

Deception and Self-Deception in Cases of the Reincarnation Type: Seven Illustrative Cases in Asia

IAN STEVENSON, SATWANT PASRICHA, AND GODWIN SAMARARATNE¹

ABSTRACT: This paper reports seven cases of the reincarnation type in Asia in which preliminary information suggested that the case was authentic, but interviews with informants showed that it was not. In three cases, informants seem to have deceived themselves; in two cases hoaxes by villagers seem the best interpretation; in the sixth case, both families concerned may have given invalid testimony; and the seventh case was a hoax by a journalist. Sound judgments about authenticity almost always require independent verification of a subject's statements.

Gamblers should leave the gaming table while they are winning, but we censure similar behavior in experimental parapsychologists and call it "optional stopping." We have no similar phrase for the conduct of investigators of spontaneous cases who give no account of their research on cases that ended in disappointment. They have, nevertheless, an obligation to report such cases. Beloff (1976), in reviewing a book by one of us (Stevenson, 1975), wrote:

It would be of great interest to know whether he [I.S.] ever has, in fact, come across a case such as he describes in this book which, at first suggestive of reincarnation, later turned out to be spurious. Since he does not

¹ Thanks are due for the support of this research to the Bernstein Brothers Parapsychology and Health Foundation and the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences, Bangalore, India.

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of: P. Pal, H. Berendt, Can Polat, P. Tanwar, K. S. Rawat, N. McClean-Rice, and the late Francis Story in the investigation of the cases reported in this paper.

Emily Williams Cook contributed suggestions for the improvement of the paper.

mention any such examples the inference must be that he has never encountered any. (p. 308)

Readers may regard the present paper as a (somewhat belated) response to Beloff's comment, but we hope it will have additional value through illustrating some of the pitfalls in the investigation of spontaneous cases of the reincarnation type.

The cases that we shall describe have the following features: (a) the subject was a child; (b) his or her claim to remember a previous life had earned the endorsement of at least one adult, usually a member of the subject's family; (c) preliminary information about the case had interested us sufficiently so that one or more of us (or, in two cases, other members of our team or a person known to us) went to the site of the case for interviews with the subject and/or the principal informant; and (d) as a result of the investigation we became convinced that deception or self-deception provided the best interpretation for the claims.

We approached four of the cases (for interviews) with the expectation that they would prove authentic. For the other three (Shishupal Singh, Kenedi Alkan, and David Morris), we had some suspicion of their weaknesses before we arranged for the interviews.

We have included all the cases satisfying the above criteria that we have investigated in Asia with a satisfactory thoroughness. We have not included a number of other cases that we still have under surveillance or about which we have been unable to obtain sufficient information to warrant an adequately confident interpretation.

The investigation of cases of the reincarnation type in Asia is costly, and journeys to their sites are often physically uncomfortable in ways that armchair critics cannot readily appreciate. We mention this because we do not ordinarily undertake interviews at the site of a case unless we have preliminary information that makes us believe that such interviews would reward the trouble entailed and offer hope of providing sufficient information to warrant a report of the case if this seems appropriate. Because we receive preliminary information about more cases than we have time and resources to investigate, we have to make some initial selection from among cases drawn to our attention. Sometimes we have chosen cases to investigate only to find later that no person could be identified whose life adequately corresponded to the subject's statements. (We say such cases are "unsolved.") With other colleagues, we have described elsewhere, with examples, this type of case, and we have compared some of their data with those of solved cases (Cook, Pasricha, Samararatne, Win Maung, & Stevenson, 1983a, 1983b). Unsolved cases may all be fantasies, or some of them may be. However, this does not make them inauthentic in our meaning of that term. By inauthentic we mean that the informants for a case have given false or seriously distorted testimony, so that the report or reports of it that we have do not adequately represent the hypothetical "case as it really happened" (Stevenson, Palmer, & Stanford, 1977).

Authenticity varies in degree. We do not know of any flawless case, and many cases that seem authentic on the whole may include items of testimony that are suspect or definitely wrong. The present cases are ones in which the inauthentic elements have so dominated the testimony that we regard the validity of the cases as effectively ruined. However, even some of these cases may also contain authentic elements, and it is conjecturable that in several of them the subject has had some real memories of a previous life. The informants have then embellished these with distortions and exaggerations that have vitiated the reports that we have obtained.

We have sometimes selected cases for interviews only to decide, after one or two interviews, that the case is insubstantial and derives chiefly or entirely from fantasies. Having made such a decision—which may be wrong in some cases—we drop the investigation of such a case. The case of Kenedi Alkan (included in this paper) and another parallel case in Turkey (summarized in Footnote 7) belong in this group.

The cases that we have retained in our collection after one or more interviews are much more numerous than those we have set aside, either without any interview whatever or, like the present seven cases, after interviews. From the cases of the four countries from which these seven cases come we have retained in the collection the following numbers:

India	327
Sri Lanka	176
Turkey	173
Israel	9

However, here we need to emphasize that although we presently consider these cases to be authentic, they are not flawless, and further study of some of them might lead us to withdraw them from the main collection of cases.

In the following reports we shall present only summaries of the cases, but we shall aim at including sufficient detail so that readers will appreciate the grounds for our decisions about the best interpretation of the cases.

Readers unfamiliar with our methods of investigation will find a description of them in Stevenson (1974, 1975). Our principal method is interviews with firsthand informants, supplemented by study of any pertinent documents.

CASE REPORTS

*The Case of Nimal Singh*²

The first informant for this case was the Ven. Vijitha, a Sinhalese Buddhist monk whom I.S. met during his first visit to Sri Lanka in 1961. The

² Pseudonyms have been substituted for the real names of the subjects and other persons concerned in three of the cases, including the case of Nimal Singh. For the case of Wije-

Ven. Vijitha had had a younger cousin, the Ven. Nimal Upali, who was also a monk and who had been the Ven. Vijitha's student. The two monks had been much attached to each other. At the age of 31, the younger monk became mortally ill, and as he was dying, he told the Ven. Vijitha that he was reconciled to death because he knew that he would be reborn in northern India. (A few years earlier a seer in India had said that the Ven. Upali might die between the ages of 30 and 32 and that, if this happened, he would be reborn in Bihar, which is in northern India. One of the principal sites connected with the origin of Buddhism, Bodh Gaya, is in Bihar, and some Buddhists think a rebirth in that region highly desirable.)

The death of his young cousin, which occurred in 1955, affected the Ven. Vijitha greatly; and about two years later he made inquiries of an astrologer (in Madras, India) from whom he hoped to learn indications of where his cousin had been reborn. The astrologer furnished some suggestions, and, equipped with these, the Ven. Vijitha went to Bodh Gaya in 1959. There he initiated a search for a child who might, he thought, be remembering the life of his deceased cousin. He located a family in a remote village, Phulia (in the region of Bodh Gaya), that seemed to satisfy the astrologer's indications. The family had a young son called Nimal; this seemed important because the Ven. Upali's first name had been Nimal. The Ven. Vijitha went to Phulia, accompanied by another Sinhalese monk, the Ven. Mahinda, who was then living in Bodh Gaya. They told the villagers why they had come. The villagers of Phulia were at first hostile and would not even allow the monks to enter the village,³ so the monks returned to Bodh Gaya. Later, the villagers accepted the idea that the monks believed a child of their village was the reincarnation of a monk who had died in Sri Lanka. One of them, Jagdish Singh, went to Bodh Gaya, where he sought out the Ven. Vijitha and said that his son Nimal had been talking about a previous life and could be the child he was looking for.

As a senior monk who had disciples, the Ven. Vijitha's schedule did not permit him to return to Phulia at that time, and he was unable to do so until 1960.⁴ He met Jagdish Singh again and learned from him that Nimal

suriya, we have used the real name that a principal informant used for the subject; but he was unsure about the name and we ourselves never succeeded in tracing the subject of this case. For the case of Shishupal Singh, we have used real names because this case received wide publicity in India (with real names) at one time. The case of Kenedi Alkan appears to be well known under the subject's name in the community where Kenedi lives. For the case of David Morris, we have used the (almost certainly fictitious) names published in the report of this case in *Fate* magazine.

³ Phulia was a geographically isolated village and hence not close to police protection. Its villagers were backward and illiterate. Moreover, there had recently been some episodes in the area of the kidnapping and sacrificing of children to the goddess Kali. These facts account for the villagers' suspicion of any strangers, as the monks were to them.

⁴ A discrepancy occurred between the testimony of the Ven. Vijitha and that of the Ven. Mahinda concerning the interval between the monks' two visits to Phulia. The Ven. Mahinda

had been saying: "My mother is in [Sri] Lanka; my brother is in [Sri] Lanka; he wears spectacles and is a guru. I must go there [meaning to Sri Lanka]." The Ven. Vijitha took these statements to refer to himself: He was from Sri Lanka, and in Asian parlance he was the "cousin-brother" of the Ven. Upali; as a monk and professor he could be regarded (in India) as a guru. However, the villagers of Phulia could have learned or inferred all this correct information on the occasion, a year before, when the Ven. Vijitha and the Ven. Mahinda had gone to Phulia and had not been allowed to enter; as we mentioned, they had at that time explained why they had come to the village.

