

# Rebirth in Theravāda Buddhism and Dr. Ian Stevenson's Research Study



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## ABSTRACT

Although Buddhism has become increasingly popular in the West, we should focus on using the ideas of rebirth and *kamma*, the language spoken by the Buddha (Sanskrit: *karma*) as an additional means to enhance moral education and spiritual development. The purpose of this article is to discuss the concepts of rebirth in *Theravāda* Buddhism and Dr. Ian Stevenson's research study. First, the author explains the terminology and definitions related to rebirth according to the Buddha's teaching. The article discusses Dr. Ian Stevenson's research work relating to memories of previous lives, his research methods and the results. I also present the opinion of Dr. Ian Stevenson and other researchers on belief in rebirth and scientific investigation. This article suggests an application of the concept of rebirth for use in peaceful living.

*Keywords:* rebirth, reincarnation, *kamma*, *samsāra*

## Introduction

While the idea of cyclic rebirth or *samsāra* in Buddhism, does not sit well with the Western scientific point of view, the rebirth process is like the transference of a flame from one candle to the other. Though one candle ceases to exist, the fire is never extinguished.<sup>1</sup> The concepts of rebirth and *kamma* are so central to Buddhist theory and practice. The idea of rebirth prevailed from the Vedic period prior to the emergence of Buddhism, which however, changed rebirth into a new dimension in the teaching of the Buddha. The Buddha stated that rebirth is continuous process of change, so that we are not only reborn at the time of death, but we are also reborn at every moment. Birth and death are one process. Death is followed by immediate rebirth in accordance with a law known as the law of causality.<sup>2</sup>

All beings are subject to impermanence. We cannot escape the cycle of death and rebirth until we obtain enlightenment. According to *Theravāda* Buddhism, the doctrines of *kamma* and rebirth not only change circumstances in the world, but also reverberate internally in each person and change their future circumstances of existence in this and in other lives. Beings are born into a particular realm according to both their past *kamma* and their *kamma* at the moment of death.<sup>3</sup> Dying and being reborn are two of the symptoms of ordinary, cyclic existence (*samsāra*), the state of continuously recurring problems, dissatisfaction, and non-freedom which all of us are caught in.<sup>4</sup> The person who has perfected his or her insight and abandoned all defilements is an *arahant*, one who is liberated from the cycle of *samsāra*.

I will introduce the work of the best known Western scientific researcher of reincarnation, Professor Ian Stevenson, M.D., psychiatrist and chairman of the Department of Psychiatry and Neurology at the University of Virginia, who investigated over 3,000 cases in many countries around the world of children who claimed to have lived before.

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<sup>1</sup>Chien-Te Lin & Wei-Hung Yen. **On the naturalization of karma and rebirth**. Accessed June 09,2015.<https://international.journaldharmastudies.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40613-015-0016-2>.

<sup>2</sup>Ven.Suvanno Mahathera, **The Thirty-One Planes of Existence** (Penang : An Inward Journey Book, 2001), P.6.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p.21.

<sup>4</sup>Sangye Khadro, **Preparing for Death and Helping the Dying**(Singapore : Kong Meng San Phor Kark Monastery Publication, Art & Design Department, 2003), p.8.

His scientific methods included recording the child's recollection of people or events and then comparing their account to the accounts of others, which served as independent evidence of the accuracy of the claimed memories.<sup>5</sup>

## Rebirth in *Theravāda* Buddhism

Rebirth is a central tenet of the majority of Indian religions, whose followers believe that it occurs in lifetime after lifetime. According to the Buddhist commentary, the Buddha taught a concept of rebirth that was distinct from that of any contemporary Indian teacher.<sup>6</sup> The word “rebirth” in Hinduism is reincarnation that is akin to transmigration of souls but in Buddhism there is no eternal soul or self to reincarnate. The Buddha stated that: there is no irreducible atman or self, that all compounded things are subject to dissolution, including all the components of the human person and personality. At the death of one personality, a new one comes into being much as the flame of a dying candle can be used to light the flame of another.<sup>7</sup>

