

BOOK REVIEW

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Cosmic Cradle: Souls Waiting in the Wings for Birth, by Elizabeth M. Carman and Neil J. Carman. Fairfield, IA: Sunstar Publishing, 1999, 734 pp + xii, \$23.95 pb.

This remarkable book by Elizabeth and Neil Carman lends itself to hyperbole, with 633 pages of text, 69 pages of glossary, footnotes, references, and index, a scope that takes in 165 cultures and religions, and a time period that includes most of recorded history and literature. Remarkable also is its fulsome yet tightly focused treatment of a rare topic: preconceptual communication between children-to-be and their future parents. Readers will find it a big book presenting a large picture of the human psyche, a view of ourselves certainly not unprecedented, as the book clearly documents, and one not unfamiliar to persons who have encountered the near-death experience.

On the shelf, *Cosmic Cradle* is an intimidating size, but once inside one finds a logical format of five parts incorporating 34 chapters, many of them brimming with personal experiences on an intimate scale. It will not give you indigestion unless you try to gulp it all down at once. The book begins and ends with striking firsthand reports, my favorite parts of the book: Parts I, II, and V. Parts III and IV carry heavy crosscultural documentation of metaphysical beliefs about the preconceptual world and the "cosmic contracts" that seem to precede conception and entry into the physical world. A short Afterword offers practical tips on how to develop greater receptivity to preconception communications.

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A cogent first chapter provides a wide angle view of a neglected world literature that speaks loudly for the normalcy of preconceptual negotiations between the souls of children preparing to come into the world and their surprised parents-to-be. In their ten-year search, the Carmans found accounts of these communications before biological conception irrespective of gender, age, race, religion, generation, or country. Table I on page 7 displays the sources of these unusual reports: 18 religious traditions, 25 cultures from ancient to modern times, 53 native North American peoples, 28 Australian Aboriginal peoples, 20 African peoples, and many others across the globe adding up to 165 cultures and religions. If you think child-parent communication before conception is a strange new phenomenon, prepare yourself to learn that it is virtually universal in human history. And it is still an untold story. The Carmans do us a service in lifting this widely scattered literature from obscurity to full view.

The organization of the book is logical, with brief thematic introductions followed by short personal stories and the listing of sources where similar reports are found in a range of cultures and countries. The latter are neatly bulleted, making spare use of words in a kind of get-to-the-point journalism. What becomes clear is that children, months or years before they are actually conceived, are active souls communicating on their own behalf with receptive future parents. They are reaching them in visions, dreams, flashes of intuition, meditation, or other altered states. Sometimes the parties meet during a near-death experience. Seven-year-old Katie, for example, awoke from a coma following her near-drowning accident asking, "Where are Mark and Andy?"—future siblings she had already met.

The parents involved in this high level dialogue are, of course, as extraordinary as the children in their readiness for this exchange, doing their part by being interested, open, curious, and highly aware human beings. Some souls remember the whole scenario from preconception through gestation, birth, and throughout their lives. The authors refer to this as *gifted memory*. Typically, conversations are as spontaneous and satisfying as the meeting of dear friends after a long absence, with much affection expressed and a completely frank exchange of needs and feelings. The force of the personalities involved is quite obvious and "babies" do not necessarily get what they want. Negotiations can be delicate and ongoing over long waiting periods before all the obstacles are removed and the mother is fully ready for the pregnancy. At that time, conscious conception is reported as a joyous experience for all concerned and feels like a reunion. Communications are purposeful,

but can just as well be sprightly and light-hearted. Such events are vivid and unforgettable for the mother, father, or the siblings involved.

Historically, *Cosmic Cradle* arrives in a friendly context of other frontier works celebrating unexpected feats of consciousness related to pregnancy and birth, including immediate predecessors *Coming from the Light: Spiritual Accounts of Life Before Birth* (Hinze, 1994) and *Soul Trek: Meeting Our Children on the Way to Birth* (Hallett, 1995). These books were the first to contain many first-person accounts of infant-parent communications prior to conception and/or prior to birth. Books about one mother's experience of communication during pregnancy include *Diary of an Unborn Child: An Unborn Baby Speaks to its Mother* (Coudris, 1985/1992) and *Cheyenne: Journey to Birth* (McManus, 1999). Roy Mills has written about his extensive memories of life before conception in *The Soul's Remembrance: Earth is not our Home* (1999).

