The Mystery of Reincarnation (2)

Two Reincarnational Dramas

In the light of what we have discussed in the previous unit we can at least begin to understand the cosmic situation in which human beings find themselves, such that, according to esoteric sources, reincarnation is a necessary aspect of humanity's spiritual evolution. One of two things—depending on which of the two theories of how life on human life on earth began, whether it came about as a result of a natural evolutionary process (please keep in mind what was said earlier regarding what this means), or whether it was the result of a "fall"—is the case. Either the soul of a person has not matured sufficiently, so that further incarnations on Earth are required in order for it to attain the level of spiritual maturity required in order to pass, permanently, to higher levels of the cosmos, or one's soul is still experiencing the consequences of having lost the awareness of its spiritual identity which came about as the result of this "fall." Therefore it must continue to incarnate on Earth until it has attained a sufficient measure of its lost spiritual awareness.

(It should be remembered that we are, at this point, still omitting all considerations of group-souls and the possible unreality of time. Once these are factored in, the entire reincarnation process will be seen to be much more complex than is indicated in the paragraph above.)

For our purposes, it is of no consequence which of the two reincarnational scenarios is the true one. For, in either case, reincarnation is for the purpose of offering opportunities for the soul to learn what is needed in order for spiritual growth to occur. The word "opportunities" has been emphasized in order to make the point that regardless of how many times one (whatever this "one" is—an issue discussed below) reincarnates, there is by no means any guarantee that it will take advantage of this opportunity.

In the previous unit (p. 3), one of the items included in the description of the esoteric view of reincarnation was the following distinction between "young" and "old" souls:

An immature ("Young") soul ordinarily views reality primarily—if not exclusively—in terms of the needs and interests of the personal ego, since it is, while incarnate, relatively unaware of, and, therefore, unconcerned about, the needs and interests of the soul. A mature ("Old") soul, being intuitively more aware of its spiritual nature, attempts to attend to the needs of the soul—which it now perceives to be its true identity. (This, of course, is a matter of degree; a totally "mature" soul would do this completely, but it would seem that very few persons who are incarnate at a particular time are manifestations of a totally mature soul.)
The expression "the needs and interests of the personal ego" stands in need of clarification. According to esoteric sources, the fundamental error made by human beings is their false identification with the specific person as which, in any particular incarnation, they manifest. Because they make this identification, they quite understandably experience their lives from the perspective of this person. And the degree to which they do so is a function of what we have referred to as their spiritual maturity; that is, the degree to which they identify with the outlook of their specific personhood or, as we shall say, for convenience, their persona. An extremely spiritually immature person (soul?) cannot see beyond his/her own needs and interests. It recognizes no needs and interests of others as having any legitimacy. Between such a person and persons who regard their needs and interests as having no greater claim to being satisfied than those of anyone else, and who, as a basis for their view of themselves and others, believe that all human beings--and indeed, all living things--are One, there are, of course, many gradations.

According to esoteric sources, these gradations represent differing stages of spiritual evolution. Persons who have no concept of spiritual evolution and may not even believe in the existence of a trans-personal level of selfhood (such as belief in the "soul"), can not provide any explanation of these differences other than to shrug their shoulders and say that "People are different," and perhaps account for these differences by referring to "nature" and/or "nurture." (Of course, by "nature" they do not mean spiritual nature; they mean something much more mundane, usually genetics.) What else can they do if they have what we referred to earlier as a one-dimensional view of reality--and of human selfhood?

Persons who have a religious perspective do operate with a two-dimensional view of reality and selfhood, but if they do not also believe in reincarnation they will, I believe, find it difficult to explain how human beings can be so very different, different with respect to what they think is important, different in their attitudes towards other persons and other living things, different in how they live their lives. How, if an omnipotent, omniscient, all-loving God created all things, can one person be a sociopath and another a saint? In attempting to answer these questions, many persons resort to the notion of free-will.

Of course, they may point out that human beings have free will, and they can attribute any differences of the sort we are discussing to use and, in many cases, mis-use, of free will by different persons. Esoteric sources would agree that how we exercise our free-will is crucially important in how we live our lives. (It is also, they maintain, crucially important with respect to what happens to us in future lives.) But they would ask: is one's use of free-will in one's present life the only variable to be considered here? Are all human beings who, when they are born, really at the same stage of spiritual development? They maintain that it is much more reasonable to speak of differences in the spiritual maturity attained.
by different persons, differences which have resulted from their use of their free-will in many incarnations.

Let us at this point pause to raise a basic question, a question which many no doubt believe should have been asked earlier. Esoteric sources insist that reincarnation is a reality. **But is there any sound basis for believing that reincarnation does, in fact, occur?** Many people who believe in reincarnation do so because, and only because, they live in cultures in which reincarnation is an integral aspect of the religious belief system endemic to that culture. For these people, reincarnation is a belief accepted on faith, just as, for Christians, certain claims of their religion, for example the divinity of Jesus, are accepted on faith. Is there any more substantial reason for believing that reincarnation does occur?

What seems to be the best available evidence for this is that some people, frequently in some kind of altered state of consciousness--such as hypnosis--(though, in some cases, even without this) have memories of **having lived before.** Some of these memories are so detailed, as well as verifiably accurate, that it is beyond doubt that there is some sort of connection between the consciousness of the person who has these memories and the consciousness of someone who has lived "before." ***

***However, the kind of connection may not be, in some cases at least, as straightforward as it is usually taken to be. We will discuss this issue in due course.

In the remainder of this unit, two examples of such cases will be presented. The first of these is taken from **Across Death and Time (1994)** by Jenny Cockell. This account is especially interesting because Cockell had very precise memories of what seemed to be a past life at a very early age. (As an adult she underwent hypnotic regression on a number of occasions and remembered even more.) Indeed, she seems to have come into the world (in 1953) with these memories, although it was much later that she was able to confirm them--as she was, in fact, able to do. It is an extremely interesting account, both humanly and from the point of view of what it contributes to our understanding of the reality of reincarnation.

