

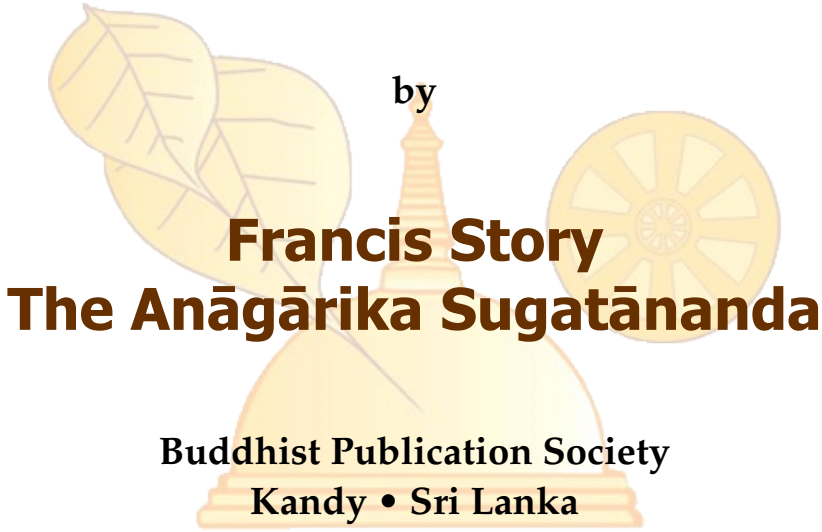
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The Case for Rebirth

Francis Story



The Case for Rebirth



by

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Foreword to the Second Edition

The first edition of this book was published in 1959. Since then, thanks to valuable assistance given by a Parapsychology Foundation in the United States, which is here gratefully acknowledged, I have been enabled to extend my researches over a wider field of cases of the recollection of previous lives in Ceylon, Thailand, and India. I am particularly indebted to the Society for Psychological Research of Thailand; under the patronage of His Holiness Somdej Phra Mahāvīravongsa, and its members, including Dr. Chien Siriyananda, psychiatrist in charge of the Medical Division, Central juvenile Court, Bangkok, for the help they have freely given to my researches in Thailand.

The cases I have personally studied, together with reports of others received from various parts of the world, are now being evaluated and classified, and the results will be published in due course. Until the work on them is completed it is not possible to publish the cases in detail, but I have added at the end of the book, in the form of notes, some tentative conclusions which at the time of writing seem to be indicated. It must be understood that these represent my own interpretations based upon my reading of the case histories as a Buddhist, and in the light of Buddhist doctrine as I understand it. I may find cause to modify them

later on, and if that be the case I shall not hesitate to do so.

The body of evidence for the truth of rebirth has increased substantially since the book was first written. One highly interesting fact which has emerged is that despite the wide range of experiences, the cases presented, which is to be expected in view of the diverse religious, cultural, and racial backgrounds of the persons claiming to have these memories, show many striking features in common.

The similarities are especially noticeable in the accounts given of experiences in the intermediate state between one human life and another. These seem definitely to point to a universal type of post-mortem experience—one which may be coloured by the individual's preconceived ideas and his customary background of living, but is erected upon a psychological groundwork common to all peoples in all ages. One man may travel by jet airliner, another on horseback, but different though their means of transportation may be, they have one thing in common, the fact of travel. So it is with the state between one life on earth and another; the post-mortem experiences vary according to the individual *kamma* (Skt. karma) and the details of the preconceived ideational worlds of those who undergo them, but fundamentally they follow the same pattern for all.

This being so, it may be possible in time to extract from these cases some fundamental principles which will enable us to formulate a psychology of rebirth and perhaps even to bring the process under some measure of control. The

ethico-psychology of Buddhism already offers the means of doing this, but until the fact of rebirth is more widely accepted and its principles more generally understood, the greater portion of mankind will still continue to blunder along from birth to birth in ignorance of the moral laws that govern human destiny.

As individuals, each with his own particular kamma, we cannot know precisely “what dreams may come when we have shuffled off this mortal coil,” but by an extension of knowledge, man may ultimately learn how to control them for his own well-being, and in learning how to die, discover the way to live.

Francis Story
December 1963

The Case For Rebirth

I



he doctrine of reincarnation, the ceaseless round of rebirths, is not, as many people imagine, confined to Buddhism and Hinduism. It is found in some form or another in many ancient religious and philosophical systems and in many parts of the world.

In the oldest records of man's religious thinking we find traces of a belief in the 'transmigration of souls.' Some of the forms it took were naturally primitive and crudely animistic. There is for instance a theory that the ancient Egyptians embalmed their dead to prevent the Ka, or soul, from taking another body. If the idea existed in Egypt it almost certainly must have been familiar also to the Babylonians and Assyrians, who shared many of the most important religious beliefs of the Egyptians.

Coming to later times we find reincarnation prominent in the Orphic cult of Greece in the 6th century B.C., when it formed part of the teaching of Pherecydes of Syros. In the Orphic view of life, man is dualism: part evil and part divine. Through a succession of incarnations the individual has to purge himself of the evil in his nature by religious

rites and moral purity. When this is accomplished he becomes liberated from the 'circle of becoming' and is wholly divine.

This corresponds very closely to the Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain teaching, and there may have been a connection between them; but it is not possible to establish one on historical evidence. Although by the 6th century B.C., doctrine had already been developed in the Brāhmaṇas and Upanishads, and may have travelled west along the trade routes, there is still a possibility that it arose spontaneously in Greece. The emphasis on ritualism differentiates it from the Buddhist view, but it is significant that it was at about the same time in both Greece and India that the idea of reincarnation first became linked with a scheme of moral values and spiritual evolution. The connection of Orphism with the mysteries of ceremonial magic must not be allowed to blind us to the fact that it represented a great advance in religious thinking. Hitherto, reincarnation had been regarded in primitive cults as a merely mechanical process, to be controlled, if at all, by spells, incantations, and physical devices. This is the idea still prevalent among undeveloped peoples in certain parts of Africa, Polynesia, and elsewhere, where, far removed from Indian influences, the idea of metempsychosis must have sprung up spontaneously.

Through Orphism reincarnation came to be taught by, among others, Empedocles and Pythagoras. In the hands of the latter the Orphic mysticism was converted into a

philosophy. This philosophical aspect of the teaching was inherited by the Platonists, while its mystical character was preserved in the traditions of Gnosticism.

In many respects Greek Gnosticism resembled Hinduism; it was syncretic and eclectic, capable of absorbing into itself ideas from outside sources while at the same time it impregnated with its own thought the beliefs peculiar to other systems. Its influence was felt over many centuries, persisting into the Middle Ages of Europe. In the early centuries of the Christian era we find it in the teaching of men as dissimilar in the general character of their outlook as Plotinus, Cerinthus, and Marcion.

Clement of Alexandria, about the second century C.E., wrote very largely from the Gnostic standpoint. He combined reincarnation with the necessity of striving for an enlightened moral elevation: a result that could be achieved only through a development taking place not merely in the present life but in past and future incarnations as well. This belief was shared by the *Pre existiani*, a sect that numbered among its adherents some of the most advanced thinkers of the period, including Justin Martyr and the great theologian Origen. They represented a very powerful intellectual movement, one in which the natural freedom of Greek intellectualism was struggling for survival in a world that was sliding towards the Dark Ages. Many of their ideas survived in Neo-Platonism; but for the most part they were driven underground, to find an insecure refuge in the suppressed teachings of the so-called heretical sects that

came to be known collectively as the Cathars, or ‘illuminati.’

A not dissimilar doctrine of transmigration is found in the Kabbalah, where it goes under the Hebrew name Gilgul. It forms an integral part of the kabbalistic system and is one of the features that distinguish kabbalism from primitive Judaic thought. The Hekhāloth, a kabbalistic work of the Gaonic era, gives Gnostic and Pythagorean ideas along with the orthodox stream of Talmudic teaching. The result may be regarded as Hellenised Judaism, but modern research on the Kabbalah tends to suggest that its original sources may be much older than has hitherto been granted. It may in fact preserve a very ancient rabbinical tradition which was not intended for the masses. Much of its philosophical content is of a high order and reveals a creative expansion of Jewish thought in which reincarnation occupies a significant place. [1]

The idea of a transmigrating soul is the central theme of the Bhagavadgīta:

As the soul in this body passes through childhood, youth, and old age, even so does it pass to another body. As a person casts off worn-out garments and puts on others that are new, so does the incarnate soul cast off worn-out bodies and enter into others that are new” (Gīta, Chapter II, vs. 13 and 22).

Throughout the Upanishads the idea of “soul” (*ātman*) in this sense persists; it is the totality of selfhood and personal

identity which transmigrates, occupying successive bodies, becoming now a man, now a god or an animal, yet in some way preserving its uniqueness as the personal ego throughout. Because of certain difficulties attaching to this concept, however, it was somewhat modified in Vedanta, the last phase of Upanishadic thought. In its place arose the theory that the ātman, as an unborn, unoriginated principle not in any way affected by the activities, good or bad, of the phenomenal being, was not identical with the individual at all but with the “Supreme Soul,” the Paramātman or (neuter) Brahman.

Mahāvīra, the founder of Jainism (the Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta of the Buddhist texts), held unequivocally to the “individual soul” theory. Jainism teaches that there are an infinite number of individual souls transmigrating in happy or unhappy states according to their deeds. But whereas in Vedanta release, or *mokṣa*, comes with the realization that the “I” is really identical with the Paramātman or Brahman (the idea summarized in the formula “*Tat tvam asi*” – You are That), in Jainism it is believed to come only with the complete cessation of rebirth-producing activities. Since automatic and involuntary actions are considered to bear resultants as well as those performed intentionally, the Jain ideal is complete inactivity. As will be seen later, the Buddhist doctrine concerning what it is that undergoes rebirth, and the nature of the moral law that governs kamma and *vipāka*, or actions and results, differs from both these theories and eliminates the teleological and ethical

difficulties to which they give rise.

The faith in survival after death, which is basic to religious thought, has its natural correlative in reincarnation. If life can extend forward in time beyond the grave, it must surely be capable of having extended from the past into the present. "From the womb to the tomb" has its complement in "from the tomb to the womb," and to be born many times is no more miraculous than to have been born once, as Voltaire pointed out.

The opposite view, that a being comes into existence from non-existence, implies that it can also—and most probably will—come to an end with the dissolution of the body. That which has a beginning in time can also cease in time and pass away altogether. The doctrine of a single life on earth therefore holds out no promise of a future life in any other state; rather does it make it improbable. But if we accept that there is a survival of some part, no matter what, of the personality after death we are accepting also a very strong argument for its existence before birth. Reincarnation is the only form that after-death survival could logically take.

So it is not surprising that wherever religion has developed beyond its simplest beginnings some idea of spiritual evolution through a series of lives is found to be a part of its message. The doctrine of reincarnation, together with that of the moral law of cause and effect, not only provides an explanation of life's inequalities and the crushing burden of suffering under which countless millions of people labour,

thus disposing of the problem raised by the existence of pain and evil in the world. It also gives a rational and practical hope where none existed before. It is, moreover, the supreme justification of moral values in a universe which otherwise appears to be devoid of ethical purpose. It is evident that the Orphic and Gnostic cults recognised this fact when they introduced the concept of moral values into their theology.

II

In all these systems of thought, rebirth is seen, as it is in Buddhism, to be the only means of spiritual purgation. It is necessary for the moral and spiritual evolution of the individual that he should, through a variety of experiences, by his consciously-directed efforts struggle upwards from the lower planes of sensuality and passion to a state of purity in which his latent divinity becomes manifest.

That the Cathars, the Kabbalists, and others mixed up this reasoned and enlightened doctrine with the practice of what was later to become known as ritual magic, and with theories of the immortal soul that were frankly animistic, is no argument against the essential truth of their belief. Reason has to emerge slowly and painfully from unreason. It was in like manner that the true principles of science were unfolded at the time when scientific method was growing up alongside the occult practices of the astrologers and alchemists.

We may smile at the alchemist's faith that he could find a means of transmuting base metals into gold, but in this age of nuclear physics the idea does not seem quite so crazy as it once did. The alteration of atomic patterns in the structure

of metals is no longer entirely outside the range of possibility. The alchemist's methods may have been hopelessly wrong; his basic assumption was not. Similarly, the transformation of the base metal of human nature into the pure gold of divinity is still a possibility. It is only a question of finding the right key to unlock the doors of the mind.

