

When Does Human Life Begin?

Evidence from NDEs & Related Experiences



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When does human life begin?

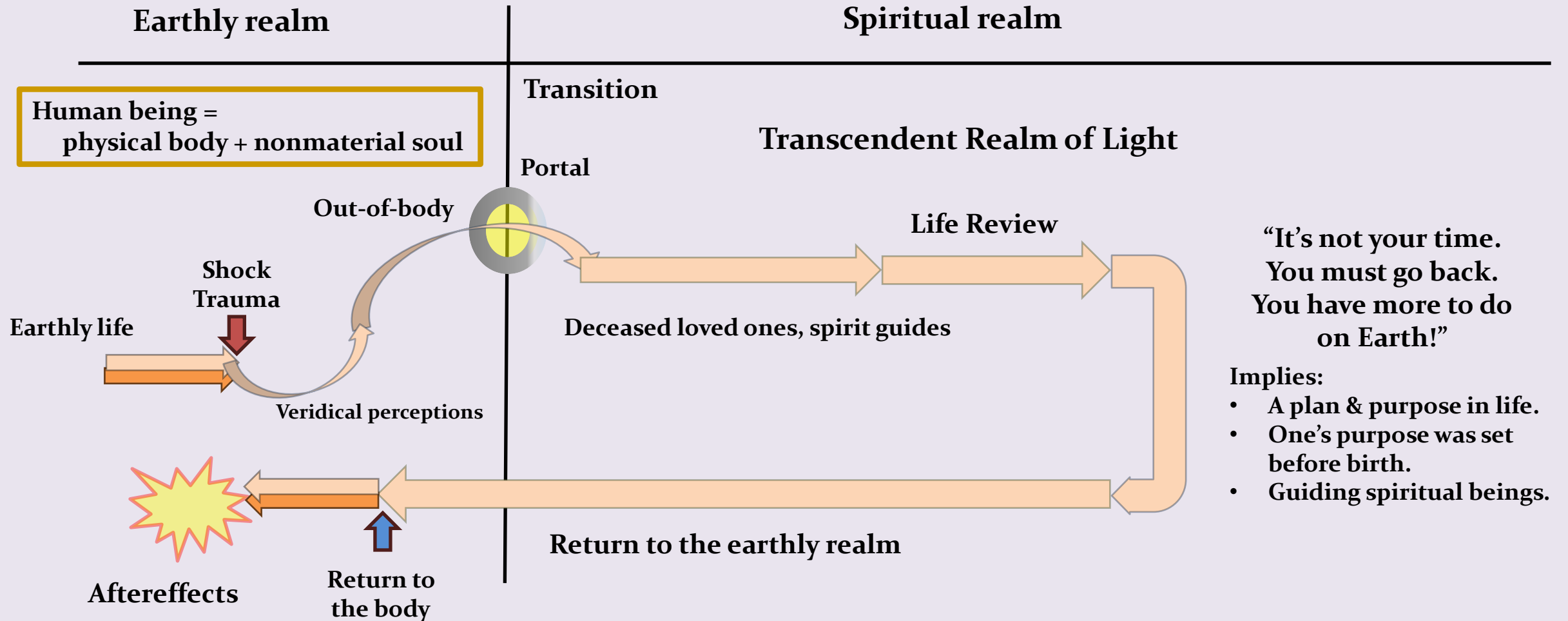
- We use the term “soul” to indicate the nonmaterial aspect of a human being which separates from the physical body during an NDE
 - Elsewhere we have called this aspect the “mind”; in the process of incarnation, “soul” seems more appropriate
- It’s important to provide a perspective on this question from the evidence that is available from near-death experiences and related phenomena
 - NDE evidence suggests that the soul is a separate entity from the physical body but unites with the body during earthly life
 - If so, the question becomes: When does the soul fully merge with the forming physical body?
- NDEs and related phenomena provide *a framework* to understand the process of incarnation of the soul from the transcendent or spiritual realm into a physical body
 - The framework can be derived from evidence from NDEs, prebirth memories, life-between-life regression, intermission memories, and so on.
 - The framework provides *new information* and a *new perspective* on the spiritual nature of the human being and the question of when human life begins
- The implications from this framework can change the current divisive debate on the mother’s rights versus the rights of the incarnating soul
 - Within this framework, can abortion be viewed in a different way without judgment?

