

NEWS & ANALYSIS

Why Carl Sagan Believed “Reincarnation Deserves Serious Study”



BY **ARJUN WALIA** · DECEMBER 14, 2021 · ⌚ 8 MINUTE READ



THE **Pulse**



Carl Sagan via Wikimedia Commons

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- Carl Sagan believed that reincarnation, among other topics within the realms of parapsychology, was worthy of serious study.
- He was aware of children being able to remember details about their past lives that should be impossible to remember.

Reflect On: Does consciousness survive in multiple forms after "death"?

Pause - set your Pulse...

Take a breath. Release the tension in your body. Place attention on your physical heart. Breathe slowly into the area for 60 seconds, focusing on feeling a sense of ease. [Click here](#) to learn why we suggest this.

Late planetary scientist, cosmologist, astrophysicist, astrobiologist, author, and science communicator Carl Sagan, who was well known for being a “hard” and rigid scientist, was actually a founding member of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP). Not many scientists even entertain the possibility that what we call “paranormal” may in fact be real and in some way provable using the scientific method.

Sagan was quite famous, yet his interest in the paranormal was and is not really known amongst the general population

He [once wrote that](#) “there are three claims in the (parapsychology) field which, in my opinion, deserve serious study with the third being that young children sometimes report details of a previous life, which upon checking turn out to be accurate and which they could not have known about in any

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He wrote this in 1996. It's now more than two decades later and the number of examples and evidence accumulated suggesting that reincarnation, or at least some form of it, is real is quite eye-opening.

Serious scientific study of reincarnation has spanned the last several decades. There are many interesting cases of children remembering details they could not have obtained from anywhere else.

For example, [a report](#) published in 2016 in the journal *Explore* titled "The Case of James Leininger: An American Case of the Reincarnation Type" published by Jim B. Tucker, MD from the University of Virginia, explains,

Numerous cases of young children who report memories of previous lives have been studied over the last 50 years. Though such cases are more easily found in cultures that have a general belief in reincarnation, they occur in the West as well. This article describes the case of James Leininger, an American child who at age two began having intense nightmares of a plane crash. He then described being an American pilot who was killed when his plane was shot down by the Japanese. He gave details that included the name of an American aircraft carrier, the first and last name of a friend who was on the ship with him, and a location and other specifics about the fatal crash. His parents eventually discovered close correspondence between James' statements and the death of a World War II pilot named James Huston. Documentation of James' statements that was made before Huston was identified includes a television interview with his parents that never aired but which the author has been able to review.

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At the age of two, James' father was looking through a book called *The Battle for Iwo Jima 1945*. His father reports that James pointed to a picture showing an aerial view of the base of the island, where Mt. Suribachi, a dormant volcano, sits, and said, "That's where my plane was shot down." His father said, "What?" and James responded, "My airplane got shot down there, Daddy." That's when it all started. This is one of many cases that are similar. In this case James demonstrated knowledge of events from 50 years before he was born. Many of his accurate statements were documented before the previous personality was identified.

On August 27, 2000, when James was 28 months old, he told his parents he had flown his plane off a boat. When his parents asked him the name of the boat, he said, "Natoma." After that conversation, his father searched online for the word and eventually discovered a description of the USS Natoma Bay, an escort carrier stationed in the Pacific during World War II. He printed out the information he found, and the footer of the printout includes the date he did.

You can read about this specific case more thoroughly, [here](#).

Eli Lasch was a prominent physician in Israel who served as a senior consultant in the coordination of health services in the Gaza Strip. He passed away in 2009, but before he did, he was investigating a supposed reincarnation case in which a three-year old boy claimed to have remembered a past life. In this life, he remembered being struck by a big blow to the head with an axe, and having a long, red birthmark on his head.

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The boy's father and a number of other relatives in the village decided to visit neighbouring communities to see if his past life identity could be established and Dr. Lasch was invited to join. On this journey, they visited multiple villages until the boy remembered the right one. He remembered his own first and last name, as well as the first and last name of his murderer.

[According to](#) the Institute for the Integration of Science, Intuition, and Spirit:

A member of this community, who had heard the boy's story, said that he had known the man that the boy said that he was in the past lifetime. This man had disappeared 4 years earlier and was never found. It was assumed that this person must have come to some misfortune as it was known that individuals were killed or taken prisoner in the border areas between Israel and Syria for being suspected of being spies.