It is unclear exactly when she began to do so, but the very first sentence of her book is, "**In childhood, my dreams were swamped by memories of Mary's death.**" (p. 1) She does not say whether, at the very onset of her memories, she knew that this woman's name was "Mary," but from the way she presents it, she did. However, It was only later that she discovered that Mary's surname was "Sutton." Jenny was born only twenty-one years after Mary died in 1932, barely a generation; which may, in part, explain the vivid memories she had of Mary's life. Another reason for this is that Jenny was psychically gifted, and so may have had access to levels of her consciousness inaccessible to most people.
Just how different Jenny was is shown in a charming episode which occurred when she was barely four years old, Jenny had been to Sunday school with an older brother. When she returned, her mother asked her if she enjoyed going there. Jenny says that she had, but adds, "I said I couldn't understand why, if they were going to talk about life and death, they didn't mention the other lives." And she adds,

On that day I discovered that reincarnation—the name for what I was experiencing—was considered a belief, not a fact. Furthermore, it was a belief not generally accepted in Britain. This revelation—that my truth was not a truth in everyone else's eyes, and that I was different—was a great shock to me, and caused me to worry and constantly question myself. (p. 12)

Nonetheless, Jenny did not believe that she was mistaken about the reality of her memories. They were, she was sure, memories, not dreams or fantasies.

The primary emotion Jenny felt in connection with Mary's death was not the act of dying, but the guilt Mary experienced at leaving behind her numerous children. This emotion was inherited by Jenny, for she experienced it very deeply, even as a child.

One of the strongest emotions I remember was a sense of guilt. I knew that I had escaped from a bad situation, but in doing so had left the children on their own. It was a release not sought, but forced upon me, yet the sense of guilt and responsibility remained. I was only a child, but my mind was dominated by a confusion of emotions that would have been difficult even for an adult to cope with. (p. 2)

Regarding the issue of leaving the children "on their own," apparently Mary's husband was unwilling or unable to care for them. They were placed in orphanages. Jenny is herself puzzled about Mary's husband, having no clear memories of him except early in his and Mary's relationship. About him she says,

Later he seemed to be at home less and less. He did not even seem to play a part in her thoughts for the children's future in those awful dreams of dying. Yet I felt sure that he lived on after that. (p. 20)

In the first few pages of Across Time and Death Jenny describes in considerable detail her memories of her children, the specific location and description of the house in which they lived, the town in which their house was situated, and many other details related to her life as Mary Sutton. These memories seem to have been available to her at an early age, though, initially,
many aspects of her memories were vague, But even as a child, Jenny made a rough sketch of the town where Mary lived, the location of the house with respect to the center of town, and other pertinent details—which later were shown to be correct—and she said about Mary,

I have always known that the period of time involved was roughly 1898 to the 1930s—that this was the span of Mary’s life. I also knew that her life was lived in Ireland. I can’t explain why or how—the knowledge was just there in my consciousness.

One day, as a child, I felt sure that if I could look at a map of Ireland, I would know, deep down, where the village was located, and could match it with the maps I had been drawing ever since I was old enough to hold a pencil. The only map I could find was in my school atlas. With the whole of Ireland on just one page, the detail was not very great, so I would be unlikely to succeed in my hoped-for match. But I tried anyway. I sat with the map in front of me, then shut my eyes for a few moments to let memory take over. Several times I tried, and each time I was drawn back to the same spot on the map....The place I had been drawn to was called Malahide, and it was just north of Dublin. (pp. 10-11)

As she became older, thoughts of Mary were never far from Jenny’s mind, but for various reasons they did not haunt her as they had when she was a child. In due course Jenny married, and in 1979 her first child, a boy, was born, and in 1983 another child, a girl. Jenny writes,

The obsession with the past, although less to the forefront, was never forgotten. It lay in wait for the right time, and re-emerged slowly. As my children grew and the strength of my maternal feeling was nurtured by their love, so the need grew to find that other family. Those children had been deprived at an early age of what my own children were now enjoying, and I felt that I had to do something about it. It seemed no coincidence that the need to search intensified as I grew nearer to the age that Mary was when she died—her early thirties. (pp. 24-25)

It would seem from her statement, "I felt that I had to do something about it" that Jenny was, in some sense, still thinking of her children as children. Of course she knew that they were now adults, quite mature adults. But the part of her that was "still Mary" (if that is the proper way to state it) felt guilt about having left them. Adult or not, they were still "her children."

It has been noted that Jenny was psychically gifted. By this time this fact about her had become publicly recognized, and she was asked to participate in some experiments to test her psychic ability. She did so, and through interaction with the persons who were investigators she came into contact with a man who did hypnotic regressions and was researching the phenomenon of memories of past lives. Eventually she permitted him to regress her.
This was on 6 January 1988. Under hypnosis I described the cobbled street with market stalls down one side, and Mary's last moments. I knew this scene well. Many times as a child I had woken from that dream, knowing the anguish of a woman destined to die before her children had grown....I did not want to leave, but knew that I would, and that I could do nothing to prevent it....This memory was the one that I had never been able to escape from, the one that usually came to me when I was alone at night.

Going through Mary's death again in this way, I found tears rolling down my face in a quite uncontrollable manner. Normally I would not allow myself to be seen crying in public, but the hypnosis took me to a level of mind where I seemed unable to apply normal constraints. (p. 33)

This was only the first of several hypnotic regressions which Jenny experienced. In the pages in which the content of these regressions is described (pp. 39-48) there is a wealth of material concerning not only Jenny's life as Mary, but also, much more briefly, a life which she describes in France in the early 18th century (as a seven-year-old French girl whose name Jenny thinks was "Anna," who had been sold into service to a household in Boulogne, a very fearful time for her), a brief reference to a life in Wales during the Dark Ages, a thousand years ago, and, most surprising of all, a very brief life she had in London, between 1940 and 1945.***

***In literature concerning reincarnation, at least reincarnation in Western cultures, it is highly unusual to find cases of persons (if "persons" is the correct term) who reincarnate within such a brief period of time; in Jenny's case eight years or so (1932-1940). Though this is purely speculative, it is entirely possible that Jenny/Mary was eager to reincarnate so quickly because she had such strong feelings about her children and wished to return to them and help them, just as we see Jenny virtually obsessed to do in her current lifetime. If so, it would have been, from her point of view, extremely unfortunate that she lived only a few years and could not have carried out her mission. Why she did die at such an early age is, of course, unknowable. And, as stated, all this is pure speculation. But, according to esoteric sources, it is quite unusual to reincarnate after only eight years. For that matter, Jenny's own birth, only some twenty years or so after Mary's death, represents quite a brief period between lives.