Disclaimers

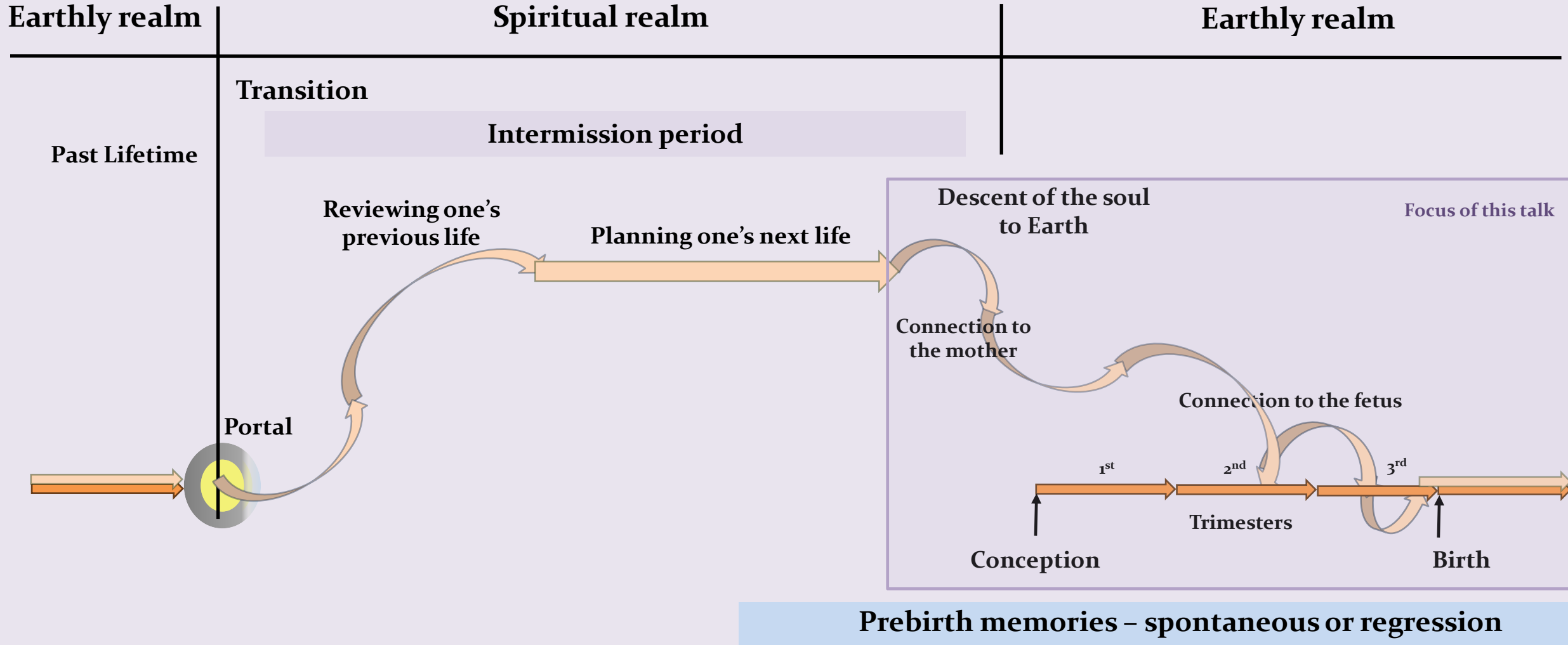
- We are presenting our research based on our interpretation of the evidence from the experiences and memories of many different experiencers, and the research results of several different researchers
 - We have attempted to include a wide range of different phenomena, accepting all results without bias or preference to a particular viewpoint
 - Where space and time allow, we will quote the experiencers and research results verbatim
- As an organization, IANDS remains neutral with respect to the interpretation of NDEs and related phenomena
 - Therefore, our results and conclusions are our own and do not reflect IANDS's position and may or may not reflect other researchers' opinions

Types of phenomena and types of evidence ...

