

From Womb to Womb

Metamorphosis of a Mother

by Francis Story



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Buddha Dharma Education Association Inc.

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of a mother

Francis Story

Plus

**A Reading Guide to
Death and Rebirth**
by Bodhisāra



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King Milinda: ‘He who is born, Nagasena, is he the same person or another?’

Nagasena: ‘Neither the same nor another.’

King Milinda: ‘Give me an illustration.’

Nagasena: ‘In the case of a pot of milk which turns first to curds, then to butter, then to ghee; it would not be right to say that the ghee, butter and curds were the same as the milk but they have come from that so neither would it be right to say that they are something else.’

Note: The Greek king Meanders (Milinda) questioned Arahant Nagasena on many difficult or controversial topics of the Buddha’s teachings. The text we have nowadays is probably legendary though it is likely to be based on a historical encounter of the king with exponents of the Buddhist order of monks. (See: The Questions of Milinda 2.2.i)

PREFACE

Buddhists usually don’t have a problem accepting the teaching of rebirth. Although Western science has not been able to come up with hard proofs, increasing evidence gained in so called soft sciences (psychology, philosophy, sociology, parapsychology, etc.) and difficulties in explaining how life could originate from matter, boosted the discussion about possible lives before birth and after death. As the famous French writer Voltaire said:

It is not easier to explain the origin of life for one existence than for two.

If one accepts the idea of rebirth then comes the question what is it that is reborn? There are two main schools of thought. One is based on the idea that in each individual there is a stable

and eternal soul (self, or inner spirit) which transmigrates from one life to another. Only the body is subjected to the law of impermanency and is 'shed' like the skin of a snake upon death. If the soul is reborn in human realm it is called reincarnation¹.

The second school of thought is based on the idea of *non-self* or *soullessness*. Here, not only matter is considered as being impermanent but also feelings, consciousness, experience, knowing, and so on—that means all aspects of the mind. It says that all components of a being, that is the body and the mind, arise, stay and disappear continuously at a sub-perceptive level. But each set of mind and body having arisen will condition by way of kammic potential the immediately following set of mind and body. So also on death. One last set of mind and body arises in this existence, comes to an end, conditioning and giving way to a new set of mind and body.

Because this process of arising and passing away is tremendously fast we can usually only

¹ *carne* meaning flesh, the expression means to become *flesh again* or *to return into a physical body*.

see the results of it, in the case of death for example the material compound left behind after the cessation of the last consciousness in this existence.

We illustrate the idea with the transmission of energy between billiard balls. The ball hit by the player collides with another ball, then stands still, *empty* of the energy that made it rolling before. The newly started ball again may hit another ball *transmitting* to a new entity the energy which kept it going before. The new balls always inherit 'something' from the old balls, yet they are never the same.

One mind moment arises, rolls on and comes to an end, passing on a kammic force or imprint which conditions the next arising mind moment. One material compound arises, ceases and conditions the next.

When King Milinda asked arahant Nagasena: "Can it be that one does not transmigrate and yet is reborn?" Nagasena's answer was: "Yes, it can. Think of some man who were to light a lamp from another lamp. The lamp does not pass over to the other. In the same way one does not transmigrate and yet is reborn." Re-

search into materiality in the 20th century physics lends support to the insights into impermanence taught by the Buddha: no matter is stable, all matter changes. In the neuro-sciences the most recent insights indicate that all there is in the mind is an ever changing range of perceptions, thoughts, feelings, etc., which are hard to grasp.

Earlier we said that usually one does not perceive these ultra quick changes of mind and body. We are aware on a conceptual level that the body is growing old and moods are changing. Where has the body gone which 'we had' ten years back? And what happened to the mind of our childhood? This rapid incessant change of mind and body can be experienced directly. Concentrating the mind and observing our body sensations and mind processes we can verify the theory of impermanence through penetrative experiential knowledge. This mental investigation is called insight meditation (in Pali language *vipassana bhavana*). The effect of the insight gained from such meditation will eventually lead to a change of one's attitude toward life as attested to by all the successful Buddhist meditators starting with the Buddha himself.

While the Buddhist psychology of Abhidhamma gives us the most fundamental explanation of change the research of rebirth on a conceptual level does also bring us many valuable insights. This research includes Near Death Experiences, remembered accounts of past lives of children, past life regression through hypnotic trance, and other approaches. Most researchers assume a soul or spirit transmigrating from one life to the next. This is to be expected as the people who have Near Death Experiences or remember past lives do not usually have the penetrative tool of insight meditation to investigate the processes on the profoundest levels. Their findings are nevertheless important. They contribute much to our understanding of the kammic forces involved in rebirth, of other realms of rebirth and of feelings involved in dying from one life and reappearing in another.