There then occurs these remarkable passages:

I was taken forward again, through the darkness, slowly, until there was a light ahead which at first was just a spot. I wanted to go towards it. As I reached it there was a feeling of warmth, actual physical warmth and comfort, and this occurred after a time of no physical awareness. These was now a sense without the other senses, a sense of being.
As an observer, I found this hard to accept, yet at the time I did seem to understand what it was about. My conscious self knew that WE HAD REACHED A POINT BEFORE MY OWN BIRTH, and what was happening related to PRE-BIRTH MEMORY. (p. 45, caps added)

(Jenny then describes her birth as Jenny in great detail, her feelings before and immediately after being born, and even the position of her head when she emerged from the womb, details that her mother later confirmed.)

As the hypnotic sessions continued, Jenny describes herself as becoming more and more obsessed with the past-life memories that were revealed, especially those as Mary, more and more eager to attempt to confirm these memories, and, most of all, to find her (Mary's) children. In her words,

_**By now my enthusiasm was running without check....I felt unable to control the extremes of emotion bubbling up through my subconscious and taking over so much of my time. The fact that I still had insufficient information, and that it possibly was not yet right to forge ahead, was not a consideration.**_ (p. 44)

Around this time Jenny's search for her past--as Mary (whose surname she still does not know; oddly the hypnotist seems not to have asked her that question while she was under hypnosis)--was given a great impetus by her receiving a gift of an Ordnance Survey map of the Dublin area by a man to whom she had been communicating about her past life memories. It was an extremely detailed map which included the area around Malahide. Looking at the map, Jenny realized that many of the landmarks on the map corresponded perfectly to her memories of that area.

Encouraged by this, Jenny began writing letters to persons in the general area whose names had come up in her regression experiences. In these letters she presented herself as simply someone who was doing genealogical research on a family who lived in a certain house on a certain road in Malahide. She said in her first letter,

"_The family I am searching for lived in the first cottage on the left on the road marked on the map enclosed. This was during the 1920s and 1930s. There were at least six or more children, and the mother, whose name I believe was Mary, died in the 1930s._"

Nothing came of this, nor did any useful information come forth from any of other of the various approaches she used in attempting gain information regarding Mary's family.

Jenny continued to permit herself to be hypnotically regressed any number of times, but eventually she decided that this approach was not resulting
in any real furtherance of her goal of confirming her memories about Mary. What she really wished to do was visit Malahide in person, but for various reasons, one of the most important of which was financial, she felt that she could not justify making this trip. As it turned out, however, in 1989 her financial situation improved markedly, and she decided, with some degree of trepidation, to go there for a weekend and see for herself if what she thought she remembered about what she believed to be her previous life as Mary could be verified.

Jenny traveled to Malahide on January 2, 1989 and once there began very excitedly exploring the town. She was greatly disappointed to find how much it had changed since the time when, according to her memory of it, it had looked in the 1920s and 30s. Malahide was now, in effect, a suburb of Dublin, though in the 20s and 30s it had been a small, almost rural, village. Even so, she did find landmarks that resonated with her memories. Despite the numerous changes, Jenny was greatly affected by being there.

What she most wanted to see, however, was the cottage where Mary had lived, on Swords Road, about a mile from the center of Malahide.

Now at last I could set my sights on the cottage, and I walked almost a mile to the beginning of Swords Road, where I knew it had been. The lane started much as I had remembered it, on the left side anyway. The north, right-hand side was covered with new housing developments, the oldest probably dating back to the 1950s. And the petrol station on the corner I did not expect at all. (One can well imagine the shock this must have occasioned.) The left side at the lane was bordered with ancient hedging and tree for about a hundred yards, then the road widened, and there was a new housing development put up in the 1960s or thereabouts. After these houses, the hedgerows returned, and I felt much more comfortable. Behind the hedge were plenty of trees and, in amongst it, remnants of an old stone wall. There was no longer the height of the one I remembered, and the sections were short and falling down. There was a small, gate-sized opening with the remains of stone piers, but I was confused by the changes and felt uncertain. LATER I BECAME MORE SURE THAT THIS WAS ALL THAT WAS LEFT FOR ME TO FIND, BUT THAT DAY I WAS STILL LOOKING AND HOPING TO FIND THE COTTAGE STANDING. For a little while I stood by these remains trying to remember how it had been and if this was the spot, but my mind could not cope with the difference between what I could remember and what was there now....I felt a piercing disappointment. (pp. 82-3, caps added)

There is so much that is interesting--and extremely poignant--that Jenny experiences that it is with regret that I must exclude most of these passages. But I find it impossible to omit what she concluded after this first visit to Malahide.
What happened during my visit to Malahide was important. At last I had seen and touched some of the things that until then had been just images in my mind; everything suddenly became very real and somehow more valid. At last I felt that there was enough confirmation for me to be able to trust myself and push on with earnest....I was standing in a portal between memory and reality, where it was clear at last that THE ONLY GAP BETWEEN THEM WAS TIME--BOTH REAL, BUT DIFFERENT TIMES. (pp. 86-87, caps added)

(I have placed Jenny's remark about time in caps because, as we shall see, one of the great mysteries about reincarnation, very probably the greatest mystery of all, is the question of the reality or unreality of time.)