To understand how the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth differs from all those that have been mentioned, and why the term "rebirth" is preferable to "reincarnation" or "transmigration," it is necessary to glance at the main principles of Buddhist teaching:

These are summed up in the Four Noble Truths:

The Truth concerning Suffering

The Truth concerning the cause of Suffering

The Truth concerning the cessation of Suffering

The Truth concerning the Way to the cessation of Suffering.

The first proposition is nothing more than a self-evident fact—that suffering is inherent in all forms of existence. No one can go through life without experiencing physical pain, sickness, disappointment and grief; none can escape old age and death.

Suffering is even more prevalent in the life of animals than in that of human beings, and Buddhism takes into account all forms of sentient life. But aside from these obvious

aspects of the universal world-suffering, there is the fact that all conditioned existence is unstable, restless, and lacking in fulfilment. It is a process of *becoming* which never reaches the point of completion in *being*. This in itself is suffering.

In brief, life even at its best is unsatisfactory. In the formula of the Three Characteristics of Being, all phenomenal existence is defined as being impermanent, fraught with suffering, and devoid of self-essence. These three characteristics derive from one another; because existence is transitory it is painful; because it is transitory and painful it can have no enduring essence of selfhood.

There is no “soul” in the sense of a total personality-entity, for what we call the self is merely a current of consciousness linked to a particular physical body. This current of consciousness is made up of thought-moments of infinitesimal duration succeeding one another in a stream of inconceivable rapidity. The psychic life of the individual is just the duration of a single moment of consciousness, no more.

We are living all the time what is in reality a series of lives. The life-stream is the rapid succession of these consciousness-moments, or momentary existences, resembling the running of a reel of film through a projector. It is this which gives the illusion of a static entity of being where nothing of the kind exists. The general characteristics of personality are maintained, but only in the same way that

a river maintains the same course until something diverts it or it dries up. Thus there is no “immortal soul that transmigrates, just as there is no river, but only the passage of particles of water flowing in the same direction. *Anatta*, soullessness, is therefore bound up with *Anicca*, Impermanence, and *Dukkha*, Suffering. The three Characteristics are three aspects of the same central fact.

Yet this state of soullessness is capable of producing rebirth. How can this be so if there is no transmigrating entity—“no-soul” to reincarnate? The answer is to be found in the Buddhist system of ethico-psychology, the *Abhidhamma*. There it is shown that the act of willing is a creative force, which produces effects in and through the conditions of the physical world. The thought-force of a sentient being, generated by the will-to-live, the desire to enjoy sensory experiences, produces after death another being who is the causal resultant of the preceding one.

Schopenhauer expressed the same idea when he said that in rebirth, which he called “Palingenesis,” it is the will, not an ego-entity, which re-manifests in the new life. The being of the present is not the same as the being of the past, nor will the being of the future be the same as the being of the present. Yet neither are they different beings, because they all belong to the same current of cause and effect. Each is part of an individual current of causality in which “identity” means only “belonging to the same cause-effect continuum.”

Since mind and body are alike continually undergoing change—or, more precisely, they are made up of constituent factors which are arising and passing away from moment to moment—this is the only kind of “self-identity” which connects the various stages of a single life through childhood, youth, maturity and old age. Buddhism presents a dynamic view of existence in which the life-continuum is merely the current of momentary existences, or successive units of consciousness, linked together by causal relations, both mental and physical. The process may be likened to a current of electricity, which consists of minute particles called electrons. An electron is much lighter in weight than an atom of the lightest chemical element, hydrogen, yet waves of these particles in the form of an electric current can produce many different effects in heat, light, and sound, and can produce them on a tremendous scale.

In the same way the units of consciousness constitute an energy-potential which in the Buddhist view is the basic energy of the universe, operating through an in conjunction with natural laws.

So we see that mental force is a kind of energy, which Buddhism has linked with moral principles by way of kamma, actions, and vipāka, moral resultants. Buddhism maintains that the physical universe itself is sustained by this mental energy derived from living beings, which is identical with their kamma. The energy itself is generated by craving. It operates upon the atomic constituents of the physical world in such a way as to produce bodies

equipped with organs of sense by means of which the desire for sensory gratification, produced by past experiences, may be satisfied again. In this world the mind-force which produces rebirth has to operate through the genetic principles known to biology; it requires human generative cells and all the favourable physical conditions of heat, nutrition, and so forth, to produce a foetus.

When it does so, the foetus and the infant that it later becomes bear both biologically-inherited characteristics and the characteristics carried by the past kamma of the individual whose thought-force has caused the new birth. [2]

It is not a question of a “soul” entering the embryo, but of the natural formation of the foetus being moulded by an energy from without, supplied by the causative impulse from some being that lived before. It is only necessary to conceive craving-force as an energy-potential flowing out from the mind of a being at the moment of death, and carrying with it the kammic characteristics of that being, just as the seed of a plant carries with it the botanical characteristics of its type, and a mental picture is formed that corresponds roughly to what actually takes place. Mind force is creative, and its basis is desire. Without desire there can be no will to act; consequently the “will” of Schopenhauer is identical with the Buddhist *tanhā*, or craving. [3]

The second of the Four Noble Truths, therefore, is that the

cause of suffering in the round of rebirth is craving. But one cause alone is not enough to give rise to a specific result. In this case, craving is conjoined with ignorance. The mind generates craving for sensory experience because of ignorance of the fact that these experiences are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and so themselves a source of suffering. So the circle of becoming, without discernible beginning and without end, is joined. This wheel of existences does not exist in time: time exists in it. Hence it does not require a point of beginning in what we know as time. It is the *perpetuum mobile* of cause and effect, counter-cause and counter-effect, turning round upon itself.

But although, like the revolution of the planets round the sun, it goes on perpetually simply because there is nothing to stop it, it can be brought to an end by the individual for himself, through an act of will. The act of will consists in turning craving into non-craving. When this is accomplished and Nibbāna, the state of desire-less-ness, is reached, there is no more rebirth. The life-asserting impulses are eliminated and there is no further arising of the bases of phenomenal personality. This is the objective set forth in the third of the Noble Truths; that concerning the cessation of suffering.

The way to that cessation, which is the Noble Eightfold Path of self-discipline and meditation leading to perfect purity and Insight-wisdom, is the subject of the last of the Four Noble Truths, and gives epistemological completeness to the whole.

The Buddhist system of thought is thus presented as a reasoned progression from known facts to a conclusion which is ascertainable by the individual and is also accessible to him as a personally-experienced reality.

The round of rebirths, or *saṃsāra*, does not come to an end automatically; neither is there any point at which all beings revolving in it gain their release by reason of its ceasing, for it has no temporal boundaries. But anyone can bring to an end his own individual current of cause and effect, and the whole purpose of the Buddha's Teaching was to demonstrate the theoretical and practical means by which this can be achieved. The painful kind of "immortality" conferred by rebirth in conditioned existences is not to be regarded as a blessing, but rather as a curse which man pronounces upon himself. Nevertheless, by understanding it we are able to gain assurance that there is in truth a moral principle governing the universe; and by learning to use its laws in the right way we become able to control and guide our individual destinies by a higher spiritual purpose and towards a more certain goal.

III

Of late years, interest in the doctrine of rebirth has been greatly stimulated by the publicity given to several cases of people who have remembered previous lives. For a long time past it has been known that under deep hypnosis events in very early infancy, outside the normal range of memory, could be recovered, and this technique has been increasingly employed for the treatment of personality disorders. It cannot be used with success on all patients because of the involuntary resistance some subjects show to hypnotic suggestion, which inhibits the cooperation necessary to obtain deep trance. But where it can be applied, it has definite advantages over the usual methods of deep psychoanalysis, one of them being the speed with which results are obtained.

The technique is to induce a state of hypnosis and then carry the subject back in time to a particular point in childhood or infancy at which it is suspected that some event of importance in the psychic life may have occurred. In this state, known as hypermnesia, the subject becomes in effect once more the child he was, and re-lives experiences that have long been buried in the unconscious. Memories of earliest infancy, and in some cases pre-natal memories, have

been brought to the surface in this way.

Some practitioners have carried out experiments in regression even further, and have found that they were uncovering memories that did not belong to the current life of the subject at all, but to some previous existence. In cases where nothing could be proved, the rebirth explanation has been contested, and various theories such as telepathy, fantasies of the unconscious, and even clairvoyance, have been put forward to account for the phenomena. But apart from the fact that many of the alternatives offered call for the acceptance of psychic faculties which, if what is claimed for them is true, themselves bring rebirth nearer to being a comprehensible reality, none of them alone covers all the phenomena which have been brought under observation. If, for example, xenoglossy, the ability shown by some subjects under hypnosis to speak languages unknown to them in their normal state, is to be explained by telepathy we are brought face to face with a supernormal faculty of the mind which itself contributes to our understanding of the manner in which mental energy may operate in the processes of rebirth. But although telepathy has now been acknowledged as one of the unexplained phenomena of parapsychology, along with clairvoyance, telekinesis, and psychometrics, it cannot legitimately be expanded to include all the phenomena these experiments have disclosed.

To account for all of them on these lines it would be necessary to combine every one of the known extra-sensory faculties into one concept, that of a freely-wandering,

disembodied intelligence, independent of spatial and temporal limitations. If we are to apply here the scientific law of parsimony, the more likely alternative is the obvious one that they are simply what they purport to be—memories of previous lives.

As to the theory that the memories are products of the unconscious mind, it cannot survive the proof to the contrary which comes from the revelation of facts that could not have been known to the subject in his present life. These are objective and circumstantial, and they exist in abundance, as any reading of the literature on the subject will confirm.

... the case of Bridey Murphy in America ...

The best known example of this kind is the case of Bridey Murphy in America, which raised a hurricane of controversy when it broke into the news. It was followed some time later by a similar case in England in which the subject, Mrs. Naomi Henry, remembered under hypnosis two previous existences. The experiments were carried out under test conditions by Mr. Henry Blythe, a professional consultant hypnotist. In the presence of several witnesses, tape recordings were made of the sessions, which were held under the supervision of a medical practitioner, Dr. William C. Minifie, who testified that the hypnotic trance was

genuine. It has been said of these recordings that they provide “what must surely be the most thought provoking, absorbing, and controversial angle ever offered” on the subject.

What happened was this: Mrs. Naomi Henry, a thirty-two-year-old Exeter housewife, the mother of four children, was cured of the smoking habit by hypnotic treatment given by Mr. Henry Blithe, of Torquay, Devon. He found her to be “an exceptionally receptive hypnotic subject,” so much so that without informing her of the purpose of his experiments he began a series of sessions in which he succeeded in taking her back beyond her present life.

Mrs. Henry remembered two previous existences. In the first she gave her name as Mary Cohan, a girl of 17 living in Cork in the year 1790. Among other circumstances she told how she was married against her wishes to a man named Charles Gaul, by whom she had two children, Pat and Will. Her husband ill-treated her, and finally caused her death by a beating which broke her leg. Whilst describing these events in the trance she was evidently re-living the intense emotional experiences of the past with the vividness of a present reality rather than of a mere memory.

Intervening time had been obliterated and she was once more the illiterate Irish girl she had been over a century and a half before. Her marriage, she said, took place in St. John’s Church, in a hamlet named “Grenner.” Several of the facts she related were afterwards verified on the spot, but no

village of the name of “Grenner” could be traced. Eventually, however, some records dating back to the 17th century were found in the possession of a parish priest, and in them mention was made of a Church of St. John in a village named Greenhalgh. The name is pronounced locally just as Mary Cohan gave it—“Grenner.”

Next she remembered a life in which she was Clarice Hellier, a nurse in charge of twenty-four children at Downham in 1902. After relating what she remembered of this life she went on to describe her last illness, her death, and her funeral, which it seems she had been able to witness. She was even able to give the number of the grave, 207, in which she had been buried.

When Mrs. Henry emerged from her trance, she had no recollection of what had taken place and it was only when she heard the recording that she learned the purpose of the experiments. The authenticity of this case has been established beyond reasonable doubt.

Edgar Cayce

obtained evidence of an even more striking nature.

One of the most remarkable men of recent times, Edgar Cayce, obtained evidence of an even more striking nature. Born in Christian County, Kentucky, in 1877, he suffered as

a young man from a psycho-somatic constriction of the throat which deprived him of his voice. Orthodox medical treatments having failed, he was treated by hypnotic suggestion, which was not a recognised form of therapy in those days. In deep trance his voice returned to normal and he diagnosed his own condition. Not only did he describe the physiological symptoms in terms of which he knew nothing in his waking state, but he also prescribed treatment.