Buddhists believe in *kamma*, the law of causation that the predominant thoughts, memories, and desires play an important role in influencing the course of next birth. According to the Buddha's doctrine of *kamma*, it *maintains* the aspect of intentional action (*cetanā-kamma*). Intentional action is the primary factor which determines suffering (*dukkha*) or happiness (*sukha*) for the doer in this lifetime and future. The doctrine of *kamma* and rebirth has been originated and plays an important role in Buddhist ethics and individual moral responsibility. The Buddha realized this doctrine through two first insights on the night of his Awakening. The doctrine of *kamma* and its result could be related to the ripening of some other deed from the distant past. In *Theravāda* Buddhism, the concept of rebirth refers to its teaching that the actions of a person lead to a new existence after death, in

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<sup>5</sup>Helen, De Cruz,Ryan, Nichols.ed., **Advances in Religion, Cognitive Science, and Experimental Philosophy**(New York USA : Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), p.9.

<sup>6</sup>Swami Anand, Siddhartha, **World Encyclopaedia of Interfaith Studies: Other religions- Philosophy and religion, Volume 5** (Jnanada Prakashan, 2009), p.1330.

<sup>7</sup>Jim B. Tucker, M.D., **Life Before Life: A Scientific Investigation of Children's Memories of Previous Lives** (USA,St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2005), p.216.

endless cycles called *samsāra*.<sup>8</sup> This cycle is *dukkha*, unsatisfactory and painful. The cycle stops only if liberation is achieved by insight and the extinguishing of desire.<sup>9</sup> The goal of the Buddhist path is release from the round of rebirth, *samsāra*, with its inherent suffering to attain *nibbāna*, an enlightened state in which the fires of greed, hatred, and ignorance have been quenched.

## **Karma and Rebirth in the Buddhist view**

According to Buddhism, the Buddha dedicated himself for many years to study the causes of unhappiness to attain enlightenment and earn freedom from suffering. In *Apappnaka Jataka: Crossing the Wilderness*, the Buddha proclaimed that: “.... I practiced the Ten Perfections for countless aeons....” He also said:

“When the mind was thus concentrated, purified, bright, unblemished, rid of defilement, pliant, malleable, steady, & attained to imperturbability, I directed it to the knowledge of recollecting my past lives. I recollected my manifold past lives, i.e., one birth, two... five, ten... fifty, a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand, many eons of cosmic contraction, many eons of cosmic expansion, many eons of cosmic contraction & expansion:

‘There I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of pleasure & pain, such the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I reappeared there. There too I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of pleasure & pain, such the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I reappeared here.’ Thus, I remembered my manifold past lives in their modes & details.

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<sup>8</sup>Peter Harvey, **An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices** (Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 32–33.

<sup>9</sup>Norman C. McClelland (2010), **Encyclopedia of Reincarnation and Karma** (McFarland. McFarland & Company: April 1, 2010), pp. 226–228.

“This was the first knowledge I attained in the first watch of the night. Ignorance was destroyed; knowledge arose; darkness was destroyed; light arose—as happens in one who is heedful, ardent, & resolute.”<sup>10</sup>

The Buddha said that life is impermanent, and that birth and death do not indicate the end of everything. The doctrine of *karma*, the law of cause and effect produces effects or bears results. They are classified as good and evil, right and wrong, just and unjust, depending on the intent of the doer.<sup>11</sup>

*Kamma* can be seen in the first two insights on the night of the Buddha’s Awakening—remembrance of previous lives, and insight into the death and rebirth of beings throughout the cosmos.<sup>12</sup> The Buddha taught that death and rebirth for all beings, in which the quality of the state of rebirth depends on the moral quality of actions performed in previous lifetimes, presented the possibility that moral standards, instead of being mere social conventions, were intrinsic to the workings of any and all experience of the cosmos. And the Buddha’s second insight was the mind’s role in determining the moral quality of actions. The less greed, aversion, and delusion motivating the act, the better its results. Unintentional acts would have *kammic* consequences only when they resulted from carelessness in areas where one would reasonably be held responsible. Intentional actions performed under the influence of right views—which on this level means conviction in the principle of *kamma* led inherently to pleasant states of rebirth, while those performed under the influence of wrong views led to unpleasant states. The Buddha found that it was impossible to bring *kamma* to an end by developing the skillfulness of the mind. Buddha taught that mental bondage was stronger than physical bondage. When there is ignorance, a subtle form of delusion, the most basic root of unskillfulness, the feeling that results from *karma* gives rise to craving (a subtle form of greed and aversion), clinging, and becoming; and these, in turn, form the conditions for further *kamma*. If ignorance can be ended, however, feeling

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<sup>10</sup> MN 19.