The upshot of her visit to Malahide was that Jenny was now greatly encouraged and was more determined that ever to try to find Mary's children. She was, however, greatly concerned about how to broach the subject with them if she were indeed successful in finding them. How could she possibly expect them to accept her as the reincarnation of their deceased mother? How could she even suggest such a thing?

Nonetheless, she began to do everything she could think of to try to find them. And she was greatly surprised that her efforts met with success far more readily than she could have hoped for. Through an organization with which she was associated, she was able to contact members of this organization who lived in the Dublin area and, after doing research about the area (which included Malahide) one of these contacts put her in touch with a man who lived on Swords Road. She wrote this man--his name was Mr. Mahon--and asked him if he might know the name of the family who had lived in the first house of the left on Swords road in the 1920s and 30s, in which family the mother, whose named she believed was "Mary," died in the early 1930s? She asked if he had, or could assist her in finding, any information about the husband and what had happened to the children of this family. Remarkably, as it turned out, Mahon remembered the names of every family who had lived on this road in the 1920s, and he sent her a list. This is the description he sent of one of the families on the list:

Relating to the mother who died in the 1930s--she was Mrs. SUTTON. I believe her husband was a British soldier in the 1914-1918 war. After her death the children were sent to orphanages--later their oldest daughter MARY returned to the home. I believe the husband returned to the UK to train soldiers, 1939-45. Their children attended the Roman Catholic schools....(p. 91)

Of course, Jenny was ecstatic to have, finally, the surname of the family. As for the children, the fact that they had been placed in orphanages puzzled, troubled, and somewhat relieved her, all at the same time. The fact that they had been placed in orphanages--plural--meant that they did not stay together, even in
these institutions. She wondered why the father had not kept the family together. She says,

**Although I had always felt he did not play much part in looking after the children, nor in Mary's thinking about the children's future, I did not believe he could have just stood by and let them be taken away. (p. 91)**

Though still unsure how she could present her interest in finding the children to the children themselves, Jenny began to contact every person and agency that might have information about them. Finally, on February 18, 1990, she received a letter from a priest to whom she had written concerning Catholic orphanages, and in the letter the priest told her that though the Sutton children were not listed in his orphanage, he had made inquiries of the Department of Education and of the church in Malahide and had gained records of baptism of most of Mary's children. This is what he wrote:

**John Sutton and his wife Mary (nee Hand) were not natives of Malahide, Co. Dublin, but came to live in the lodge of Gaybrook House, Swords Road. Six children were christened in St. Sylvester's Catholic Church, Malahide.**


Elizabeth had been born September 25, 1932, a month before Mary, the mother, died--October 24, age 35. Notably missing is the first-born child. Mary, apparently, was born before the family moved to Malahide, so there would be no record of her having been christened at St. Sylvester's Church. (It is later learned that Mary is no longer living, having died at age 24; as Jenny remarks, *before I was born.*" She also discovers that there were two other babies who died as infants.) The oldest male child, "Sonny," was not listed. Jenny later discovered that he been born in 1919, so there would be no record of him at this church either.

With this news Jenny immediately began writing letters to different persons named "Sutton" whose names she found in the Dublin telephone directory, giving the relevant information about the family and asking if the person she wrote might have any knowledge of them. On March 3, 1990 she received a communication containing a copy of Mary's (the mother's) death certificate and the birth certificates of Jeffrey and Elizabeth, plus dates and details of some of the other children.

In the latter part of the book, Jenny recounts in great detail how she finally was able to make contact with most of Mary's children (Bridget had moved to Australia in 1959 and had died there nearly twenty years ago, news that greatly saddened Jenny.) The first of these whom she contacted was Sonny, who was
living England, in Leeds. Before they met, Jenny was extremely apprehensive about how to relate to him the reason she had contacted him and his other siblings and what, if she told him the truth, he might think about her. However, on September, 23, 1990 she did finally visit him (he was 71, old enough, Jenny remarked, to be her father), and he received her so pleasantly that she was soon speaking freely to him about her "dreams," suggesting that, for her, the only reasonable explanation was that she was his mother, Mary, reincarnated. To Jenny's immense relief, whatever he thought about it privately, Sonny offered no objection to this possibility.

Jenny immediately began telling him many details about the life she thought she had lived as Mary, which included many incidents involving Sonny, details which Sonny--truly amazed--confirmed. One of the most vivid memories she had of her life as Mary was waiting on a jetty, alone at dusk, for someone she was to meet there, someone who was coming there by boat. She could not remember why she was there, or for whom she waiting. She mentioned this memory to Sonny.

When we discussed Mary's waiting on the jetty...Sonny became really animated and showed me a map of Malahide. He pointed out the jetty I had visited....It had once been wooden, as I had described. (It had subsequently been replaced by a jetty made of concrete.)

"I'll tell you why you remember that jetty," said Sonny, "As a boy I used to caddy on the island for the golfers, and at dusk my mother would wait for me on the jetty and we would go home together." He would earn 2s 6d, of which he gave his mother two shillings and kept the sixpence. So I had been waiting for a boat, though a small row-boat ferry. (p. 121)

In the course of their conversation Jenny mentioned countless extremely small details concerning their home (a two-room cottage), their activities, their meals, their clothes, Mary's other children, about which, in all cases Jenny's memories proved to be astonishingly correct.

On one subject Sonny provided information about which Jenny had little memory, perhaps due to suppression, for the details of what Sonny told her were truly unnerving. This concerned Mary's husband, who Sonny characterized as an alcoholic, tyrannical brute who would beat both the children and Mary with a large, brass-buckled belt. As the oldest son, Sonny was especially targeted for his father's rage. After Mary's death the children, except for Sonny and the baby Elizabeth (who was adopted, against the father's wishes, by one of the father's brothers) were taken from him and placed in orphanages, the father being deemed not capable of caring for them.