His self-cure was so remarkable that he was persuaded, rather against his will, to try prescribing for others whose illnesses would not respond to medical treatment.

This he did with great success, using technical terms and prescribing remedies which, as a man of only moderate education, he was quite unfamiliar with in his normal state. Sometimes the medicines he prescribed were conventional remedies in unusual combinations, sometimes they were substances not found in the standard pharmacopoeia.

Cayce himself was puzzled and somewhat dismayed by his abnormal faculty, but since it was proving of benefit to an increasing number of sufferers he continued to use it, only refusing to take any payment for the help he rendered. He soon found that a hypnotist was unnecessary; his trances were really self-induced, and he worked thereafter solely through autohypnosis.

One day, while Cayce was giving a consultation, a friend who was present asked him whether reincarnation was true.

Still in the trance, Cayce immediately replied that it was. In answer to further questions he said that many of the patients who came to him for treatment were suffering from afflictions caused by bad kamma in previous lives. It was because of this that they resisted ordinary treatment. Asked whether he was able to see the past incarnations of his patients and describe them, he said that he could.

When he was told what he had said in the trance, Cayce was more disturbed than before. The thing was getting decidedly out of hand. He had never heard the word karma, and his only idea of reincarnation was that it was a belief associated with some "heathen" religions. His first reaction was to give the whole thing up, as being something supernatural and possibly inimical to his Christian faith.

It was with great difficulty that he was persuaded to continue. However, he consented to be questioned further under hypnosis, and after having given some readings and more successful treatments he became convinced that there was nothing irreligious or harmful in the strange ideas that were being revealed. From that time onwards he supplemented all his diagnoses by readings of the past kamma of his patients. It was then found that he was able to give valuable moral and spiritual guidance to counteract bad Kammic tendencies, and his treatments became even more effective. He was now treating the minds as well as the bodies of the patients who sought his help.

When Cayce discovered that he was also able to treat people

living at great distances, whom he had never seen, the scope of his work broadened until it ultimately extended all over the United States and beyond. Before he died in 1945, Cayce, with the help of friends and supporters, had established an institution, the Cayce Foundation, at Virginia Beach, Virginia. It is now operating as a research institute under the direction of his associates. Cayce left a vast number of case-histories and other records accumulated over the years, and these are still being examined and correlated by the Foundation. For further information on Edgar Cayce, his work and the light it throws on rebirth, the reader is referred to *Many Mansions* by Gina Cerminara, *Edgar Cayce, Mystery Man of Miracles* by Joseph Millard, and numerous publications issued by the Cayce Foundation.

There is a great deal in the evidence to suggest that Cayce in his hypnotized state had access to lost medical knowledge, as well as the power to see the previous lives of others. In the Buddhist texts of a very early date there are references to advanced medical knowledge and techniques of surgery in some ways comparable to our own. Jīvaka, a renowned physician who was a contemporary of the Buddha, is recorded as having performed a brain operation for the removal of a living organism of some kind.

But there are still older records than these. The Edwin Smith Papyrus (ca. 3500 BC) describes the treatment of cerebral injuries, and the writings attributed to Hippocrates include directions for opening the skull. The great Egyptian physician, Imhotep, who lived about three thousand years

before the Christian era and was a many-sided genius comparable to Leonardo da Vinci, had such skill in medicine that he became a legend. He was deified under the Ptolemies and identified with Asklepios, the god of healing, by the Greeks; but there is no doubt whatever that he was an actual historical personage.

Without venturing beyond what is naturally suggested by Edgar Cayce's statements concerning rebirth, and their linking up with the often unusual but brilliantly successful treatments he prescribed, it is possible to see that there might be a direct connection between the knowledge possessed by these ancient physicians and the abnormal knowledge released from Cayce's unconscious mind under hypnosis.

But even Cayce was not altogether unique. Egerton C. Baptist in *Nibbāna or the Kingdom?* quotes the following from *Life and Destiny* by Leon Denis: "In 1880 at Vera Cruz, Mexico, a seven-year-old child possessed the power to heal. Several people were healed by vegetable remedies prescribed by the child. When asked how he knew these things, he said that he was formerly a great doctor, and his name was then Jules Alpherese. This surprising faculty developed in him at the age of four years."

In Buddhism, the faculty of remembering previous lives and of discerning the previous lives of others is one that is developed in the course of meditation on selected subjects. But it is acquired only when a certain precisely defined

stage of *jhāna*, or mental absorption, has been reached. The subject is dealt with in the Canonical Texts of Buddhism, and at considerable length in the *Visuddhimagga* of Buddhaghosa Thera. [4]

Those who have practised meditation to this point in previous lives without having attained complete liberation from rebirth may be reborn with the faculty in a latent form. In the case of others, hypnosis seems to provide a short-cut technique to releasing some at least of the dormant memories of former lives, just as it provides a shortcut to results ordinarily reached by deep psychoanalysis. There is much to be done in the way of more extensive and systematic investigation before definite conclusions can be tabulated. The chief difficulty is to obtain suitable subjects for the tests. [5]

IV

A question that is often asked is: if rebirth is a fact, why is it so rare for people to have any recollection of their previous lives?

There are several answers to this. The first and most obvious is that even ordinary memory is very restricted, and varies greatly in extent and vividness with different people. Death itself, the Lethe of psycho-mythology, is an obliterating agent, for it is necessary for each consciousness to begin its renewed course more or less a *tabula rasa* with the formation of a new physical brain. Another factor is the nature of the lives intermediate to one human birth and another. There are, as Buddhism maintains, rebirths in states that are non-human and in which the consciousness does not register impressions clearly, so that a series of such lives between one human birth and another may erase all traces of memory connection between them. A study of the earliest behaviour patterns of children, however, will furnish much evidence to suggest that they bring with them into the new life certain dim awarenesses that do not belong to their present range of experience. The aptitude certain children show for acquiring some particular skills strongly suggests remembering rather than learning. The

headmistress of a kindergarten school told the author that a few years after the end of the First World War she noticed that some of her boy pupils were showing a maturity of mind and a facility in gaining knowledge which was so unlike anything in her previous experience that it roused her curiosity.

After making a study of these children she came to the conclusion that they were not learning but remembering. She became convinced of the truth of rebirth when one small boy, born after the war and exhibiting a highly-strung nature which she had formerly attributed to post-war conditions, one day became violently agitated by a sudden explosive noise close behind him. The fear he showed was out of all proportion to the cause; in fact he fell into an almost cataleptic state. When he recovered, he told her that he had a vague memory of a tremendous explosion and a brilliant flash of light, and that the loud noise had brought it back to him so vividly that he felt as though he was dying. From that time she was convinced that her extremely intelligent but often nervously unstable pupils were the reincarnations of men whose immediately previous lives had been cut short by the war, and who had been reborn almost at once into the human state to complete the interrupted Kammic continuity of that particular life. [6]

Many children lead vivid lives of the imagination, or so it is supposed. They sometimes speak of things that bear no relation to their present experiences. Parents as a rule do not encourage this kind of imaginativeness, particularly if some

of its manifestations cause them embarrassment. They then peremptorily forbid the child to tell any more untruths. But are these always untruths? May they not in fact be residual memories of past experiences? In any case, they are “driven-under” by the parents’ unsympathetic attitude and quickly become obliterated by new impressions. In the East, where children are allowed greater latitude to prattle of what they will, this does not happen. The difference may account for the frequently-noted fact that instances of people recollecting past lives are more numerous in the East than in Western countries.

The son of a distinguished Indian doctor practising in Burma started talking of his “wife” and of events and people belonging to another realm of experience as soon as he was able to speak. The boy was living in a tri-lingual environment where Hindi, English, and Burmese were spoken, but his father noticed that from the start he used words to denote familiar things, such as doors, tables, and houses, which were not Hindi, English or Burmese. The doctor noted down a number of these words phonetically, with the intention of later on trying to identify them. Unfortunately, at that time the Japanese occupation of Burma took place and the records were lost, so it was never possible to establish whether the words belonged to any existing language or not.

Cases of children remembering their previous lives in considerable detail are not uncommon in Asian countries. An example which bears all the classic features of this

phenomenon is that of Parmod, the son of Babu Bankey Lal Sharma, M.A., Shastri, a Professor in an intermediate college at Bissuli in the district of Badan. The boy was born at Bissauli on March 15th 1944. As soon as he was able to utter any words clearly he pronounced the names "Mohan," "Moradabad" and "Saharanpur." Later he said quite distinctly, "Mohan Brothers." When he saw his relatives purchasing biscuits, he told them that he had a big biscuit factory in Moradabad, and on being taken to large shops he would frequently say that his shop in Moradabad was bigger than any other shop. As time went on he became insistent that he should be taken to Moradabad, where he had a brother, sons, a daughter, and a wife.

When he was able to give a clear account of himself, he said that he was Paramanand, the brother of one B. Mohanlal, the proprietor of a catering firm, Messrs. Mohan Bros., having branches in Saharanpur and Moradabad. As Paramanand, he said, he had died of a stomach ailment at Saharanpur on May 9th 1943. The date was just nine months and six days before his birth as Pramod.

Early in the year 1949, when the boy was five, a friend of the family, Lala Raghunandanlal of Bissauli, told one of his relatives living in Moradabad about the boy and his assertions. It was then learned that there was actually a firm of Mohan Bros. caterers, the proprietor of which was named Mohan Lal. When the story was told to him, Mr. Mohan Lal visited Bissauli with some of his relatives, and there met the boy's father. Young Pramod, as it happened, was paying a

visit to some relatives in a distant village at the time (July 1949) and could not be seen. Professor Bankey Lal however consented to take him to Moradabad during the forthcoming Independence Day holidays.

They arrived in Moradabad on August 15th. On alighting from the train the boy at once recognised his brother and ran to embrace him. On the way to Mohan Lal's house Pramod recognised the Town Hall and announced that his shop was close at hand. They were riding in a tonga which, to test the boy, was being driven past the shop. Pramod recognised the building and called out for the vehicle to stop. He then alighted and led the way to the house in front of Mohan Lai Brothers' premises where the late Paramanand had lived. There he entered the room which Paramanand had kept for his religious devotions, and did reverence to it. He also recognised his wife and other relatives, and recalled incidents known to them, by which he established his identity to their complete satisfaction. The only person he failed to recognise was his eldest son, who had been thirteen years old when Paramanand died and had altered greatly in the five years' interval.

After a touching reunion with the relatives of his former life, the boy expressed a desire to go to his business premises. On entering the shop he went to the soda-water machine and explained the process of making aerated water, a thing of which he could not have acquired any knowledge in his present life. Finding that the machine would not work, he at once said that the water connection had been stopped,

which was a fact; it had been done to test him. After that he said he wanted to go to the Victory Hotel, a business owned by a cousin of Paramanand's, Mr. Karam Chand. The boy led the way to the building, and entering it pointed out some rooms on the upper storey which had been added since his time.

During the two days of their stay in Moradabad the boy was taken to the Meston Park by a leading citizen of the town, Sahu Nanda Lal Saran, who asked him to point out where his civil lines branch had been. At once the boy led the company to the Gujerati Building owned by Sahu Lal Saran and indicated the shop which had once been the branch of Mohan Bros. On the Way to the Meston Park he had already recognised and correctly named the Allahabad Bank, the waterworks, and the district jail. Some of the English words, such as Town Hall, were not in use in the small town of Bissauli, and Pramod had never heard them, yet he used them accurately. He not only identified his former relatives but also people who used to visit his shop on business.

The following is the account given by Mr. J. D. Mehra of Messrs. Mohan Bros., Moradabad, a brother of the late Paramanand :

“My brother, Paramanand, aged 39, died of appendicitis on 9th May 1943 at Saharanpur about 100 miles from Moradabad. Pramod, the boy concerned, was born on 15th March 1944 at Bissauli. As the boy grew up he began to utter things of his previous life. For instance, he would say

to his father when offered biscuits that he would have biscuits of his own shop and that he owned a big shop at Moradabad. He used to refer to his four sons, daughter, and wife. When his mother would prepare meals, he would say to her, 'Why should you prepare meals? I have an elderly wife, send for her.'

"As requested by us it was decided to bring this boy to Moradabad on August 15th 1948 (the day of India's Independence). Sri Karam Chand, the eldest of our brothers, went to the station to receive the boy and his father. When Mr. Bankey Lal, the father, alighted from the station with his boy, Pramod spotted out Sri Karam Chand from the crowd and clung to him, and would not go to his father. When questioned whether he knew the gentleman, he at once replied, 'Yes, he is my *Bara Bhai* (elder brother).'