<sup>11</sup> Thupten Ten.zing, “Karma and Rebirth in Buddhism”, **Bulletin of Tibetology**. Accessed September 18, 2019. [http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/bot/pdf/bot\\_1996\\_01\\_02.pdf](http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/bot/pdf/bot_1996_01_02.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Thanissaro Bhikkhu (Geoffrey DeGraff), Translated and Explained, **The Wings to Awakening: An Anthology from the Pali Canon** (Cover Art © Art Matrix. Seventh edition, revised: 2013), p.46.

does not form a condition for craving or clinging, and thus there is no becoming to provide a realm for further *kamma*<sup>13</sup>. The Buddha expressed the right views to provide an entry point into the analysis of *kamma* directly on the question of stress and suffering: issues that tie in with what people make of their own life experiences. The ignorance and craving are subtle forms of the roots of unskillfulness.

In Buddhist views, life is considered with *samsāra*, wandering or an unceasing cycle of living and dying, implying that individuals experience death innumerable times, both in the past and the future. Ven. Sayadaw U Silanandabhidhivamsa pointed out that the Buddha taught us what was real. He said rebirth was suffering and to get rid of all mental defilements is the way that leads to the end of suffering and rebirth.<sup>14</sup>

## Rebirth and Dr. Ian Stevenson's research study

Dr. Ian Stevenson began studying children who claim to remember previous lives, an endeavor that will surely be remembered as the primary focus of his life's work—almost by accident.<sup>15</sup> Stevenson's research began in 1960 in Sri Lanka where a child reported remembering a past life. Some of the children have birthmarks and birth defects that correspond to wounds or other marks on the deceased person. They are, however, also found in other areas of the world, and Stevenson has also studied many cases in Europe and North America.<sup>16</sup>

We see young children in many parts of the world, usually between the ages of 2 and 5, speak about a previous life they claim to have lived. Most of them often show behavior that seems concordant with the child's statements about their previous lives, such as a phobia, that is unusual in their family. It cannot be explained by any current life events.

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid, p.50.

<sup>14</sup>Venerable Sayadaw U Silanandabhidhivamsa, **A Talk of Kamma, Rebirth and Suffering**, Given to The International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University. at 9:30 a.m. on the 13th March, 1999. <https://www.budsas.org/ebud/ebdha225.htm>.

<sup>15</sup>JIM B. TUCKER, “Ian Stevenson and Cases of the Reincarnation Type”, **Journal of Scientific Exploration, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2008**, p. 36., Accessed September 18, 2017. [https://www.scientificexploration.org/docs/22/jse\\_22\\_1\\_tucker.pdf](https://www.scientificexploration.org/docs/22/jse_22_1_tucker.pdf).

<sup>16</sup>Baca juga, **Past Life Research, University of Virginia**. Accessed April 16, 2019. <https://edukasipresentime.blogspot.com/2009/03/past-life-research-university-of.html>.

Researches on claimed memories of previous lives by children around the world appeared sporadically in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including small series of cases.<sup>17</sup> Here are some cases studied by Dr. Stevenson:

## The Case of *Sukla*

*Sukla*, daughter of *Sri K. N. Sen Gupta* a railway worker, was born in March 1954 in the village of *Kampa*, West Bengal. When she was about a year and a half old, barely able to talk, she used to cradle a pillow and call it “*Minu, Minu*,” and said it was her daughter. Three years later, *Sukla* recalled events in her previous life in which she indicated *Minu* was her daughter. *Sukla* often talked about her daughter and also about her husband, the father of *Minu*. She also spoke of the younger brothers of her husband, *Khetu* and *Karuna*. They all lived, she said, at *Rathtala* in *Bhatpara*. *Sukla*’s family, the *Guptas*, knew little about *Bhatpar*, only that it was a city about 11 miles south. And they had never heard of a place called *Rathtala*, nor of the people *Sukla* had named.