A vast field of study has opened, research is carried out in many branches of science. The collected material is already extensive and exciting. We present to the reader one beautiful example of this research, done in Myanmar by the late Francis Story. For those who would

like to do further reading on death and rebirth we include in the appendix a guide to some of the best literature available.

Bodhisāra

Penang, 1997

THE STUDY OF REBIRTH

Professor Ian Stevenson¹ of the Department of Neurology and Psychiatry of the University of Virginia has collected upwards of 600 cases suggestive of reincarnation from various parts of the world. Their geographical distribution, ranging from North Africa to Alaska, shows that they occur among peoples of diverse cultural backgrounds and even in cultures where religion gives no sanction to the belief in rebirth. A comparative study of these cases reveals that they have certain features in common which seem

¹ For his work see reference in the Reading Guide.

independent of conditioning factors in the subjects' mental environment. A case of apparent reincarnation is usually regarded as a scandal when it comes to light in a community where religious orthodoxy is entrenched against the belief. It is impossible to estimate, of course, how many such cases are suppressed for this reason.

In the cases in Asia which I have studied personally inhibiting social influences do not play a large part. Sometimes there are familial complications which prevent prolonged study and controlled tests of the case. The parents of a child who claims to remember a previous life and who has identified certain living persons as his former father and mother usually wish to break the child's attachment to these claimed parents rather than encourage it by fostering his memories. In several cases known to me the present parents have shown a definite fear that the family of the past life would alienate their child's affections or even attempt to take him from them. This, while it makes study of the case more difficult, is at the same time strong evidence for its genuineness or at least of the sincerity of the persons concerned.

A general survey seems to indicate that rebirth tends to take place in the same locality and social group, often in the same family, as that of the previous life. This is one of the common features to which I have alluded and is easily understandable on the basis of attachment and emotional pull. It is in fact exactly what might be expected. The principle is well illustrated by the case of a little girl, Win Win Nyunt, which came to my attention in Burma some years ago.

THE CASE OF WIN WIN NYUNT

Win Win Nyunt's father, U Khin Nyunt, was Military Administrator and Sub-Divisional Officer of Pyinmana, Upper Burma, in 1948 when Communist insurgents were harassing the district. When other rebel forces, the Karens, drove them out U Khin Nyunt and his wife Daw Mu Mu were taken prisoner and conveyed to Thandaung in Toungoo District. U Khin Nyunt's mother, aged 67, was then in Rangoon

and all communication between them was cut off. One night U Khin Nyunt dreamed that his mother was ill and yearning to see him. Later he dreamed that he was at her bedside and she was trying to tell him something which he could not understand.

While they were still at Thandaung U Khin Nyunt's wife became pregnant and about that same time he had another dream in which he saw his mother lying dead. She was fully dressed, as if for cremation, in accordance with Burmese custom. The dream was so realistic that he was able to take precise note of the clothes she was wearing.

And then his wife also had a dream in which she saw his mother who said that she was coming to live with them. In Daw Mu Mu's dream the mother got into the bed and lay down between U Khin Nyunt and his wife. This dream occurred early in Daw Mu Mu's pregnancy and in fact it was only after the dream that she realized she was pregnant. They had been married for six years but did not wish to have any children on account of the difficult and dangerous position they were in.

In due course the child was born; it was a boy and they named him Maung Maung Lay. About three months after his birth U Khin Nyunt had another dream of a very disturbing nature. He dreamed that his son was dead and that his heart, liver and other organs were scattered around in a glass case.

Soon after this dream an opportunity came for them to escape but U Khin Nyunt had to take a different route from that taken by his wife and the baby. On reaching Rangoon he learned that his mother had died. For some time before her death she had been weeping and asking for him. On receiving the news he told his relatives about his dreams concerning his mother and it appeared that the date on which the last one had occurred corresponded with the date of his mother's death.

When he described the clothes he had seen her wearing in his dream he was told that they tallied exactly with those in which her body had been laid out for cremation. They were new clothes which he never had seen her wear in life.

