

# HYPNOTISM AND REBIRTH

By Amarasiri Weeraratne

*Hypnotism is a state of induced sleep. Under hypnosis, a subject can recall his past experiences not only of this life but also of previous lives. This invariably gives rise to the theory of rebirth.*

*Amarasiri Weeraratne apparently supports this rebirth theory by quoting the cases of a number of people who, under hypnosis, were able to recall the experiences of their previous existences. These include the case of an English lady, Mrs. Naomi Henry (with three previous lives), an English school-teacher, Anne Okendan (with seven previous lives) and the most famous case of all – Mrs. Ruth Simmons who, hypnotised on 6 different occasions between November 1952 and August 1953, gave such a vivid wealth of details (almost all of which were later verified as true) concerning her previous life as Bridey Murphy, that the Western World was completely taken by surprise. Bridey Murphy died in 1864.*

*As expected, there were people who, inspired by religious prejudices or other motives, vehemently discredited the Bridey Murphy case and considered Mrs. Simmon's memories of her previous life as mere illusions. But Amarasiri said, "Hypnotists working in widely separated countries with subjects of widely different culture and traditions have come across memories of previous lives coming from subjects under deep trances. How is this possible?"*

*Amarasiri, a well-known author from Sri Lanka, has written widely on various aspects of Buddhism, especially on Karma and Rebirth and has contributed articles to almost all known Buddhist magazines.*

*Ed.*

Though the history of hypnotism can be traced to the civilisations of the ancient world, this technique was first introduced into Europe by an Austrian doctor named Mesmer. Mesmerism came to be named after him. In 1779 he submitted a paper on his experiments in hypnotism to the Medical Council of Vienna. The medical authorities considered Dr. Mesmer a charlatan and he was soon forced to leave the country. He went to Paris and continued his research work there. Not only Dr. Mesmer but other pioneers in hypnotism had to meet with persecution and browbeating no less than Copernicus, Galileo, Bruno, Darwin, and other pioneers of modern science. A Swiss doctor named

La Fontaine was expelled from Italy on the orders of the King for practising hypnotism. Dr. John Elliotson of the London University hospital was forced to resign his post for the same reason. These were only the teething troubles. Now the medical profession recognises hypnotism as of potential value in the treatment of any physical illness in which a pronounced emotional element is involved. It can help directly in the treatment of anxieties, compulsions, phobias, and other more severe cripples of the mind. Dr. Samuel Weber was appointed as the head of a committee to inquire into and report on the value of hypnotism as a technique in healing various kinds of phobias, ailments, disorders and so forth. The report of this committee was submitted to the congress of representatives of the medical profession in America in 1960, and it was accepted by them as a potential cure for a large number of disorders. Since then hypnotism has become a profession, and about 10,000 trained hypnotists are practicing it in America, not to mention others in Britain and Europe.

The behaviour of the human body is influenced by the mind. The mind in turn is influenced by suggestions. By hypnosis the mind becomes responsive to suggestions. This principle is made use of to wean away people from harmful habits such as smoking and drinking. Under the suggestion of the hypnotist a subject falls into a sleep. He is induced into a trance and a suggestion is made that his hand is stiff and that it cannot be raised. Or he is told that he cannot open his eyes and while in this trance it is found that the subject cannot do any of these things however much he may try to until the suggestion is made that he can do so. Then the hypnotist proceeds to induce a medium trance. The body can be made rigid on suggestion in order to test whether the trance is real. Then the hypnotist can proceed to induce a deep trance. Here the subject can be regressed in age. Thus when he is regressed to the age of 10, or any such age he will relive his life during that time and describe his experiences. His voice will be the same as that which he had during the corresponding period. His handwriting too, will be same if he is given a paper to write on. Similarly age can be regressed to the time of birth and even beyond to any other life which he can remember. It is here that the all-important memories of previous lives come into the picture.

The deep hypnotic trance is also utilised for pain-free surgery and even for child-birth. Hypnotic suggestions can be made for the subject to take a dislike to certain foods and drinks that are uncongenial to his health. Henceforth he will detest such items of food and drink. Doctor William Kroger is the pioneer in the use of hypnosis in obstetrics and gynaecology. He has delivered hundreds of babies using little or no anaesthetics.