*Sukla*’s desire to go there grew, and she insisted that she could go by herself if her parents did not take her. Her father mentioned it to one of his railway co-workers, S.C.Pal, an assistant station master who lived near *Bhatpara* and had two cousins there. He learned from his cousins that *Bhatpara* indeed had a district called *Rathtala* and knew that a man there named *Khetu*. *Khetu* had a sister-in-law named *Mana* who had died several years before, in 1948, leaving behind an infant daughter named *Minu*. *Sen Gupta* decided to investigate further. He arranged for a visit to *Rathtala* with the consent of that family and *Sukla* said that she could show the way to the house. So in 1959, when *Sukla* was about five, *Sen Gupta* and five other members of his family journeyed with her to *Bhatapra*.

When they arrived, *Sukla* took the lead and brought them straight to the house of Amritlal Chakravarty, her supposed father-in-law in her past life. Chakravarty happened to be out on the street at the time the party approached. *Sukla* looked down shyly when she saw him, which is the usual custom for a young woman in the presence of older male relative. But when *Sukla* went to the house she was confused and did not seem to be at

<sup>17</sup> Stevenson, I. (1960a), **The evidence for survival from claimed memories of former incarnations, Part I. Review of the data.** Accessed June 05, 2019. <https://med.virginia.edu/perceptual-studies/book-publication/the-evidence-for-survival-from-claimed-memories-of-former-incarnations/>.

the right entrance. Because after the death of *Mana* (*Sukla*'s name in her previous life), the entrance had been moved from the main street to an ally on the side. The party soon found that *Sukla* recognized not only the house, but also the people in it, including those she said were her mother-in-law, her brother in law, her husband and her daughter. Inside the house, *Sukla* found herself in a room with some 20 to 30 people. She correctly indicated Chakravarty when she was asked.<sup>18</sup>

### **The case of *Swarnlata***

*Swarnlata* is the daughter of *Sri M.L. Mishra*, Assistant in the office of the district inspector of schools, *Chhatarpur, Madhya Pradesh*. She was born on March 2, 1948. When she was three and three and a half years old, her family lived in *Panna*, in *Madhya Pradesh*. *Swarnlata* was travelling with her father to *Jabalpur* which lies about 170 miles south of *Panna*. As passing through the city of *Katni* (57 miles north of *Jabalpur*), she suddenly asked the driver to turn down a road to take them to 'my house' for a cup of tea. In the time that followed *Swarnlata* related more memories of her life in *Katni*, all recorded by her father. She declared that her name was *Biya Pathak*, and she was married with *Sri Chintamini Pande* of *Maihar*, the town north of *Katni*. *Biya* had died in 1939. *Swarnlata* later told that she was reborn as one *Kamlesh* in *Sylhet*, Assam (now in Bangladesh) and she died at nine years old. Then she was reborn in the *Mishra* family. *Swarnlata* can sing and dance in Bengali style. She can remember specific details about the house in which she lived. It was white with black doors, a railway line in front and a girl's school behind, and located in *Zhurkutia*, a district of *Katni*. She said the family owned a motor car, which was a particularly significant claim as cars were rare in India in the 1950s and especially before *Swarnlata* was born. When she was 10 years old, the researchers came to see *Swarnlata* to check if her claims could be verified and used the notes taken by her father. The researchers were able to locate the house 100 miles away which was exactly described by *Swarnlata*. They interviewed the *Pathak* family to confirm that *Biya Pathak* had indeed lived in the house, with her husband and her sons, and had died in 1939.

*Biya*'s husband with his son and eldest brother travelled to *Swarnlata*'s home to test her in the summer 1959. *Swarnlata* immediately greeted him with his pet name and

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<sup>18</sup>Ian Stevenson, M.D. **Twenty Cases Suggestion of Reincarnation**, Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged (USA: University Press of Virginia,Charlottesville,1980), pp.52-67.

recognised her brother and named her husband. She acted according to Hindu tradition in lowering her eyes to greet him. She could remember that when she died, her son was only 13 years old. She remembered *Biya*'s gold fillings in her front teeth and the details of the room in which *Biya* died that were secrets between *Biya* and her husband. *Swarnlata* did not know about the changing in the family after *Biya*'s death. The *Pathak* family accepted *Swarnlata* as *Biya* reborn and continued to visit each other for many years. According to Stevenson, when he asked her years later that she said she wished she could return and she reminisced about her happy life in *Katni*, and her eyes brimmed with tears for a moment.<sup>19</sup>

