end of Session 3.

We integrated all these experiences, and Alice had some good insights from her regressions. I worked with her in the trance state to cleanse her feelings of filth and disgust. With the help of her "angel friend" and the imagery of a healing light, she was led towards being more self-forgiving and a happy state.

The following few months did not bring the clinical improvement as expected. In fact Alice was seen to be a little more anxious and impatient. She recalled some things about her childhood, and stated that she had absolutely no good memories of her early years at all. She was tired, overworked, and wanted to slow down on her therapy because she was going through a rough time financially. As it was around mid-December, we decided to take a break for a month to coincide with her vacation.

Session 6: Back to Past Life Karina

Resting did her good. When we resumed therapy after the break, Alice was feeling much better. She was even showing signs of being close to a boyfriend, whom she did not consider handsome, but sensitive and understanding. Nevertheless, there was still a long way to go on her part because the thought of the possibility of having a relationship with him still made her anorexic.

At this session, she went into a new regression experience and she was led to review the lifetime as Karina in which she had an affair with the slave (Session 4). Surprisingly, she now recognized the slave as the same individual as her boyfriend in her present life. She remembered that she had become very angry at him during that previous lifetime, because she expected him to have stood by her side when her husband discovered their affair. Instead, the slave, afraid that he would lose his life if caught, ran away and disappointed her. So, she had made a conscious decision never again to love a man, and never again to believe in love. This reinforced the similar decisions she had made in other lifetimes and those decisions were hard to give up.

Alice's therapy continued, alternating between work in trance state and cognitive therapy. There was a mix of different therapeutic approaches, from the more direct, cognitive-behavioral approach to a broader, transpersonal approach.

Interestingly, her boyfriend managed to become a romantic partner for a short period of about three months. Thereafter she continued to progress slowly in her emotional wellbeing, towards acquiring a more mature and conscious attitude of herself.

Recovery

The path to recovery was not a smooth one. Alice continued to experience attacks of anxiety during which she felt uneasy, and sometimes with the fear that she could not cope with her stress. She even thought about suicide, but fortunately each time the thought arose, she promptly rejected the idea.

A couple of years later, Alice witnessed two car accidents within the same week. That reminded her of the regression experience as Leticia (Session 2) during which she killed herself with a deliberate car crash and as Lara (Session 3) in the lifetime where she committed suicide after giving birth. The recollection of the memory of her suffering associated with the suicides in those previous lifetimes had helped her to make a strong, conscious decision to never take away her own life again.

This had been an unusual case with the severity of the problem and the patient needing far longer to integrate the therapy sessions into her current life. While most regression therapy would require sessions over a few months, with Alice it extended over a period of about nine years.

The interval between Alice's sessions had ranged from a few months to more than a year. During these times Alice still had to deal with many aspects of her own insecurity. This included the management of her relationship with her difficult mother, and learning to improve her relationships with men through trial and error. During this journey, she had several flashbacks of her previous lifetimes. With the details recalled, she could integrate them and even elucidate some issues and insights on her own. In

fact, in one regression experience, she went back again to her present childhood, to work with her feelings of guilt about her parents' divorce.

It was a long journey. She had lots of issues to deal with and lots of experiences and feelings to process. My role as the therapist was to walk alongside her, support her emotionally and help her get in touch with her deeper self and the reality of her inner world.

Breakthrough

Our efforts eventually paid off. Alice gradually began developing different relationships with her friends and romantic partners. She was in the process of becoming aware that men were also human with both positive and negative qualities, and learning how to deal with their shortcomings. Almost eight years after our first session, she took a major step forward. She moved out from her mother's home!

Next, I realized she had been dating the same man for a couple of years. That was a remarkable improvement compared to how she was struggling with love when she first came to me. She was happy with the man, even though she felt he was not as smart and dedicated to professional growth to the same extent as she was. At one point, they were thinking of moving in to stay together, but she decidedly refused that, because she wanted to have the experience of living alone and taking care of herself. Slightly more than one year later, they married.

That was a breakthrough!

At the wedding ceremony, while they were exchanging their marital vows, I heard her saying distinctly to her marriage partner: "Thank you, for being such a loving man, and most of all, thank you for making me believe again that love exists!" Following those words, Alice turned her head smilingly to one

side and looked straight at me. There was a clear signal in her expression.

It was a most meaningful and a memorable moment. Behind the achievement was the story of a flaming heart within. If it hadn't been for those long hard years of struggle with her therapy, I would never have felt that sense of accomplishment.

Concluding Thoughts

Alice's story is a complex one, as are most of the stories we encounter in therapy, especially in the presence of associated depression and panic disorder. It is after all, about handling the relationships we have in various lifetimes, dealing with different situations, but always facing the difficult task of living with people that are necessarily different from us. We need to learn to love, and to be loved.

Alice was repeating the same pattern lifetime after lifetime. Her problem was that she felt guilty for something she had done in one of her past lives and that feeling of guilt prevented her from being happy in subsequent lifetimes. She refused to love, then tried again, but always had her expectation frustrated. This resulted in self-destruction and a renewed decision to never love again.

When we went back further, she located the source of that pattern as having come from her lifetime as Maria Madalena. Her revolt against being abused by her foster father had resulted in a harsh and mean attitude throughout that lifetime. This had generated a long-lasting guilty feeling.

In the present lifetime, she had an unexplained guilt about her childhood experience pertaining to the unloving parent-parent and parent-daughter relationships. As a child, Alice undeservingly took the guilt upon herself. This is not unusual because, as children, we usually believe our parents are perfect. If and when

something goes wrong at home, we tend to blame ourselves, as we know we are not perfect.

As an epilogue, Alice came back to my office for a couple of times a few months after her marriage, and it was to deal with some minor problems related to her work. I followed up with her clinical condition four years later. She had weaned off all psychiatric medication and felt really happy. By then, she was more mature and independent, and had not experienced any major episode of anxiety or depression.