Under hypnosis a subject can recall his past experiences even up to the embryonic stage. Thus a person can be regressed to the age of six, and his voice,

handwriting and his experiences in this state can be checked with those of his actual life. **Such experiences have convinced psychologists and psychiatrists today that authentic buried memories of one's childhood experiences which cannot be called to mind under normal consciousness can be recalled under hypnosis.** When the hypnotic age regression is extended to an ante-natal period there has been a recall of memories of previous lives. Dr. Alexander Cannon used to think that rebirth is a nonsensical belief as he was brought up and reared in the Christian tradition. But after hundreds of his subjects who never held any belief in rebirth gave accounts of their previous lives when regressed to periods prior to birth in this life he changed his opinion and came to believe in rebirth. He makes this clear in his book, "The Power Within". "**The Daily Express**" challenged Mr. Henry Blythe, a professional hypnotist, to prove if possible an authentic case of rebirth in Britain. In reply he hypnotized an English lady, Mrs. Naomi Henry, and obtained details of not one but three previous lives, and published a book, "The Three Lives of Naomi Henry", in 1906, to prove his contention. Arnoll Bloxham hypnotized an English school-teacher, Anne Okendan, and obtained details of seven of her previous lives. These range from the caveman days to the Victorian era. Her life as a soldier in Oliver Cromwell's army is most interesting. He has been an eye-witness to the trial and execution of King Charles I. A wealth of detail about Cromwell's private life, his friends, enemies, etc., can be found in this narrative. Another interesting narrative is her life as a blind man during the time of William the Conqueror.

Further, Professor Theodore Fluorney of the Geneva University hypnotized a young Swiss girl working in a business house and obtained details of her previous life 50 years ago as an Arab Chief's daughter, Simandani by name. She became the wife of a Hindu Rajah, Sivouroka of Kanara, who built the fortress of Chandragiri in 1401. These facts had to be verified by delving into obscure Indian historical sources. Her use of the Hindi language under hypnosis is also astounding.

Dr. Johnathan Rodney has published a book called "Explorations of a Hypnotist". In this he gives details of tape-records where a number of his subjects give their experiences in previous lives. One of these is a Lancashire housewife, Mrs. Anne Baker, who never studied French and has never been to France. Under hypnosis she spoke fluent French and referred to the death of Marie Antoinette as if it had just happened. The information she gives about the leaders of the French revolution is very interesting. The details of Paris she described as in 1794 have been checked up and found to be correct, even though the streets she mentions by name are not there now.

The most famous of the cases of previous lives remembered under hypnosis is that of Mrs. Ruth Simmons. She was hypnotized by Morein Berenstein on six different occasions between November 1952 and August 1953. She recalled her life as Bridey Murphy in Ireland. The earliest event that she could remember was that at the age of seven, as Bridey Murphy, she scratched off the paint from her newly-painted bed. For this mischievous act she was punished by the parents. Her father was Duncan Murphy, a lawyer of Belfast. Her mother was Kathleen and she had a brother, elder to her, named Duncan. The memories of her early childhood and school days remembered in detail.

At the age of 20, she was married to a lawyer, Brian McCarthy. After marriage she travelled from Cork to Belfast for her husband's home. Details of the journey and the places passed on the way are mentioned by her, including such minor items as railway-crossings which could be checked only with much difficulty. Her house was near St Lucia's Cathedral, Belfast. A Catholic priest, Father John was in charge. Her husband was a Catholic while she remained a Protestant. Her husband had written a series of articles to the "Belfast Newsletter" regarding law. He was part-time lecturer in the local university. She had no children in that life. She had bought foodstuffs from John Carrigan and Farr & Co., two Belfast grocers. Bridey died in 1864, at the age of 66.

The details given in this account were handed over to an independent firm of Irish lawyers for verification and report. The report of the firm indicated that 18 items were verified as correct. Seven items were doubted or challenged, but subsequently verified as true. Three items were doubted or denied, but found to be not improbable. Four items were doubted or unverified but not shown to be conclusively false.

The Bridey Murphy case took the Western world by surprise. The book by Moren Berenstein, "The Search for Bridey Murphy", became a best-seller within two weeks. Fifty-one newspapers of America serialised the story. In five months the book went through ten editions amounting to 205,000 copies. Paramount Pictures bought the movie rights for documentary treatment. Translations were arranged for it in Holland, France, Italy, Denmark, Sweden, Spain and Finland. Of Berenstein's book, "The Search for Bridey Murphy", Gina Ceraminara, M.A., Ph. D., says in her classic work on Rebirth, "The World Within":

"It caused a sharp sudden explosion, as sudden, unexpected and devastating as the attack on Pearl Harbour, or the bomb over Hiroshima. As in the Pearl Harbour or the Hiroshima affair, there have been extraordinary and irreversible consequences, and probably there will be more."