"Whilst passing the Town Hall compound the boy said that it was the Town Hall, an English word with which he was not familiar in his own small city. ... When taken round the place where biscuits were manufactured, he said that it was a bakery, another English word not familiar to him in his birthplace. Entering the kitchen he said that he used to sit on a wooden cot there and pray. Before he entered the room he did Namaskar to the place where he used to sit in meditation.

"Seeing his wife without the vermilion mark on her forehead he questioned her: 'Where is your Bindu (mark) on the forehead?' This was a very significant remark for a boy

of his age ... “

The boy's own father, Shri Bankey Lal Sharma, wrote the following testimony:

“I have read almost all the versions of the statement regarding the rebirth of Paramanand of Moradabad. As I have been the eyewitness of all these things, I can say with emphasis that everything contained in the report is true to its minutest detail.

“Paramanand is a wonderful child with a very fine intelligence. He began to utter “Moradabad” and “Mohan Brothers” alone one year back. Since December last he spoke of the firm he owned during his last existence and also the articles he dealt in. A few days later he made a reference to a shop of his at Saharanpur. Biscuits and tea have been his great attraction. Although nobody attaches any importance to them in my family, he is very fond of them. It was through the association of biscuits that he spoke of his previous soda water and biscuit firm.

“When he visited Moradabad he recognised almost everybody with the exception of a few, especially his eldest son who is much changed. ... He recognised other sons, his only daughter, wife, brothers, mother and father, and several others whom he contacted during his previous life ...

“I am a middle-class man, but the boy is not satisfied with the present status. He often stresses on business and opening a big shop in Bombay or Delhi. In the latter place, he says, he had been several times on business. He wants

aeropionas, ships, mansions, radios, and all modern fashions." He has a great leaning towards his past relatives and does not want to live with me. He requests me to purchase and have a bank of our own ..."

It was only with great difficulty that the boy was taken away from Moradabad after the visit. He showed such unwillingness to leave his old relatives and the shop, that his present father had to carry him away in the early hours of August 17th while he was still asleep.

On the day prior to their departure, August 16th 1949, a large public meeting was held at the Arya Samaj where Prof. Bankey Lal, Pramod's father, gave a full account of the development of the boy's memories since his early childhood. The case was investigated in the full light of local publicity by people known to all the persons concerned.

Among numerous cases from Burma, the following, given on the testimony of U Yan Pa of Rangoon, is one of the most thoroughly substantiated.

In the village of Shwe Taung Pan, situated close to Dabein on the Rangoon-Pegu trunk line, the eldest daughter of a cultivator named U Po Chon and his wife, Daw Ngwe Thin, was married to another cultivator of the same village, named Ko Ba Thin. This girl, whose name was Ma Phwa Kyin, died in childbirth some time later.

Shortly afterwards, a woman in Dabein, Daw Thay Thay Hmyin, the wife of one U Po Yin, became pregnant and in due course gave birth to a daughter whom they named Ah

Nyo. When she first began to speak, this child expressed a strong wish to go to the neighbouring village, Shwe Taung Pan. She declared that she had lived and died in that village, and that her name was really not Ah Nyo but Ma Phwa Kyin. Eventually her parents took her to the village. The child at once led them to the house of the late Ma Phwa Kyin, pointing out on the way a rice field and some cattle which she said belonged to her. When the father, mother, and two brothers, Mg Ba Khin and Mg Ba Yin, of Ma Phwa Kyin appeared, she at once identified them. They confirmed that the house, field, and cattle were those that had belonged to Ma Phwa Kyin, and when the child recalled to them incidents of her former life they admitted that her memories were accurate and accepted her as being without doubt the dead girl reborn. Later she convinced her other surviving relatives in the same way. The girl Ah Nyo, now about twenty-five years of age, is everywhere in the neighbourhood accepted as the former Ma Phwa Kyin reborn.

More numerous are the cases in which specific skills are carried over from one life to another, rather than any distinct recollection of identity. Among musical prodigies we find Mozart composing minuets before he was four years old; Beethoven playing in public at eight and publishing compositions at ten; Handel giving concerts at nine; Schubert composing at eleven; Chopin playing concerts in public before he was nine and Samuel Wesley playing the organ at three and composing an oratorio at

eight. The musical precocity of Brahms, Dvorak, and Richard Strauss was manifest at an equally early stage.

In a less specialised field there is the case of Christian Heinrich Heineken, born at Lubeck in 1721. At the age of ten months he was able to speak, and by the time he was one year old he knew by heart the principal incidents of the Pentateuch. "At two years of age he is said to have mastered sacred history; at three he was intimately acquainted with history and geography, ancient and modern, sacred and profane, besides being able to speak French and Latin; and in his fourth year he began the study of religions and church history."

This amazing child created a tremendous sensation, crowds of people flocking to Lubeck to see and discourse with him. He died at the age of four, soon after he had begun to learn writing. That he was able to master so many abstruse subjects before he could even write is proof that his abnormal achievements were not the result of learning but of remembering.

Saṅgāyana, the journal of the Union of Burma Buddha Sāsana Council, reported in its issue of July 1954 the case of a six-year-old girl, Ma Hla Gyi, who showed remarkable intelligence for her age, combined with a phenomenal memory. "She can read," the report stated, "the most difficult Pali verses a few times, memorise and recite them promptly and correctly." In a test given to her she recited the final stanza of the sub-commentary on the Buddhist

Compendium of Philosophy in Pali without an error, after reading it five times. She was also able to recite without a single error a page of the Pali Paṭṭhāna text (an abstruse Abhidhamma passage) after looking at it for one minute. This might be explained by the possession of a photographic memory, but for the fact that the child could understand what she read and was able to give its meaning.

These and many other instances of the appearance from time to time of child prodigies, although not constituting direct evidence for rebirth, present phenomenon for which biology and psychology cannot account. That memory itself is something extra to the activities of the brain cells is a conclusion accepted on physiological grounds by Max Loewenthal and others.

From the cases available for examination it would seem that memories carried over from one life to another are subject to the same broad, general principle as are ordinary memories belonging to the current life: we remember what most interests us, and what we most desire to remember.

Therefore a strong Kammic predisposition to a particular form of study is more likely to persist from the past life than are the actual details of that life, which may be connected with personal psychological reactions and emotional responses that are in the ordinary course of nature suppressed.

V

Despite great advances in the study of genetics, there is still much that is unexplained in the biological processes that produce living organisms. While the transmission of hereditary characteristics through the genes can be traced in the operation of physical laws, there is yet no known method of accounting for the sudden mutations that occur from time to time and so give rise to variations of species. Yet these mutations, and the fact that they are possible, are a matter of the first importance, since it is by them that biological evolution takes place. For many generations the structural units of a chromosome, the genes, remain the same, and produce uniform hereditary types; but suddenly, without any intermediary stages, a new type is formed from them which may or may not continue to propagate itself. A well-known example of this is the fruit fly, *Drosophila melanogaster*, which, being normally an insect with a grey body and long wings, produces from time to time a spontaneous mutation having a black body slightly different in shape, and very short wings. Many similar cases are known of this kind of departure from a hereditary form, but precisely what different combinations or genes, chromosomes or atomic patterns cause the variation, or why

they occur, is still a mystery to biologists. All that can be said is that the changes are isomeric transformations of the kind found in simple molecular structures, and that they follow the laws of chemical kinetics which also apply to non-living substances under certain conditions.

Between "living" and "non-living" matter there is no sharp line of distinction, for it is known that the processes by which living cells nourish themselves from their surrounding medium, assimilate material for their sustenance, and divide into other cells capable of independent existence is closely paralleled by processes observable in chemical molecules. For example, virus particles, which are the simplest form of life known at present, have to be considered as living units because they perform all the essential functions of living cells, yet at the same time they are regular chemical molecules, subject to all the laws of chemistry and physics. As living molecules comparable to the genes by which organic life is propagated, they are able to multiply, and they are also capable of producing biological mutations which result in the appearance from time to time of new types of a particular virus.

Yet a purely chemical study of them shows each type of virus to be a well-defined chemical compound similar to various complex organic compounds that are not strictly "living" matter. They thus represent a "bridge" between living" and "non-living," substance, and possibly the point at which the "non-living" merges into the "living."

What has to be sought is the directive principle that prompts the transformation and guides the molecules to combine into more complex organic structures. To be able to follow the process, even right from its earliest stage, is not the same as to know its cause, and it is here that scientific method has to enlarge its scope to include the study of principles and laws underlying the phenomena of the physical universe and functioning on a different level from that to which the scientist has hitherto confined himself. Inasmuch as Buddhism locates these ultimate principles in the mental and immaterial, rather than the physical realm, the enquiry must necessarily be turned towards the interaction between mind-energy and the material substance through which it manifests itself.

If the transformations of non-living into living matter and the developments which these transformations afterwards undergo are regarded as the physical manifestation of kamma and vipāka (kamma-result), it is only necessary to add these to the present stock of scientific knowledge as the unknown factors that at present elude identification, for many things still obscure to become clarified, without resorting to the supernatural for an explanation.

The embryonic human being derives its hereditary characteristics from the genes of the parents, sharing in equal measure the chromosomes of father and mother, the sex being determined by the proportion of what are distinguished as X and Y chromosomes. Female cells contain always two X-chromosomes, while the male has one

X and one Y, and it is in the substitution of one Y for an X-chromosome that the basic difference in sex consists. At the time of conception the male sperm cell unites with the female and by the process of syngamy forms one complete cell, which afterwards divides into two, thus starting the process of mitosis by which the complete organism eventually comes into being. Here, what is not known is exactly why in certain cases the X and Y chromosomes combine to form a female, while in others they produce a male cell.

This may be purely fortuitous, but it is more in accordance with the scientific view of cause and effect to suspect the presence of another factor that in some way determines the combination. The Buddhist view that this unknown factor is kamma or energy-potential, the mental impulse projected by another being which existed in the past, is one that science by itself can neither prove nor disprove, but it provides the most likely explanation—in fact, the only one which can be offered as an alternative to the improbable theory of chance.

**Kamma as cause,
and vipāka as result,**

also provide an explanation of the intermediate conditions in which sex characteristics are more or less equal in one

individual, or where it is possible for a complete change of sex to take place. The kamma which in the first place produced a male may be weak, or may become exhausted before the life-supporting kamma comes to an end, in which case the characteristics of the opposite sex may become so marked that they amount virtually to a sex-transformation, the result of a different kind of kamma coming into operation. [7] Similarly, masculine thoughts and habits gradually becoming dominant in a female may bring about more and more marked male characteristics with the passage of time, and these influences may be so strong that they actually reveal themselves in physical changes.

On the other hand, they may only affect the psychic life. What is certain, as this analysis will attempt to show, is that the thought accretions do have the power to affect not only the general outlook and habits but the physical body itself. For “thought-accretions” we may substitute here the Buddhist term *saṅkhāra*, since this is one of the various associated meanings of this highly-comprehensive word. Individual character is usually attributed to two factors, the first being heredity. But simple physical characteristics alone are not always traceable to this cause. Colour-blindness, although it can be followed back through successive generations and shows clearly-marked biological transmission, is not invariably hereditary; and in those individual features that partake of both the physical and psychological, such as the sexual deviations referred to above, the hereditary influence does not provide any

satisfactory explanation. That they are not hereditary is the conclusion of most authorities.

This also applies to the many examples of infant prodigies and to the less striking, but nevertheless significant, instances of children who bear no resemblance whatever to their parents or grandparents. Where hereditary traits transmitted through the genes of the parents cannot account for differences in character the second factor, environmental influence, is brought in to explain the variation. But this also fails to cover all the ground because the same antecedents and the same environment together frequently produce quite dissimilar personalities, and there are numerous examples of pronounced characteristics appearing at birth, before any environmental pressure is brought to bear on the developing personality.

In Buddhist philosophy it is axiomatic that more than one cause is necessary to produce a given result, so that while character may be partly drawn from heredity, and partly modified by environment, these two factors do not in any way rule out the third factor, that of the individual *saṅkhāra*, or kamma-formation-tendency developed in previous lives, which may prove itself stronger than either of them.

