

Discussions of Survival of Death in the *Psi Encyclopedia*

Carlos S. Alvarado, PhD

Research Fellow

Parapsychology Foundation

carlos@theazire.org

Those of you familiar with the [Psi Encyclopedia](#) know that this is a free online reference work about parapsychology sponsored by the [Society for Psychical Research](#). The project, edited by Robert McLuhan, began in 2014 and it is work in progress. Due to the magnitude of information to be covered it is estimated that the main topics will be adequately covered by the year 2020 (for information about the purpose and scope of the project click [here](#)).

One of the main areas represented to date, and the topic of my comments, are some, but by no means all, of the entries relevant to the topic of survival of death. This, as we shall see, includes many essays about phenomena, cases, mediums, and ideas. In addition to presenting information about the topics covered, I will make suggestions for further additions with the understanding that the encyclopedia is ongoing with current plans to enlarge it considerably.

Overview of Survival Evidence

A general introduction to the topic appears in philosopher Stephen Braude's article [Postmortem Survival](#). As stated by Braude: "There is undoubtedly no shortage of cases at least superficially suggesting postmortem survival. But for all of these there are non-survivalist explanatory options which any clear-headed appraisal of the evidence must consider seriously and which those favoring survivalist explanations must strive to rule out." As to these explanations that need to be considered some are conventional explanations such as malobservation and various psychological processes such as dissociation and cryptomnesia.



Stephen Braude

In addition, Braude considers ESP and acknowledges the controversy that exists on this issue between survivalists and non-survivalists (see also Braude's [The Super Psi Hypothesis](#)).

One of the things I like about Braude's take is that he mentions that many who reject the living psi hypothesis arguing that it takes an unprecedented degree of high psi functioning fail to consider that "survivalists are committed to positing comparably impressive psi on the part of the deceased or the living, simply in order to explain how evidence suggesting survival was manifested in the first place." While I do not pretend to solve the debate here (and I have much sympathy for survival agency), I think points like this remind us of the complexity of the subject, which Braude explores in the rest of his essay. If anything it is important to examine the assumptions of both camps, and then focus on the best cases.

Braude gives good summaries of investigations and cases, but I wish he had devoted more space to more detailed descriptions of this material. For example, a reader not familiar with the Piper or Leonard mediumship will have difficulties getting a flavor of the actual material, of some of the details of the records that impressed researchers in the past. But other entries in the work may help with this, especially as the project develops further.

Reincarnation Cases

The most frequently discussed survival topic in the encyclopedia to date (August 2017) is that of research with children who claim to remember previous lives. A good place to start is psychiatrist Jim Tucker's [Past Life Memories Research \(Overview\)](#). He writes: "The children say that they remember experiencing various events from the past, and they have associated emotions that are appropriate for the deceased individual in whose life those events occurred. Taken at face value, these cases indicate that some children remember lives they experienced in a previous incarnation. Fifty years of research has produced significant evidence that supports this."

Other essays are about more specific topics. Tucker has an article about [Birthmarks](#). Anthropologist James G. Matlock has detailed entries about [Experimental Birthmarks and Birth Defects](#), [Patterns in Reincarnation Cases](#), [Replacement Reincarnation](#), and [Xenoglossy in Reincarnation Cases](#). Matlock's contributions are among the best articles on the topic in the encyclopedia, being both open to reincarnation and critical at the same time. The latter is shown in the following comments in the xenoglossy article: "Usually it is only a few words that are spoken, and when responsiveness in conversation is attested, the level of proficiency is low. An important caution is due here, though. Although the testimony seems sound in these cases, in most of them investigators had no opportunity to observe the subject speaking, and only rarely

have voice recordings been made for evaluation later. Much more work must be done before we can be confident that responsive xenoglossy is possible, but these spontaneous cases suggest that it is, and that makes the xenoglossy of the regression cases more plausible.”



James G. Matlock

Other topics reviewed by journalist Karen Wehrstein were [Adult Past Life Memories Research](#), [People Who Knew Each Other in Past Lives](#), and [Twins Reincarnation Research](#). Psychologist Erlendur Haraldsson summarizes his research in [Psychological Studies of Children Claiming Past-Life Memories](#). I believe this is one of the most interesting areas of reincarnation research. Different from most other survival (and reincarnation) research that centers on veridical phenomena to show that there may be a surviving self that can present evidence of identity, this work, of which Haraldsson is probably the leading researcher (e.g., Haraldsson, 1997), is an attempt to connect cases to psychological aspects of the children, expanding our understanding of the phenomena in different directions. Haraldsson writes that he found that some of the children who remembered other lives had more behavior problems (argumentative, quarrelsome) than a comparison group. Also, in a study of children from Sri Lanka it was found, as stated by Haraldsson: “The great majority expressed general happiness with how their lives had developed. Their educational level was higher than that of their generation . . . They seemed to be living normal productive lives . . . On the whole the data showed that they had fared reasonably well in life, apparently somewhat above the average for their age group in Sri Lanka.”