In Rangoon U Khin Nyunt was reunited with his wife and child but soon afterward the baby's

health began to give them anxiety. They obtained the best medical advice available but his condition did not respond to treatment. In this troubled situation U Khin Nyunt's mother-in-law advised them to take him to a well-known Buddhist monk at Gyogon, to the late Yagyaw Sayadaw who was known to be clairvoyant. This they did. As soon as the old Sayadaw² saw the boy he said, "Your son is only a visitor here."

U Khin Nyunt was deeply perturbed by these words and even angry at the fatal prophecy they implied. Refusing to speak to the Sayadaw, he left abruptly. In Burma Buddhist monks are held in the highest veneration and his behavior toward the Sayadaw shows the measure of U Khin Nyunt's distress.

In April, 1953, the little boy, then years old, fell seriously ill with what was diagnosed as acute anemia. Just before this the father had another dream in which a frightful-looking personage in black was trying to pull his son away from him. With great difficulty he resisted but he awoke deeply troubled. And he could not shake off the feeling of depression left by the

² Venerable Teacher: the usual honorific of Burmese monks.

nightmare. It had been more like a waking vision than a dream experience.

The child was then taken to a WHO (World Health Organization) specialist who, after a thorough examination, sent a specimen of his blood to America for a report. When it came the diagnosis was leukaemia—cancer of the blood for which there was as yet no known cure.

There followed another vivid and realistic dream. U Khin Nyunt and his wife both dreamed they saw his mother leaving their room and going downstairs. She was dressed as in the death dream and did not look at them nor speak. Still dreaming, U Khin Nyunt turned to his wife and said, “Just look at my mother! She didn’t even speak to us!”

Two months after that Maung Maung Lay died.

During his final illness the little boy had wanted desperately to stay alive. He repeatedly said, “Can’t you help me? Can’t you save me from death?” About half an hour before the end he looked up at his parents and cried out, “I shall be coming back!”

ANOTHER RETURN

After this loss the parents were inconsolable. They wondered very much about the dreams and the dying child’s last words to them. What was the connection between U Khin Nyunt’s mother and the little son who had left them so tragically? What was the meaning of those last words uttered with all his remaining strength? Would he really come to them again? In an attempt to resolve their doubts a sister took them to consult a reputed seer in Henzada. He said, “Your child will come back to you after three years. But as a daughter, not a son.”

Sure enough, three years later Daw Mu Mu became pregnant again. She dreamed she saw her little son come back. At about the same time one of their servants, who did not know the mistress was expecting another child, also dreamed that she saw the little boy enter the compound of the house wearing the clothes he

had worn on his deathbed. When the servant asked him where he was going he replied that he was returning to the house. She told this dream to the master and mistress but they did not inform her of the pregnancy.

On March 22, 1957, a girl was born whom they named Win Win Nyunt. On her left ankle the baby had a rectangular birthmark, paler in color than the rest of her skin and looking exactly like a mark left by adhesive tape. It was precisely in this spot that the WHO specialist, Dr. Perabo, had given a blood transfusion to their son during the three days preceding his death.

In U Khin Nyunt's employ there was a driver who had been very fond of the little boy. This man had been deeply grieved at the child's death and whenever he passed the cemetery used to call out, "Maung Maung Lay—come back!" When the little girl was shown to this driver the first thing he did was turn the baby over on her stomach. Then he pointed triumphantly to a dark patch on her buttock. "That is the mark I made!" he said.

The parents, not knowing what he was talking about, were surprised. He then told them that

just before Maung Maung Lay's burial he had made a mark with charcoal on the dead child's buttock. The mark borne by the new baby was identical with the one he had made on Maung Maung Lay, he said.

When the little girl Win Win Nyunt was able to speak connectedly she claimed that she was not only the former Maung Maung Lay but also Daw U Shwe, the mother of U Khin Nyunt. By mentioning the names of persons she could not have known in this life and referring to incidents in the lives of Daw U Shwe and Maung Maung Lay she convinced both U Khin Nyunt and his wife that they were indeed her former personalities. She sometimes forgot herself and addressed her father as if he were her son. In Burma where as in most Asian countries distinct forms of address are used to denote seniority and status within the family, this in itself was unusual enough to excite comment. Even without the use of the words 'father', 'mother' or 'son' it can be known whether an elder or younger relative is being addressed.