Hereditary transmissions themselves are a part of the operation of the causal law, for it happens that owing to strong attachments the same persons may be born again and again in the same family. This accounts for the fact that a child may be totally unlike either of its parents in

temperament, tastes, and abilities, yet may resemble a dead grandfather or some more distant ancestor. Physical appearance may be derived in the first place from the genes of the parents, but it undergoes modifications as the individual develops along his own lines, and it is then that distinctive characteristics, the result habitual thought tendencies stamping themselves upon the features, become more pronounced.

That the mind, or rather the mental impressions and volitional activities, produce changes in the living structure, is a fact which science is beginning to recognise. Hypnotism affords an opportunity of studying this phenomenon under test conditions. It is only recently that hypnotic suggestion as a mode of therapeutic treatment has been officially recognised by medical associations in many parts of the world, but it is already being used with success as a form of harmless anaesthesia during operations and child-birth, and as a treatment for psychological disorders. Clinical experiments with hypnosis are helping to reveal the secrets of the mysterious action of mind on body, for it has been found possible by suggestion to produce physical reactions which under ordinary conditions could only be obtained by physical means. Doubtless many of the "faith cures" of Lourdes and other religious centres are the result of a strong mental force, comparable with that produced under hypnotism, acting upon the physical body; the force in this instance being the patient's absolute conviction that a miraculous cure will take place.

The task of the hypnotic practitioner is to induce this acquiescent and receptive state of unquestioning faith by artificial means. This, of course, requires the consent and cooperation of the subject, and it is here that the difficulty usually arises. The patient must have complete faith in the operator to enable him to surrender his own will entirely, for the time being, to another person. When full control of the subject's mind is gained, the required suggestions can be made with every confidence that the mind of the subject will carry them out, and the astonishing thing is that not only does the mind obey, but the body also responds. If, for instance, the idea of a burn is conveyed through the mind, the mark of a burn duly appears on the flesh on the spot indicated, without the use of any physical means to produce it. Many similar experiments attest to this close inter-relationship of the mental and physical, and prove beyond question the truth of the Buddhist teaching that mental conditions precede and determine certain classes of phenomena which we have been wont to consider purely physical and material.

Hysteria also produces marked physiological changes in certain circumstances, among them being the well-attested phenomenon of "phantom pregnancy." The abnormal mental excitation which produces phantom pregnancy is also to be found in states of religious frenzy, when an unnatural degree of strength, insensibility to pain, and even invulnerability to injury are exhibited. These unexplained phenomena point to the existence of a mental force which

can not only inhibit normal reactions to sense-stimuli, but more than that, is able to affect the physical structure in a particular way.

All this has a distinct bearing on the manner in which the mental impulses generated in past lives, particularly the last mental impressions at the time of the preceding death, influence the physical make-up and often predetermine the very structure of the body, in the new birth. Before going more deeply into this a specific example may be offered for consideration.

Rebirth Case History

From the records of the Burma Buddhist World-Mission.
S. T. Karen, age 20. Birthplace, Upper Burma:
Examined in Rangoon, 1949.

The subject, a Karen house boy employed by a friend of the writer, while he was in all other respects, physically sound, well built, and well proportioned, suffered from an unusual malformation of hands and feet. Across his right hand a fairly deep, straight indentation, roughly following the heart-line of palmistry, but much deeper and sharper than any of the normal lines of the hand, and extending right across the palm, divided the hand into two sections. Above this line the hand was not as well developed as at the base of the palm, and the fingers had something of the childish, unformed appearance that is one of the physical accompaniments of cretinism, although not to the same degree. Lower down on the hand and across the forearm there were similar marks, but not so pronounced as that at the base of the fingers.

The left hand was indented in the same unusual fashion, but to a lesser degree; and linear indentations of the same kind appeared less distinctly across both feet and on the calves, the lines being roughly parallel to one another. In addition to this, two toes of the left foot were joined together.

The boy's previous employment had been with a leading Rangoon surgeon who, after examining these marks had declared that although they had been present from birth they could not have been caused by any pre-natal injury or abnormal condition in the womb. Questioned about them, the boy confirmed that they were congenital, and stated that all the indentations had been much more pronounced in childhood. Furthermore, at birth three of his toes had been joined, but his father, with the rough surgery of village folk, had separated two of the toes himself. During his infancy and boyhood these malformations had been a cause of acute suffering to him, for, at times, particularly when the attention of others was drawn to them, his right arm would swell, and severe pain would be felt in all the affected parts. At such times he experienced mental as well as physical distress, being conscious of fear and depression in connection with the malformations.

According to the boy's own narrative, as a child he had been very reluctant to talk about his physical defects, but one night, lying under the mosquito net with his mother he felt a sense of security which enabled him to speak freely. He then told her that he remembered incidents of his previous life which were the cause of his terror and distress whenever he was reminded of the marks. He had been, he said, the son of a rich man, possibly a village headman, who had died leaving him three adjoining houses and a large quantity of silver stored in large vessels of the type known as Pegu jars besides other treasure secreted in various parts of the

buildings.

After his father's death he had lived alone, unmarried and without servants, in one of the three houses. One night a band of dacoits, armed with bamboo spears, broke into the house and demanded to be told where the treasure was hidden. When he refused to tell them, the robbers bound him with wire in a crouching position, with his hands firmly secured between his legs. In this position, tightly bound and unable to move, they left him huddled in a corner while they ransacked the other two houses, finally making off with the entire store of silver and jewellery.

For three days he remained in that position in acute agony, and one of the things he remembered vividly was that blood, dripping from the deep cuts made in his hands by the wire, fell onto his feet and congealed between three of his toes. Some time during the third night he suddenly became aware, in his alternating periods of consciousness and insensibility, that he was looking down at a still form, crouched in a corner, and wondering who it was. It was only later that he realised the body was his own, and that his consciousness was now located in a different and less substantial form.

The rest of his recollection was confused and obscure. It seemed to him that for a long time he wandered about the scene of his former life, conscious only of a sense of loss and profound unhappiness. In this condition he appeared to have no judgement of the passage of time, and was unable

to say whether it lasted for days or centuries. His sense of personal identity, too, was very feeble, his thoughts revolving entirely around the events just prior to his death; and the memory of his lost treasure, which he felt a longing to regain. He seemed, he said, to have his whole existence in a single idea which was like an obsession: the loss of his wealth and the desire to recover it. [8]

After a long time he again became aware of living beings, and felt an attraction towards a certain young woman. He attached himself to her, following her movements, and eventually another transition was effected, in a manner he was unable to describe clearly, as the result of which he was reborn as the woman's child.

These were the memories that lingered with him in connection with the strange malformations of his hands and feet, and which he told his mother in halting, childish words when he was able to speak. The case history bears several features in common with other instances of the recollection of previous lives that are fairly frequent in the East, and so may be profitably discussed as a typical example. One fact, however, should be noted at the outset: the child who made the claim to these recollections had nothing material to gain by doing so, neither had the parents. Another noteworthy fact is that the boy was a Karen, of a family that had been nominally Christian for two generations, and would be expected to have no belief in the doctrine of rebirth.

Certain interesting and very significant features emerge

from an analysis of this particular case. In the first place, the craving motif is strongly marked throughout. The young man's choice of a solitary life in a house filled with valuables suggests a fear of employing servants and a tendency towards miserliness in his character. After death, in the Peta state (i.e. as an unhappy ghost), his attachment to the lost treasure and to the locale of his previous life persisted as the strongest element in his consciousness, up to the time when he again became attracted to another human being.

So far, this important part played by the impulse of craving and attachment links the story with other instances of Petas haunting the spots where their former property was located; but here there is another element, that of fear, combined with the attachment. This fear was generated during the days and nights when the subject crouched, bound with wire, in the empty building, with no possibility of escape. In remote spots on the outskirts of villages and townships it is even now possible for such solitude to remain unbroken for weeks at a time.

An intensely strong mental impression of the wire cutting into the flesh must have been formed during this period, and it was probably the last image present in the consciousness at death. In accordance with the principles of Abhidhamma psychology, this last thought moment would determine the character of the *paṭisandhiviññāṇa*, (connecting-consciousness or rebirth-consciousness), and would thus become the chief factor in determining the

conditions of the new birth.

To understand how this comes about we must turn to a brief consideration of the Buddhist analysis of consciousness.

The process by which thought impressions register themselves is called *citta-vīthi*, or the course of cognition, and there is a *citta-vīthi* connected with each of the organs and fields of sense-cognition; that is, eye, ear, nose, tongue, touch (body) and mind. The passive flow of the subconscious mind-continuum (*bhavaṅga*) is disturbed whenever an external impression through one or other of these six channels impinges upon it. This disturbance is called *bhavaṅga-calana*, (vibration of the subconscious mind-continuum) and it lasts for exactly one thought-moment. It is followed immediately afterwards by *bhavaṅgupaccheda*, or the cutting-off of *bhavaṅga*, which is a definite interruption in the smooth flow of the subconscious current. At this point the thought-moments begin to follow a set progression of cognitive response beginning with *Pañca-dvārāvajjana*, which is the turning towards the sense-door (in this case one of the five physical organs).

This is followed by the arising of the consciousness-moment appertaining to whichever of the sense-doors, eye, ear, nose, tongue, or body, is involved. This is the involuntary act of turning the attention towards the external object, and it is followed at once by *sampaṭicchana*, which is the actual seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, or feeling as the case may

be. When this has been effected, the function of *santīraṇa*, or investigation, comes into play; at this stage associative ideas arise by which the mind is able to identify the impression that has been received, so that the next stage, that of *Votthapana*, or identification, can be produced. *Votthapana* is the stage of conscious recognition, at which the object assumes a definite identity in the mental awareness. This stage is then succeeded in a full course of cognition by no less than seven *javana* [9] thought-moments, during which consciousness relating to the object arises and passes away. It is followed by *tadālabhāna*, which is the holding of the impression and the registering of it upon the mental stream; this stage, which lasts for two thought-moments, completes the *cittavīthi* of that particular impression, making sixteen thought-moments of the course of cognition from the first awakening of attention to the object to its fixing upon the consciousness. Each of these thought-moments is complete in itself, consisting of three phases: arising (*uppāda*), enduring (*thiti*), and passing away (*bhaṅga*).

The relative intensity or feebleness of impressions varies considerably. One single impression may be the subject of thousands of complete *vīthi*, each of them very distinct (*atimahanta*). If the impression is less marked it is called *mahanta* (distinct), and does not give rise to the *tadālabhāna* stage. Still weaker is an impression that does not even reach the *javana* stage (*paritta*; i. e. feeble); while, if it is very feeble indeed (*ati-paritta*), it passes away after the *bhavaṅgacālana* (vibration of *bhavaṅga*) without any of the subsequent

thought-moments arising. An extremely vivid and clear impression reaching the mind door, accompanied by a full course of cognition, is called *vibhūta* (vivid). It is such impressions as these, repeated over and over again, which influence the mind and may be capable ultimately of influencing the body, with or without the accompaniment of a volitional impulse directed towards that end.

Normally the mind is selective, turning again and again to those impressions which are most agreeable, while ignoring the others; but under certain exceptional conditions disagreeable impressions force themselves upon the attention so strongly that they cannot be thrust aside. Very often such impressions may be rejected by the conscious mind, yet linger in the bhavaṅga ineradicably.

We are here dealing with states of consciousness arising in the *kāmaloka* (the world of fivefold sense-perception) and such as come into being through contact with external sense-objects. The course of ideational objects, those entering through the *mano-dvāra*, mind-door, is slightly different. In the cognitive series (*cittavīthi*) dealt with above, the javana thought-moment occurs up to seven times, but in loss of consciousness or at the moment of death it subsides after the fifth repetition. At that moment, representing the end of the final phase of the current life, cognitive thought (*vīthi-citta*) is experienced, and this takes the form of an idea-image which may be that of predominant kamma, of something associated with that kamma and its performance, or else a representation of the destiny to which the past

kamma has been directed. At the expiry of the cognitive thought (*vīthi-citta*) or that of the *bhavaṅga*, there arises the *Cuti-citta* (death-consciousness) which performs the function of cutting off, and immediately after that the *paṭisandhiviññāna*, or connecting-consciousness, arises in the next life as rebirth-consciousness. In the formula of 'Dependent Origination' (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) this is expressed as:

“Viññāṇapaccayā nāma-rūpa”—“From (rebirth-) consciousness arise name and form”, i.e., mental and physical aggregates. This consciousness, conditioned by ignorance and actions (*kamma*) motivated by craving, carrying with it predominant impressions of the last thought-moments, functions as the *bhavaṅga* of the next existence, and so determines the key, as it were, in which that life is pitched. Thus the life-continuum flows on from one existence to another in the endless succession of *paṭisandhi*, *bhavaṅga*, *vīthi*, and *cuti*.