Near-death experiences



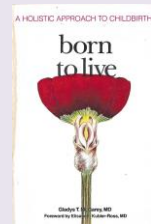
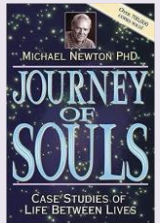
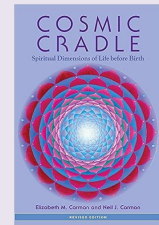
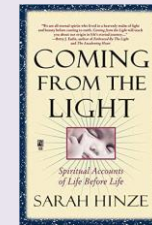
Types of phenomena and types of evidence



Life-between-lives and intermission memories – spontaneous or regression memories

Our primary sources

- **Most evidence of prebirth experiences comes from:**
 - From parents: communications with the soul of a child prior to conception (dreams, visions, announcing signs)
 - From young children: spontaneous memories about their experiences prior to conception and later in the womb
 - From hypnotic regression sessions tapping into prebirth memories
 - From NDErs: memories about planning their future life and about their experiences in the womb
- **Sources based on reports of spontaneous prebirth experiences from parents and children**
 - Sarah & Brent Hinze, *Coming From the Light* (1994) ~ Elizabeth & Neil Carman, *Cosmic Cradle* (1999, 2013)
- **Sources based on hypnotic regression therapy**
 - Helen Wambach: Important hypnotic regression study of prebirth memories – *Life Before Life* (1979)
 - 750 volunteers, hypnotic sessions with 20–50 subjects at a time, written answers to standard questions
 - **Life Between Lives** hypnotic regression analysis
 - Newton: *Journey of Souls* (1994) ~ Newton: *Destiny of Souls* (2000) ~ Shakuntala Modi: *Remarkable Healings* (1997)
 - Describing regression sessions: past-life memories, life-between-lives memories, and memories of the prebirth incarnation process
- **Sources that analyze and summarize communications with the unborn, spontaneous prebirth memories, and hypnotic regression memories**
 - Gladys McGarey, *Born to Live* (1980) ~ Carol Bowman, *Return From Heaven* (2001) ~ Elisabeth Hallett, *Stories of the Unborn Soul* (2002) ~ Ian Lawton, *The Book of the Soul* (2004)
- **Sources of NDEr prebirth memories**
 - Christian Sundberg, *A Walk in the Physical* (2021) ~ Venia R., *My Near-Death Experience: From A to Z* (2022) ~ Nancy Rynes, *Awakenings from the Light* (2015)



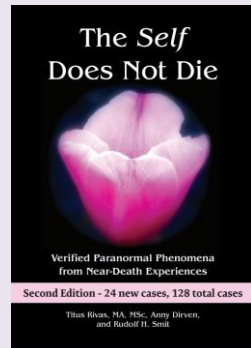
Validity of the evidence from prebirth phenomena

- The prebirth evidence is valid because:
 - First, many people of different cultural and religious backgrounds report having the *same* experience
 - Second, memories of the *same* experience occur in *different types* of recollections such as:
 - Spontaneous prebirth memories
 - Hypnotic regression memories
 - Episodic memories from an NDE
 - Third, the evidence includes paranormal aspects with *accurate, verified* (veridical) perceptions
 - Finally, experiencers who had two or more different types of experiences thought they were from the *same* realm
- The evidence is internally *coherent* and is *consistent* across all of these prebirth phenomena
 - The experiences provide a coherent picture of transmateral realities
 - And are part of a *continuum* of paranormal experiences, which have mutually consistent elements across a wide spectrum of death-related phenomena—including NDEs, SDEs, ADCs, etc.
- Therefore:
 - The evidence implies that these prebirth experiences are *objectively real*
 - The collective evidence can be taken as *accurate, objective* data

The soul is *not* the physical body ...

Principle: The soul is *not* the physical body

- The strongest evidence of this principle comes from NDEs: the soul functions as a *separate entity* independent of the body
 - During the NDE, the soul is a cohesive unit
 - There is a continuity of consciousness throughout the separation and return
 - The out-of-body NDEr does not identify with the physical body; “That physical body wasn’t me!”
- The separate soul entity is objectively real, that is, it can be observed by others
 - There are a number of cases in which the NDEr can be seen by others:
 - By animals: Jerry Casebolt and the German Shepherd
 - By other people: “apparitional” NDEs
 - Objective corroboration by others of the NDEr’s out-of-body form demonstrates that the NDEr soul is a real being—the essence of the person
 - The soul really exists