### **The case of *Wijeratne Hami***

*H.A. Wijeratne* was born in the village of *Uggalkaltota*, Sri Lanka on January 17, 1947. He was born with a marked deformity of his right breast and arm which they attributed in a general way to some *karma* from a previous life. When he was two, or two and a half, he began to walk around the house and talked to himself. His mother heard that this was because he had murdered his wife in his previous life and mentioned more details about the crime. Her husband, *Wijeratne*'s father, *H.A. Tileratane Hami*, then told her for the first time about his younger brother, *Ratran Hami*, who had been executed in 1928 for the murder of his wife, *Podi Menike* in a neighboring village. He said he thought the child's statements referred to this event, and this was confirmed by investigators on the basis of interviews and court documents.

*Wijeratne*'s father tried to stop *Wijeratne* from talking about his previous life but he persisted in doing so, often. When he was about five and a half years old, he stopped speaking about his previous life unless asked to do so. The crime and execution of *Ratran Hami* took place between 1927-1928, 7 years before *Wijeratne*'s father and mother married. During his trial *Ratran* had argued he had not intended to kill his wife, but following his conviction accepted that he had to die for the crime. *Wijeratne* told an investigator that he (as *Ratran*) had committed the murder and expressed no contrition, saying that in a similar situation he would do the same again. He regarded the deformity as a just punishment for his behavior but thought he had acted correctly as a husband should. After the judge passed sentence of execution on *Ratran Hami*, his elder brother, *Wijeratne*'s father went

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid, pp.67-91.

to him and asked him how he felt. *Ratran Hami* said he was not afraid, and he knew that he would have to die. He also said he was only worried about him, and he would return. *Wijeratne* considered that the malformed arm with which he was born was a punishment for the murder of his wife, *Podi Menike*.

*Wijeratne* also referred to the destruction of many lives, not just the single life of the murdered person. One of these was that he was a bird. He said that he had felt light in weight at the time. Stevenson reported that both the presumptive precipitating factor of *Wijeratne*'s psychosis and the delusion of being a bird during it may have some connection with his memories of a previous life. Furthermore, Mr. V.F. Guneratne, Mr. Francis Story, and Mr. E.C. Raddalgoda all said they remembered that *Wijeratne*, had said that during the long interval between the death of *Ratran Hami* in 1928 and the birth of *Wijeratne* in 1947 (eighteen and a half years), he had passed at least some of his time reborn as a bird. *Wijeratne* had never specially said that he had been a bird but after dropping into the pit of fire following the execution of *Ratran Hami*. He said he had flitted through the air and perched on treetops. All observers had assumed that *Wijeratne* was referring to an “intermediate” life as a bird.

According to Dr. Stevenson, he mentioned that he reached this case 12 years after *Wijeratne* first began talking about his past life. He also said that since *Ratran Hami*'s brother expected him to be reborn as his son, we could easily believe that he might then have influenced *Wijeratne* although unconsciously toward an identification with his dead brother.<sup>20</sup>

## **The Case of *Ranjith Makalanda***

*Ranjith Makalanda* was born in 1942 in *Kotte*, Sri Lanka. He is the seventh child of a Sinhalese family. When *Ranjith* was less than two years old his father, Mr. *Makalamadage Sam de Silva*, noticed his sign of unusually strong memory and traits that were more characteristic of English people than of Sinhalese children.

His family spoke both English and Sinhalese and the children had an opportunity to learn both. But *Ranjith* was able learn earlier and better than any of the other children. His father noticed that *Ranjith*'s habits were unfamiliar among Sinhalese people. *Ranjith*

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid, pp.149-169.

did not eat rice in Sinhalese style but threw the grains into his mouth. He enjoyed eating bread spread more liberally with butter and handled it in the English style. When he ate in a hotel, he used a knife and fork skillfully unlike his siblings, who found this difficult. When he was three years, his father heard him telling his mother and siblings that they were not his family, which was in England. He named two brothers as Tom and Jim, and a sister as Margaret. He could not remember his father's name in his previous life but he said his father worked on big steamers. His house was on a top of a hill without other houses close by. He described feeling cold, and the appearance of ice outside which was picked up by horse-drawn wagons (neither of which he could have seen in Sri Lanka). Eventually he went for a while to live and work in England. He also had an intense love of flying: in adulthood he speculated that he had been a British airplane pilot who had been killed in an airplane crash near *Kotte*, where the RAF had a base.

