

BOOK REVIEW

I Saw a Light and Came Here: Children's Experiences of Reincarnation by Erlendur Haraldsson and James G. Matlock. Hove, UK: White Crow Books, 2016. 289 pp. €20.30 (paperback). ISBN: 978-1-910121-92-4.

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Part 1 of the book comprises the first 166 pages, having been contributed by Erlendur Haraldsson (professor of psychology emeritus at the University of Iceland) (Haraldsson 2017a). The remaining 106 pages, Part 2, are from anthropologist James G. Matlock (Parapsychology Foundation, USA).

Erlendur Haraldsson may be seen as the doyen of European survival and especially reincarnation research. Among many of his books, he has now, at last, come out with one bringing together, as part of his outstanding lifetime accomplishments, his many relevant articles between two book covers (see references on p. 275) (Haraldsson 2017b). He belongs to the pioneers who around the world investigated cases of children spontaneously claiming to remember a previous life.

Part 1 is written in the manner of an empirical field researcher. He lets his cases speak for themselves. Especially the first three examples, but also others farther down, will pose a problem to skeptics to come up with an explanation devoid of reincarnation.

The first case is about the Sri Lankan girl Purnima Ekanayake (p. 3). She made 20 statements about her previous life, 14 of which were correct, 3 could not be tested, and 3 were false. Large birthmarks corresponded to the mode of death in her previous life. Before verification, the previous and the current family were not acquainted with each other; they lived far apart.

The Lebanese boy Nazih in the second example (p. 13) uttered 17 verifiable statements about his previous life, all of which could be shown to be correct. He was asked 15 questions about very private family matters. He could answer them all to the satisfaction of the researcher. The small boy of only 4 years of age recognized a number of members of the previous family whom he could not have known normally. His case is one of the best documented because there were 9 informants who could contribute information about Nazih before contact was made with the previous family. For verification, 4 persons were available.

Example number 3 deals with Duminda Ratnayake (p. 27), a boy from Sri Lanka, who made 8 statements about his previous life which were all correct. Even more remarkable than this is his behavior shown beginning at age 2 to 3 and which suggests a previous life as a Buddhist monk. Professor Haraldsson lists no fewer than 18 behavioural traits relating to this.

Another boy from Sri Lanka (p. 33), Sandika Tharanga, showed similar clear behavior of a Buddhist monk, beginning from toddlerhood, although growing up in a Catholic family.

Gamaga Ruvan Tharanga Perera's case (p. 36) is similar to the aforementioned. Its peculiarity is to be seen in the fact that written documents had been made before the case was investigated. Apart from this, the boy showed recitative xenoglossy just as Duminda did.

Professor Haraldsson, an Icelander, continues in Chapters 4 and 5 with 5 examples from his home country (beginning at p. 45) that are partly weak and unsolved, demonstrating a clear contrast to the above cited cases.

Because Professor Haraldsson investigated predominantly in Lebanon and Sri Lanka, he presents 3 randomly selected Druze cases in Chapter 6 (p. 57) demonstrating the elements of "recognition," "phobias," "special behaviour of playing," "announcing dreams," and "physiologic reactions."

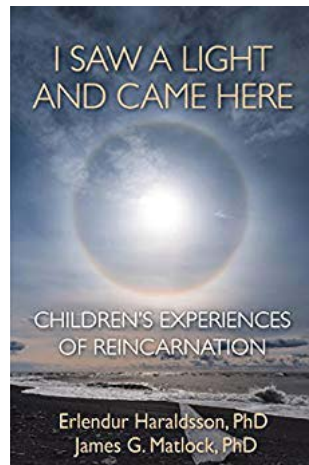
Professor Haraldsson completes his series of examples in Chapter 7 with three reports from Sri Lanka in which written reports had been made before attempting to solve the case (Dilukshi, p. 73; Pretiba, p. 80; Thusita, p. 84; Chatura, p. 88).

The researcher's case reports are not 1-to-1 copies of the previously published articles but edited texts excluding less important elements of the cases. The different possibilities to explain the material are not discussed in this book except for a short rejection of Professor Keil's notion of "thought-bundles" (p. 164).

Professor Haraldsson contributed to worldwide polls about belief systems and reports on results in Chapter 8 (p. 95). In the US, 25% of the population believes in reincarnation and in Great Britain 24%.