The soul is *not* the physical body

Principle: The soul is *not* the physical body

- This principle *also applies* to the incarnating soul, which generally feels itself separate from the fetus through most of the pregnancy
- The 750 subjects of the Wambach study were nearly unanimous on one point (Wambach, 1979, 99)
 - They felt that the fetus was not truly a part of their consciousness
 - They existed, fully conscious, as an entity *apart* from the fetus
 - For most of the pregnancy they did not identify with the forming fetal body
 - “I was in and out of the fetus, and it seemed there were two different worlds, *outside* and *inside* the fetus. The attachment was not total.” (p. 111)
- The incarnating souls are intelligent, have an adult perspective, and work on the developing fetus
 - Many subjects viewed themselves as an adult consciousness relating to the fetal body as a less-developed form of life (p. 99)

The process of the incarnation of the soul ...

- The incarnation of the soul from the spiritual realm to physical embodiment involves several steps or stages
- Before conception, these are the typical steps the soul takes:
 - Planning the next life with help from spiritual guides: the goals for this life, location, time period
 - Selecting the type of body and selecting the mother and father
 - Arranging for one's life connections with others for the planned life
 - Making arrangements with one's siblings, friends, future spouse
 - Arranging significant encounters with others, agreeing on significant roles to play, etc.
 - Previewing the significant events of the coming life and checking one's choices
 - Descending to the earthly sphere, and
 - Establishing a connection to the mother, typically *before* conception

The process of the incarnation of the soul



Left panel: “It will be”

- With the guidance of angels in the realm of the stars, the soul *ascends* into the spiritual world at death
- An extended life review (Rückschau) begins

Center: “It is coming into being”

- In its life planning for a new incarnation, the soul looks back to other souls whom it will meet on the Earth to fulfill its destiny
- Simultaneously, the soul looks forward at the loving couple it is bringing together to provide the physical conditions for its Earthly life

Right panel: “It is”

- Led by angels toward the Earth, the soul *descends* out of the planetary spheres into Earthly incarnation and birth

Birth and Reincarnation – by Rudolf Steiner

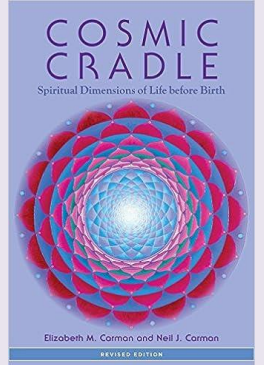
Violet etched-glass window at the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland

Connection of the soul to the mother: *before* conception

- Typically, the soul establishes a connection to the mother *before* conception and there are many ways the soul announces that it is coming
 - A feeling coming over the mother and a strong desire to have a baby
 - Announcing dreams or announcing signs to the mother or a relative
 - Waking visions or dreams
 - Communicating through an inner voice, telepathy, or an intuitive awareness
 - In meditation, the soul asking the mother to be born
 - A negotiation with the incarnating soul
 - During an NDE, the NDEr may meet souls who will become their children after they return to their body

An archetypal example of a soul's incarnation ...

- An archetypal example is one in which *all of the elements* of the phenomenon are present
 - The case of Elizabeth and her mother Lezlie is an archetypal example of the soul undertaking the process of incarnation from the spiritual world to physical birth. (Carman & Carman, 2013, 39–50)
 - The soul first planned to be a boy with the particular father and mother who had been selected
 - In the 12th week, the parents argued whether to circumcise the baby if it was a boy---a division that threatened the marriage
 - With counsel from a spiritual guide, the boy's soul decided to terminate the pregnancy and come back later as a girl who was named Elizabeth
 - With the miscarriage in the shower, the soul felt itself wash down the drain—the memory of which caused intense phobias in Elizabeth of drains and flushing toilets
 - Returning to the spiritual world, the soul met the soul of her younger sibling yet to be born. The miscarriage now delayed the sibling's soul's life plan.
 - Elizabeth's soul, now incarnating as a girl, delayed her delivery by 17 days and forced herself to be born by emergency C-section.
 - Elizabeth provided numerous prebirth veridical perceptions which Lezlie corroborated, for example, “Oh, yeah, Mom, I was in your tummy twice. The first time I washed away. The second time, I came out like a zipper.”
 - When Elizabeth was seven, she told Lezlie, “I remember the miscarriage [in the first pregnancy]. That was me. I was a boy and you and dad had a fight. I chose to leave and come back as a girl.”