The Ven. Vijitha overlooked the foregoing possibility and felt sufficiently impressed by what Jagdish Singh told him to wish to return to Phulia. He then went there again (accompanied, as on his first visit, by the Ven. Mahinda) and met the young boy, Nimal, who had been provisionally identified as the child for whom he was looking. Nimal's father, Jagdish Singh, was not present when the Ven. Vijitha met Nimal. The boy came to the Ven. Vijitha and sat contentedly on his lap. The Ven. Vijitha told I.S. that he had taken with him a gold watch that his deceased cousin had owned, and he offered this to Nimal along with a 10 rupee note. (I.S. clearly understood that he had offered the boy the watch and the 10 rupee note at the same time in order to see which he would choose.) The boy eagerly took the watch and said: "That is my watch." The Ven. Vijitha was highly pleased with what he had learned and observed, and he went back to Sri Lanka confident that he had identified the reincarnation of his deceased cousin.

The Ven. Vijitha gave I.S. all the foregoing information at the time of their first meeting in 1961. In Sri Lanka the Ven. Vijitha had a reputation for scholarship and piety, and this, together with the quiet simplicity of his narration, convinced I.S. that he should investigate the case further. He sent copies of his notes to Professor P. Pal (of West Bengal) and asked him whether he could make a stop in Bodh Gaya and conduct independent verifications there.

In October of 1963 Professor Pal was able to meet the Ven. Mahinda in Bodh Gaya and then travel to Phulia. The Ven. Mahinda told Professor Pal that Nimal had readily gone to the lap of the Ven. Vijitha and had taken the offered watch first and then the 10 rupee note. In Phulia, Professor Pal met Nimal's paternal grandfather and some other villagers, but not Nimal's father. The villagers, including Nimal's paternal grandfather, told him that Nimal had never made any statements about a previous life,

thought the visits occurred within 3 days of each other, but the Ven. Vijitha said he did not return to Bodh Gaya until a year after the first visit to Phulia. A discrepancy of this magnitude is probably due to faulty recording in notes, in this case by Francis Story, who may have written "following *day*" when he meant to write "following *year*." The Ven. Vijitha's chronology (recorded by I.S.) is probably the correct one. For purposes of this report the discrepancy does not seem important.

and they suggested that the Buddhist monks (meaning the Ven. Vijitha and the Ven. Mahinda) had built the case from nothing.

Professor Pal's report to I.S. includes the following: "I left Phulia with the impression that what the Ven. Vijitha had stated to Professor Stevenson was wishful thinking or had been told [to him] by the parents of Nimal only to please him."

I.S., not lacking confidence in Professor Pal but still thinking that the case had some substance, urged (the now deceased) Francis Story (F.S.) to stop at Bodh Gaya and study the case further. F.S. had been present when the Ven. Vijitha had given I.S. his account of the case in 1961, and he was just as eager as I.S. to probe it further. He and I.S. made a tour of investigation together in India in August of 1964, and, after they separated, F.S. went to Bodh Gaya alone. Although, unlike Professor Pal, F.S. needed a Hindi interpreter, he was able to stay longer in the area, and he later sent I.S. a nine-page typewritten report of interviews he had.

F.S.'s inquiries first turned up the important information that the astrologer whom the Ven. Vijitha had consulted after his cousin's death had given only some vague indications of general applicability. The Ven. Mahinda had no copy of the astrologer's reading, but drawing on his memory he said: "It did not actually give any names. It said something like: 'His mother's name will be one of those given to Parvati [a Hindu goddess, the wife of Siva], his father's name will be one of the names of Ishwara [Siva].'" When F.S. asked whether the reading gave the name of the village, Phulia, the Ven. Mahinda said: "It did not give the name exactly as Phulia, but a similar name." Many children might be found in northern India who would conform to these indications.

Next, F.S. learned from both the Ven. Mahinda and a villager of Phulia, Gopal Chandra, both of whom had been present during the meeting between Nimal and the Ven. Vijitha, that the latter had handed the watch to Nimal first, without giving him a choice between the watch and a 10 rupee note. (The Ven. Vijitha, in talking with I.S. in 1961, had emphasized the simultaneous presentation to the boy of the watch and the 10 rupee note as a test of the boy's identification of the watch.) The Ven. Mahinda recalled that the Ven. Vijitha had told Nimal, in giving him the watch: "This is your watch, which you had in Ceylon." (As mentioned, Jagdish Singh had been absent at this meeting.)

In Phulia, both Jagdish Singh and Gopal Chandra told F.S. that Nimal had never made any statements about a previous life. (F.S. was unable to interview Nimal's mother, who was kept from him on the grounds that she was nervous and did not meet strangers.)

The Ven. Mahinda told F.S. that a few days after he and the Ven. Vijitha had gone to Phulia and met Nimal, Nimal's father had come to him (Ven. Mahinda) at Bodh Gaya and spoken about statements Nimal had been making about a previous life. These were references to having lived previously in a foreign country and were much less specific than the state-

ments the Ven. Vijitha remembered. He also said that Nimal had been talking in a strange language. He then asked for 500 rupees with which to buy a cow. Later, Nimal's parents returned and, in the words of the Ven. Mahinda, they "kept on saying they were very poor; the boy ought to be educated; they wanted a cow for milk for him."

F.S.'s report includes the following:

The Ven. Vijitha, through his affection for the Ven. Upali, has managed to convince himself that he [Ven. Upali] has been reborn as Nimal on no stronger evidence than the dead man's statement that he would be reborn in India and a few pieced-together hints in an astrological reading, which could be interpreted in any number of ways. . . . I cannot see the matter as anything else but a clear instance of eager self-deception. . . . The parents of Nimal are not altogether culpable, since the deception has almost been forced upon them, and I could not find any proof that they were deliberately fabricating anything to support it.

Comment. F.S.'s remark about the villagers' innocence seems generous. The evidence shows that they were antagonistic to the Ven. Vijitha until they saw some benefit to themselves in his desire to find the reincarnation of his cousin. Then they became friendly and began to tell him and the Ven. Mahinda about statements Nimal had made concerning a previous life. (The cupidity of Nimal's father may have increased further after the Ven. Vijitha showed Nimal a gold watch and gave him a 10 rupee note.) Yet later, in talking with our associates, the villagers denied that Nimal had ever made any such statements. Professor Pal had at one time been a magistrate, and F.S. had great skill as an interrogator. In their presence, the villagers may have thought it prudent to withdraw the claims and statements they had made earlier to the monks.

The discrepancy in the testimony about whether the Ven. Vijitha offered Nimal the gold watch and the 10 rupee note separately or at the same time does not necessarily reflect on the Ven. Vijitha's honesty. Instead, it seems to us an excellent example of how one can misremember an event and in doing so adapt memories of it to one's wishes.

Before the investigation of this case, I.S. had a largely bookish appreciation of the importance of independent verifications in spontaneous cases. This case contributed much to our realizing how essential they are.

The Case of Wijesuriya

I.S. first learned of this case in 1966 from A. K. Wijesekera, who was an eminent judge in Sri Lanka and a keen student of cases suggestive of reincarnation. He had helped us in the investigation of several cases and notified us about others. A. K. Wijesekera gave I.S. the following account of the case.

A wealthy landowner of Sri Lanka, Charles Christie, had been shot and

killed in 1936 by one of his employees. He had been an unpopular and, indeed, miserly and oppressive landlord, and he was little mourned outside his family. Some years later a child born in a poor family in a village on one of Christie's estates began to say or imply that he had been Charles Christie in his previous life. He also said that the peasant laborers on the estate were insufficiently paid. Charles Christie had been a Christian, and one of his sons, Henry Christie, had become an important clergyman of the Anglican Church. The Reverend Henry Christie had learned about the claims of the boy born on the Christie family estates and had gone to visit him in disguise. The boy had recognized him despite the disguise, and the Reverend Christie had hastily departed.

As thus narrated, the case seemed almost ideal for adherents of Buddhism: a marked demotion in socioeconomic status suggesting the workings of retributive karma, shame on the part of the subject for the stinginess of the wealthy landowner in the child's presumed previous life, and a shock to the Christian community's skepticism about rebirth through a case involving a Christian family.

When I.S. learned about the case, he was eager to investigate it at first hand. A. K. Wijesekera warned him that the Christians concerned in the case would not welcome an investigation or publication of a report about it; but I.S. assured him that he would approach the case with the special tact it seemed to require. A. K. Wijesekera promised to obtain further information, including the subject's name and address.

The letters in our folder of this case reflect I.S.'s persistent but unsuccessful efforts over the next 4 years to learn the name of the subject. A. K. Wijesekera was a secondhand informant for the case; being a conscientious person, he thought that he had a responsibility to trace the case and furnish more exact information about it. He therefore (in 1968) spent about 5 days in the area of Baddewatte, where the (major) Christie estates were located. (This is in the highlands of central Sri Lanka.) He reported that no one in the area of Baddewatte had heard of the case. Eventually, A. K. Wijesekera returned to his firsthand informant for the case, who was a Buddhist monk of Colombo, the Ven. Malessara. He was the director of a clinic for traditional medicine to which the subject of the case had been brought for treatment some years earlier. A. K. Wijesekera asked him to look through his records of clinic visits to find the subject's exact name and address. The Ven. Malessara made some effort to do this, but failed to retrieve the required information.