There is no actual thought-existence that passes across from one life to another, but only an impulse. Each moment of consciousness passes away completely, but as it passes it gives rise to a successor which tends to belong to the same pattern; and this process is the same, whether it be considered from the viewpoint of the moment-to-moment life-continuum that makes up a total life-span, or from that of the connecting link between one life and the next.

The rebirth is instantaneous and directly conditioned

by the preceding thought-impulse. Since both mind and body are conditioned by it, even the distinctive pattern of the brain convolutions that accompanies a particular talent, say for music or mathematics, is the result of this powerful mental force operating from the past life and stamping its peculiar features on the physical substance, the living cell tissues of the brain. It is this which accounts for the phenomenon of genius in circumstances where heredity offers no tenable explanation. In the case of the Karen boy under discussion, the most potent rebirth-force, craving, was conjoined with a strong impression of physical suffering and physical marks, and this impression had been the central pivot of consciousness for three days and nights—long enough to set up a thought-construction (or a pattern impressed on the bhavaṅga) sufficiently emphatic to influence the succeeding phases of consciousness and the new body that was formed under its direction. In some way not yet known to science, the thought-energy released at the time of death is able to, control the combinations of male and female gametes and by means of *utu* (temperature) and the other purely physical elements of generation to produce a living organism that embodies the nature and potentialities of the past kamma in a new life (*anāgata-vipāka-bhava*).

Here it should be noted that strongly marked tendencies, both mental and physical, as well as actual memories belonging to past lives, are most in evidence when the rebirth is direct from one human life to another. The memories themselves are transferred by impression on the brain cells, so that the ordinary rules of memory obtain here, and it is the most recent and vivid impressions that survive. Intermediate lives in one or other of the remaining thirty planes of existence can efface altogether the memory of previous human lives, and if these intermediate existences have been in any of the lower states, where consciousness is dim, or spent in the inconceivably long lifespan of the Deva realm, it can hardly be expected that there should be any recollection at all.

This is only one of the many reasons why most people altogether fail to remember having existed in a previous state, and yet may have a vague feeling that they have done so. In the case under review the subject spent an undefined period in the state of a Peta, or what is popularly known as an "unhappy ghost". His own belief was that this state lasted for a long time; but in such conditions time is a purely subjective element. His existence as a Peta may in fact not have lasted for more than a few thought-moments.

Questions put to the boy by the writer, however, seemed to indicate that the interval of Peta existence had actually been of considerable duration, for after his rebirth he had not been able to identify any places or people from the former life. Everything had changed from his memory of it. Other

attempts to draw some clue as to the period of the previous life were equally profitless. The primitive weapons of the dacoits did not necessarily indicate that it took place before the invention of firearms, for the statement that they used wire points to a more recent date. It is possible, however, that the boy's use of the word "wire" was a linguistic error, he may have meant thin strands of creeper, which would produce the same effect. The joining of his toes, corresponding to the manner in which they had stuck together with the congealed blood, is a striking instance of the enduring power of a mental impression: crouched with his head bent down to his knees, his hands and feet would be the central objects of his *cittavīthi*, and what was happening to them must have stamped itself visually on his consciousness, to reproduce itself later in his new body by means of *paṭisandhiviññāṇa*.

This case is the most remarkable one known to the writer for the demonstration it gives of the mind's influence upon the physical body in a direct causal sequence from one life to another. [10]

That the process of mutation from one existence to the next is carried out without any "soul" or transmigrating entity is another fact that becomes apparent on examination of the case history. The only factor of identity between the headman's son, the *peta* (unhappy ghost), and S. T. the Karen houseboy, was the craving-impulse that carried with it the potentiality of re-manifestation: that is, *bhava* (existence) resulting from *upādāna* (attachment). The terrors

and physical affliction were the direct outcome of the upādāna, or attachment. In terms of Dependent Origination, *saṅkhāra* (kamma-tendencies) conditioned by *avijjā* (ignorance) had produced *viññāṇa* (consciousness), and from that consciousness had sprung a fresh *nāma-rūpa* (mind-body) bearing the marks that had impressed themselves on the last moments of consciousness during repeated cittavīthi on the same object. It is thus that all living beings carry with them, throughout countless existences, the inheritance of their own thoughts and actions, sprung from past tendencies and nourished on the ever-renewed craving that comes from contact between the senses and the objects of the external world. Heredity itself is merely one factor in the multiple operations of the law of kamma and vipāka (result), and it too is greatly influenced by the direction taken by past interests, activities, and attachments.

In the Buddha's Teaching it is naturally the moral aspect of kamma and vipāka that is stressed; and indeed there is a moral aspect to every major volitional impulse. The relationship of good kamma and good vipāka, bad kamma and bad vipāka, however, is not always obvious at first glance. A child born with a physical deformity, as in the present case, has not necessarily inflicted injury of a similar kind on someone else in a previous life. The physical defect may be the result of a strong mental impression produced by some other means. But as in the case of the Karen boy, the ultimate cause can invariably be traced back to some

moral defect of the individual concerned to some trait of character unduly dominated by the *āsavas*, the taints or fluxes associated with the grasping tendency which in *Paṭiccasamuppāda* is shown as the immediate cause of the process of “becoming” (*uppāda*, or grasping, gives rise to *bhava*, or “becoming, which in its turn causes *jāti*, arising or rebirth). Thus the whole individual life-process, including its physical medium, the *rūpa* (body), must be viewed as “*santati*,” that is, a causal-continuum of action and result; all the actions being to some degree tainted by craving for existence, passion, self-interest, and ignorance, until the attainment of Arahantship extinguishes these energy-supplying fires.

It only remains to be noted that in the operation of mental impulses upon living cells at the time of their uniting, and during the processes of syngamy and mitosis, Buddhism offers a fully scientific explanation of the biological mutations described at the beginning of this chapter.

VI

Buddhism teaches that there are altogether thirty-one planes of existence on which rebirth is possible; the human plane is only one of them. The thirty-one “abodes” comprise the states of extreme suffering, or “hells,” to which people consign themselves by reason of their bad kamma; the realms of the unhappy spirits, or “Petas,” who on account of attachment to mundane concerns of a low order are more or less earthbound; the animal world into which people may be reborn through the manifestation of bestial characteristics; the realm of superior spirits intermediate between earth and the heavenly planes themselves, which are the abodes of Devas enjoying sense-pleasures as the result of their past good actions; and lastly the Brahma worlds, wherein beings who on earth have attained specific spiritual goals live for aeons in pure and immaterial forms. All of these states of existence, however, are impermanent; sooner or later they come to an end, when the kamma that has produced them is exhausted. Rebirth then takes place once more, as the result of craving and residual kamma of another type from past lives which then comes into operation. So the process of saṃsāra continues until all craving is extinguished and Nibbāna is reached.

It is important to realise that Buddhism does not teach rebirth only on the human level. If it did so it would leave unexplained all the phenomena of spiritualism and a great deal more besides, which has to be accounted for in human experience. Many western spiritualists have now come to accept rebirth as a fact because it is the only valid explanation of certain data which cannot otherwise be fitted into the spiritualist concept. To give only one example, it is well known that spiritualist mediums find it impossible to “contact” certain people after death, while with others they are able to do so. This has always been a great difficulty to spiritualists, but the Buddhist answer is a simple one: it is not all who are reborn into the so-called spirit worlds, and furthermore some of these planes of existence are too remote from the human world to be accessible to any ordinary “medium.”

The idea of other realms of existence is more difficult for those to accept who have become conditioned to thinking in terms of “naive realism,” and it sometimes happens that through a misunderstanding of the Buddhist doctrine of *anattā* (no-self) they believe that rebirth can take place only in a physical and human body. This is an error which the Buddhist texts do not support. To deny the possibility of rebirth in the animal world, for example, is a negation of the universal applicability of the moral law of cause and effect which the Buddha consistently proclaimed. Both Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism teach unequivocally that if the kamma of the last thought moment before death is on a low

moral level governed by any of the unwholesome factors associated with lust, hatred and delusion, the next manifestation of the causal continuum will be on precisely that level. In other words, rebirth as an animal, a *peta*, or a being in one of the hell states will result. It must be understood that this does not correspond at all to the Pythagorean idea that the “soul” of one type of being can enter the body of another.

For the sake of a clear understanding of the processes of saṃsāra in regard to other realms of existence, the following extracts from letters from the present writer to a friend are given:

“Like yourself, when I first studied Buddhism I thought of rebirth as being only in human form. In the beginning that was satisfactory; as you say, ‘a nice, clear-cut philosophy, rational’—and of course ethical as well. But further consideration revealed certain mechanical difficulties in the way of direct rebirth invariably from one human state to another. It meant, for instance, that at the moment of death some conception must be taking place somewhere which was in all respects ideally suited to be the vehicle of expression for the kammic potential released by the death.

Of course, conception is actually taking place in millions of cases all over the world at any moment one cares to name; yet still it seems that too many coincidental factors must somehow be present to bring the thing within the realms of probability. Again, if animals are to be taken into the

scheme, which is philosophically necessary in order to make the world-view comprehensive and to get away from the anthropocentric idea that ethics and spiritual meanings apply only to mankind—an idea which always seemed to me quite indefensible—it must be that the rebirth concept is somehow extensible to other modes of existence besides the human. After all, why should we assume that we are the only form of sentient and intelligent existence in the cosmos? Does the scientific outlook forbid us to envisage the possibility of other modes of life, simply because we cannot see, hear or handle them? Does not science itself tell us that most of the significant things in the universe, the things that really shape the visible world, are themselves invisible and intangible forces? We have to take many things on the authority of science which we cannot see and test for ourselves. True, somebody else has presumably tested these theories and so, science being a body of shared knowledge, as distinct from the esotericism of personal revelations, we accept the findings that the universe is of such and such a construction, that man has evolved from lower forms of life, and so forth. Even when we are led by gradual degrees to Einstein's general theory of relativity, the space-time complex, curved space, the expanding universe, and other ideas which nobody, not even the scientists themselves, can demonstrate in tangible form, we go on believing something that we cannot realise, or ever hope to realise except as perhaps a mathematical concept, simply because we have faith in the former discoveries of science

and have seen that the method bears results. In other words, we believe in the method, even when we cannot check its latest results for ourselves.

At that stage very few of us are philosophers enough to ask ourselves why we believe in a substantial physical universe when every new concept of science brings us into a more abstract world and proves that the universe is in reality something quite different from the mental picture we have formed of it from the data furnished by our senses. In a universe of energy, what has become of the solid, impenetrable substance of our world? If it is not exactly illusion, it is so different from the reality that its appearance at least may be termed illusion. Because it is a *shared* illusion and one that is necessary to our continued functioning within the framework of a world that we must regard as substantial, we are compelled to go on treating it as though it were actually the thing it appears to be as interpreted by our sensory awareness. But when we try to apply the laws of Newtonian physics to nuclear physics, and Euclidean geometry to the multiple space-time dimension, we find that these laws, while they are still valid in the limited sphere of the material world, are quite inadequate to cope with the abstract and much more complicated world of mathematical (and therefore philosophical) reality. From then on we have to suspect that the relatively simple material universe, in which certain things just cannot be because they cannot be always seen, heard or felt, is only a very partial aspect of the whole. What was simple and

obvious to Charles Bradlaugh becomes not quite so certain. But still, through habit we go on asserting the validity of materialistic principles in spheres where it is far from certain that they obtain. So people say that there cannot be a heaven because they were always told that heaven existed somewhere up above the clouds, and stellar exploration (even before it became fact) has disproved this.

“But on what principle do we insist that heaven or hell must have an objective, external existence? If ‘heaven’ is happiness and ‘hell’ misery, they are personal and subjective states; they exist independently of physical location. To take a concrete example, two men may be sitting side by side in a bus. One is desperately unhappy, perhaps through remorse, unsatisfied longing, anger, or any one of the myriad causes of human misery; he may be contemplating suicide, even. The other is blissfully happy; he has perhaps got promotion in his job, just had his first book published and the reviewers have been enthusiastic, or he has married the girl he loves. Each of these two men is inhabiting his own personal world, which has nothing to do with the world of the other; yet physically they are sitting side by side in this familiar world shared by us all. They may both get off at Sloane Square, but for one of them Sloane Square is a bus stop in heaven, while for the other it is located nowhere but in hell. So these states of being—really the only true states, since the external world has no part in making them what they are, but itself takes on whatever aspect they give to it—are internal, subjective, and

purely mental states. As such they have no connection with location in time or space, or the events of the world going on about them. Each of us lives and has his own peculiar experience in a separate world, to which the external world presents only points of contact and general reference.