An archetypal example of a soul's incarnation

- **This example gives an overall picture of the incarnating soul entering earthly life**
 - **The incarnating soul is a fully conscious, autonomous spiritual being**
 - **The incarnating soul is very involved in the details in planning its future life—with the parents, siblings, and others they will encounter in life, with their physical gender, and the timing of their birth**
 - **“I saw that I was involved at every stage of my choice to come here on earth. ... In seeing all [that went into my life plan], I was truly amazed how involved we were in the decision-making process of our lives. Almost nothing appeared to be random.”** (Venia, pp. 68–69)
 - **The soul makes these choices to meet the overall needs for their spiritual growth and the fulfillment of their prebirth intentions**
 - **The soul monitors everything going on in their future parents' lives and the environment**
 - **When conditions change, the soul is free to change its life plan, even after conception and the adjustments are made, including deferring the birth until conditions improve**
 - **Wise spiritual beings provide counseling to the incarnating soul throughout the process of life planning, the descent to the Earth, conception, and birth**

The soul's connection to the fetus ...

- The soul's *initial connection* with the mother and fetus may occur *after* conception
 - In studying cases of apparent reincarnation in which a young child remembers a previous life, Ian Stevenson found a pattern of 21 cases “in which a child was born *less than nine months* after the previous personality died” (Bowman, pp. 183–184)
 - These cases imply that the soul connected with the mother and fetus *after* the fetus had begun development
 - These cases “challenge the notion that the soul must enter the womb or be bound to the fetus *at conception*”
- During gestation, the incarnating soul goes in and out of the fetus frequently to check on and influence its development, spending *most of the time outside* the fetus (Wambach, pp. 99, 106–107)
 - “I felt that I was just interested [in the fetus] from time to time in perceiving from the inside, but most outside. I seemed to be adjusting it to fit my awareness.”
 - “I saw [the fetus] and nurtured it and watched out for it, and also was in it all the way a few times, but not most of the time.”
 - Wambach's subjects frequently reported that the fetal body was confining and restrictive, and that they preferred the freedom of out-of-body existence
 - Janice's prebirth memories of embryonic life: “Fetal life felt heavy, terrible, and awkward. I entered the womb for a while and then went back to Heaven. I gradually became accustomed to my body by increasing the time spent in the womb as pregnancy progressed.” (Carman & Carman, 2013, 102)
 - Many of Wambach's subjects reported that they reluctantly joined their consciousness with the newborn infant

The soul's connection to the fetus ...

- The fact that the incarnating soul spends time out-of-body outside the womb is supported by veridical perceptions the infant later reports
 - One two-year-old boy reported observing his mother severely cutting her finger during pregnancy and staining her yellow dress, which she later threw away; the mother had forgotten this latter detail until her son reminded her (Bowman, 2001, 183)
 - Recall that seven-year-old Elizabeth remembered the miscarriage in the mother's first pregnancy which occurred the next morning after the fight between her parents. (Carman & Carman, 2013, 49)
- After some level of brain development, the soul works with the fetus to develop and fine-tune the brain and nervous system
 - “ “When I enter the womb of the mother, I create a red light of tight energy and direct it up and down the spinal column of the [fetus]—following a network of neurons to the brain. ... I meld my energy warmth to the gray-blues of brain matter.” (Newton, 2000, 389–390)
 - “[I endeavor to improve fetal] brain function by stimulating brain areas ever so slightly. ... The whole idea is matching the soul's vibrational levels and capabilities with that of the natural rhythms of the [fetal] brain waves.” (Newton, 2000, 390)

The soul's connection to the fetus

- At some point in development, varying from soul to soul, there is a “uniting” or “coupling” of the soul with the fetus
 - In his prebirth memory, Christian Sundberg recalled the process of incarnation
 - His energetic vibration level plummeted from being connected with everything to a state of being in a dark, cold vacuum of the flesh
 - As he struggled to hold on, he sent a simple message: “Did it take?” And he was told simply, “Yes.” (Sundberg, 2021, 7)
 - “I entered my current body in the eighth month. I prefer to enter on the late side when the brain is larger, so I have more to work with during the coupling.” (Newton, 2000, 391)
 - “[My soul entering the fetus] is a melding. There is an emptiness before my arrival which I fill to make the baby whole.” (Newton, 1994, 270)
- We speculate that the coupling generally occurs when the soul can interface sufficiently with the developing brain and nervous system
 - Before that the soul carefully works on the developing brain but remains *outside* the fetus

When does the soul fully unite with the fetus? ...