In Chapter 9, Haraldsson acknowledges the achievements of the father of reincarnation research, Professor Ian Stevenson, and his colleagues scattered over the globe (p. 99).

As a psychologist, Professor Haraldsson was interested in, and investi-



gated, the question whether specific properties of the children might explain their peculiar memories of previous lives (Chapter 10:105, Chapter 11:113). For Sri Lanka and Western countries he found characteristic features, but none explaining children's memories of previous lives. It should be mentioned though that some of the children showed signs of posttraumatic stress disorder, which is quite understandable taking into account the high percentage of unnatural deaths of the previous persons.

In Chapter 12, Professor Haraldsson states that children's memories of a previous life prevail longer than hitherto presumed and that no detrimental effects remain from them (p. 124).

The book's title suggests that the book mainly deals with statements and insights about life after death and the question of survival. This is duly covered with respect to children's memories in Chapter 13 (p. 125). However, only a few examples are given, although a statistic from Dr. Tucker, the successor of Professor Ian Stevenson, reveals that 253 children, of a total of 2,242 with memories, report about dwelling in the world beyond, 199 of their burial, and 116 of their conception.

The problem of survival of consciousness is one of Haraldsson's topics. His competence on this matter is exemplified in the following chapters: Chapter 14 (p. 131) deals with deathbed-visions, Chapter 15 (p. 137) is about near-death experiences, Chapter 16 (p. 141) is on spontaneous contacts with the departed, especially apparitions of the dead, and in Chapter 17 (p. 149) we read about contacts with the beyond through mediums. Outstanding examples for the latter field of experience are the medium Hafstein and his contact to the diseased "Runki" who was searching for his missing leg, and the physical medium Indridi Indridason. It is remarkable that among mediumistic contacts, as well as among spontaneous contacts, there are more people who died an unnatural death than are found in the average population.

If reincarnation is real, memories must not exclusively circle around death, but also deal with conception, gestation, and birth. Results of polls around these chapters of life are given in Chapter 18 (p. 157). There are statements of young children saying they had chosen their mothers before coming to earth or had visited the wedding ceremony of their prospective parents.

The second part of the book—beginning with Chapter 20—was written by a profound expert of reincarnation research: Dr. James Matlock. Most of his examples are taken from published articles of the pioneers of reincarnation research. His sequence begins in Chapter 21 (p. 175) with historic cases of children remembering previous lives, some of which were unknown to me. There appear features of "experimental birthmarks" as were later de-

nominated by Stevenson. They are remarkable because no trauma, but mere signs, seem to be sufficient to cause birthmarks.

In the following Chapter 22 (p. 183), Dr. Matlock presents 3 cases of native North American and one of African aborigines. Amongst these many are in-family cases and birthmarks and announcing dreams are prevalent rather than conscious memories.

Most cases worldwide originate from India. That is reason enough to follow in chapter 23 (p. 191) with two examples from India. The first of these is the impressive case of Titu Singh, which was investigated by Prof. Antonia Mills of Canada. Because his date of birth is uncertain two possibilities exist: He might be born 3 month after the death of the previous person (Suresh) or 9 month previously. In the latter case Dr. Matlock offers the explanation that Suresh might have been adamantly insisting on an immediate return, so much that he pushed out the soul of a baby and replaced it with his own soul. Titu's birthmarks would support this model. (Other examples exist suggesting the notion of soul-exchange (Stevenson 1974)).

The second Indian case, Mridula Sharma, was investigated in 1970/1980 by Professor Ian Stevenson together with his Indian colleague Prof. Satwant Pasricha, but was not hitherto published. Dr. Matlock got access to the data, replenished them with new data, and published this case here for the first time. The story is impressive because of its many recognitions and the wonderful relationship which developed between both families concerned.

In chapter 24 (p. 201), the author revives two impressive cases from Brazil. The first being Stevenson's case of Marta Lorenz characterized by the huge amount of 120 written statements of her about a previous life, which regrettably were lost and had to be reconstructed. The previous person Sinhá announced her rebirth which was later corroborated by many features presented by Marta.