There are too many details regarding the children to include here, but, returning to the present, Jenny learned that Mary's children, those who were still alive, had not kept in close contact. It was with some difficulty that she was able
to contact them, and even more difficult to visit with them in person. Once they became aware of how much Jenny knew of Mary's life, and of them, they were, of course, impressed to the point of amazement. In time, they became convinced that there was some close connection between their mother and Jenny, but they did not know how to understand what the connection was. Sonny, at least, believed that Jenny was indeed their mother reincarnated. Phyllis (Philomena) and Betty (Elizabeth) tended to believe that Jenny was, rather, psychically in touch with their mother (a view which a priest had suggested to Phyllis.) What the others believed is not given.

In the last week in April, 1993, Jenny and five of Mary's children visited Malahide in order to film a documentary on Jenny's story--which by this time had become widely publicized. (Their coming there was, in fact, part of a publicity tour.) Concerning this visit Jenny says that "It was the first time the family had been together since 1932." During the course of their stay there they visited the ruins of the Gaybrook lodge where they had lived. There were many emotional moments during this visit, and Jenny reports,

It soon became clear that nobody found it all strange that I was able to point out where the fireplace or door had been, and talk about life at the lodge just as easily as any of the older family members. By now it was something that everyone was getting used to. (pp. 150-1)

About the whole experience of finding Mary's family, Jenny comments,

Has finding a family resolved my emotional torment? Do I now feel at peace? The one word that sums up my feelings has to be relief....And there has been a change....It feels as though I have walked through a door. After years of following a tortuous path, where my own fears and feelings of inadequacy held me back as much as real delays, I have reached a point where I feel allowed to talk about my thoughts and experiences much more openly than before. And it has been strange to discover just how many people have "odd" experiences that they have not been able to discuss with others for fear of ridicule....Best of all, it was evident that I was reaching a few of those people who, like myself, had past life memories and had begun to try to make some sense of the images, despite cultural opposition (pp. 152-3)

In the last paragraph of Jenny's book there is a remarkable "footnote." In order to understand this footnote, however, it will be necessary to consider this passage from an earlier point in the book. The experience described occurred on the Easter weekend of 1990.

Dreams, premonitions or psychic visions can come at any time without warning....On this particular occasion, I was a passenger in a car on a longish journey. My mind was drifting in no specific direction, which
in retrospect seems to be the ideal state for such experiences. I was running my hand through my hair and was aware that the texture was different. I then noticed that both of my hands were in front of me on my lap, so I REALIZED THAT THE SENSATION WAS WITHIN MY MIND RATHER THAN OF THE PRESENT. I WAS AWARE OF THE KNOTTY REMAINS OF BABY HAIR AT THE ENDS OF THE SMOOTH, STRAIGHT STRANDS, WHICH WOULD PUT MY AGE AT ABOUT TWO OR LESS. When I looked down I did not see myself at all, but bare feet and slight brown legs. THERE WAS A FEELING OF BEING ASIAN GIRL, AND THE SENSATIONS WERE OF FUTURE AND OF SELF. It was very much as though a future self was looking back while, in the same slightly absent-minded state, sitting running her fingers through her hair.

....(The experience) was not at all worrying, but very gentle, comfortable, and reassuring....Perhaps by accepting the past I was now becoming more able to accept the future....

From that point onwards I have had more experiences of this kind, and a more complete picture began to form. (Jenny then offers this possible explanation) TIME IS VERY MUCH LINKED WITH OTHER DIMENSIONS AND IS NOT STATIC OR NECESSARILY CONSISTENT. The theory of relativity states that at speeds approaching the speed of light, time slows. At speeds greater than the speed of light, the theory is that time would go into reverse.

It then becomes not inconceivable that some element of energy, in this case thought, perhaps covering a brief span of time, might travel fast enough to go back in time and be experienced in the past AS THOUGH IT WERE A PREMONITION OF THE FUTURE. This could also explain WHY PREMONITION FEELS LIKE SOMETHING THAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED RATHER THAN SOMETHING THAT MIGHT HAPPEN;*** and why the precise details within a brief one or two minute premonition can turn out to be exactly right, yet, being out of context, can cause confusion of interpretation. (pp. 108-9)

***In describing premonitory experiences in this way, I assume that Jenny is drawing on her personal familiarity with such experiences. I am unaware of ever having heard of such experiences being described in this manner--as seeming to have already happened--but if what Jenny says is correct, this would seem to be a highly significant fact about these experiences.

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Turning, now, to the last paragraph of the book, we find this passage:

Another challenge is now rising from the solution of the past. I find myself more and more intrigued with that other frequently elusive fact, premonition of the future. At the height of my search for yesterday's children, I glimpsed what I now believe to be my next life. As I earlier recounted...during Easter weekend of 1990, I had a brief glimpse into the
life of an Asian girl--Nepalese in fact--in the next century. I want to
discover if it is possible to find out more of this new life and if I can gain
enough information to locate the area and confirm some of the details I
have seen. I feel a great continuity through the awareness of past, present,
and future lives. I know that more of my time will be taken up with this new
search. No longer seeking the answer to yesterday, free from a burden that
took half a lifetime to resolve, tomorrow begins to beckon. (p. 153)

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Another extremely interesting example of what seems to be a clear-cut
case of a person bringing into the present life memories of a past life is found in
Soul Survivor (2009) by Bruce and Andrea Leininger "with" Ken Gross. (Gross
was clearly the main author.)

In May of 2000, the two-year old son of Bruce and Andrea Leininger,
James, began having nightmares. These continued almost nightly for some two
months. This was, of course, of great concern to them, and they did everything
they could think of to deal with it. Then, one night, they heard him scream in his
sleep some words that would, eventually, change their lives. The words were

"Airplane crash! Plane on fire! Little man can't get out!"

He said this over and over. At his age, barely two years old, he had
difficulty speaking in complex sentences at all; what he was saying hardly
sounded like to language of a two-year old.