While this history was being related to me by U Khin Nyunt and his wife at their pleasant

home in Campbell Road, Rangoon, Win Win Nyunt was present. The conversation was in English but whenever the name Daw U Shwe was mentioned the little girl exclaimed, "That's me!" Like most of the children who claim to remember previous lives she seemed a precocious child. Several times she said in Burmese, smiling happily, "Daw U Shwe—that's nobody else but me!"

In Burma it is a custom to mark children who have died or are expected to die in the hope that they will be reborn in the same family and be identifiable by a birthmark on the same spot.

This practice is noted by H. Fielding Hall in his book *The Soul of the People*. In most of the cases of children believed to have been identified in this way the marks correspond to those made on the previous child by the parents, which are consequently known to them. This gives rise to the possibility that the mark may be reproduced by a prenatal suggestion coming from the mind of the mother, which in some unexplained manner acts on the embryo during its formative period. However, there is nothing in genetics to support the theory that a mother's

ideas can affect her unborn child in this way and in fact most geneticists would flatly deny that it could happen. Nevertheless, this hypothesis has been put forward to account for such cases.

But in the case I have recorded above it can be ruled out so far as the mark on the infant's buttock is concerned because the only person who knew the body of Maung Maung Lay had been marked after death was the driver who did it. Both parents were unaware of his action which was prompted by his own affection for the boy. This makes the case one of especial significance, apart from its other remarkable features.

It can be objected that the parents' desire for the return of the same child together with their belief in its possibility created a mental atmosphere in which they projected their wish onto the personality of the child who thereupon 'acted up' to it. Possibly in such a situation this could happen; but it would not account for the child's knowledge of people and events connected with the previous personalities. And even if the parents' wishful thinking were sufficient to establish a fictitious connection between the

boy Maung Maung Lay and the new baby there is no reason to suppose they were predisposed to see in Maung Maung Lay the reincarnation of U Khin Nyunt's mother. Neither does the theory explain the series of dreams in this particular case. Had the dreams concerning Daw U Shwe been experienced only by her son they could be dismissed as coincidences; but he and his wife both had similar dreams and at a time when they had no reason to think that Daw U Shwe might be dying.

There remains one other possible theory: Win Win Nyunt acquired her information telepathically from her parents and adopted the knowledge thus gained as her own memories. This however would be to stretch the potentialities of telepathic communication far beyond the limits of what has been demonstrated as possible by any experiments so far conducted. There is not, insofar as I know, any instance of telepathically-acquired knowledge being absorbed into the personality as a permanent part of its structure.

If all the children who have given proof of possessing knowledge of the lives of people no

longer living have acquired it in this way, telepathy must be a much more common extra-sensory faculty than controlled experiments have indicated. Moreover it must be capable of passing on information more detailed and exact than that received in any verified telepathic tests. It is a far cry from telepathically reproducing simple line drawings and calling Zener cards to relating incidents from the lives of other persons and identifying those persons and the places they had known, as these children have done. Sensitives, it is true, have obtained such information by psychometry but here again the impressions they receive always remain distinct from the contents of their own minds and do not result in any confusion between their own personality and those of others.

Suppose that Win Win Nyunt was psychometrically sensitive—she must have handled objects belonging to many other persons in the household besides those of her dead grandmother and brother and there seems no valid reason for her acquiring information connected with them alone.

THE CONCEPT OF PERSONALITY

This interesting case brings into sharp focus the problems attached to the concept of personality. To what extent does a 'transmigrating' entity remain the 'same' entity—in any generally accepted sense? The components of personality commonly regarded as fundamental to its structure (such as sexually-determined attitudes, characteristics formed by past experience, environment, acquired knowledge and even personality patterns governed by the action of the endocrine glands) if they survive death at all must undergo complete transformation in the process of rebirth when an entirely new physical basis and environmental situation comes into being. There then remains only the possibility of memory, of recalling the past, to maintain a connection between the present personality and previous personalities.

Actually the same difficulty exists if we choose to confront it in our idea of a man of 70 being the 'same' person that he was as a boy of seven. If he suffers total loss of memory there

remains no connection between himself and the child he once was. All that can be said is that he is the indirect result of that child in the same world-line of existence.

In Buddhism the difficulty is overcome by holding that personality is purely an idea. The term merely signifies a current of cause and effect in which no enduring entity is to be found. At death all that we consider to be personality passes away, leaving only the potential of the past karma (actions) to produce a new psycho-physical aggregation a new personality. One personality is linked with a former personality and with all those personalities that have gone before by the fact of belonging to the same individual stream of cause and effect in the psychic order. This is said to be the sole form of *identity* existing between one life-manifestation and another in the sequence. Mahayana Buddhism accounts for the recollection of previous lives by postulating a *Reservoir of Consciousness*³ peculiar to each life-stream which may be tapped under appropriate conditions.

