

A Fine Book on Reincarnation Studies

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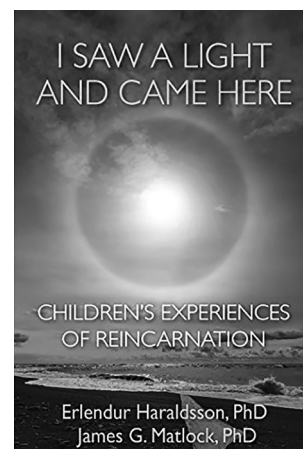
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A review of
*I Saw a Light and Came Here:
Children's Experiences of Reincarnation,*
by Erlendur Haraldsson and James G. Matlock.

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Erlendur Haraldsson and James Matlock have produced a fascinating book called *I Saw a Light and Came Here: Children's Experiences of Reincarnation*. In a wide array of chapters (19 chapters by Haraldsson, followed by 12 chapters by Matlock) they present a very readable account of their depth of understanding of the nature, significance, and intricacies of reincarnation cases around the globe based on their poignant research on the topic. Their collaboration is excellent. Haraldsson and Matlock first co-published in 1988 an article on a poltergeist case; both are very knowledgeable about all aspects of psychical research.

Haraldsson presents the depth of rebirth studies he has made in Sri Lanka, Lebanon, and his native Iceland over his lengthy career, including his ground-breaking studies of the personality characteristics of children who remember previous lives. He reminds us that he came to know Stevenson, the pioneer of careful recordings of reincarnation cases, in 1969 when Haraldsson did an internship in clinical psychology at the University of Virginia. Haraldsson was asked by Stevenson to study an Icelandic rebirth case in 1973, which led Haraldsson to conduct a national survey of reincarnation in Iceland in 1974, and again in 2006. Haraldsson was one of three people psychiatrist Ian Stevenson invited to do a replication of his reincarnation studies (Haraldsson, 1991). He reminds us that he has documented over a hundred cases since then. Matlock, a generation younger than Haraldsson, has been deeply engaged in reincarnation studies for over 35 years. He augments his interesting insights and examination of published cases with cases he has learned about through his online Facebook course about reincarnation.



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The title of the book, *I Saw a Light and Came Here*, refers to the case of Purnima, a Sri Lankan girl who told her parents that she saw a light when disembodied and came to them. Haraldsson enhances his original 1991 report of the case with the addition of photos of Purnima as a child with the birthmarks she bore from the previous person being killed in a traffic accident. Although it is a cross-gender case, Purnima did not act in a masculine manner, as Stevenson (1977) described in a Burmese case. Haraldsson comments on the personality characteristics she exhibited, something he describes further in other chapters from his later studies of these aspects of the cases.

Haraldsson compares the array of rebirth cases with Near-Death Experiences that also involve seeing a light; with death-bed visions, a topic Osis and Haraldsson (1977, 2012) studied thoroughly; with Spontaneous Contact with the Departed; Contact through Mediums; Memories Between Death and Rebirth; and adds Memories of Birth and Life in the Womb, using Ohkado's work (2015). Thus he places the rebirth narratives in the context of other sources of knowledge about life after death, showing how they reinforce each other. Matlock also comments on examples and aspects of seeing a light in his section of the book.

Haraldsson presents what he calls a "truly exceptional case that is perhaps better verified than any other I have investigated" (p. 13), originally published by Haraldsson and Abu-Izzeddin, (2002). But here the telling of the case is more engaging, like Shroder's 1999 book *Old Souls* that presented Ian Stevenson's study of cases for the general public. Haraldsson enjoys presenting not only very strong cases but, in other chapters, cases with varying degrees of strength to show their variability, including three "run of the mill" randomly selected cases from the Druze sample in Lebanon that Haraldsson (2003) used to assess the psychological characteristics of children who remember a previous life. I was not previously aware that Haraldsson had used unsolved cases in studying the psychological profile of children said to remember a previous life, although Haraldsson notes that they were cases where the child had deep emotional experiences, memories of emotions in play, and physiological reactions. He also gives examples of unsolved cases, such as three Icelandic men of long ago who had strong images of themselves in a different life in apparently another country and how they died or were killed, thus presenting multifaceted aspects of unsolvable cases as well.

Haraldsson portrays in a new way his three studies of the psychological profile of children who remember a previous life, two from Sri Lanka and one from Lebanon, in a chapter called "Brighter and More Mature?" He notes that Tucker and Nidiffer's 2014 study of 15 US rebirth cases confirms what he found in Sri Lanka, which interestingly, he points out, was not confirmed by his study in Lebanon. Haraldsson's chapter called "Scars from a Distant Past?" is not about birthmarks, but about the behavioral traits of children who recalled a past life in war torn Sri Lanka and among the Druze in war-torn Lebanon, compared to a control sample of children in these cultures who did not remember a previous life. Haraldsson found that children who died a violent death in the previous life they remembered were more likely to have Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder type-symptoms than those who had no such memories. Haraldsson also looks at how long past-life memories continue based on his studies, for although children typically forget after they are 6, his studies show when and how memories are kept alive and/or fade.

In James Matlock's portion of the book, he makes use of cases presented by Stevenson (1974, 1980, 1997), Pasricha (2008), Andrade (2010) and several cases he himself learned about through his Reincarnation Facebook course. He presents four cases from Tribal Societies, two from India, two from Brazil, and two from North America. One of those North American cases he learned about from a woman who took his online reincarnation course. Matlock presents the case with the lavish detail the mother supplied, recounting how her young high-functioning autistic boy was perceived as her late father who had repeatedly sexually abused her when she was a teenager. Yet when the boy was 30 months old he said, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry," when his mother was undergoing treatment from her partner, to heal from the abuse from her father. Some may have doubts about the validity of this and the second, unsolved, case from Matlock's Facebook course, with aspects of passive xenoglossy. I think he includes them to extend our understanding of how they play into children's lives and their parents' experiences of them, rather than from Stevenson's perspective of trying to present strong cases to convince psychologists and psychiatrists who are skeptical about the existence of reincarnation.

Matlock discusses both recitative xenoglossy, responsive xenoglossy and passive xenoglossy, as well as the current evidence of solved international cases, including the motives for choosing such a rebirth. He also presents ten solved suicide cases that show that the person who took his/her own life comes back very quickly, in less than 9 months in 6 of the cases; indeed the birth was 2 days, 4 weeks, 1 or 2 months, 5 weeks, and 8 weeks after the previous person died in those 6 cases, showing that suicide bring the person back so quickly that they are bumping out the baby in utero. In three of the suicide cases the come-back had a birthmark related to the cause of death (shooting, hanging himself, and setting herself on fire); and in one case a cleft chin like the previous person who was not genetically related to the reincarnate. Matlock also reports the difference expected death (as in suicide and war time) makes compared to unexpected violent death in rebirth cases.

In "Two Cases from India" Matlock interprets the apparent 3 month period between the death of Suresh Verme and his rebirth as Toran Singh, known at Titu, (originally reported in Mills, 1989) as related to this kind of in utero bumping-out replacement. Matlock notes in Titu's case that his mother had difficulty with her pregnancy at the time Suresh was killed, suggesting that was when Suresh replaced the baby she was previously carrying, implanting the birthmarks of his fatal bullet entry and exit wounds on the fetus.

I recommend *I Saw a Light and Came Here: Children's Experiences of Reincarnation*, as it presents a comprehensive review of what rebirth cases can teach us about the impact of past lives on successive lives, from the perspective two scholars who know and largely address the methodological and conceptual critiques of such studies. My only criticism is that the copy-editing is imperfect and fails to include eight references cited.

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