It is not possible to relate the various episodes that, one by one, caused
the Leiningers to wonder, increasingly, what to make of what James said and did.
But even before the nightmares began, one day in March of 2000, Andrea and
James had been shopping, and had passed a craft and toy store. In some bins
outside the store there were plastic toys and boats. Andrea picked up a toy
airplane and handed to James, saying, "And there's even a bomb on the
bottom." James studied the toy, then said, "That's not a bomb, Mommy.
That's a dwop tank." Andrea had no idea was a drop tank was, but that night,
in talking to Bruce, learned that it was an extra gas tank that airplanes used to
extend their range. They were mystified as to how James could possibly know
about drop tanks, but did not pursue the matter.

As time passed it became obvious that James was fascinated, even
obsessed with airplanes. Some time after he began having his nightmares,
Andrea finally asked James who was the little man who couldn't out of his
airplane. James answered matter-of-factly, "Me." Hearing this, Bruce turned
pale and was obviously extremely disturbed. He asked James what happened to
his plane; James told him, "It crashed on fire." Asked why it crashed James
answered, "It got shot." Bruce continued, "Who shot your plane?" Bruce was not prepared for the answer he received nor the tone of the answer. Whereas before James had answered the questions calmly, in answering this question there was clearly a note of disgust: "The Japanese!" Neither Andrea nor Bruce knew what to say about this answer. No further questions were asked.

Before continuing, it should be understood that Andrea and Bruce were a very ordinary middle-class couple and had no scintilla of a belief in reincarnation. Indeed, they had apparently never even thought about it. In addition, Bruce was a devout mainstream Christian, and belief in reincarnation was not only a totally alien concept, it conflicted with his Christian belief-system in a fundamental way. It is important to realize this about Bruce, because throughout the book he tries time and time again to dismiss the mounting evidence that his son James was, indeed, the reincarnated spirit of a pilot who had been shot down and killed in the Pacific theater of war during World War II.

As the evidence mounted, indicating more and more conclusively that what James knew about airplanes and the war in the Pacific, Bruce became desperate to find some way to discount what his son was saying. At one point he writes,

...I feel that I am a developed Christian on a continuous path of spiritual growth.

If James's nightmares were truly a manifestation of a past life—a proof of reincarnation—then, as I saw it, it would threaten the biblical promise of salvation. If the immortal soul can randomly transfer from person to person, generation to generation, then what does that imply for the Christian orthodoxy of redemption? What happens on Judgment Day if the immortal soul is handed off like that? It goes against the evangelical teaching of rebirth through a spiritually transformed personal life.

The impact of James's story on my spiritual well being...felt like spiritual warfare. My purpose for disproving what was happening to my son was to establish that this was all a coincidence, as astronomically remote as that possibility seems. (pp. 202-3)***

***The attitude evinced in this passage would no doubt be seized upon by many persons, who see it as a perfect example of the limitations and dangers of attempting to understand reality in terms of a religious belief system. However, many of those persons who would do so are themselves guilty of attempting to understand reality in terms of a belief system based upon the claims of mainstream science. They would attempt to explain away, or, perhaps simply ignore, any purported evidence for reincarnation, for to accept the reality of reincarnation would require a radical re-thinking of their view of reality, and this they are as reluctant to do those who wish to reject it on religious grounds.

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The phrase, "as astronomically remote as that possibility seems," indicates that by the time Bruce wrote these words, it had become virtually impossible to find some alternative explanation of what James was saying about what he says he had experienced in a previous life. At this point James had identified the type of airplane he was flying when he was shot down. In response to a question about this he calmly replied, "A Corsair," an airplane which, it would seem, there was no possible way he even knew existed. And when he was asked where his airplane took off he simply said, "A boat." Not only did he know the name of the airplane, he maintained that it had taken off not from land but from "a boat." But this was only the beginning. When asked the name of the "boat" he replied immediately, "Natoma."

When James said this Bruce thought he saw an opening. He replied, "Natoma, huh?...That sounds Japanese." At this James became annoyed, impatiently, he replied, "No, it's American." At this point Andrea said it was time for James to go to bed. Later that night Bruce went to his computer and googled "Natoma." What he found was an aircraft carrier, "Natoma Bay," which fought in the Pacific in World War II. Bruce described his response to this news as follows:

In a funny way, when James gave us the name Natoma, it made me mad. Not at anyone, just at the situation. He wasn't even potty trained, and he was telling me something that shook my world. I needed to be right about this. (p. 71)

A point not yet mentioned is that when James was asked the name of the "little man" whose airplane was on fire he replied, "James." When reminded that that was his name, he replied, "The little man was named James, too." However, he could not remember his last name. But when asked if he could remember "anyone else in the dream," he immediately answered, "Jack." Moreover, Jack's last name he could remember. "Larsen. It was Jack Larsen." Larsen was a friend of James and also a pilot.

When Andrea and Bruce received this information they were stunned, but Bruce saw it as a basis for disproving the reincarnation theory. So he began searching sites on his computer which might contain information about Jack Larsen, a WWII pilot. He was still working on this, spending almost all of his spare time doing so, into the Christmas holiday season, 2001.

At this point something remarkably serendipitous occurred. Bruce's father was a WWII buff, and as a Christmas present for him he ordered a book, The Battle for Iwo Jima. He was leafing through the book one morning when James came in and sat on Bruce's lap. At some point they reached a page that contained a photo of Iwo Jima. James pointed to it and said, "Daddy, that's when my plane was shot down." Bruce asked him to repeat what he had said, and James did so. Bruce immediate rushed into his office where he had a copy
of *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*. His discovered, almost to his horror, that Natoma Bay had been at Iwo Jima and had supported the U. S. Marines' invasion of Iwo Jima in March, 1945.