At this stage, A. K. Wijesekera, a little chagrined, gave us (I.S. and G.S.) the name and address of the Ven. Malessara, and we called on him at his clinic. He remembered the case and gave us an account of it that accorded closely with what A. K. Wijesekera had told I.S. earlier. He added one additional detail; he remembered that the subject of the case had a birthmark on his chest and that its location corresponded to that of the fatal wound received by Charles Christie when he was shot and killed. He

said that he had followed newspaper accounts of the sensational murder of Charles Christie and the subsequent trial of the murderer. This seemed to qualify him to speak about the correspondence between the birthmark and the wound. In fact, it did not; we obtained a report of the autopsy on Charles Christie, which showed that the wounds were in a different location of the chest from the place where the Ven. Malessara had remembered the subject's birthmark to have been. (However, he might also have misremembered the location of the birthmark.)

We now thought that we were close to meeting the subject of the case. Unfortunately, the Ven. Malessara was not sure that he could remember the subject's name, but he thought that it was Wijesuriya and that he had come from Baddewatte. He remembered that the boy's father had a small boutique in the village. He offered to search systematically through his medical records and find more precise details for us. His search was ineffective, and we then offered to search the records ourselves. We even borrowed his record book for a time, and G.S. examined them, also without success.

The Ven. Malessara then referred us to another monk who, he thought, might know the subject and direct us to him. We visited this monk, but he could give us no information. At that point, we decided to go to Baddewatte itself and make inquiries among the headmen and other villagers of the area. This effort also ended in failure. No one with whom we talked in Baddewatte had heard of the case.

We continued to think about the case over the next several years. Finally, with the help of one of G.S.'s friends in Kandy, we were able to meet the Reverend Henry Christie, who was then living in retirement not far from Kandy. We thought that if he had ever met a child claiming to be his father reborn he would remember this much and tell us so, even if he found the idea of rebirth uncongenial. The Reverend Christie received us (G.S. and I.S.) with great cordiality. He was a devout Christian, but in no way intolerant concerning the idea of rebirth. We described the case as we had learned about it to him, and he said that he had never heard of it. He remembered having heard that a child had been born on the family estates at the very moment of his father's murder. There had been conjectures that this baby was his father reborn, but he had heard nothing more about the baby. He had never heard of a case like the one we described, and he had never met any boy who had claimed to be his father reborn. The Reverend Christie's affability and candor impressed us. We left convinced that he was not concealing anything he knew from us.

Comment. Buddhist monks are justly celebrated for telling the truth. We do not believe that the Ven. Malessara invented the case, and he probably added little to it from his own imagination. Almost certainly a father had told him that his son had been claiming to be Charles Christie reborn. Why then were we unable to trace the case? There are several possibilities.

First, the Ven. Malessara might have misremembered the area from

which the subject and his father had come and thus directed us incorrectly to search in one region when we should have been looking in another. Second, the case might have been a hoax on the part of villagers. Having initially prepared it as a means of exploiting the wealthy Christie family, they may have later considered this imprudent and suppressed the case. Third, there might have been a genuine case, which the Christians in the community where it occurred (not necessarily the Christie family) had succeeded in suppressing, either by deriding it or by exerting pressure on the child's family. Fourth, our efforts to trace the case may not have been sufficiently thorough.

Whether a rudimentary case related to the information we learned had ever existed we cannot say. We do believe, however, that the detail concerning the subject's alleged recognition of the Reverend Henry Christie is false.

The Case of Shishupal Singh

This case first came to our attention through the publication of a report of it in the Indian tabloid newspaper *Blitz*. The issue of this newspaper for May 26, 1962 contained an account of the claims of a youth called Shishupal Singh to be Mahatma Gandhi reborn. The case had received some publicity earlier in other newspapers, and the report in *Blitz* was actually an exposé, because its reporter stated that Shishupal could not answer simple questions about the life of Mahatma Gandhi and that he had been observed covertly reading about Mahatma Gandhi in his school's library.

We decided to investigate the case, but we did not give it high priority in relation to numerous other cases about which we had learned. It was more than 9 years after reading the report in *Blitz* that I.S. went to Shishupal Singh's village on November 3, 1971. Unfortunately, one of the persons assisting him had gone out to the village in advance and told Shishupal's family that I.S. was coming to study the case. He intended this notice to detain Shishupal in the village, but it had the opposite effect. When I.S. reached the village, he found that Shishupal was away, ostensibly to negotiate about a marriage in the family. This was almost certainly a pretext for his avoiding I.S., because his older brother (who had remained in the village) would have been a more appropriate person for such an embassy. Nevertheless, I.S. was able to interview Shishupal's father, Madho Singh, his older brother, Jagdish Singh, and three other villagers.

The village in question is Khurrampur, which is in the Etah District (north of Agra) in Uttar Pradesh, India. Shishupal Singh had been born there on January 13, 1948.⁵

⁵ This date may be wrong. It is the one Shishupal himself gave S.P. in 1983. Earlier, in 1971, Shishupal's father, Madho Singh, had not been able to say confidently in what year Shishupal had been born. The report of the case in *Blitz* of May 26, 1962 said that Shishupal had been born 2 months before Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated, which happened on January 30, 1948.

Madho Singh gave the following account of the development of his son's case. (We have organized Madho Singh's testimony, which was given to us in piecemeal fashion, into a more coherent and chronological order.) When Shishupal was between 4 and 5 years old, he became ill and began talking irrationally. He was thought to be possessed. He said that he had been killed and had been living (as a discarnate spirit) near a peepal tree. Asked by whom he had been killed, he said by "Nathu Ram Godse." After this he recovered and said nothing further about a previous life for some years. When Shishupal was about 7 years old, his younger sister, Shanti, who was then about 5, began to talk about a previous life. She made statements that included proper names of a place and persons. We suppose that these names might have justified an attempt to verify what she was saying, but this was not done.

A few years after Shanti's statements about the previous life she claimed to remember, Shishupal began to say explicitly that he was Mahatma Gandhi reborn. (By this time he was about 12 or 13 years old.) Shishupal had a birthmark on his chest, and, because Mahatma Gandhi had been killed by bullet wounds, including two in the chest, this detail seemed to increase the credibility of Shishupal's claims. He wrote a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, who was the Prime Minister of India. This letter stimulated a visit from a government official, and then other persons came to the village and made inquiries. Madho Singh could not remember what they had done or said. (He was illiterate and may have given little attention to his son's claims at that time.)

We obtained much of the remaining information for this phase of our investigation from other informants in Khurrampur and from correspondence with persons outside Khurrampur who had met and talked with Shishupal about his claims. We did not ascertain the sequence of events following the first visits from inquirers outside the village. Shishupal appears to have written other letters to public persons in which he asserted his claim. For these he obtained some aid from other villagers who either believed in the authenticity of his claim or saw in it a chance to share in the profits of its exploitation. A few persons who had known Mahatma Gandhi well took the trouble to visit Khurrampur and talk with Shishupal directly.

Among the inquirers from outside Khurrampur, the most important was a local schoolteacher, Balwant Singh; he was the headmaster of a secondary school (in a nearby village), which Shishupal was then attending. He questioned Shishupal about the life of Mahatma Gandhi and found that about 80% of his answers were wrong. What was much worse, he observed Shishupal reading about Mahatma Gandhi in the school library. Moreover, when Shishupal noticed that Balwant Singh was watching him do this, he covered up the material that he had been reading in an effort to prevent this from being seen. Balwant Singh reported his observations to the journalist who published the article in *Blitz* to which we referred earlier. The same article also stated that Shishupal was unable to answer

elementary questions about Mahatma Gandhi's life, some of which might have been known normally to almost any Indian.

After the publication of the exposure in *Blitz*, but not necessarily because of it, Shishupal abandoned public claims to being Mahatma Gandhi reborn. However, he continued to make the claim privately, that is, within his village, and his family and at least some other villagers supported him in this claim. His family was so angry at Balwant Singh's allegations that they withdrew Shishupal from the school where Balwant Singh taught and entered him in another one, in Etah; but Shishupal did not do well there and dropped out of school in the ninth grade. Thereafter, he took up the family vocation of cultivating land, married, and had children.

By the time of I.S.'s visit to Khurrampur, Shishupal was about 23 years old, and the notoriety of the case in the public press had long subsided. I.S. expected that Shishupal's family and other villagers would acknowledge the case to have been a hoax and excuse Shishupal's conduct as a childish aberration for which no one should blame him. I.S. was therefore surprised to find that Shishupal's father and brother still believed in the genuineness of his claim to be Mahatma Gandhi reborn. Shishupal's older brother, Jagdish, warmly endorsed his brother's case and said that Shishupal had recognized without cues two persons whom Mahatma Gandhi had known. (However, one of the persons he said Shishupal recognized later denied to I.S. that she had ever met Shishupal; we give further information about this later.) Another villager whom I.S. interviewed similarly supported the case. And this appeared to be true of a large crowd of villagers who surrounded I.S. and his party and listened to the interviews; none of them so much as murmured a word of dissent. In interpreting this accordance of the crowd we must be cautious and remember that dissident villagers, if there were any, might have preferred to remain silent rather than offend Shishupal's family.

As I.S. left the village and was just outside its area and preparing to drive back to Agra, he was approached by a villager of nearby Kantaur, in whose territory I.S. then was. This man, Kanchan Singh, was the brother of the headman of Kantaur, and he spoke English. Rather excitedly, he denounced Shishupal's case as a fraud. He claimed to be a student of the life of Mahatma Gandhi and said that Shishupal had not been able to answer commonplace questions about Mahatma Gandhi's life. He also said that at the school in Etah to which Shishupal had transferred (after *Blitz* had published Balwant Singh's allegations), Shishupal had asked Kanchan Singh's son, who was a student of the same school, not to refer to his (Shishupal's) claim to be Mahatma Gandhi reborn. Kanchan Singh interpreted this request as a confession of fraud and an effort on the part of Shishupal to break with the past.