The second Brazilian case was investigated by Hernani Andrade, a private researcher. It is about the boy "Kilden" whose mother heard the voice of the (later established) previous person, the Salesian Father Jonathan, when after his car accident he lay in hospital and was in a coma. During her pregnancy with Kilden she had a craving for father Jonathan's favorite food. When old enough, Kilden told his mother that he was once Alexander the priest (Alexander was the second Christian name of Jonathan). Kilden described his accident differently from what his mother had heard on the radio. But his version turned out to be the correct one. Kilden spoke of "his" operation following the accident. What he recalled is similar to the out-of-body experiences that are often part of a near-death experience (NDE). The old argument that the NDEer did not really die and did not come back from death seems to be discredited. More case elements are in the book.

In the next chapter, 25 (p. 209), Dr. Matlock presents a North American case investigated by himself, but being weak compared to the next case from the US. It is about the boy Ryan investigated by Dr. Tucker. Ryan said he was the tap-dancer and movie-actor Marty Martyn. A considerable 55 statements made by the boy turned out to be correct, 15 were wrong and 140 could not be checked.

Dr. Matlock dedicates Chapter 26 (p. 219) to universal and culture-linked patterns of the cases. It is about the percentage of solved to unsolved cases (68% of 2500 cases solved), about the ratio of violent to natural deaths, about the relationships between the families concerned, about the duration of the interim and about the amount of gender-change cases.

Chapter 27 (p. 229) deals with international cases, meaning those in which the previous person is from another country than the current subject. At present only 14 such cases, which have been solved, are known. These are too few to allow for conclusions. But it is interesting to note that in all these cases a motive to cross the border could be found. All deaths in the previous lives were expected, not violent, so that a considered or planned reincarnation was possible.

Xenoglossy, speaking a language never learned, is the topic of chapter 28 (p. 237). Dr. Matlock goes through the few cases of “responsive” and “recitative xenoglossy” we have. He coined the term *passive xenoglossy* meaning cases in which the child learns to speak easily and rapidly because his language is the same as in the previous life. This also implies the counterpart of a child learning only slowly to speak or even reluctantly learns to speak, when the languages of the subject and its previous person are different. Dr. Matlock presents us with one example of “passive xenoglossy” he has personally investigated.

In chapter 29 (p. 245), Dr. Matlock looks for patterns among 9 suicide cases from the literature and one of his own research work. In all cases there existed a social relationship between the current person and members or acquaintances of the previous family, giving rise to the assumption that reincarnation is not governed by mere chance but also is not a process controlled by strict rules. In these cases the median value for the duration of the interim (between death and rebirth) was only 3 months, while it is 16 months in the rest of cases.

In Chapter 30 (p. 255), Dr. Matlock shows cases declared as true cases of the reincarnation type, which may turn up as questionable on closer inspection.

With the last two chapters, 31 and 32 (pp. 261, 267), Dr. Matlock shares with us his thoughts and conclusions on the phenomena found. Questions are raised such as: Why do only a few people remember their previous

lives? What is the role of unfinished business? What of us survives death and what reincarnates? Which bodily features and which abilities survive? Can we choose where to reincarnate? Is there a principle like “karma”? Are there soul mates? What about continual development over the course of many lives?

I find it laudable that the book has an index of keywords and that the footnotes are put on each page, not assembled at the end of each chapter, thus avoiding cumbersome searching.

No light without shadow. The first edition of a book is rarely free from mistakes. The appendices A and B announced on page 164 and 220 are just not there. On page 101 my CORT “Rolf” (case of the reincarnation type) is slightly misrepresented (Hassler 2013). Rolf’s behavioural memories do not “relate to the opposite sex of the previous personality”, as is written, but instead to his homosexuality. This very case is also cited on page 247 as an example for suicide of the previous person although in the original article it is clearly said (on page 22), that it remained unclear whether suicide was intended or not.

In concluding this review I have to say that this book will appeal to believers as well as to open-minded people looking for new horizons. They will find convincing evidence for reincarnation. Most sceptics will not be satisfied with it in spite of its convincing case material; first, because (in my opinion) nothing will ever convince them and second because they cannot quarrel with the authors who do not discuss alternative explanations. If this were to be done carefully it must, in principle, be applied first to each case individually and then to the totality of experiences from all walks of life using arguments of statistics. But this would expand the book to a volume not acceptable to most readers.

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