“So, if this can be the case in regard to two living men in a bus, whose physical bodies are touching one another but whose minds—and therefore real being—are living in different realms, why do we insist that if heaven exists as a reality it must be accessible by space travel or anything of that kind? In doing so we are naively applying laws that are relevant to physical space and time to other modes of conscious being where they are not relevant at all.

“What I am trying to express is a different vision of the world of reality. To me it seems that the real world is an intangible world of mental events and concepts, to which the external is only incidental. This may of course take the appearance of Berkeleyan idealism or, worse still, mysticism. But in reality it differs fundamentally from both: it is not Berkeleyan idealism because it does not attempt to brush aside the physical world as being nonexistent. It accepts that world as a reality, but not the whole or the final reality. It differs from mysticism in that it does not lose touch with the conditions in which we function as living, material organisms, and does not postulate any invasion of the laws governing extra-physical phenomena into the realm of the physical to the disorganisation of the latter. The worlds exist side by side; interpenetrating one another and

affecting one another in various ways, but only within the limits imposed by the laws peculiar to each, and in conformity with those laws. Each world stands in relation to the others as a teleological necessity.”

It may be objected that of the two men in the bus, the happiness of the one and the wretchedness of the other have certainly been caused by external events; something has happened to them to put them into their respective heaven and hell. That is true, but it is retrospective to the cause, while we are dealing with the effect as it now is. Their present conditions, whatever may have induced them, have no reference to one another nor to the objective world they share. They are living in discrete worlds that have been created for them by their reaction to some previous events.

Now had they been indifferent to those events they could not have been plunged into hell or exalted to heaven by them. So finally their condition can be traced back to their own minds and the degree of their susceptibility to external occasions for joy or sorrow. A certain thing happening to one man may cause him a mild and fleeting unhappiness; the same thing happening to another may reduce him to suicidal despair. The same kind of event objectively, but vastly different in its results—that is, in the kind of world it creates internally. If that is the cause, which is the more significant—the event in itself or the respective mental conditions of the two men, which have invested it with such different degrees of importance? If we say, as it seems to me we are bound to say, that the mental condition is the more

significant, it must follow that it is the mental state, not the event, that represents the true reality in any situation. The illustration of the two men in the bus may be a trite and obvious one, but from it we are entitled to draw certain inferences concerning the nature of state of being in terms of isolated experiences. One of them is that the mind has its own habitat and a limitless capacity for creating its own worlds out of the raw materials of any situation. That these worlds of subjectivity have their counterparts in planes of existence other than our own is borne out by the testimony of Swedenborg, William Blake, and a host of others whose independent experience has given them glimpses of their reality. The part science plays in life is only on the fringe of mankind's collective experience.

In any case, when we bring science into the problem of being we ought to begin by defining just what we mean by the word. The most we can say is that science is a body of knowledge concerning accepted facts, gained by the pursuit of a certain method which has been found to give results in the past and so is presumed to be valid for all investigations. Scientific theories are constantly subject to alteration as knowledge increases, but scientific method remains the same. Therefore at any given point it is the method that is more important than any particular stage it has brought us to in the never-ending pursuit. But there can be no assurance that the method will eventually succeed in revealing everything. In fact, its progress suggests that the more it reveals the more there remains to be explored. It

continually opens up new vistas, each of which demands that it be explored with new compasses. The 'expanding universe' maybe just a natural allegory of man's expanding knowledge of the universe, something to which there can be no final limit. It becomes increasingly difficult to apply any sort of scientific knowledge to ontological questions, even when it seems to have some bearing on what we desire to know. Science may destroy religious myths but it has not made any important change in the terms of philosophical thought. It has given us a wider range of symbols and a more exact terminology, but that is all. We are no longer obliged to talk of the elements of earth, air, fire, and water, but the philosophical concepts they stood for remain fairly constant. Everything we know is merely a subjective experience based upon data presented by our senses, and these data come to us in the form of impressions which are in most cases far removed from the nature of the object as it really is. All that physics tells us is that the objects of the external world would appear to us quite differently if we possessed a different kind of cognitive apparatus. But even this was known long ago. Things that we see, hear, smell, taste, and touch have no intrinsic properties, only the characteristics we invest them with in the course of cognising and appraising. Thus the world of aesthetic values lies only in ourselves, and is in some respects different for each of us. In this mental world, made up of highly individualised impressions combined with the concepts that have gathered about them from prior

association and, in the field of abstract concepts, the biases, predilections, and prejudices that are personal to the individual concerned, the range of variations becomes limitless. No two people think exactly alike, which means that no two people inhabit precisely the same world. Two persons may agree on all factual points, yet the interpretation they give to the totality may produce two quite different pictures.

So the world we live in is largely, if not wholly, a mental construct. Science gives us information about the external world which we know to be true so far as it goes. It is true because it is seen to work; if we apply the knowledge practically we get the expected results. Constructing a machine in accordance with certain proved laws of physics we get something that flies, defying another law of physics, gravitation. Something which one law seems to make impossible thus becomes practicable by the understanding and use of other laws. It is this form of progression from the impossible to the possible that has made our world what it is. The laws governing the propagation of sound make it possible for the voice of someone talking in London to be heard in New York, and three hundred years ago the “natural philosopher” would have been content to leave it at that and would have had a hearty laugh at the notion of radio. But Newton would probably not have dismissed it as impossible because the genius of a really great scientist is like all other forms of genius—it includes a large amount of imagination. Had it not been for the old alchemists with

their absurd theory that somehow the elements of one metal could be rearranged to form another, we should never have had modern chemistry. Even those who went further than the elixir of life and the transmutation of metals, and tried to produce the 'homunculus,' an artificial man, were only in a crude way trying to anticipate something which bio-chemistry may one day make possible.

And here it may be noted in passing that even if science should ultimately succeed in generating life from nonliving matter, the achievement will make no difference to the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth according to karma. The kammic causal current may manifest through vital elements brought together artificially in the same way as it does through the natural biological processes. The artificial production of living organisms may deal the final blow to the theory of divine creation, but it will not in any way affect the Buddhist explanation of life.

The laws that work in science are continually having to give way before the discovery of fresh laws which either cancel them out or modify them, or make them subservient to ends which previously they appeared to obstruct. And as this process develops we find ourselves becoming more and more doubtful as to whether it will reach any conclusive end. The horizon is eternally receding from us, the spiral nebulae forever thrusting outwards into limitless space. The familiar and comfortable world of 'things' is meanwhile dissolving into abstract forces, a whirling dance of electrons, of atoms which are never the 'same' atoms from one

moment to another of their restless existence. Does what we see bear any relation whatever to the external reality? Can we ever be certain that physics itself is 'true'?

Speculative thought has been dried up at its source by the realisation that science alone can never help to reveal ultimate truth, but can show us only expanding areas of what is relatively true. It was because of this that Wittgenstein was constrained to renounce all attempts to erect systems of philosophy, even negative systems, and was particularly averse to theories which take mathematics or natural science as the ideal. But while the scientist remains content to work within the areas of relative truth and to leave teleological questions alone, his self-denial does not forbid others from making use of his knowledge in the attempt to trace a coherent pattern in the diversity of human experience. We have evidence from other sources that it is possible to improve man's perceptual apparatus and extend it, and by that means we may break through the impasse. It is only necessary that the ideas we bring into play should not be of a kind that science has shown to be false on grounds within its own province.

The limits of scientific competence should be clearly understood. It is a common error to suppose that science has accounted for a phenomenon when it has given it a name, and that it has explained a cause when it has merely described a process. To take an example, 'natural selection' is accepted as one of the primary factors in evolution. But if we ask what causes natural selection—precisely why does a

living organism choose one course of action rather than another, or whence comes the instinctive urge to mate in a certain way that 'happens' to be conformable to biological needs—science is silent. It does not know the answer. It has named a process, and shown how it works, but it has not discovered the reason for it. To say that there is no reason is to evade the issue. The purpose may be assumed to tie in the final result, but that is legislating after the event. A certain phenomenon may be produced by accident, but for a long and involved series of such accidents to bring forth in the end a highly-organised and equipped animal of the type of the higher vertebrates is stretching pure chance too far. All the evidence points towards some kind of drive behind the process, but this theory is vitiated by the fact that the drive does not go directly towards the fulfilment of its purpose. It blunders along by a painful process of trial and error—stopping, retracing its steps, coming to dead ends, and scattering the debris of its failures along the path of geological time, yet always ensuring that in some way its surviving stages are contributory to the ultimate result, whatever that may be. This drive, or demiurge, cannot be a creator-god, for if it were, it would achieve its purpose with greater economy and, presumably, with more regard for ethical principles. That these are completely lacking in nature is one of the strongest arguments against the emergent theory. All the indications in fact are opposed to the idea of a supreme deity, whether God be conceived as a complete being or as an evolving and progressively

revealed spiritual principle. Yet when all this is granted we are still left with the vacuum created by the lack of a purposive directing force. The question still remains: Can biological processes be explained in purely physical terms, or do the problems of structure, function, and organisation necessitate some kind of teleology? The scientist may reject the “vitalism” which Hans Driesch postulated as a necessity, but something of the kind is needed to account for organic evolution.

The “demiurge” and the “élan vital”

Buddhism meets the challenge with the concept of the force of craving, an impersonal urge to fulfilment continually renewing itself in successive manifestations. The “*demiurge*” and the “*élan vital*” are both functionally represented in this concept. Here we have not a ‘something’ which has visualised the final result from the beginning and has been capable of creating from nothing and moving directly towards its consummation, but a blindly-groping urge which shows itself in the instinctive behaviour of animals and on the deeper psychological levels of human beings. It is the one great creative impulse to which all the laws of the universe are subservient.

Far from precluding the possibility of other states of being besides our own, science makes them, by inference, a logical

necessity. The facts suggest that, in the words of Sir Oliver Lodge, “an enlarged psychology, and possibly an enlarged physiology—possibly even an enlarged physics—will have to take into account and rationalize a number of phenomena which so far have been mainly disbelieved or ignored.”

It is as well to bear in mind that the existence of extraterrestrial modes of being had always been recognised until science, by confining the method and grounds of knowledge to the material level, caused an unprecedented antagonism to metaphysical ideas. The revolution in outlook justified itself in many ways, but a new rationalism is emerging which has its roots in the enigmatic territory that modern physics has revealed beyond the tangible world.

Understanding of how rebirth in the human states takes place is sometimes obscured by misconceptions regarding certain biological principles, especially those relating to the transmission of hereditary characteristics. Here it is necessary to realise that the various parts of an organism are not received intact from the parents but developed out of comparatively simple structures present in the egg. There is no real analogy between heredity and the legal notion of inheritance of property. One speaks loosely of a given hereditary character being ‘transmitted’ from parent to offspring, but obviously this is impossible since the only materials which can be thus transmitted are those contained in the uniting sex cells, the eggs and spermatozoa in higher animals. “An individual receives from his parents not a set

of fully-formed characters but a set of determinants or genes, as a consequence of whose activities the hereditary characters are developed. This concept of hereditary determinants is fundamental for an understanding of heredity" (Prof. G.H. Beale, Lecturer in Genetics, Edinburgh University, 1957). The determinants are therefore only a contribution to the sum total of characters, or personality. The extent to which they are decisive must depend very largely on other factors, not all of which are to be accounted for by environment. Heredity and the predispositions from past kamma may be complimentary to one another, as when attachment leads to repeated rebirths in the same racial group, or even in the same family; or the kammic tendencies may modify or counteract the hereditary characteristics. It is only if rebirth is taken to mean the transmigration of a 'soul' that there is any conflict between it and the known facts of genetics.

The emphasis laid upon *anattā* is fundamental to the Buddhist point of view. There is no 'soul' in the sense of an enduring entity; in its place there is mental energy flowing out from living creatures which after their death continues its current of causality by assembling out of physical substances a new being. But this new being, which is the continuation of the kammic cause-effect current of the previous one, does not necessarily have to be a human being. It may be an animal or it may be a being existing in other realms, where it produces a body in accordance with the particular laws of generation obtaining in those realms.