The group went through the village and at one point the boy pointed out this past life house. Curious bystanders gathered around and suddenly the boy walked up to a man and called him by name. The man acknowledged that the boy correctly named him and the boy then said:

"I used to be your neighbor. We had a fight and you killed me with an ax."

Dr. Lasch then observed that this man's face suddenly became white as a sheet. The 3-year-old then stated:

"I even know where he buried my body."

The boy then led the group, which included the accused murderer,

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"He buried my body under these stones and the ax over there."

Chanai Choomalaiwong

Chanai Choomalaiwong was a boy from Thailand, who, when he was three years old, began saying that he had been a teacher named Bua Kai who had been shot and killed as he rode his bike to school. He pleaded and begged to be taken to Bua Kai's parents, who he felt were his own parents. He knew the village where they lived, and eventually convinced his grandmother to take him there. According to the research:

His grandmother reported that after they got off the bus, Chanai led her to a house where an older couple lived. Chanai appeared to recognize the couple, who were the parents of Bua Kai Lawnak, a teacher who had been shot and killed on the way to school five years before Chanai was born.

Children's Reports of Past Life Memories: A review by
Jim B. Tucker, MD

The fascinating thing is that Kai and Chanai had something in common. Kai, who was shot from behind, had small, round wounds on the back of his head, typical of an entry wound, and larger exit wounds on his forehead; Chanai was born with two birthmarks, a small, round birthmark on the back of his head, and a larger, irregularly shaped one towards the front.

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[2005](#). You can access many more research studies on the topic [here](#). All of these come from the Perceptual Studies department at the University of Virginia.

Can “Consciousness” or “the mind” survive “death” ? Is reincarnation one of many paths?

Reincarnation may not be “the” answer as to what occurs when someone dies. Perhaps it’s one of many paths.

These questions have been contemplated for thousands of years. In the Socratic dialogue, Meno by Plato, the character Socrates attempts to prove that life exists before birth. Instead of innate knowledge that we are simply born with, knowledge that simply comes naturally to us, Plato relies on prenatal knowledge to explain our ability to solve problems in mathematics and philosophy, and suggests that we must have known the answers to these problems all along.

Perhaps reincarnation isn’t really reincarnation? Perhaps these memories are simply proof that all consciousness, in some way, is connected and these children are simply picking up on aspects that’s simply another part of themselves? Perhaps they are simply retaining memories of the past life, and that specific consciousness or “soul” did not actually reincarnate into another body, because if it did would more memories not be present? Perhaps there is another explanation as to why these children can remember such things that don’t include the idea of reincarnation?

There are so many unanswerable questions.

The question of whether or not consciousness survives after death is at the forefront of many scientific circles. For example, Neurosurgeon Dr. Eben

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to come in from somewhere else. He believes there is reason to believe our consciousness continues after death, and that a physical body is not required for consciousness to exist.

[Here](#) is a great video from Dr. Gary Schwartz, professor of psychology, medicine, neurology, psychiatry and surgery at the University of Arizona discussing whether or not consciousness is the product of the brain or a receiver of it.

There is also the topic of Near Death Experiences (NDEs) that are quite astonishing. People who have “died” and come back on the operating table were able to describe being outside of their body and provide details they would not otherwise have been able to provide had they been “inside” their body. To read and learn more about NDEs, you can access the research [here](#).

The idea that consciousness is a separate “thing” from our biology is supported by a wealth of evidence in the fields of quantum physics, parapsychology and neuroscience. Despite this evidence, the topic is still shunned within many mainstream academic circles, and perhaps it’s because the idea simply challenges our long held belief systems of what we think we know and have already discovered.

Cassandra Vieten, PhD and president/CEO at the Institute of Noetic Sciences offers a possible explanation.

There seems to be a deep concern that the whole field will be tarnished by studying a phenomenon that is tainted by its association with superstition, spiritualism and magic. Protecting against this possibility sometimes seems more important than

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"When Skeptis Face The Evidence."

Consider the prominent physicist Lord Kelvin who [stated](#) in the year 1900 that, "There is nothing new to be discovered in physics now...All that remains is more and more precise measurement." It wasn't long after this statement that Einstein published his paper on special relativity.

Einstein's theories challenged the accepted framework of knowledge at the time and forced the scientific community to open up to a broader/alternative view of reality. This type of thing will continue to happen throughout human history, the only thing constant is change and discovery that expands upon and changes what we once thought we knew.

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Carl Sagan

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