American psychologists, psychoanalysts, and psychiatrists, however, came out with the illusion-theory as the scientific explanation of the Bridey Murphy case. They assumed without proof that Mrs. Simmons must have obtained information about Ireland in a normal manner, even though a careful study of the items verified would have shown that this was virtually impossible. At the same time a Catholic priest, Rev. Wally White and his team of investigators published a series of newspaper articles concerning the alleged childhood of Mrs. Simmons, which if true would have shown conclusively that her story was a conduct of both fraud and fancy. Recently, however, Dr. C. J. Ducasse, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, Brown University, has shown in his recently published work, (A Critical Examination of the Belief in a Life after Death, Illinois, U.S.A., 1961) that Rev. Wally White's "exposure" contains a "tissue of falsehoods inspired by religious prejudice" and that the "so-called scientific explanation was most unsatisfactory since it did not account for the verified facts". Dr. Ian Stevenson M.D., Head of the Department of Neurology and Psychiatry, University of Virginia, agrees that the case demands a para normal explanation.\*

Some have tried to explain the memories of previous births tapped under hypnosis as "illusion". They assert that the hypnotic subject is highly suggestible and has heightened powers of dramatization, and could live up to the role required of him by the hypnotist. But there are instances where the details of previous lives given under hypnosis have been independently checked and found correct, in the light of historical facts. It has also been established that the subject could not have obtained the information by normal means during the course of this life. Hence we have to look for another explanation. It may hypothetically be granted that there is a possibility of illusion in certain cases, where memories recalled have not been verified, and also where there is a possibility that the subject could have acquired the information by normal means. But in the cases where the details have been verified and found to be correct and where the possibility of the subject gathering the information by normal means is ruled out, this hypothesis will have to be dropped. Moreover, the suggestion to give an account of a previous life (if the subject can recall anything at all) would not be a suggestion to hallucinate. Dr. Jonathan Rodney has carried out various experiments to distinguish between hallucination and normal recall under hypnosis. \*\* He has established that hypnotic subjects do not hallucinate without specifically been told to do so by the hypnotist. Thus it has been established beyond doubt that the memories of previous lives recalled under hypnosis are not the result of any hallucination or illusion any more than are the memories of this life when regressed to childhood, infancy, and so on.

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\* Dr. K.N. Jayatillaka – Notes on a lecture on Rebirth, University of Ceylon

\*\* Page 94, "Explorations of a Hypnotist" – Dr. Jonathan Rodney

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How then are we to regard this appearance, in so many places of what appears to be past lives? Is this a kind of psychic epidemic attendant on the noxious emanations of the Atomic Age? Are they the sly promptings of the devil to bewilder and confuse the faithful? Or is it rather an epoch-making step forward towards answering the all-important questions of **Karma** and Rebirth?

“CONSISTENCY WITHOUT COLLUSION IS EVIDENCE IN A COURT OF LAW. IT IS ALSO EVIDENCE IN THE REALM OF SCIENCE. IF A GREAT MANY SERIOUS AND PROFESSIONALLY TRAINED PEOPLE ARE INDEPENDENTLY FINDING THE SAME SORT OF THING, SURELY THERE MUST BE BENEATH ALL THE SMOKE SOME FIRE.”\*\*\*

The early Christian sects such as the Gnostics, Simonists, Priscilleans, Manicheans and Marcionites accepted Rebirth. They did not find any incompatibility between this doctrine and the teachings of the Gospels. Nay, they interpreted **certain passages in the Gospels as having confirmed the doctrine of Rebirth.**\*\*\*\* Origen, the Prince of the Church Fathers in the 3rd Century A.D., was an enthusiastic exponent of Rebirth. The idea spread so fast among the early Christians that the Church was obliged to suppress it by passing a law in the Council of Constantinople. Even at this Council one-third of the Church Fathers dissented refusing to accept that Reincarnation is incompatible with the teachings of the Gospels. Rev. Leslie D. Weatherhead, M.A., Ph.D., says in his “Case for Reincarnation”, “Christ himself never taught directly the idea of Reincarnation, though it was taught by the Essenes, a prominent sect of his day. Josephus, the Jewish historian makes reference to it as if it were a common Jewish belief. (See his **De Belle Judaice**, 2, 8). Christ seems to have referred to it as though it were a part of the accepted ideas of his day. He never repudiated it, denied it, or taught that it was false.”

According to the **Catholic Encyclopaedia**, Vols. IV and XI, the Second Council of Constantinople having been called by the Emperor Justinian was attended by a very few bishops, and was presided over by Eutichias, Patriarch of Constantinople. Though Pope Vigilius was in Constantinople, he refused to attend it.

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\*\*\* “The World Within”, Gina Ceraminars, M.A., Ph.D

\*\*\*\* Matthew XI, 14, “This is Elijah which is to come”, Mark IX, 11. Matthew XVII, 12. Matthew, XVI 13, John IX.2

Therefore, it will not come as a surprise if the decision of the Council at Constantinople in A.D. 543 is revoked in the future when in the face of overwhelming evidence in support of the truth of Rebirth, the one-life theory of Orthodox Christianity becomes untenable.

(The Buddhist)