- To summarize our principles so far:
 - In the earthly realm, the human being is the integration of the physical body and a nonmaterial soul
 - The soul is the primary aspect of being human, it is the essence of the person, the humanness of the person
 - The soul is not the physical body

Principle: The fetus becomes a human being when the human soul fully unites with it

- In the early stages of gestation, the soul is generally only tenuously connected with the fetus
 - However, the soul *can* have a sense of connection, attachment, and even embodiment earlier than 6 months – these cases are relatively rare
 - Wambach study: “89% of subjects said they did not become a part of the fetus or involved with the fetus until after 6 months of gestation.” (p. 99)
 - “According to my patients’ reports, the soul may enter the fetus any time from conception till birth. Most commonly, the soul enters the body just before or after birth.” (Modi, p. 102)

When does the soul fully unite with the fetus?

- **Later in gestation the soul is generally more involved with the fetus**
 - However, the soul still alternates ‘in and out’ of the fetus, spending more time out than in the fetus (Wambach, p. 99)
 - The soul works on the fetus “from the outside”
 - In a multiple birth, the souls may not even be *assigned* to a specific fetus until just before birth. Wambach reported the case of a twin: “Shortly before birth we entered the fetuses. We were fighting about which body to pick, the blonde or the brown-haired fetus.” (Wambach p. 101)
- **When does the soul *specifically* unite with the fetus? There is wide variability:**
 - **Early on: between conception and 6 months: relatively rare**
 - “It seemed to me that I surrounded the fetus until it developed a heartbeat [end of 4th week], then I entered it.” (Wambach, p. 117)
 - “It seemed to me that I came early into the fetus, at about five months [20 weeks].” (Wambach, p. 116)
 - **After about 6 months’ gestation: reported by 89% of Wambach’s subjects**
 - **Just before or during physical birth or even after physical birth: “I didn’t enter the body until well after birth”**
(Wambach p. 111)
 - **Even uniting with a stillborn baby** (case of W. Martin cited by Cook et al., 1998, *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 12(3), 387)

When the process of incarnation is blocked ...

- The whole process of physical incarnation is part of the soul's *prebirth planning*—the various possibilities in the plan are known to the soul *before* conception
 - The soul knows, for example, the possibility that the mother will decide to block conception or to abort the pregnancy
 - But such termination may be *part* of the soul's *life plan*, or, at a minimum, is foreknown as a *possibility*
 - Or the termination could be the result of the soul's own choice:
 - For example, in his earlier brief incarnation, NDEr Christian Sundberg was so terrified of being cut off from the Source that he forced his soul to pull away and reject the 'veil,' resulting in a miscarriage (Sundberg, p. 5)
 - "A miscarriage occurs when the spirit assigned to the fetus, decides not to incarnate. The spirit is never damaged in that process. To put it simply, the spirit has changed its mind and decided not to incarnate, or it will find another vessel (mother) to be born to." (Venia, p. 19)
 - In general, "[The soul] knows if [the fetus] is going to full term or not. Not being born comes as no surprise to [the soul]." (Newton, 1994, p. 267)
- When the soul is aware of the situation, it can choose to leave, resulting in a miscarriage
 - In a case of pregnancy, the dad was not ready to marry, so the mother chose to abort the pregnancy:
 - Several year later, their four-year-old child recalled her memory of these events "When I was four inches long and in your tummy, Daddy wasn't ready to marry you yet, so *I went away*. But then I came back." (McGarey, p. 54)
 - The girl's statement implies that her soul decided to leave *before* the abortion