³ Sanskrit: *Alayovijnana*

It may be this hurdle of the destruction of personality that rebirth entails that makes the doctrine unacceptable to many people. There are those who would prefer to be annihilated altogether rather than become another person as it seems to them they would in being reborn.

We think of ourselves as personalities in terms of our past memories, our present consciousness and character and all the mental furniture we have acquired, including the knowledge of our relationships with others from our earliest years. With all this gone and being cast into an entirely new environment, what remains of the individual I call *me*? The only answer is that each of us is the product of an individual stream of becoming, a process in which nothing is constant except the cause-effect continuum.

Yet there is no need to take a nihilistic view of rebirth merely because it excludes a *total* survival of the personality. Where characteristic traits are strongly developed they reappear in the new life, often markedly enough to demonstrate a recognizable relationship between the two personalities. Special aptitudes that have been acquired in previous lives can be carried

forward if they have been cultivated with sufficient determination and singleness of purpose. The child prodigy in music or any other sphere probably is not the recipient of an unearned gift. Change is the basic principle of growth and it is idle to ask whether the 300-year-old oak is the same plant as the acorn from which it sprang.

When a distinctive personality appears again and again in the same family, skipping one or more generations, it well may be that a factor other than heredity is involved; it may demonstrate a psychic heredity which is the individual's own property. The biological laws themselves would help to make it possible for the same ancestor to be born repeatedly in the line of his genetic descendants. In this connection the force of attachment to her relatives which seems to have been operative in the case of Daw U Shwe and the gravitational pull toward the family group displayed in many other rebirth cases provides an explanation of what may be called the recurring family type, a phenomenon often enough observed in the lineage of families noted in history.

By a logical extension of this principle a prolonged conditioning through a series of rebirths within the same ethno-psychological group would tend to produce those racial and national types which, although they have been grossly caricatured in literature and propaganda, undoubtedly do exist. A systematic study of the subject might throw light on the nature and origin of racial memories. The collective unconscious of Jung may be nothing after all but the submerged memories of previous lives and the subliminal impulses associated with them.

Honore de Balzac characterized the process of *becoming* through a series of lives when he wrote in *Seraphita*:

The virtues we acquire, which develop slowly within us, are the invisible links which bind each one of our existences to the others— existences which the spirit alone remembers, for matter has no memory for spiritual things.

Thought alone holds the tradition of the bygone life. The endless legacy of the past to the present is the secret source of human genius.

Perhaps he was right and it is this legacy of the virtues and skills we have striven for that constitutes our true personality, not the ephemeral and adventitious contents of our minds at any particular moment. I believe that to understand this is to have a true notion of what it means to say, 'I exist.'

CHANGE OF SEX

Before closing this brief discussion of the case of Daw U Shwe something should be said about her change of sex in the intermediate life. It is possible that Daw U Shwe was born as a boy because her anxiety to be reunited with her son caused her to re-manifest in a body that had been conceived before her death and was of the wrong sex. Unfortunately I was not able to obtain the exact date of the beginning of Daw Mu Mu's pregnancy but if my assumption is correct the child's early death would be explicable on the ground that Daw U Shwe's kamma was not the kind to sustain a male personality.

The situation could then be adjusted only by the transfer of her karmic life-potential to a new birth as a female.

This does not mean that a change of sex in rebirth always must lead to such a result. On the contrary, there are a number of cases of sex-change on record and their various degrees of sexual identification and adjustment are the subject of a special study. But in all or most of them there appears to have been predisposing factors in the former life that made the transition from one sex to another more or less appropriate. In the case of Daw U Shwe her strong maternal instinct makes the assumption that such factors were not present a valid one. Her brief life as a boy may have been nothing but a mistake on her part, one that nature quickly rectified.

This is my own interpretation of the case; others who read the facts may come to different conclusions. Whatever the finally correct interpretation may be a case containing so many diverse elements of paranormal experience would be difficult to explain away without recourse to the doctrine of rebirth. Rather than

strain beyond reasonable bounds the possible scope of telepathy, psychometry, clairvoyance, precognition and other ESP phenomena I find it easier to believe that Win Win Nyunt is precisely what she claims to be—Daw U Shwe and Maung Maung Lay reborn.