If it has brought about a birth in the Deva or Peta loka (which are justifiably called 'spirit' realms, since 'spirit' has nothing to do with 'soul' but denotes a particular type of body, different from the bodies of the terrestrial plane) it continues with a more or less recognisable personality. It is similar enough in general characteristics to the person who died to be recognisable as belonging to the same current of causal identity, and so we call it the 'same' person, just as we say that John Smith at ninety is the 'same' person as John Smith the infant which he once was. Actually they are not the same, except in this conventional sense—they merely belong to the same continuum of cause and effect. The new being, Deva or Peta, also retains memories of the previous life, and if emotional links or other attachments are strong, it continues to share the interests of people living on this, our own plane. Furthermore, when personality is very strongly marked it is all the more likely to reproduce characteristics which make it identifiable as the 'same' person in a new manifestation.

In this way Buddhism accounts for the phenomena of the séance room. Rebirth in these other realms, or *loka*, does not necessitate a soul any more than does rebirth as a human being or animal. When the result of the kamma that has caused the rebirth in the Deva or Peta realms is exhausted, the mental energy once more flows out to operate through the conditions of the physical world and human rebirth takes place again. Or it may be that another Deva or Peta rebirth will come about, or a rebirth in any other of the

thirty-one planes of existence according to the nature of the residual kamma.

There are several lines of enquiry on which investigation into rebirth may be carried out. It has been possible to indicate only a few of them here. The serial continuity of life, which so many people in all ages have felt instinctively to be a truth, however, carries with it the force of an intellectual conviction to all who seek for a purpose and a moral pattern in human experience. It is not too much to say that the whole of man's future development depends upon an acceptance of rebirth and a fuller understanding of the ethical principles it brings to light. Mankind is now ripe for a complete reassessment of values and a restatement of the universal principles on which our moral and spiritual convictions rest. Unless this is undertaken, we stand in danger of a catastrophic destruction of all those virtues by which man has risen to his present position in the hierarchy of living beings. It is only by the acceptance of rebirth as a fact that the sense of moral responsibility in an ordered universe can be restored.

Notes

1. Since this was written, confirmation of the view that reincarnation beliefs in Kabbalistic Judaism are of considerable antiquity has been found in an article, *Seelenwanderung und Sympathie der Seelen in der J?dischen Mystik (Transmigration and the Sympathy of Souls in Jewish Mysticism)*, by Prof. Gershom Scholem, in the *Eranos Jahrbuch* Vol XXV, 1955 (Rhein Verlag, Basel 1956).

Prof. Scholem finds the first mention of reincarnation in the book *Bahir*, edited ca. 1180 in Southern France, but notes that it is there spoken of as a matter of course, without apology or explanatory comments. Official Jewish theology emphatically opposed the doctrine, yet Kirkisani, a 10th century writer, in his “Book of the Lights” affirms that the Karaic teacher ‘Anan accepted the doctrine in the 8th century.’ Anan wrote a book on it, and his followers preserved the doctrine.

The author is indebted to the Ven. Nyanaponika Maha Thera for the translation of Prof. Scholem's articles from the German.

2. The formation of personality has to be considered under three heads. There is first the Kammic potentiality of the

individual, which is the inheritance from his own previous lives. Secondly, there is the set of hereditary characteristics which he derives from his parents. This appears to be connected with the kamma by way of attraction, as when the rebirth takes place in the same family or in the same sociological or ethnic group, and accounts for racial characteristics the origins of which cannot be specifically determined. Thirdly, there is environmental influence, which produces modifying effects upon the developing personality. Since causality in the Buddhist sense implies multiple-causality, the Kammic character-motif which represents at once the residuum of the old personality and the matrix of the new, does not exclude the other two formative factors, nor is it excluded by them.

On the other hand, the attempt to erect a theory of the origin of personality solely upon biological heredity and environmental influences is at the outset nullified by the fact that beings with the same hereditary background and reared in the same environment show marked differences in character and abilities. Such differences are frequently to be met with even in the case of twins.

- 3.** The will to act undergoes a complete reversal when desire is totally extinguished, as in the case of the Arahāt. It is not, however, converted into what would appear to be its opposite, volitional inertia. The Arahāt continues to will and to act as long as he lives, but his willing is not prompted by desire; its source is the uniform, practically

automatic, functioning of the impulse of disinterestedness. For this reason it is *Kiriya*, or kammically neutral and non-regenerative. The personality-pattern in which desire is totally absent bears no resemblance to the psychology of the ordinary person who is subject to rebirth. A close parallel to the Buddhist conception of will as a generative force is to be found in Bergson's theory of Creative Evolution. If the Bergsonian Idea were to be enlarged, as quite logically it could be, to include a succession of lives subject to kamma and its results, the parallel would be exact.

4. Translated by Bhikkhu Nanamoli: *The Path of Purification*, 2nd ed. (Colombo 11, Ānanda Semage).
5. Hypnotic regression, the technique of carrying a subject under hypnosis back to a previous life, may give negative results from a variety of causes. Due to an unconscious resistance the regression may not be complete; or the existence to which the regression has led may have been on a sub-human level and therefore inarticulate. Several cases are known to the author in which the subject has had fragmentary memories of a previous life whilst practising meditation. In some instances the descriptions afterwards given of these experiences strongly suggest that they relate to states of consciousness of a sub-human order. If a hypnotic subject is regressed to a previous condition of this kind the response will naturally be negative.

The question of hetero-biological transition in rebirth is a controversial one, but so far as Buddhism is concerned it is disputed only by those who have not succeeded in overcoming the anthropocentric bias that has its root in personality-belief (*sakkāyaditṭhi*). It cannot be too often stressed that Buddhism does not subscribe to the belief in a sharp distinction between human and animal life which has dominated Western thought for many centuries, and which continues to colour it on the emotional level despite the discoveries of biological science.

The chief objections to the cases of apparent memories of previous lives under hypnosis may be briefly stated here. The first is that such cases can rarely be confirmed by objective evidence, and that even when such proof is given, as in the cases mentioned in Part I. It is difficult to eliminate the possibility that the subject may have acquired the information either unconsciously by normal means, from books and other sources, or telepathically from other minds. The picture is further complicated by the possibility that the source of information is the “collective unconscious,” or race memory. Nevertheless, methods are being devised whereby these possibilities may be either ruled out or confirmed. The “collective unconscious” itself, if it exists, may turn out to be a misinterpretation of what are actually memories of previous lives. Rebirth would seem in fact to imply the existence of a common stock of experiences preserved on the unconscious level in each individual.

Another possibility, in cases where no objective proof can be

obtained, is that the suppressed memory of a previous life may be a 'fantasy.' Experience has shown, however, that mental fantasies under hypnosis do not arise spontaneously. They come about in response to suggestions from the hypnotiser, and can readily be distinguished from genuine memories.

In the cases of spontaneous recollection, those in which a child claims, to remember a previous existence without assistance from hypnotism, it is easier to eliminate alternative explanations of the phenomenon. These cases present a much broader basis for investigation, particularly in view of the fact that, as recent examples seem to indicate, they occur when the intermediate existence between the former human life and the present one has been relatively short. A number of such cases have recently come under investigation and the findings on them will be published in the near future. They are supported by much evidential material in the form of identifications by the subjects of persons and places known to them in their previous lives. In quite a few instances the subjects have been found to be in possession of information on matters hitherto unknown to the other persons involved, which on inquiry has been found correct.

6. Recent investigations carried out by the author in Ceylon and Thailand appear to indicate that such memories occur when the previous life was cut short abruptly by sickness, accident or violence. From a survey of these and a number of cases gathered from other parts of the world it

would seem that rebirth in the human world tends to take place more quickly after a premature death, and that it is in such cases that vestigial memories of the previous life are retained in sufficient strength to permit their spontaneous revival.

The implication is that a premature death leaves the pattern set by the regenerative kamma uncompleted, with the result that it is renewed more quickly, and more of the previous personality-structure survives. This, of course, is a tentative supposition which further research may establish or disprove. The accumulation of evidence has to be examined in the light of the fact that personality is a composite formation, subject to alteration, disintegration, and reconstruction, and that in rebirth it is not the total personality that is transferred from one life-manifestation to another but only the kammically-directed impulse of the previous existence, which may reproduce more or less of the recognisable features of the former personality.

7. The Commentary to Verse 43 of the Dhammapada relates a sudden change of sex, due to exceptionally weighty kamma, in the case of a youth, Soreyya, who became a woman as the result of a thought of lust directed towards an Arahant, the Thera Mahā Kaccāyana.
8. Several cases have been found in which the subject remembers an intermediate life. These memories show an underlying unity of pattern, and in some respects confirm the accounts given in spiritualist communications. At first

the disembodied entity is not aware that death has taken place. The sensations described resemble those of persons who have had experiences of the disembodied consciousness under anaesthesia or in what is known as astral projection. The term "disembodied" is not strictly correct; the consciousness is always located in, or associated with a body of some kind but the physical vehicle (Rupa) is of the fine-material type known to Buddhist metaphysics; that is to say, while it is unsubstantial on the plane of human consciousness, it is solid on the plane of a different vibrational frequency on which it manifests.

A feature which frequently occurs in these memories is the appearance of a guide who assists and directs the discarnate entity. In the case of a Burmese Buddhist monk whose rebirth history was investigated by the author, such a guide appeared to him shortly after his death, and directed him to his new birth. Subsequently, the same personage appeared to the monk in a dream during a critical period of his present life, and gave him valuable advice. A close parallel has been found in a case in America. A connection may be traced here with the almost universal belief in the "guardian angel" or spirit guide. It is significant, also, that such helpers do not appear to be attached to every individual. The Buddhist explanation is that the guide and protector is someone who has been closely connected by ties of friendship or relationship with the individual in a past life, and who still continues to take an interest in his welfare.

The case from America, referred to above, gives support to this explanation. Here again, the post-mortem experience was followed by further appearances of the guiding entity in the present life, in one of which a strong hint was given of a kammic link between the two persons concerned.

9. Lit., impulsion. It is at that phase that kamma, good or evil, is produced.
10. Cases in which the subjects have birthmarks corresponding to injuries or physical characteristics they bore in the previous life form an important class of the rebirth case-histories. They include the following examples:

Thailand: Large capillary naevus on left of cranium, corresponding to fatal knife wound received in the previous life. Also malformation of big toe, corresponding to wound present at the time of death.

Thailand: Slight malformation of left ear, reproducing similar irregularity in the previous life.

Burma: Birthmark on ankle resembling the mark of adhesive tape, corresponding to mark on the dead body of the previous life where adhesive tape had been fixed for blood-transfusion.

Ceylon: Extensive malformation of right arm and right upper chest. The subject remembers having killed his wife by stabbing, and relates his deformities to the use of his right hand in the slaying. Case confirmed by a number of

living witnesses.

England: Round, reddish area the size of a bullet wound, corresponding in position to fatal bullet wound in the previous life.

Brazil. Pigmented mark on back, below right scapula, with area of increased hair over left ribs in front of chest. The subject as a child said that he had been killed by a bullet in World War II.

America: Scars closely resembling bullet wounds of entry and exit, front and back of left chest. Other particulars of the case suggest death by murder in the previous life.

The case in Ceylon differs from the other in that it indicates retributive kammic effect. The others in this selection would appear to be psycho-kinetic effects which could be explained on the assumption that the subjects in a post-mortem disincarnate state saw the marks on their own bodies. These were then reproduced on the new body, as in the cases of S.T., the **Karen** boy, quoted in Part V above.

Well-authenticated cases of a change of sex in rebirth at present number fifteen. These are being made the subject of special study in view of the light they may throw on sexual deviations where the cause is not traceable in the present life. In a few of the cases so far investigated there is a decided predominance of the characteristics of the opposite sex in the present personality. In others the sexual adjustment is normal. The latter cases are valuable in that they eliminate the possibility that the rebirth memories are a

'fantasy' designed to explain away the sexual aberration. In one case, that of a girl, the previous personality was a boy who had a strong desire to be of the opposite sex. The child not only identified places, and persons still living, connected with the previous life, but also showed strong liking for certain persons and dislike of others, exactly as the previous personality had done. She remembers having wished to be a girl, and is happy now that her wish has been fulfilled. One striking feature of this case is that the girl recognised a school teacher who had been kind to her in the previous life, and now shows a strong attachment to him. The teacher testified that the dead boy whom she claims to be, had asked him whether it was true that people were reborn after death. This particular case is supported by an abundance of detailed proof and contains many features of psychological interest.

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