This case suggests prominent behavioral features and claim by the child who remembered his previous life even with insufficient details for verification, and such cases occur not uncommonly in Europe and also in the United States.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Case of *Einar Jonsson***

Einar Jonsson was born on July 25, 1969, in Reykjavik, Iceland. He was the only child and when he was a year and a half old, he talked about a man on a tractor, Harald, his half-brother who had died. He said that he had another mother and cried often. He wanted to see "his real mother". He also spoke about life in the country and his grandfather in his previous life. He said, "now my grandmother is baking," or "my grandfather is cutting grass". He said he had a big brother and described a big mountain in the countryside. He was very shy and lived with his single mother, Helga Haraldsdottir, and his grandparents.

According to Dr. Stevenson, he was informed about this case by Geir Vilhjalmsson's letter and asked Dr. Erlendur Haraldsson to investigate it. Dr. Haraldsson reported that he interviewed Einar's parents when Einar was four years old. He was very shy and did not respond to his questions. Einar rejected his mother, Helga Haraldsdottir and did not welcome his father, Jon Nielsson when he came to see him. Einar had said that he had playmates at his nursery school, but he never mentioned that he had two fathers.

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid, pp.171-174.

Einar was born on July 25 and Harald's death was on July 18, 1969, so there were only seven days between Harald's death and Einar's birth. It is an extremely short intermission time for a Western case. Stevenson and Erlendur visited the farm in 1999 and saw a mountain behind the farmhouse. Some of Einar's statements were very specific such as the broken boat that was kept some distance away from the farm and a man with a limp, also about the unusual, shaped mountain behind the farm.<sup>22</sup>

## The Case of *Chaokhun Rajsuthajarn*

Nai Leng was born in 1863 in Ban Kraton village, Surin Province in Thailand near the border of Cambodia. His parents had 7 children and Leng was the eldest son in the family. He studied Khmer language in the temple, and he could read and write in that language. When he was nineteen years old, he taught Khmer language to the Buddhist monks in the temple. After that, he decided to be a farmer and sell some products. He travelled many years between Lao and Thailand so he knew Lao language very well. After he married at nineteen years old, he had three children. He was a good Buddhist and practiced meditation every night.

Lian, Leng's younger sister married and had ten children. When she was nineteen years old, she conceived her third child. During pregnancy, she ordained as a Buddhist nun and stayed in Wat Takieng. Before giving birth, she came back to her house. Leng was sick and died in October 1908 after Chaokhun Rajsuthajarn was born a day. Chaokhun Rajsuthajarn claimed to have been Leng in his previous life and he said that he attended the funeral ceremony of Nai Leng who died. He stated that he tried to interact with the guests in the ceremony, but nobody saw him. He also said he seemed to move very easy from place to place and he had a sense of lightness. He mentioned Nai Leng, his mother's brother, that he remembered his death and delivered then he found himself in a helpless position. As soon as he could talk, he called his grandmother "mother", but he did not call his mother "mother" because he still remembered that she was his younger sister. He called her by a pet name he had called his sister. As soon as he could talk, he called his grandmother "mother", and his mother by a pet name he had called his sister. His family accepted that he was Nai Leng reborn, but tried to make him forget his previous life. Chaokhun Rajsuthajarn

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<sup>22</sup> Ian Stevenson, M.d., **European Cases of the Reincarnation Type** (London: Mcfarland & Company Inc. Publishers, 2001), pp.126-128.

died in 1976 and he was a highly respected monk in Thailand. According to Stevenson, he commented that this case was extremely rare in Buddhist countries, and he studied it with much care but couldn't find an explanation for the discrepancy.”<sup>23</sup>

## Dr. Ian Stevenson's process of study

Stevenson's scientific method focused on the investigation of the spontaneous cases involving children who reported memories of previous lives mostly between two and four years of age and usually stopped speaking about such memories between five and seven.<sup>24</sup>