A READING GUIDE TO
DEATH AND REBIRTH

This small guide offers an overview on some topics of death and rebirth. Books are briefly introduced and at times commented on. Many, but not all, of the listed book titles are available in Malaysia, either in stock or by order. Some books are hard to come by and some are out of print and can only be found in libraries.

1. General
2. What Religions Teach
3. Near Death Experiences
4. Past Life Memories
5. Contact with Beyond
6. Dying and Care for the Dying

■ ■ **1. GENERAL**

Robert and Beatrice Kastenbaum

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF DEATH

Myth, History, Philosophy, Science the many

Aspects of Death and Dying

AVON BOOKS (1993)

This comprehensive reference book provides a concise and enlightening view of human mortality. From ancient beliefs to modern scientific studies to exploring feelings about different age groups and cultures, the **Encyclopedia of Death** includes contributions from experts on a wide variety of death related subjects: Appropriate Death, Death Anxiety,

Life after Death, Near Death Experience, Religious Beliefs, Research and Theory, and much more. Although usually people don't read Encyclopedias this one might be quite an exception. Apart from being a reference book it is fascinating to browse through the many readable entries. It also contains many valuable references.

Sherwin B Nuland

HOW WE DIE

Reflections of Life's Final Chapter

VINTAGE BOOKS (1995)

Nuland tells the reader clearly, frankly, yet compassionately how most of us are likely to die. The mechanisms of humans' most common killers like cancer, heart attack, stroke, AIDS, etc. are explained. Nuland is only interested in casting a look on the taboo of dying without venturing into thoughts about a life after death.

■ ■ **2. WHAT RELIGIONS TEACH**

The so called materialistic stance towards life which says a being originates in matter at the conception and returns back to matter after death is not a modern view but has been more widely accepted with the development of Western thought after the Age of Enlightenment and the progress of its sciences. On the other hand almost all religions have a concept of one kind or another about life after death. Yet not all subscribe to the idea of a life (or series of lives) before birth into the present existence.

• THERAVADA BUDDHISM

The Theravadin view of death and the instantly following rebirth is unique. It is based on the difficult doctrine of non-self (*anatta*). The central teaching explaining the causal relationship which leads to new existences is the Dependent Origination (*paticca samuppada*). Insight meditation (*vipassana*) is the method with which to verify through direct intuitive understanding the teachings put forward.

Meditators with strong concentration faculty can also access the memory of past lives through powerful recollection. Past lives are systematically remembered and analyzed in Pa Auk method of meditation in Myanmar.

Francis Story

REBIRTH AS DOCTRINE AND EXPERIENCE

Essays and Case Studies

BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY (1975)

Francis Story was much interested in the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth for most of his life, writing more than a dozen essays and spending much time in researching cases of the spontaneous recall of past lives. As a Westerner he was well qualified to engage strong skepticism prevalent in Europe and the USA, where the cultures have been strongly influenced by reductionist scientific models.

V F Gunaratna

REBIRTH EXPLAINED

BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY (1980)

A slender booklet of the Wheel Series explaining in a concise way all the relevant points of the Theravada school concerning rebirth.

V F Gunaratna

BUDDHIST REFLECTIONS ON DEATH

BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY (1975)

Another Wheel booklet explaining how death is seen by the Theravada Buddhist tradition.

Bhikkhu Bodhi

THE GREAT DISCOURSE ON CAUSATION

The Mahanidana Sutta and Its Commentaries

BUDDHIST PUBLICATION SOCIETY (1975)

This is a thorough exposition of the Buddha's teaching on Dependent Arising by one of the leading Theravadin scholars. It is from this radical insight from which everything else in the Buddha's teaching unfolds, including the understanding of the conditions that link one lifetime to the next.

Pa Auk Sayadaw

LIGHT OF WISDOM

Meditation in Pak Auk Forest Monastery

Kuala Lumpur WAVE (1996)

In the Pa Auk method of meditation the students first develop very strong concentration and then analyse processes of mind and body in past lives and potential future lives. An uniquely systematic and penetrative approach taught in a highly technical style by a Myanmar meditation teacher.