Following his visit to Khurrampur, I.S. corresponded with three of the outside persons who were said to have talked with Shishupal and interrogated him about the life of Mahatma Gandhi. One of these was Balwant Singh, who, in a long letter of July, 1972, repeated his observations and

views of the case more or less as they had been reported in *Blitz* 10 years earlier. He added that he had tried to persuade Shishupal and his family and neighbors to desist from claiming that Shishupal was Mahatma Gandhi reborn, but he had completely failed in this endeavor.

Of the other correspondents, one denied that she had ever visited or otherwise met Shishupal. The third correspondent was Dr. Malkand Singh Sasaudia, who was principal of an intermediate college in Etah. He did not claim that he had himself been a friend of Mahatma Gandhi but wrote that in about 1962 he had accompanied two of his (female) relatives in Khurrampur. One of these women had lived for a time in Mahatma Gandhi's ashram. She asked Shishupal whether he recognized her, and he said that he did and that she was from Sitapur (a medium-sized town in Uttar Pradesh), which was correct. In reply to other questions, however, Shishupal gave only vague and general replies. The visitors left without being convinced that he was Mahatma Gandhi reborn but feeling, in all fairness, that the case deserved further study.

This case seemed important enough for a follow-up visit and for another effort to talk with Shishupal himself, who (as already mentioned) had gone out of Khurrampur in 1971, possibly to evade I.S. Accordingly, in December, 1983, S.P. went to the area of Khurrampur.

S.P. first met and talked with Balwant Singh in his village of Beri, 2 kilometers from Khurrampur. He thought that Shishupal had given up his claim to be Mahatma Gandhi reborn, although the villagers still called him "Gandhi" as a friendly nickname. Balwant Singh repeated his conviction that the case was a hoax, and he elaborated on the contribution of Shishupal's neighbors in promoting it. He said that some of them had coached Shishupal in the role of Mahatma Gandhi with the naive idea that if his claim were accepted he might be given a scholarship or other favors by the government.

Shishupal, when S.P. interviewed him (in Khurrampur), denied that he had abandoned the claim to be Mahatma Gandhi reborn. He did say, however, that almost all the memories he had had earlier had faded away. He still believed that the birthmark on his (right) chest corresponded to the fatal wound on Mahatma Gandhi's chest. Shishupal gave a different chronology for the development of his case than I.S. had received in 1971 from his father, Madho Singh. He said that his sister Shanti had remembered a previous life when she was a young child and that he had *afterward* (at the age of about 7 or 8) had his first memories of a previous life. He said that his parents suppressed these early memories because they thought he was possessed. Then he had no further memories until he was about 13, when his full memories of Mahatma Gandhi emerged. (This would have been in 1961.)

Shishupal denied to S.P. that he had ever read (at any time) books on Mahatma Gandhi. He evidently believed in the genuineness of his case, although he had long since given up trying to exploit it. He was living the life of a simple cultivator, and he probably rarely thought about his

claimed memories of the life of Mahatma Gandhi except when persons like ourselves happened to ask about them.

Comment. This case undoubtedly has fraudulent elements in it, and there may be nothing more to it. Even without the features of the claim to have been a famous person reborn and the evidence of Shishupal's secretly studying details in the life of Mahatma Gandhi, the case has other aspects that should raise questions about its authenticity. First, Shishupal was much older than the average subject of cases of this type when he made his full statements about being Mahatma Gandhi reborn. (This is not an absolute sign of inauthenticity, but it should raise doubts.) Second, he actively sought publicity for his claims.

Nevertheless, there is room for thinking that the case might be a mixed one. Suppose, for example, that Shishupal had had a few memories of a previous life (at the time of his illness when he was 4 or 5 years old) and that he had said that he was killed by a man called Nathu Ram, without mentioning the name "Godse." Nathu Ram is a common name in northern India, and Shishupal's family would naturally have wanted to know of which Nathu Ram he was speaking. Someone might then have suggested to him the family name of "Godse," because Nathu Ram Godse was well known as Mahatma Gandhi's assassin. (Mahatma Gandhi died close to the time of Shishupal's birth.) Thus, the idea might have arisen that Shishupal was talking about the death of Mahatma Gandhi. Shishupal's birthmark might have increased the credibility of his claim. As mentioned, I.S. did not meet Shishupal in 1971, and at that time Madho Singh said that Shishupal had a birthmark on the chest without localizing it further. In 1983, N. McClean-Rice (who accompanied S.P. at that time) found that Shishupal had a round puckered mark on the right side of his chest. It was reasonably close to the site of two of the three bullet wounds that killed Mahatma Gandhi; two of these had been in the right chest (Nair, 1956). We cannot be certain that this was a birthmark, but it may have been the mark to which Madho Singh referred, and he did say that Shishupal had had a birthmark on his chest.

If Shishupal was nicknamed "Gandhi" (on the basis of these associations and correspondences), he might have come to think—at first vaguely and then with more assurance—that he really had been Mahatma Gandhi in a previous life. In his early teens he had enough literacy and access to books so that he could learn about Mahatma Gandhi's life. When he had sufficient information, or thought he had, he wrote a letter to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and "went public" with his claim. If something like this happened, it would not be the first occasion known to us when parents have overinterpreted (or misinterpreted) statements a child has made about a previous life. Other examples occurred in the cases of Imad Elawar (Stevenson, 1974) and (probably) Necati Çaylak (Stevenson, 1980).

We should add here that (unlike Kanchan Singh and, to some extent, Balwant Singh) we ourselves would not denounce the case as fraudulent

because Shishupal could not answer questions about the life of Mahatma Gandhi. Many subjects of cases that seem to us authentic speak about their memories only spontaneously, and they cannot answer questions put to them about the previous life, least of all questions asked by strangers. Some subjects are able to answer questions, but they seem to be a minority.

The Case of Mahender Jain

Mahender Jain was born in the village of Puranpur, District Lalitpur, Uttar Pradesh, India, on May 17, 1976. He was the fourth child of his parents, Jagdish and Swarnlata Jain. By the time the case developed the family had moved to Sanjitpur in the Jhansi District of Uttar Pradesh. (Jagdish Jain died when Mahender was 4 years old, and he does not figure in our interviews for the case.) Mahender's mother was the principal informant for what he said and did related to the previous life that he seemed to remember. When Mahender was just learning to speak—even at the age of one, his mother said—he began saying that his parents lived “far away.” He used for them the expressions “Mummy” and “Papa,” which were not customary forms of address in his family, although other families of the area where they lived did use them. He asked to be taken to his “mummy and papa.” Much later, Mahender said that he had drowned in a well after another boy had pushed him into it. He did not make this statement until July, 1980. In the meantime, Jagdish Jain, his father, had died during the preceding April, leaving Swarnlata Jain in dire economic circumstances. In addition to her own four children, she was responsible for a daughter her husband had had with his first wife.

After Mahender had made the few statements mentioned, Swarnlata Jain began to ask him for further details about the previous life he seemed to be remembering. She asked about brothers and sisters that he might have had in that life, and he said that he had no brothers but one sister. She asked the father's occupation, and Mahender replied: “He teaches, as you do.” (Swarnlata Jain was a schoolteacher.) Mahender compared the previous house, which had a flush toilet, with that of his family, which did not. At this stage, Swarnlata, thinking of persons she knew who had lost sons, presented Mahender with lists of their names and of the places where they lived. From such lists Mahender chose “Kailash” and “Ram Devi” as names of persons. He gave Nagpur as a place name, picking it out of a list, as he had the personal names of Kailash and Ram Devi.

From the information Mahender had thus furnished, or that Swarnlata had extracted from him, she inferred that he might be referring to an acquaintance of her family. This was Kailash Jain,⁶ who, at that time was

⁶ The similarity of family names does not imply that the two families were related. Both families belonged to the Jain religion, and Jains not infrequently assume that name as a kind of family name.

teaching Hindi at a college near Nagpur, which is in the state of Maharashtra. (Nagpur is about 400 kilometers from Sanjitpur.) Kailash Jain's wife was called Ram Devi, and they had lost a son, Gopal, who had drowned when they were living at Wardha, a town about 65 kilometers from Nagpur. Swarnlata was obviously thinking about Kailash Jain and Ram Devi when she questioned Mahender about his memories; otherwise she would not have included their names in lists she offered to Mahender. At that time she had heard about him from other persons, but had never met Kailash Jain herself.

In the early summer of 1980—most likely, early June—Swarnlata Jain wrote to Kailash Jain. In her first letter to him she merely described her economic distress and inquired about any possible interest that Kailash might have in adopting one of her children; she did not broach the subject of Mahender's apparent memories of a previous life. However, in later letters (in the summer of 1980) she wrote about Mahender's memories; several times she urged Kailash Jain to visit her and meet Mahender in Sanjitpur. (We have studied three of these letters.)