The topic of hypnotic regression is also covered by Honorary Archive Officer to the SPR Melvin Willin in [Past Life Regression](#). The author states: “In combination, the obscurity of the information, realistic presentation of character and emotional identification on the part of the subject have convinced many people of the reality of reincarnation. Alternative parapsychological explanations include ESP and exposure to the memories of deceased humans. Some narratives have been traced to printed sources, suggesting the presence of cryptomnesia . . . There remain serious reservations about the authenticity of memories recovered under hypnosis, especially given the phenomenon of false memory syndrome.”

There are also several entries about reincarnation cases. A long, and useful list of cases taken from Ian Stevenson's writings is presented by Robert McLuhan in [Children Who Remember a Previous Life](#). Also interesting is Wehrstein [Famous Past Life Claims](#) and Matlock's [Reincarnation Accounts Pre-1900](#). All these articles give a good idea to prospective readers about the variety of individuals that say that they remember previous lives. In addition, there are summaries of specific cases authored by Haraldsson ([Dilukshi Nissanka](#); [Nazih Al-Danaf](#); [Pretiba Gunawardana](#); [Purnima Ekanayake](#); [Thusita Silva](#); and [Wael Kiwan](#)), McLuhan ([Kumkum Verma](#); [Jagdish Chandra](#); [Ratana Wongsombat](#); and [Sunil Dutt Saxena](#)), and Wehrstein ([Imad Elawar](#); [James Leininger](#); and [Titu \[Toran Singh\]](#)).

Haraldsson's case of [Dilukshi Nissanka](#) is one of a few cases in which there was a written record of the information the child gave before the case was formally investigated. "Before she was two years old Dilukshi Nissanka began to speak about a previous life in Peravatte in Dambulla, some 80 miles distant, which ended when she drowned in a stream. She refused to address her parents as mother and father, and requested to be taken to her previous mother." Of at least 22 statements made by her, most were verified." Twelve of the statements were completely or partially correct, 4 were wrong, and the other 6 were ambiguous.

Mediumship

To date there are only a few entries about mental mediums. These are writers Guy Lyon Playfair's [Chico Xavier](#), Michael Tymn's [Leonora Piper](#), and Willin's [Rosemary Brown](#). In addition there are two articles by Tymn and Braude about Pearl Curran: [Patience Worth \(Pearl Curran\)](#) and [Patience Worth \(analysis\)](#), respectively.

The article about Piper presents a good broad overview of this important case of mediumship. Several classic investigations are summarized, among them those of Richard Hodgson. For example Tymn writes about the "George Pelham" (George Pellew) communicator: "Hodgson noted that the communicator appeared to be lifelike. He also remarked that among a total of a hundred and fifty individuals whom he arranged to sit with Piper, from the time of Pelham's first appearance to the time of writing, as many as thirty had been known to Pelham: in each case Pelham recognized them and greeted them by name, with one single exception, a woman who had been a child when Pelham knew her. Pelham did not, however, recognize, or greet by name, any of those whom he had not known. Hodgson argued that this was consistent

with what would be expected if Pelham had survived death and found himself able to communicate.”



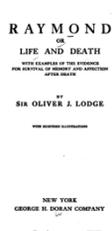
Leonora E. Piper

An interesting contribution, and one not focusing on survival, is Everton de Oliveira Maraldi’s essay about [Hélène Smith](#) (whose real name was Catherine-Élise Muller). She was mainly investigated by Théodore Flournoy, who documented and interpreted in psychological terms her communications about previous lives in India and France, as well as life in planet mars. As Maraldi stated about Flournoy’s work: “For him, Hélène’s romances were products of a subliminal imagination, their content based on her previous memories and experiences, incubated and creatively combined in the subliminal regions of her mind.”