● TIBETAN BUDDHISM

Francesca Fremantle and Chogyam Trungpa
THE TIBETAN BOOK OF THE DEAD
SHAMBHALA (1992)

A translation and commentary on the Tibetan teachings about death and what follows. While the Theravadin school of Buddhism has contributed the profound analysis of death on the level of mind moments, it is the Tibetan system which has explored more deeply the stages which are gone through during the death process. While the Tibetans talk about an *intermediate stage* between this and the next life (called Bardo), the Theravadins would attribute this 'intermediate stage' to either the last moments of life of a dying person or else consider it as a rebirth in itself (for example as the new existence of a spirit).

● OTHER RELIGIONS

References can be found in the **Encyclopedia of Death** (see page 22).

■ ■ 3. NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCES

A Near Death Experience (NDE; also called Resuscitation Experience or Deathbed Vision) is an experience of a person at the brink of death. Often the person feels disassociated from the body, looking down on it from above and then is pulled into a tunnel or black space towards a realm of indescribable brilliance and universal love.

Near Death Experiences have been thoroughly investigated worldwide since the publication of Raymond Moody's classic *Life after Life* in the mid-1970s. While the medical profession approached this phenomena in the beginning with much skepticism if not hostility the existence of NDEs is now generally accepted. Still, the interpretation of the meaning of NDEs ranges from rebirth type explanations to reductive physiological explanations.

Raymond A Moody
LIFE AFTER LIFE
BANTAM (1976)

This is the book which initiated the recent deep and unabated interest in NDEs. The small booklet outlines the typical stages a person having a NDE goes through. The open-minded and questioning attitude of Moody helps the reader find his or her own conclusions about the presented information.

Kenneth Ring

HEADING TOWARD OMEGA

WILLIAM MORROW (1984)

Another best-selling book about the phenomenon of NDE. Dr. Ring explores the effects on behavior and values of those who have had near-death experiences.

Kenneth Ring

CLOSER TO THE LIGHT

Learning from the Near Death Experiences of Children

SHAMBALA (1992)

Children are the most unbiased and innocent observers of this universal phenomena.

■ ■ **4. PAST LIFE MEMORIES**

Several different ways exist to access the memories which are believed to come from past existences, though past life recall most commonly occurs spontaneously in children, as in the example of *Win Win Nyunt*. Extensive studies have been carried out by Ian Stevenson and his co-workers. These studies might be particularly appealing to readers who like facts and scientific investigation rather than depending on subjective reports from psychics or compilations of hypnotic recollections.

But the most encompassing and thrilling material about past lives has been gained from hypnotic regression. This century has seen the emergence of

Eleonora Piper and Edgar Cayce, probably the two most serious and influential sensitives of modern times to access information about past existences.

A small group of psychiatrists and psychologists discovered and explored past lives through hypnotic regressions of their clients. We highly recommend the readers to delve into this absorbing approach to the explorations of possible past lives. The Theravada Buddhist reader should not be confused by the concept of a soul migrating from one existence to another. Understanding the profound doctrine of non-self and the working of consciousness according the Buddha's teachings one can approach these reports with an open and unbiased attitude, benefiting greatly from the detailed descriptions of kammic forces, realms beyond the human, etc.

Brian L Weiss

MANY LIVES, MANY MASTERS

The True Story of a Prominent Psychiatrist and his Past-Life Therapy with a Young Patient

A FIRESIDE BOOK (1988)

A skeptical orthodox psychiatrist stumbles over past-life experiences in his therapy with a young and psychologically troubled lady. The past-life exploration brings about a profound mental healing in the patient. This is a classic which has sold over a million copies.

Brian L Weiss

THROUGH TIME INTO HEALING

Discovering the Power of Regression Therapy to Erase Trauma and Transform Mind, Body, and Relationships

A FIRESIDE BOOK (1993)

Dr. Weiss shares his deepened understanding of the process of rebirth and the healing power of past-life therapy after years of experience in hypnotic regression. He surprises us again with his insightful, honest and sensitive descriptions of his work into this non-orthodox field of study.

Brian L Weiss

ONLY LOVE IS REAL

A Story of Soulmates Reunited

WARNER BOOKS (1996)

Weiss explains how the insights gained through his past-life explorations in hypnotherapy influenced his understanding of the meaning of life.

Joel Whitton and Joe Fischer

LIFE BETWEEN LIFE

Scientific Explorations into the Void

Separating One Existence from the Next

WARNER BOOKS (1988)

Fischer presents the findings of past-life explorations done by the Canadian psychologist Joel Whitton. The 'void' is a term for a state between

death and rebirth in the human plane, called *bardo* in the Tibetan tradition. Theravadins would most likely understand it as an 'intermediate' life in a lower heavenly realm or in some cases in a realm of unfortunate spirits. These two realms are invisible to the normal human being but in the close proximity to the human realm.