Swarnlata's letters aroused Kailash Jain's curiosity. As mentioned, he had lost one son, Gopal, who had drowned in a well in 1963; and later, his only other son, Nirmal, had been killed in a railway accident in 1977. He and his wife had a daughter, Radha, but his wife had had a tubal ligation, and they could have no more children. The prospect of adopting a son, especially one who might be his own son reborn, appealed to Kailash.

Accordingly, in August, 1980, he journeyed to Sanjitpur, where he visited Mahender and his family for 6 days. Mahender was affectionate toward Kailash; in addition, Mahender's appearance and one of his gestures (not specified to us) reminded Kailash of his dead son, Gopal. However, Mahender was able to furnish only one further detail about the previous life (apart from general remarks of wide applicability, such as that the previous house had a tile roof); Kailash asked Mahender about the whereabouts of a ball Gopal had owned, and Mahender said: "It was with me." This was correct for Gopal, because when his body had been recovered from the well in which he had drowned, a ball was found in a pocket of his clothes. It was also correct that Gopal had addressed his father as "Papa."

However, Mahender had made other statements that were either incorrect for Gopal or unverifiable. We have already indicated that he got the name of the place where Gopal had lived wrong, although Nagpur and Wardha are in the same general area of Maharashtra. Gopal had not addressed his mother as "Mummy"; instead, he had called her "Jiji," the name (meaning "sister") by which everyone in the joint family household of the (Kailash) Jains had called her. Although Gopal had definitely drowned in a well, no one knew how this had happened. He had disappeared from his home one evening after returning from school and reporting that a teacher had falsely accused him of misconduct and slapped his face. When he was noted to be missing, a search was begun, and on the third day his body was found in a well. His family conjectured that he had been pushed into the well by another child, perhaps unintentionally;

suicide was also considered in view of the child's harsh treatment by his schoolmaster. Finally, Mahender was wrong (at least from the perspective of Gopal at the time of Gopal's death) in saying that he had no brothers. Gopal did have a brother, Nirmal, although Nirmal had also died by the time Mahender said that he had no brother in the previous life.

These mixed correspondences between the few statements Mahender made about the previous life and facts in Gopal's life left Kailash in a state of perplexity. He returned from Sanjitpur without having reached a conviction that Mahender was Gopal reborn. He gave the family some nominal gifts, but not a large donation. Yet he expressed interest in meeting Mahender again and spending more time with him. The two families met again on later occasions.

A journalist heard of the reason for Kailash's visit to Sanjitpur and extracted enough information from him for a somewhat muddled account of the case, which was published in Lucknow in the Hindi newspaper, *Swatantra Bharat*, on September 9, 1980. Two of I.S.'s correspondents in India promptly sent him translations of this newspaper report and another one. The reports mentioned that the two families concerned in the case had corresponded before meeting, and this aroused our hope of obtaining an account of what Mahender had said that had been written down before Kailash had gone to meet Mahender. We therefore gave the case a high priority for a tour we were planning at the time.

As often happens, the newspaper reports of the case bungled some of the names, and S.P., when she tried to trace the case in October, 1980, had some difficulty in doing so, but eventually succeeded. She located the house in Nagpur where Kailash and Ram Devi Jain lived, but they were away at the time. Two weeks later, I.S. and S.P. went to Nagpur together (on November 2, 1980) and there we had long interviews with Kailash and Ram Devi Jain. We also had a second interview with Kailash Jain 2 days later. In December, 1980, S.P. went (with an associate) to Sanjitpur, where she had a long interview with Swarnlata Jain and a brief chat with Mahender himself. She also interviewed two of Swarnlata Jain's younger sisters, Sudha and Indira, about the second of whom we shall say more later. In May, 1981, S.P. was in Indore and there met Swarnlata's brother-in-law, who had some acquaintance with one of Kailash's relatives who lived in that city. This last meeting was part of our effort to learn how much Swarnlata Jain might have learned normally about Kailash Jain before they had first met in August, 1980.

These inquiries led to our learning that, although Swarnlata Jain and Kailash Jain had not met personally before August, 1980, some of Swarnlata's relatives had known Kailash Jain well. In particular, Kailash Jain had conducted extensive negotiations with one of Swarnlata's widowed sisters, Indira, with regard to his adopting Indira's only son. (These negotiations had taken place in about 1977.) In the end nothing came of this proposal, but at the time members of Swarnlata's family must have learned much about Kailash's family, including some information about the deaths of his two sons.

Comment. We have already described how Swarnlata had Kailash in mind when she spoke to Mahender a list of possible names of his “mummy and papa.” (She fell just a little short of suggesting the names to him.) As she did this, she may also have been thinking both of her own desire to lighten the economic burdens that encumbered her after her husband’s death and the expressed strong desire of Kailash to adopt a son.

Kailash, for his part, had some insight into these forces—his own need for a son and Swarnlata’s need to lessen her family responsibilities. He was sufficiently cautious not to rush toward an adoption of Mahender. His family also had some restraining influence on him. His wife, Ram Devi, was not openly opposed to their adopting Mahender, but not enthusiastic either. Radha, their daughter (who was in 1980 qualified as a medical doctor) openly opposed the idea. She even wrote to Swarnlata Jain and accused her of making false statements and of exploiting Kailash Jain’s grief for his deceased sons. (Her views were perhaps not disinterested because the adoption of another child would have affected her inheritance of the family property.)

In 1977, when Mahender was just beginning to refer to the previous life, his aunt Indira was negotiating with Kailash Jain about the adoption by Kailash of her son. Mahender may have overheard conversations (for example, between his mother and aunt) relating to these negotiations, including information and conjectures about the drowning of Gopal Jain. Some of these details may have entered into Mahender’s statements about a previous life.

It remains possible that Mahender had some real memories of a previous life. However, the few details that he stated, without mentioning any proper names spontaneously, could apply to a considerable number of persons in India. There are many teachers in India, and deaths by drowning in wells are still distressingly frequent there. In some other family, Mahender’s case might have remained just another unsolved case of the reincarnation type, such as we have described elsewhere (Cook et al., 1983a, 1983b). However, given the desires to believe—for different motives—of Swarnlata Jain and Kailash Jain, Gopal Jain came close to being regarded as the deceased person whose life Mahender may have been remembering, although there is almost no evidence that he is.

A Follow-up Interview. In November, 1985, S.P. visited the Jains again at their home near Nagpur. They had pulled back from adopting Mahender, although they remained friendly toward him, and he had recently visited them in Nagpur. Ram Devi had become markedly skeptical about the idea that Mahender was the reincarnation of her son Gopal. On the other hand, her husband was inclined to believe that he was.

The Case of Mahesh Shakya

Mahesh Shakya was born in Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, India, on March 6, 1956. His parents, Daya Prasad and Leelawati Shakya, were members of

the Kachchi caste, who are vegetable growers and low in the social structure of India. Mahesh was the older of two sons in the family. In addition to a younger brother, he also had an older sister and a younger sister.

According to Leelawati, Mahesh began to refer to a previous life when he was about 2 years old. He said that his name had been Parmeshwar, that he had been a Brahmin, and that he had been killed. He made a number of other statements about the previous life, and these included names of family members, which his mother (our principal informant for Mahesh's statements) subsequently forgot.

In addition to his statements about the previous life, Mahesh showed some unusual behavior that was, however, appropriate for the previous life he claimed to have lived. For example, he showed a degree of Brahmin snobbery: He avoided playing in the dirt, he did not like to do menial work, and he had scruples about eating with other members of the family. (Brahmins are meticulous about cleanliness, and they are fastidious about the food they eat, its preparation, and the circumstances in which they eat it.) Mahesh also played at teaching.

Mahesh's father had known a Brahmin schoolteacher called Parmeshwar Tiwari who had been murdered in 1953, about 3 years before Mahesh's birth. He was a prominent citizen of Bareilly and was the principal of the high school (later a junior college) where he taught. He was also a private money-lender; he seems to have lent money mainly to assist other persons and charged little or no interest. He had loaned money to Daya Prasad Shakya, who had not paid it back at the time of Parmeshwar Tiwari's death. (He owed 450 rupees, a considerable sum for a cultivator of his means.) Mahesh's family lived within about 300 meters of Parmeshwar Tiwari's house.

In 1975, Leelawati Shakya said that she had had a dream about Parmeshwar at some time during the interval between Parmeshwar's death and Mahesh's birth. She could not remember more precisely the date of this dream, but in it Parmeshwar had said to her, "I will come here." In 1985, she said that she could not remember such a dream.

Mahesh's parents tried to stop him from talking about the previous life. His mother explained this as due to a fear that Parmeshwar's murderers might try to murder him. Mahesh had described Parmeshwar's murder, and he seemed to have made attempts at stating the murderers' names, but his family had not comprehended the names he was trying to say. They had known about Parmeshwar's murder, however, and Daya Prasad had gone to see Parmeshwar's body. Despite his parents' efforts to suppress him, Mahesh continued to talk about the previous life until he was about 5 or 6 years old, and then he stopped.

We first learned of this case in 1975 from an informant in Mainpuri, which is a town of Uttar Pradesh about 150 kilometers from Bareilly. He showed us a report of the case published in *Sainik* (a newspaper of Agra) on July 20, 1959. This newspaper report must have been published shortly after Mahesh had met members of Parmeshwar's family. Although we

learned about the case many years after its development, we decided nevertheless to investigate it.