Bruce then began, more or desperately, to attain more information on the Natoma Bay. Searching countless websites to no avail, he finally discovered a site called *Escort Carriers Sailors' and Airmen's Association*. From this site he picked four names and finally contacted a man named Leo Pyatt. Unwilling to reveal the real reason he was calling, Bruce lied to the man and told him he was planning to write a book about the ship. Pyatt accepted this, and offered to provide information. One of the first questions Bruce asked him was whether there were any Corsairs on the ship. Pyatt's answer both relieved and puzzled Bruce. Pyatt said, "No, not that I know of." But after some further conversation regarding the type of airplanes on the ship, Bruce broached the question of Jack Larsen. Pyatt: "Oh, yeah, I remember Jack. We never saw him again....He flew off one day, and we never saw him again." (However, this did not mean that he had been killed. He went to another assignment.)

This answer threw Bruce back into a state of confusion and bewilderment. He couldn't imagine how his toddler son could possibly know that there was someone name Jack Larsen on a ship called the Natoma Bay and, further, that Larsen was a pilot! Despite this information, however, Bruce still held out hope that there was another explanation for this scenario than reincarnation. Bruce keep trying to convince himself that, somehow, James was just dreaming the whole thing. And on one major point, at least, James was factually mistaken: there were, he had discovered, no Corsairs on the Natoma Bay. Writing later about his state of mind at this time he says,

*Still it was only a dream, and the fact that James got something wrong--the Corsairs--made me feel reassured in a strange sort of way. The Corsairs were crucial to my skepticism. (p. 100)*

During this period, Andrea was far less skeptical about the possibility that James had reincarnated from a life in which he was a pilot based on the aircraft carrier Natoma Bay. Around this time, both Andrea and Bruce read Carol Bowman's, *Children's Past Lives*, and though Bruce rejected, or tried to reject, the entire reincarnation premise, Andrea became convinced that reincarnation was the best--perhaps only--explanation of what they were experiencing.

In the following months there were many episodes in which James exhibited an astounding knowledge of WWII airplanes and flight procedures. These are too numerous to mention here. During these months both Andrea and Bruce were constantly looking for websites which might give them further information about the Natoma Bay and the pilots stationed there who had been killed in action. They were doing so for opposite reasons: Andrea, who had decided that James' "dream" was a past-life memory, was attempting to identify
the pilot who had reincarnated as James, and Bruce was desperately attempting to find some reason to doubt that this was the case. (More on this presently.)

During this period there were two episodes with James that stand out as particularly significant. The first was an episode that occurred Christmas, 2001. The occasion was James’ receiving another GI Joe doll. He had already been given two such dolls. To these dolls he had given what seemed to Bruce and Andrea rather odd names, "Billy" and "Leon." When he was given the third doll, they asked him what he would name it. He answered, "Walter." Curious, they asked him how he happened to select the names, "Billy," "Leon," and "Walter." James replied casually, "Because that’s who met me when I got to heaven."

Stunned, Bruce went over to his desk, looking for some documents he had received concerning the pilots who had been stationed on the Natoma Bay. Among those pilots who had been stationed on the ship were these names, all of whom were in the same squadron, and all of whom had been killed: Leon Conner, killed October 25, 1944, Walter Devlin, killed October 26, 1944, and Billie Peeler, killed November 17, 1944. There was another name on the list of those pilots stationed on the Natoma Bay; James McCready Huston, Jr., killed March 3, 1945.

The second episode occurred in October, 2002 while Bruce, accompanied by James, was doing some yard work. Suddenly feeling great affection for James, Bruce reached down, picked him up and kissed him, telling him how happy he was to have him as a son. James replied in a tone that seemed to Bruce eerie,

That's why I picked you. I knew you would be a good daddy.

Bruce asked him to repeat what he had just said. James explained, "When I found you and Mommy, I knew you would be good to me." Understandably perplexed, not to say stunned, Bruce asked him, "Where did you find us?"

James proceeded to describe the scenario. It was in Hawaii. They were staying in the big pink hotel." He continued: "I found you on the beach. You were eating dinner at night."

Bruce, totally dumbfounded, well remembered the time to which James was referring. In 1997, he and Andrea had gone to Hawaii to celebrate their fifth wedding anniversary. They had stayed at the Royal Hawaiian hotel (pink, of course). On their final night there they had had a moonlight dinner on the beach. Five weeks later Andrea became pregnant. This episode in James' young life had never been mentioned in his presence. When Bruce told Andrea about what James had said, she took it very calmly. She had already decided that James was what he claimed to be. She had decided also precisely who it was that
James had been in his life as an airplane pilot shot down by the Japanese in WWII: **Ensign James McCready Huston, Jr.**

Bruce, however, still held out hope that this was not true. One fact he discovered that gave him some reason to hope was that he found out that James Huston was not actually killed at Iwo Jima, but on a mission a hundred miles away, at a place called Chichi-Jima. For some reason Bruce continued to focus on the name, Jack Larsen, though he did not believe that his James was the reincarnation of this man either. As it turned out, as he discovered later, Jack Larsen had not been killed in WWII; in fact, he was still alive! This discovery was a great shock to Bruce, but he later had a meeting with him. And Larsen remembered the day James Huston Jr. was killed.

Bruce’s attempt to deny the reincarnation theory finally came down to a single issue: the **Corsair**. He had been told by at least two different people that there were no Corsairs on the **Natoma Bay**. Andrea, on the other hand, having come to terms with James having been James Huston, became increasing disturbed by Bruce’s continual skepticism.

**Frankly, I was tired of Bruce’s endless investigation. Nothing was enough. There was always just ONE more detail that needed to be nailed down, confirmed—then he’d really believe. My life was simpler. I chose to believe. I didn’t need a dead body in my living room to convince me that James was experiencing the time of James Houston. (p. 208)**

In order to bring this remarkable story to a conclusion expeditiously, it will be necessary to omit a number of interesting and evidential details which Bruce and Andrea uncovered. Perhaps the climax of this story was their discovery that James Huston’s sister, an eighty-six year old woman named Anne Barron, was still alive. Andrea called her and slowly and gently told her what had been happening with their son James for what was, at this time, some three years.