Stanislav Grof

REALMS OF THE HUMAN UNCONSCIOUS

Observations from LSD Research (1993)

This is one of Grof's early works on his explorations of the human mind (and human evolution) through LSD research. Grof now works with deep breathing and music, attaining similar results to those of his LSD work. Grof is also close to meditation teachers such as Jack Kornfield, meditation teacher of Insight Meditation West.

Gina Cerminara

MANY MANSIONS

The Edgar Cayce Story on Reincarnation

An exposition of the discoveries about past existences of the Christian Edgar Cayce.

Helen Wambach

LIFE BEFORE LIFE

Choosing to be Born

Helen Wambach is another great contributor to

past-life exploration through hypnotic regression. She presents statistical results from her extensive work with large groups of people. Most fascinating are her insights into the pain of the birth process re-collected by many people in her workshops.

Ian Stevenson

TWENTY CASES SUGGESTIVE OF REINCARNATION

UNIVERSITY PRESS OF VIRGINIA (1979)

A selection of the most convincing cases of spontaneous recollection of past lives in children. Scientific approach.

Ian Stevenson

FURTHER CASES SUGGESTIVE OF REINCARNATION

Learning from the Near Death Experiences of Children

UNIVERSITY PRESS OF VIRGINIA

Other compelling case studies by a careful investigator.

Alan Gauld

MEDIUMSHIP AND SURVIVAL

A Century of Investigation

HEINEMANN (1982)

Gauld analyses the results of the investigation of

the phenomena of rebirth through mediums. Includes a portrayal of Eleonore Potter's work.

■ ■ **5. CONTACT WITH BEYOND**

Investigators of the life after death frequently work with mediums, sensitive people who apparently can communicate with the dead. There was much interest in the work of mediums at the end of the last century, with numerous parapsychological societies being founded to investigate the topic in more serious ways. People have also described encounters in dreams and apparitions with relatives reborn as 'spirits'.

Rosalind Heywood

BEYOND THE REACH OF SENSE

The Incredible Findings of

a Century of Research on Death

E P DUTTON (1961)

Describes what is believed to be the communication of the late psychic researcher Frederic Myers through mediums. Myers describes in detail the higher realms he has been living in for years and gives a theory of human evolution.

Ian Currie

YOU CANNOT DIE

The Incredible Findings of

a Century of Research on Death

ELEMENT (1995)

An introduction to the issues of survival after death, covering a wide range of subjects such as accounts of out-of-body experiences, NDEs, mediumship, apparitions and hauntings.

■ ■ 6. DYING AND CARE FOR THE DYING

Awareness of the importance of a peaceful death (on potential future rebirth) has also helped to improve the well-being and care of terminally ill persons. The Hospice movement which is founded on a philosophy of respect for the needs and rights of the dying person and his or her friends spread within a few decades to many countries. The new approach to a terminally ill person has also forged new attitudes towards life. In America and elsewhere some active meditators have also tried to bring their understanding into the work with the dying and their relatives and friends.

Sandol Stoddard

THE HOSPICE MOVEMENT

VINTAGE BOOKS (1992)

This book covers the evolution of the modern hospice movement from its medieval predecessors, and describes how hospice programs work.

Ian Currie

FINAL GIFTS

Understanding the Special Awareness, Needs, and Communications of the Dying,

Maggie Callanan and Patricia Kelley

BANTAM BOOKS (1992)

In this moving and compassionate book two hospice nurses share their intimate experiences with patients at the edge of life. Through these stories the reader comes to appreciate the near-miraculous ways in which the dying communicate their needs and reveal their feelings.

Stephen Levine

WHO DIES

An Investigation of Conscious Living and Conscious Dying

ANCHOR BOOKS (1982)

Levine many death-related topics in a thoughtful and thought-provoking way based on over thirty years of meditation and years of hospital care.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross

LIVING WITH DEATH AND DYING

MACMILLAN (1981)

In this book Dr. Kübler-Ross discusses dying children and their families.

Readers who are interested in any of the books mentioned in the Reading Guide can contact Sukhi Hotu Book Store in Penang for information about books available for sale. SUKHI HOTU DHAMMA BOOK & GIFT HOUSE
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