When the process of incarnation is blocked

- Another possibility: the mother can *initiate a conversation and negotiation* with the incoming soul, explaining the circumstances and her decision to abort:
 - The soul can then decide to leave: a pregnant 15-year-old and her family prayed, spoke to the incarnating soul, and decided to go ahead with the abortion; however, there was a spontaneous miscarriage the next morning (McGarey, 1980, pp. 55–56; Bowman, 2001, p. 188)
 - Or with communication with the soul, the mother can change her plans regarding the baby.
 - Elizabeth Hallett related the story of one unmarried woman who had planned in the eighth month to give her baby up for adoption.
 - Right after her decision, she had a vivid dream, instantly recognized her connection with the incarnating soul, and began communicating with him. She changed her plans and kept the baby (Hallett, 2002, pp. 130–131)
 - A conversation and negotiation between the mother and the incoming soul should become *the preferred way of handling an initially unwanted pregnancy*
- If the pregnancy is terminated, the soul returns to the spiritual world to formulate a *new plan* for incarnation
 - But terminating the pregnancy *when the soul is unprepared* can cause trauma (Carman & Carman, 2013, pp. 39–50)
 - In the soul's life planning, the possibility of abortion will likely have been known and accepted—it may have been a plan arranged even before *both* the mother and soul had incarnated
- In all of these cases in which an incarnation is blocked, there is no evidence of negative spiritual judgment, disapproval, or condemnation

Moral, legal, and societal questions ...

Principle: The free will of the incarnating soul and of the mother are *equivalent*

- By this spiritual principle, the choice of *both* the incarnating soul and the mother should have equal effect or weight
 - The mother has the right to decide what is best for her life situation
 - Therefore, in principle the mother should be *free to choose* to terminate the pregnancy up to a particular time without any external interference; Other factors like rape, incest, health of the mother, etc. should *also* be allowable for intervention
 - The soul needs to have the mother's willingness to bear the child
 - The incarnating soul is *free to abort* the pregnancy with a spontaneous miscarriage; there are many documented cases of a miscarriage occurring immediately after a decision or event happened (e.g., the case of Elizabeth and in Gladys McGarey's work)
- With their free-will choices available to them, a *negotiation* can occur between the incarnating soul and the mother
 - If the mother chooses abortion, the soul leaves the fetus and may select other parents, or to come to the same mother at a later time
 - "In the case of abortion, I was shown that no [soul] will be assigned to a fetus that is to be aborted. Period. It is literally that cut and dry, when viewed from the other side." (Venia R, 2022, 20)
 - If the soul persuades the mother, the mother may decide to allow the pregnancy to proceed to birth
- At the spiritual level, no *judgment* appears to apply to cases of abortion, or *stigma* with miscarriages, etc.
 - "There is absolutely no stigma attached to [the abortion], and it definitely was not looked upon as a so-called sin or murder. [Spirits] are in no way affected by abortion, and can never be destroyed, by any means." (p. 20)

Moral, legal, and societal questions

Principle: Ideally the mother's choice would be made through her *moral intuition*

- That is, the mother's intuition of what is best *for this specific incarnating soul and the mother's specific life circumstances*
- This principle allows the decision to be made in *complete freedom*, without influence from any external authority
- However, there comes a point on the timeline of the incarnation process when legal and societal requirements may intervene to set a standard beyond which abortion is *not* allowed
- A reasonable point is the point of “fetal viability”—that is, the ability of the fetus to survive outside the womb
 - Viability occurs near the end of the second trimester; with medical advances it can in rare cases be as early as 22 weeks
 - The best choice: when the level of care available gives a 50-50 chance of survival: currently about 24 weeks
 - Therefore, the current 50% level of viability of 24 weeks is a good compromise point
 - The incarnating soul can still choose to leave after this point through miscarriage, but it would *no longer* be a choice for the mother to terminate the pregnancy, providing the other allowable factors of rape, incest, the health of the mother, etc. are absent

Conclusions—Inspired to Loving Action

- The evidence from prebirth memories, NDEs, and related phenomena show that:
 - The incarnating soul is *not* the physical fetus
 - The incarnating soul is *not* a blank slate; rather it is a mature, self-aware spiritual being with a plan for its upcoming earthly life
 - The incarnating soul generally does not join the fetus at conception or even up to six months; a *majority* of souls do not experience the fetus until just before birth
- If there is a conflict between the mother and the incarnating soul: through communication and negotiation between both parties, the process of resolution can be guided by Love –
 - The answer can be reached by a “moral intuition” of what is right for the specific situation of *this particular soul* and *this particular mother*—
 - Rather than dictated by laws, rules, general principles, and scientific or religious dogmas
- The principle of Unconditional Love should guide all considerations in these matters

NDErs know that Unconditional Love is the fundamental principle of all life,
in the spiritual world and on Earth