Also in the same context of pregnancy and birth are works in the expanding field of prenatal and perinatal psychology, including *The Secret Life of the Unborn Child* (Verny and Kelly, 1981/1986), *The Mind of Your Newborn Baby* (Chamberlain, 1998), *Your Amazing Newborn* (Klaus and Klaus, 1989/1998), *Remembering Your Life Before Birth* (Gabriel and Gabriel, 1995), and the more recent *Parenting Begins Before Conception: A Guide to Preparing Body, Mind and Spirit For Your Future Child* (Luminare-Rosen, 2000). An even larger context of supportive literature on human consciousness is, of course, the abundant research on near-death experiences so familiar to the readers of this Journal. I would add also the less familiar body of research on psychic phenomena, particularly telepathy, which helps to explain the remarkable effectiveness of prenatal and perinatal communications between infants and parents (for example, Szejer, 1997).

The authors of *Cosmic Cradle* correctly sense the prime importance of neglected epochs of human development, including the exiled territories of perinatal psychology, prenatal psychology, and now preconception psychology, to which their volume promises to make such a distinctive contribution. Since 1980, in my own published papers, I have chronicled the rapid accumulation of scientific findings about the realities of life at birth, life before birth, and in recent years, life before conception—areas that after all this time are still mostly invisible in academic medicine and psychology. As a practicing clinician, however, I had a secret advantage: clients who were teaching me every day that these areas were *not* outside the bounds of personal memory. Another advantage I had was the book *Life After Life* (Moody, 1975), given to me by a colleague as a Christmas present in 1976. From this book I quickly realized that

the unpredicted cognitive power of persons having near-death experiences, far removed from their physical brains, matched exactly the unpredicted cognitive power of newborns and babies in the womb who, in hypnosis, could tell me all about their experiences despite the pitiful status of their brains. This was when I began to think about the need for a larger paradigm to explain babies and ourselves.

Cosmic Cradle arrives at a time in the history of psychology when there may be a more favorable response to the type of research data that give the book its special clout: self-report. Psychologists have not always agreed on the relative merits of different methods of research. At one extreme, at the beginning of the 20th century, academic psychology wanted above all to establish itself as a science; therefore the study of consciousness was sacrificed and the methods considered valid were experimental methods, preferably measuring with "brass instruments." Over time, the value of evidence obtained in clinical situations asserted itself and eventually found grudging acceptance beside the experimental method.

A later arrival was the cautious appreciation of data offered by individuals in the form of self-report, also known as "anecdotal" evidence—a term often meant as a put-down. These data are perhaps the most undervalued in psychology today, although they are often the leading edge of the field, anticipating realities that may take a decade longer to formalize in experimental research. In my opinion, we should celebrate self-report as indispensable and priceless in psychology. As a method, self-report gains persuasive power when repeated observations can be made—an enduring principle in science—and when many examples can be found, especially if they come from widely scattered regions and cultures over centuries of time—the unique advantage of cross-cultural research.

Cosmic Cradle's principal data on the stratospheric heights of human memory, functioning (as claimed) *before* conception and therefore prior to the physical brain, could be a wake-up tonic for psychology. However, these data challenge psychological theories of memory on a critical point: their complete dependence upon brain matter. The common ground shared by pioneers in near-death research, newborn cognition, prenatal intelligence, and preconception wisdom is that the farther reaches of memory are indifferent to the location and status of the physical brain. Moving backward from birth, memory is increasingly deprived of the brain matter that is used to explain it. This materialistic foundation of memory, though it has seemed plausible in our contemporary scientific culture, is proving inadequate to explain the

most interesting and important discoveries in consciousness research in the last century. We are being forced to articulate a larger paradigm.

With a title like *Cosmic Cradle: Souls Waiting in the Wings for Birth*, this book will not easily be recognized by search engines racing to add to a database in medicine or psychology. In this respect its appearance reminds me of the innocent way Raymond Moody's *Life After Life* entered the world. Neither book fits in what we would now call the old paradigm of understanding human life as *matter*, particularly brain matter, and nothing more. With 20/20 hindsight, we should now be able to appreciate that both books contribute greatly to a new paradigm of the human mind and soul as consciousness vaulting well beyond the body/brain.

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