On November 29, 1975, S.P. went to Bareilly and obtained from Leelawati Shakya all the information that we have summarized in the first six paragraphs of this subsection. (She could not meet Mahesh's father, Daya Prasad; and, although she briefly met Mahesh himself, he said very little when she tried to interview him.)

As narrated by Leelawati, the case seemed to have many of the features of a typical rebirth case of northern India with which we are abundantly familiar. For example, the ages at which Mahesh started and stopped speaking about the previous life were the usual ones for such cases; also typical were his mention of a violent mode of death for the previous personality and the appropriate behavior (in his case, Brahmin snobbery) that he showed. Everything seemed quite straightforward, and S.P. proceeded for interviews with Parmeshwar's family, fully expecting them to verify Mahesh's statements and endorse the case. (Leelawati had implied that they had done this.)

It did not turn out this way at all. S.P. interviewed four of Parmeshwar's close relatives, and every one of them denied the authenticity of the case. S.P.'s informants for this side of the case were: Parmeshwar's widow, Sakuntala Tiwari; his son, Sanjeev Tiwari; his older brother, R. D. Tiwari; and his niece, Madhu (R. D. Tiwari's daughter). Most of these persons denied that Mahesh had made any correct statements about facts in Parmeshwar's life that were not public knowledge. (It should be remembered that Parmeshwar had been something of a public figure in Bareilly and that his murder had been widely publicized.) They said that Mahesh had neither recognized members of the Tiwari family nor answered questions put to him about private matters within the family. Madhu Tiwari said that Mahesh had recognized a photograph of Parmeshwar (as of "himself"), but she thought that someone accompanying him had given him hints about this.

Sanjeev Tiwari said that his uncle, R. D. Tiwari, had challenged Mahesh and charged him with telling lies. He had then extracted from Mahesh a confession that Mahesh's father, Daya Prasad Shakya, had coached him to pretend that he was Parmeshwar reborn. However, R. D. Tiwari did not mention such a confession to S.P. All he said was that Mahesh had not stated anything about Parmeshwar's life that he found convincing, and that he had learned from Daya Prasad that he (Daya Prasad) owed money to Parmeshwar. He had then accused Daya Prasad of creating a hoax and had threatened him with calling the police if he ever returned.

After we had prepared a draft of this report of the case in 1984, we remained in doubt about its interpretation. We decided that, even though many more years had passed since the case had developed, we should undertake a second round of interviews and also try to meet some previously unavailable witnesses. Accordingly, in 1985 S.P. met again with Mahesh's mother and was able also to interview his father, whom she had

not met in 1975. She also returned to the Tiwari family and interviewed Sakuntala, Parmeshwar Tiwari's widow, once more. In addition, she interviewed a new informant, Sunita Tiwari, who was the wife of Parmeshwar's brother R. D. Tiwari.

The 1985 interviews did not resolve the question of whether Daya Prasad had, in fact, repaid the debt he owed to Parmeshwar Tiwari to some member of the Tiwari family, as he claimed he had done. We decided that we should try to ascertain the truth of this matter. Accordingly, two of us (S.P., this time accompanied by I.S.) returned to the site of the case. We had another interview with R. D. Tiwari and again briefly met Sakuntala Tiwari (Parmeshwar Tiwari's widow), who happened to be visiting her brother-in-law when we came to his house. We also had another interview with Daya Prasad in which his wife, Leelawati, participated. In all these last interviews we gave our principal attention to the matter of the debt, but we reviewed some other details as well.

The interviews of 1985–1986 contained the discrepancies about small details that we are accustomed to find without surprise when informants review the same events after a lapse of 10 years—or less. The most important observation derived from them, however, was that the stances of the two families toward the case had not altered in the least.

Mahesh's family members still said that they believed he had had real memories of the life of Parmeshwar Tiwari; and Parmeshwar's family still believed that the case was a hoax contrived by Mahesh's family in order to avoid payment of the debt owed to Parmeshwar. They said that they had never received payment for the debt. Daya Prasad, for his part, insisted that he had repaid the debt. When we questioned him about how he had done this, he said that he had given the money to a man who lived in the compound of the Tiwari family and was regarded as virtually a member of their family. He had obtained no receipt for the repayment, but he was sure that R. D. Tiwari had received the money because afterward R. D. Tiwari stopped asking him for repayment; earlier, he had asked for the money several times.

Comment. We have still not been able to reach a definite conclusion about the best interpretation for this case. Our reason for this uncertainty is that motives for distortion and even falsehood existed on both sides of the case.

The motive on the part of Daya Prasad seems at first sight clearer and stronger. He owed money to Parmeshwar, and he might have hoped that his debt would be forgiven if he could show that Parmeshwar had been reborn as his son. He said that Mahesh had "forbidden" him to repay the money on the grounds that he (previously Parmeshwar) was reborn in their family; but Daya Prasad said that he had ignored his son's suggestion and repaid the money anyway. The Tiwari family denied this, but there remains the possibility that the person to whom Daya Prasad said he paid the money forgot to pass it on to the Tiwari family or dishonestly kept it for himself.

On the other side of the case, Parmeshwar's family had a strong motive for denying the case. They were rich Brahmins, and none of them could have found congenial the thought that Parmeshwar had been reborn in a poor Kachchi family. Such an event would have implied an extreme demotion in socioeconomic status for Parmeshwar, and this would mean (in terms of the Hindu doctrine of karma) that he had been guilty of some serious moral misconduct. Hardly less attractive for the Tiwaris was the idea that by recognizing the genuineness of the case they might involve themselves in visits and countervisits with members of a caste that was for them one of almost repulsive lowness. It was far simpler and far pleasanter, they may have reasoned, to imagine that the Shakyas had simply invented the case in order to weasel out of their debt to Parmeshwar. They may also have seen a desire on the part of Mahesh's family to associate themselves with an upper class family as an additional reason for developing the case fraudulently.

Ample precedents exist in our case collection for the rejection of a case by the family of a wealthy and socially prominent person on the grounds that the subject's family—of much lower socioeconomic status—intended to exploit them through evoking their interest in the subject as the supposed reincarnation of a member of their family. This motive for rejection of a case occurred, for example, in the cases of Sunil Dutt Saxena and Dolon Champa Mitra (Stevenson, 1975). No evidence was found that the families of these subjects had the slightest intention of imposing on the other family concerned, but the other families—wealthy in both cases—feared this nevertheless. In the present case the Tiwari family had before them—to stimulate skepticism—not only the large socioeconomic gap between the two families, but also the existence of an actual debt owed by the subject's family to theirs.

We believe that as a young child Mahesh probably had some real memories of a previous life. Furthermore, these may well have been of the life of Parmeshwar Tiwari. It is also possible that Daya Prasad prematurely and erroneously identified Parmeshwar Tiwari as the person about whose life Mahesh was talking. On the other side of the case, members of the Tiwari family may have been initially receptive to having Mahesh's statements linked to Parmeshwar but then recoiled from the association with Mahesh's low caste family. In order to justify this, they emphasized Mahesh's ignorance of private family matters (although we have known subjects of cases we consider authentic who could not answer questions about the previous life put to them in a demanding manner by strange adults), and they also attached importance to the debt, which from their knowledge had not been repaid, although probably it had been.

The Case of Kenedi Alkan

Kenedi Alkan was born in Mersin, Turkey, on November 9, 1965. He was the fourth child of Mehmet Alkan and his wife, Zekiye. They later

had three other children. Mehmet Alkan was a laborer, and he and his wife were Alevis (members of a Shiite sect having numerous adherents in south central Turkey and Syria).

Not long before Kenedi's birth in 1965—Mehmet Alkan said it was the day before—Mehmet Alkan dreamed of the late President John F. Kennedy, who had been murdered on November 22, 1963. He said that in this dream President Kennedy wanted to visit and stay with him; Mehmet opened the door of his house and President Kennedy entered. On the basis of this dream Mehmet Alkan named his newborn son Kenedi, giving the name a Turkish spelling.

In November, 1967, Reşat Bayer and one of us (I.S.) were studying cases of the reincarnation type in south central Turkey. We learned of two children who had been named after President Kennedy because they were thought to be reincarnations of him. Kennedy was the American president of the period following World War II best known among foreign peoples (not only because of his assassination) and highly regarded by most of those living in developing countries. It is not surprising, therefore, that parents in Turkey would sometimes name their children after Kennedy, but it is somewhat surprising that they would believe these children were Kennedy reincarnated. Reşat Bayer and I.S. went to both the families concerned in these cases.⁷

On November 12, 1967, we tape-recorded an interview with Mehmet Alkan. He spoke of his great admiration for President Kennedy and told us about the dream described above and how he had named his son after President Kennedy. He said that Kenedi had no birthmark. He told us that he had written to Senator Robert Kennedy that he had named his son after President Kennedy, and he showed us a reply from Senator Kennedy; it thanked him for naming his child after Senator Kennedy's brother and for taking the trouble to write him about this.

In November, 1967, Kenedi was just 2 years old, and his father said that he had so far made only one statement about the previous life. When asked his name, Kenedi would say: "I am President Kennedy."