Anne Barron was quiet and said little. She thanked Andrea and said that she would get in touch with them soon. Later Anne and Andrea talked again, and Anne revealed that she had been thinking about what Andrea had told her and that the more she thought about it, the more she believed. She also had this experience from the past to report:

**Jimmy was due home in March of 1945, and I was in my living room, cleaning and anticipating his arrival. I sensed that he was in the room with me. And I spoke to him just as though he was there with me. We were all going to meet at my home in Los Angeles for the reunion. A couple of days later I got the news from my dad that Jimmy had gone missing….I was devastated. We were very close.**
When my father told me the date Jimmy was lost--March 3--I remembered... That was the day I felt his presence when I was cleaning. (p. 235)

What is surely the most compelling evidence that James was the reincarnation of James Huston occurred when he spoke to Anne on the phone. From the beginning of their conversation James called her "Annie." When James used this name, Andrea thought it disrespectful, but Anne explained that this was the name that her brother--and only her brother--called her.

James also knew that he had another sister, "Ruth," which he pronounced as "Roof." Ruth was four years older than Annie, who was four years older than James. Annie confirmed that this was the case.

James also knew about their father's alcoholism, that it once became so bad that he had to be institutionalized. And he knew that Ruth, who was a society columnist on a local paper was "mortified" when their mother had to take a job as a common maid in the home of a prominent family that she was writing about.

There are a number of other details that James (nor anyone else not in the family) could possibly know. Anne was thunderstruck. She knew that she was speaking to her brother. There is also other evidence, just as compelling, given in the following pages concerning James' knowledge of WWII aircraft. For example, while watching a program on the History Channel, on Corsairs, he remarked that the narrator was mistaken in saying that in one bit of action the airplane a Corsair shot down was a Zero. It was, he insisted, a "Tony," a Japanese fighter that was smaller and faster than a Zero. (Question: How many people have ever heard of an airplane called the "Tony"? Even adults; even persons alive during WWII.)

And this: In his many searches for information about pilots who had served on the Natoma Bay, Bruce had met a number of these pilots, including one named Bob Greenwalt. Not mentioned up to this point is the fact that some time earlier, the Leiningers had been approached by ABC Primetime to do a show about James. Such a program was finally taped, and soon after it was telecast, Bruce received a called from a man named Bob Greenwalt who had seen the show. Bruce had met Greenwalt and knew him to be one of the pilots who had come aboard the Natoma Bay at the same time as James Huston, October 8, 1944.

During their conversation Greenwalt reveals that he was a close friend of Huston and had flown with him on the raid in which he was killed. Indeed, he had been responsible for packing Huston's personal effects to his family after his death. Greenwalt also revealed that he and Huston and some others were part of an elite squadron called "Devil's Disciples." Their job was to test-fly the
Corsair for use on carriers. There were various reasons why it was not suited for this, especially on landing. But after many modifications it finally became a standard for U. S. carrier duty. (Note: Greenwald is not quoted as saying that Huston was flying a Corsair on the day he was killed. However, since he received special training for flying Corsairs from carriers it seems reasonable that he would have been flying one that day as well.)

In 2004 the Natoma Bay Association reunion was held in San Antonio, and Bruce was determined to attend. By this time many of those attending the reunion had seen the Primetime show on James, and he was treated as a celebrity. The morning after arriving and settling in a hotel, Bruce was busy doing organizational tasks, and Andrea and James were walking around when a man approached them, stopped, looked down at James and asked, "Do you know who I am?" James looked at him for a moment, then replied, "You're Bob Greenwald." The man looked shocked, then acknowledged that he was indeed Bob Greenwald. Later, in their room, Bruce, who had been told about the incident, asked James how he knew that the man was Greenwald. James replied, "I recognized his voice."

During the activities of the reunion James was a full participant. One morning while he was alone with his mother she notice that he looked troubled. She asked if anything were wrong, and he said there wasn't. The only thing would tell her was "I'm sad that everyone is so old."

It is interesting to note that James, by this time six years old, was becoming more and more reluctant to speak in public settings about his "dreams." About these he said, "Sometimes I remember what happened, but I don't want to talk about it. Maybe when I'm a teenager."

By this time James' story had become well known, even outside the country. A Japanese production company wanted the Leiningers to come to Japan and to visit Chichi-Jima, where James was shot down. Bruce very much wanted to go (by this time he seems to have been enjoying the publicity) and persuaded Andrea to go, taking with them, of course, James. They flew to Japan, then took a boat 650 miles to the Ogasawara Archipelago, where Chichi-Jima was located.

When the boat reached the spot where Huston's plane went into the water, the captain cut the engines. Everyone looked at James, but he didn't show any emotion.

"Are you okay, buddy?" asked Bruce.

"Yeah, I'm fine."
But he wouldn't look at Bruce or at the camera. It was clear that he was containing his emotion.

Andrea pulled her son close and said softly, "James Huston has been part of your life for as long as you can remember. And he will always be an important part of who you are. It's time for you to let go."

James nodded.

"It's time to say good-bye."

He put his head down in his mother's lap and broke into tears. It was a deep, heart-wrenching sob, as if he was unleashing all the pent-up emotion that had boiled inside his child's body for the past six years. He sobbed and wept for fifteen minutes. Everyone else on the boat was silent and awestruck by the sight of a little boy in such deep grief. He seemed to be weeping for himself and for James Huston--and for all the world of woe that he had ever seen or felt.

Finally, he recovered. He took the bouquet (of flowers that Huston's sister had asked them to drop on the spot where he had died.) The boat was rocking, and he pitched the flowers into the harbor. His nose was running, and his face was streaked with tears, and he said in a broken voice, "Good-bye, James M. Huston. I'll never forget you."

He took up straight and saluted. Then he put his head back in his mother's lap and cried some more. (p. 255)

By this time Bruce had long since given up his "hope" that his son James was not the reincarnated James M. Huston. He now accepted reincarnation as

A gift to those who need some tangible proof that there is something beyond death, that life has meaning beyond the bare mathematics of a person's lifetime. It reaffirmed his religious convictions, revived, rather than challenged, his faith, and gave him something rare and wonderful: hope. (p. 256)