Stevenson strictly adhered to scientific methods and stayed on the evidence, not accepting any conjecture, in order to maintain the scientific veracity of his data. He implied by exploration, including the collection and interpretation of data. As the first step, he conducted a series of interviews with the subject, then with members of his or her family, parents, and siblings. Furthermore, he collected available firsthand testimonies of other people including with relatives, neighbors and researchers about the subject's statements and the behavior claimed to be remembered from a past life.<sup>25</sup> He also investigated birthmarks and birth defects and all evidence with detailed descriptions, drawings, and photographs. Stevenson interviewed the family of the claimed previous person, dates, existing records, such as birth certificates, identity cards, personal journals, and so forth. He documented all facts and events related to the interaction between the two families.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, Stevenson in his scientific research tried to specifically address deep questions about the nature of human consciousness, both during and after life, and this should have a powerful impact on the religious beliefs and spiritual well-being of the people. Moreover,

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<sup>23</sup> Stevenson, Ian. **Cases of the Reincarnation Type. Volume 4 - Twelve Cases in Thailand and Burma.** (University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA., 1983), pp.174-177.

<sup>24</sup> Tucker, J. B. (2007). Children who claim to remember previous lives: Past, present, and future research, **Journal of Scientific Exploration, Volume 21, Issue 3**, pp.543-552.

<sup>25</sup> Sergei Slavoutski. “Is the Reincarnation Hypothesis Advanced by Stevenson for Spontaneous Past-life Experiences Relevant for the Understanding of the Ontology of Past-life Phenomena?”. International Journal of Transpersonal Studies. Volume 31, Issue 1. 1-1-2012, p.86.

<sup>26</sup> Stevenson, I. (1977), “The explanatory value of the idea of reincarnation”. **Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, Volume 164, Issue 5**, p.324.

not only on trying to recall something that took place in the past, but already at the time when something is experienced that is to be memorized, information is not simply taken in. Rather, information is stored in the mind together with inferences, and often enough one is not aware of the fact of having drawn such inferences.<sup>27</sup> Stevenson's work is rooted in between science and religion and that open-minded empirical inquiry is leading us inexorably to an expanded conception of the nature of human personality, particularly if the research becomes more widely known.<sup>28</sup>

## Conclusion

According to Buddhism, *samsāra* is the wheel of life and being reborn again and again is suffering. From a Buddhist point of view, liberation from *samsāra* is possible by following the fourth noble truths, *Dhukka*, *Samudāya*, *Nirodha* and *Magga*. The Buddhist theory of rebirth and *kamma* holds that we are what we do and that *kamma* follows a person like a shadow. We may not have physical evidence for the existence of rebirth, but it is implied that rebirth is more or less reasonable or logical.

Modern science has its limitations when it comes to interpreting axiological issues such as the meaning or purpose of life, but we must accept the changeable in the modern world. Even science contributes a lot to solve puzzles pertaining to the physical realm, but its methods are not suitable for analyzing.<sup>29</sup> In modern times, belief in rebirth plays an important role in western countries, according to Professor Stevenson, who studied children who claim to remember previous lives for more than 40 years from 1960. He methodically documented the child's statements in each case and identified the deceased person's life that matched the child's memory and believed that his strict methods ruled out all possible "normal" explanations for children's memories. Rebirth serves as a possible explanation

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<sup>27</sup>Bhikkhu Anālayo, **Rebirth In Early Buddhism & Current Research** (MA 02144. USA. Wisdom Publication, 2018), pp.82-83.

<sup>28</sup>Edward F. Kelly and Emily Williams Kelly, "Where Science and Religion Intersect: The Work of Ian Stevenson", **Journal of Scientific Exploration**, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2008, pp.75-76. Accessed April 19, 2015. <https://pdfs.semanticscholars.org/bc78/2065a414356f12b326607926df04324bacc6.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup>Chien-Te Lin & Wei-Hung Yen, **On the naturalization of karma and rebirth**. Accessed June 09/2015. <https://international-journaldharmastudies.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40613-015-0016-2>.

for the young children about two years of age who talked about their previous lives. Moreover, there are other types of evidence including strange behavioral characteristics and xenoglossy, ability in another language spoken in the past life and some types of birthmarks or birth defect. Stevenson's research work is widely accepted in the scientific community in the modern period. The doctrine of rebirth in *Theravāda* Buddhism can be explained by reasoning with scientific research methods as Dr. Stevenson conducted to support as well.

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