Reşat Bayer and I.S. found this case amusing, and I.S. filed the folder

⁷ The second "Kennedy case" in Turkey had features closely resembling that of Kenedi Alkan. Reşat Bayer and I.S. studied it also in 1967. The subject was Mahmut Haklıgör, and he was born in Adana in about 1964. The day before Mahmut's birth his mother dreamed that a man calling himself Kennedy had come into the family home and insisted on staying with them. Mahmut was born the next day and had two birthmarks on his neck. Mahmut's father said they had oozed, but not bled, when he was born. Later, Mahmut had rejected the name Mahmut and insisted on being called Kennedy. He said that he had a wife and children, but he gave no names or other particulars. He showed an unusual interest in a nearby family who knew some Americans. The case contained no other details, and Reşat Bayer and I withdrew from it after deciding that, like the case of Kenedi Alkan, it rested largely on fantasies. Here again, however, the fantasy element may have entered into the identification of the previous personality. We cannot exclude that Mahmut may have had some memories of a previous life.

of notes we had about it in a cabinet where we keep our dossiers of cases that we consider inauthentic or fantasies. As explained earlier, for most of these cases we have reached judgments without going so far as to conduct interviews; we retain the folders partly because of their possible future interest to a sociologist studying the belief in reincarnation and partly because now and again we obtain some further information about a case in this group. This happened in the present case.

Since 1983, Dr. Can Polat has been traveling to south central Turkey and investigating cases there for the University of Virginia. He has found and studied numerous new cases, and from time to time he has also obtained additional or follow-up information for cases that Reşat Bayer and I.S. studied earlier. Occasionally, he has been directed toward a case already known to I.S. but for which I.S. had not sought additional information. One such case was that of Kenedi Alkan. In June, 1985, he learned about the case and, without knowing that I.S. had studied it many years earlier, he conducted interviews with Kenedi, both his parents, and two of his sisters.

In June, 1985, Kenedi Alkan was a young man of nearly 20 years. He was then said (by his parents) to have begun speaking about the previous life of President Kennedy at the age of about 4, and he was still speaking about it in 1985. However, the apparent memories had faded to some extent when Kenedi was between 12 and 13 years of age. Kenedi's statements about the previous life were few. According to his father (in 1985), he had said that he was President Kennedy, that he lived in America, was married, had two children, and was rich.

Kenedi's family mentioned several unusual behaviors in which he differed from other members of his family: He was unusually industrious and intelligent; he performed outstandingly well at school (although he had left school after passing the eighth grade and worked, like his father, as a laborer); he was conscientious and responsible; his family regarded him as a leader; although somewhat shy with other children he readily made friends with foreigners; among foreign countries he showed a preference for the United States, countries of Western Europe, and Japan; he expressed a wish to travel abroad and said that he would go to America where he could find his house; finally, he was unusually interested in politics.

Kenedi was said to have been lighter in pigmentation (during childhood) than other members of his family. (A photograph that Reşat Bayer took in 1967 shows that at the age of 2 Kenedi was fairer than his father.) As he grew older, Kenedi became darker. (Photographs that Can Polat took in 1985 show that he then had the dark brown hair typical of most Turkish people; however, his complexion was fractionally paler than that of two of his brothers who appeared in one photograph with him.)

Although Mehmet Alkan had told I.S. in 1967 that Kenedi had no birthmark, Kenedi himself told Can Polat that he had a birthmark on his left shoulder that corresponded with a bullet wound President Kennedy re-

ceived when he was assassinated. It was a linear mark about 2 centimeters long on the anterior surface of the left shoulder. (This does not correspond with wounds on President Kennedy; he was hit by bullets in the head and neck ["Report of the President's Commission," 1964].)

Kenedi and his family appear to have obtained some kudos locally from his claim to be President Kennedy reborn. They told Can Polat that an American professor (almost certainly I.S.) had come to investigate the case. Later, some Americans from the United States Air Force Base at Adana (the largest city of south central Turkey) came to visit Kenedi, and some of them, his family said, had expressed a wish to take Kenedi to America. Kenedi's family refused this request, but his mother continued to be afraid that Kenedi might be taken away to America; she even at first refused to cooperate with Can Polat because she thought (quite mistakenly) that he might somehow promote Kenedi's emigration to the United States. During Kenedi's school years she had instructed him not to talk about his identification with President Kennedy outside the home.

Comment. As mentioned above, I.S. had dismissed this case from his mind until he recognized the name "Kenedi Alkan" in notes that Can Polat sent him in 1985. In its later development, however, the case illustrates how a parent may impose an identification on a child.

Students of cases of the reincarnation type have sometimes suggested that parents possessing information about a deceased person—whether acquired normally or paranormally—may somehow impose an identification with that person on a child. In his first book of case reports (Stevenson, 1974, pp. 343–373), I.S. discussed this interpretation of the cases more fully than any other interpretation. We have for long wished to find a case for which we could feel confident that this was the correct interpretation, and the present case appears to be an example. We think it developed in the following way.

Full of admiration for President Kennedy, Mehmet Alkan dreamed about him just before his son was born. The dream had the form of typical "announcing dreams" of these cases (Stevenson, 1974), and on the basis of it Mehmet Alkan named his son Kenedi after John F. Kennedy. When Kenedi was beginning to speak, he was naturally told his name and why it had been given to him. Later, he was told, or otherwise learned, a few additional items of information about President Kennedy, and he incorporated these into his "memories" of the life of President Kennedy. He became fully convinced that he really had been President Kennedy in a previous life and remained so up to the age of 20.

However, the case also suggests the limits of the imposition of an identification on a child. We do not know what other details about the life of President Kennedy Mehmet Alkan might have suggested to his son or Kenedi himself might have learned. Numerous other details were certainly in the public domain almost as much as Kennedy's name. For example, it must have been widely known that he was assassinated by shooting, and many persons would have known the name of his wife, Jacqueline. How-

ever, Kenedi had made no statements about these or other details when he was a young child. (At the age of 20 he talked about Kennedy's assassination in connection with his claimed birthmark, but he had not said anything about this when he was a child.) We have deliberately said that the case only "suggests" the limits of parental imposition; we can say no more because other children may be more suggestible than Kenedi was.⁸

It remains to add that Kenedi appears to have been an unusual child in his family. He undoubtedly stood out among his siblings in several important features of behavior. These qualities may have tended to intensify in his parents and also in himself the conviction that he had been someone special in a previous life, and hence they may have contributed to the identification of Kenedi with President Kennedy. On the other hand, it is also possible that, from being early identified as the reincarnation of President Kennedy, he received more attention from his family and perhaps more favors and opportunities than his siblings. Zekiye Alkan told Can Polat that Kenedi was her favorite child, but she attributed this to Kenedi's great affection for his family. We have often observed, informally, that the subjects of cases seem to be more intelligent and more mature than their siblings; it remains to be learned whether objective tests can confirm this impression. If they do, we shall also want to learn whether the unusual qualities of the subjects have something to do with their becoming subjects, that is, having memories of previous lives, or merely result from the special attention that nearly all subjects receive in their families.

The Case of David Morris

This case has already been exposed as a hoax perpetrated by a journalist. We have decided to include a brief report of it here, however,

⁸ We learned of a somewhat parallel case that developed in India in 1983. A young girl, Meenu Singh, in a village near Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh, began narrating details of a previous life that included a particularly sordid murder. These details were correct for the life of a woman whose husband had murdered her. The husband had been convicted and sentenced to a long term in prison. Some years later he applied for release from prison on the grounds of ill health. At this time the statements of Meenu, who was claiming to be his wife reborn, were given wide publicity and seemed to his family to endanger his appeal for clemency. They brought forward a child who, they said, was also claiming to be the deceased wife reborn. When it was discovered that this child was the murderer's niece, he and his family said they had deliberately coached this child in order to show that a child could be trained to claim to be a deceased person reborn. They thus hoped to discredit Meenu's statements. We wanted to study this second child almost as much as Meenu, because her case seemed to offer a chance to learn how and to what extent parents can impose an identification on a young child. Unfortunately, when S.P. tried to approach the family of the second child, they would not cooperate. Thus, there are only newspaper reports of what the second child actually said, and we were unable to learn anything more from this case about the extent to which a young child can be coached to make a fraudulent case.

Norbu and Turnbull (1969, pp. 235–236) briefly describe the case of a child in Tibet who was fraudulently coached by his parents as a claimant to be the reincarnation of the thirteenth Dalai Lama.

because one of us (I.S.) initiated one exposure of it—there were actually two separate exposing investigations, as we shall explain—and because it shows some of the typical extravagances of hoaxes that should be familiar to more readers than they are.

A report of the case appeared in the issue of *Fate* for January, 1968. The report was entitled “A Boy 3,000 Years Old?”, and the author’s name was given as Leo Heiman. The author claimed that an Israeli boy, David Morris, had been speaking an ancient form of Hebrew from the age of about 3. (At the time the article was published he was said to be 6 years old.) David’s father, Dr. Samuel Morris, was a dental surgeon who had been in the Israeli army but was then in private dental practice in Jerusalem. He made tape recordings of what his son spoke in the “ancient Hebrew,” and an expert of the National Museum, identified as Dr. Zvi Hermann, said that the content of the child’s utterances appeared to resemble or repeat what King David might have said to his people at the time he was building the great Temple in Jerusalem. David Morris went into trances from time to time and could be heard exhorting “his people” to destroy their enemies or making other patriotic utterances. David was said also to have made out of toy building blocks a close replica of King David’s temple, of which he had never seen a model.

The greatest paranormal feat attributed to David Morris was the discovery of a hitherto unknown passage—actually a narrow tunnel or shaft, but passable to humans—running from the Cave of Gichon (*sic*) to the central courtyard of the El Omar Mosque on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem. The author of the report claimed that “most historians assume” (p. 40) that King David captured Jerusalem by siege, and he further claimed that David Morris’s discovery of a tunnel had provoked a controversy about whether King David had used the tunnel to capture the city. He said that David Morris had guided a group of archeology students led by one Moshe Lerer and that they had climbed up the shaft that David pointed out.

In addition to the authorities we have already mentioned, the author of the article cited two others as supporting the case in one way or another. These were a Professor Ephraim Auerbach, a psychologist who observed David’s trances; and Rabbi Yedidia Cohen of the Supreme Religious Council, whom the author quoted as offering sympathetic comments concerning the stance of the Jewish religion on reincarnation and the suggestion that David Morris was in fact King David returned as the Messiah.

When I.S. read Leo Heiman’s account of this case soon after its publication in *Fate*, he found little of interest in it. The report contained two features that often occur in inauthentic cases: (a) an extremely long interval between the death of the previous personality and the presumed rebirth and (b) a famous presumed previous personality. I.S. would willingly have put the case completely out of his mind. However, he soon began to receive mail asking for his opinion about it; some correspondents seemed baffled that he had not immediately investigated the case, so good did it seem to them. Eventually, I.S. wearied of replying to such corre-

spondents that he knew nothing about the case, and he decided, in self-defense, to ask Dr. Heinz Berendt of Jerusalem to make inquiries about it on his behalf. (Dr. Berendt was President of the Israeli Parapsychological Society.)

In November, 1968, Dr. Berendt wrote a long letter to I.S. in which he summarized some entirely negative or adverse facts bearing on the authenticity of the case. At almost the same time, a French magazine, *Edi-Monde*, had initiated an independent investigation into the case by their representative in Jerusalem. The editors of *Edi-Monde* had been considering publishing a French translation of *Fate's* report of the case, but they decided first to probe it for themselves on the scene. The inquiries by the representative of *Edi-Monde* were as negative as those of Dr. Berendt.

Mrs. Mary Fuller, the editor of *Fate*, sent I.S. a copy of the report from *Edi-Monde*, and he made available to her a copy of Dr. Berendt's letter to him. She immediately published in *Fate* a retraction of the original article, and she canceled plans for publications of other articles the same author had submitted (Editors, 1969). Subsequently, Dr. Berendt published in German a brief account of his investigation of the case (Berendt, 1972, pp. 110–111).

The reports by Dr. Berendt and the representative of *Edi-Monde* overlapped to some extent, but each included some details not mentioned by the other. We shall here collate the reports in summarizing the results of the two inquiries.

Heiman's article as published in *Fate* included a supposed photograph of young David Morris (appearing to be 5 or 6 years old) with his father, who was wearing an Israeli army uniform. When this photograph was examined in Israel, it was immediately noted that the father's uniform was of the period of 1948, that is, almost 20 years before the presumed date of the photograph. No evidence could be found that anyone called Samuel Morris had ever served in the dental service of the Israeli Army, or for that matter, had ever been a dentist of any kind in Israel. No dental surgeon by the name of Samuel Morris could be found in the telephone books of Israel, in the registry of the Israel Dental Association, or in the government's official registry of members of the dental profession. Some of these lists were searched by both Dr. Berendt (who is himself a dental surgeon) and the representative of *Edi-Monde*, and so it is unlikely that any oversight occurred. The photograph was shown to more than eight dental surgeons in military service and in university teaching positions. None of them recognized the photograph of Samuel Morris as that of a dentist they had known. In sum, "Dr. Samuel Morris" appears to have been invented by the author of the article in *Fate*. The photograph seems to have been chosen and submitted with little thought given to congruity of detail between the photograph and the text of the article.

No Dr. Zvi Hermann was found at the National Museum or located elsewhere; nor could anyone be found with a name similar to Zvi Hermann who had known anything of the case. There was a Professor Ephraim

Auerbach in Jerusalem, but he was an expert on the Talmud, not a psychologist, and he knew nothing whatever about the case. A search of the lists of university students of archaeology in Jerusalem showed that there had never been one called Moshe Lerer. Inquiries at the headquarters of the rabbinical council elicited the information that there had never been a member of the Supreme Religious Council called Yedidia Cohen.

Finally, the tunnel or shaft (from the Spring Gihon) allegedly discovered by David Morris had been known to exist since 1867; it was more fully explored as early as 1911 (Kenyon, 1974).

When the results of these inquiries were made known to Leo Heiman, he replied that he had used pseudonyms to protect the persons concerned in the case, including the experts he had consulted. He had not, however, stated this reservation in his original article, as he might easily have done if he had consulted real experts and they had wished to remain anonymous. It sometimes happens that perpetrators of hoaxes try to insist that the persons who expose them have made a terrible mistake.

Comment. We cannot say how often journalistic hoaxes occur. It is, however, certain that more than a few slip past the scrutiny of editors of tabloid newspapers and magazines. One of us (I.S.) has had a hand in the exposure of several. In northern India, the Hindi newspapers employ stringers in towns and villages. They are not paid regular salaries but receive money for any reports they submit that are published. We have learned first of many cases in northern India through publication of reports of them in the Hindi newspapers, and when we have tried to trace a case thus reported we have usually succeeded. In three instances, however, members of our team journeyed with considerable difficulty to a somewhat remote village from whence a case had been reported in a newspaper or magazine. None of the inhabitants of these small communities had heard of the case in question, and we assume that a local reporter, succumbing to temptation and not thinking that anyone would ever take the trouble to check his report, had invented a case for the purpose of earning some extra money. Retrospectively, these cases, as reported, were atypical and slightly too good to be true; we must acknowledge, however, that we did not say that before we tried to locate and study them.

DISCUSSION

The seven cases presented here do not supply enough material for generalizations, and thus our concluding remarks can be brief.

Readers will have noticed that in five of the seven cases the previous personality was either a famous person (Mahatma Gandhi, John F. Kennedy, King David) or a prominent member of his community (Charles Christie, Parmeshwar Tiwari). One should, we think, be unusually cautious in considering claims of a subject to be the reincarnation of a well-known person. Yet, if reincarnation occurs for everyone (something we

are far from asserting, but which is possible), some of us must have been prominent persons in previous lives. It would be unjust to condemn out of hand every case with such a claim.

In the remaining two cases (Nimal Singh and Mahender Jain), the hope of reunion with a dearly loved deceased relative seems to have provided the principal motive for a person who influenced the development of a case. In one case this motive combined with cupidity of villagers, in the other with the economic distress of a widow; their desires meshed with that of the grieving person and made him a potential victim of self-deception and perhaps deception. We are not, however, suggesting that every bereaved person loses his or her capacity for critical judgment about the claims of someone to remember the life of the person he or she has lost.

Although we limit the applicability of the foregoing cautionary remarks, we think we can make one generalization of universal relevance in the study of spontaneous cases: We should always verify independently whatever the informants for the subject's side of a case tell us. Most cases that appear authentic from preliminary information stand up well to close scrutiny, but a few do not, and we cannot separate the latter from the former group except by our own careful investigations.

REFERENCES

- BELOFF, J. (1976). Review of *Cases of the Reincarnation Type. Volume I. Ten Cases in India* by I. Stevenson. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 48, 306–309.
- BERENDT, H. C. (1972). *Parapsychologie*. Stuttgart, West Germany: Verlag W. Kohlhammer.
- COOK, E. W., PASRICHA, S., SAMARARATNE, G., WIN MAUNG, U., & STEVENSON, I. (1983a). A review and analysis of "unsolved" cases of the reincarnation type: I. Introduction and illustrative case reports. *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, 77, 45–62.
- COOK, E. W., PASRICHA, S., SAMARARATNE, G., WIN MAUNG, U., & STEVENSON, I. (1983b). A review and analysis of "unsolved" cases of the reincarnation type: II. Comparison of features of solved and unsolved cases. *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, 77, 115–135.
- EDITORS. (1969). Postscript to a disaster. *Fate*, 22(11), 75–79.
- HEIMAN, L. (1968). A boy 3,000 years old? *Fate*, 21(1), 32–43.
- KENYON, K. M. (1974). *Digging up Jerusalem*. London: Ernest Benn.
- NAIR, P. (1956). *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*. Ahmedabad, India: Navajivan Publishing House.
- NORBU, T. J., & TURNBULL, C. M. (1969). *Tibet*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of John F. Kennedy*. (1964). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

- STEVENSON, I. (1974). *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation* (2nd rev. ed.). Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.
- STEVENSON, I. (1975). *Cases of the Reincarnation Type. Volume I. Ten Cases in India*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.
- STEVENSON, I. (1977). *Cases of the Reincarnation Type. Volume II. Ten Cases in Sri Lanka*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.
- STEVENSON, I. (1980). *Cases of the Reincarnation Type. Volume III. Twelve Cases in Lebanon and Turkey*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.
- STEVENSON, I., PALMER, J., & STANFORD, R. G. (1977). An authenticity rating scale for reports of spontaneous cases. *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, 71, 273–288.

Department of Behavioral Medicine and Psychiatry
Division of Personality Studies
Box 152, Medical Center
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, Virginia 22908
(I.S.)

Department of Clinical Psychology
National Institute of Mental Health
and Neurosciences (NIMHANS)
Bangalore 560 029
India
(S.P.)

145 Peradeniya Road
Kandy, Sri Lanka
(G.S.)