One thing I like about this article, and which I would like to see in other entries, if relevant, is that Maraldi connects the work Flournoy conducted with this medium with what has been called “the evolving field of subliminal psychology” (Miranda, 2016, p. 29), that is, the developments about the capabilities and functions of the unconscious mind that were developing at the time, and that greatly influenced both psychology and psychical research. Furthermore, Maraldi has rightly stated, in my opinion: “Hélène Smith illustrates the influence that exemplary cases may have on the development of research programs, especially for its implications for the then-emerging fields of psychical research and dynamic psychiatry . . .” This is a topic that Maraldi and I have developed in other publications which are part of current efforts in restoring the importance and influence of psychical research, and more particularly, mediumship, in the development of ideas of dissociation and the unconscious mind in psychology and psychiatry (Alvarado, 2010; Maraldi & Alvarado, 2018).

On a different issue, it is important that cases and arguments like Flournoy’s which are not supportive of survival also appear in the encyclopedia. The importance of this for psychical research was pointed out over a hundred years ago by James H. Hyslop (1906). Fortunately discussion of conventional explanations have not been neglected in other articles, such as those about Rosemary Brown and Leonora Piper, as well as hypnotic regression.

Various other topics are also discussed, as seen in the entries about [The Cross-Correspondences](#) (Trevor Hamilton) and [Book Tests](#) (Tymn and McLuhan), and specific cases and sittings (Tymn [The Junot Sittings \(Leonora Piper\)](#); Tymn [Raymond](#)). The latter refers to communications purported to come from Raymond Lodge, the son of Oliver Lodge, who died in World War I in 1915. These mediumistic communications formed the basis for the famous book *Raymond, or Life After Death* (Lodge, 1916).



Oliver Lodge

Raymond was a book that fulfilled various roles. Lodge's book was an expression of the hardships of war time, and more particularly, of personal and national bereavement in England (Kollar, 2000). It was to some extent a response and a message of comfort for people to deal with the great amount of loss of life due to the war. More relevant to psychical research, *Raymond* presented evidence for veridical mediumship, and included Lodge's discussion about various aspects of the process of communication that are not discussed in the entry probably, and understandably, to keep it short. In these comments Lodge was also critical of mediumistic description of spirit life in the beyond. He wrote: "I should think, myself, that they are of very varying degrees of value, and peculiarly liable to unintentional sophistication by the medium. They cannot be really satisfactory, as we have no means of bringing them to book. The difficulty is that Feda [the medium's control] encounters many sitters, and though the majority are just inquirers, taking what comes and saying very little, one or two may be themselves full of theories, and may either intentionally or unconsciously convey them to the 'control'; who may thereafter retail them as actual information, without perhaps being sure whence they were derived. Some books, moreover, have been published of late, purporting to give information about ill-understood things in a positive and assured manner, and it is possible that the medium has read these and may be influenced by them. It will be regrettable if these books are taken as authoritative by people unable to judge of the scientific errors which are conspicuous in their more normal portions; and the books themselves seem likely to retard the development of the subject in the minds of critical persons" (Lodge, 1916, p. 192).

I am sure that other articles about specific mental mediums will appear in the near future (although some articles about researchers also have relevant information, among them my entry about [William James](#)). There is certainly not a shortage of relevant mediums, among them: Geraldine Cummins, Ermance Dufaux, Eileen J. Garrett, Gladys Osborne Leonard, Hester Travers Smith, Minnie Soule, and Rosina Thompson, among others. There is also a need for more discussion of specific topics. Because the entries for the encyclopedia focus on the old literatures, there is a need for comments about modern mediumship research, which has been reviewed by Beischel and Zingrone (2015). Further topics that may be added are xenoglossy via mediums, mediums that play musical instruments and that produce drawings and painting without training, and mediumistic literature. Regarding the latter, Playfair wrote about Brazilian medium [Chico Xavier](#), who produced mediumistically more than 450 books: “Chico’s literary output is as notable for its variety as well as for its size. It included novels, both historical and contemporary, stories for children, essays, a constant stream of poems by authors both known and unknown, a history of Brazil . . . and numerous works of Spiritist philosophy. Much of his writing was done at public sessions, several of which were filmed showing him at work, his left hand covering his eyes and his right hand filling sheet after sheet of paper at extraordinary speed. More writing was done during Chico’s lunch break when he was working at his day job. Thus there was clearly no time for him to do any research, nor was there any local library where he could have done it.”



Chico Xavier

Apparitions

The topic of apparitions only has a few entries. But the encyclopedia has three good overview articles. These are Peter Hallson’s [Ghosts and Apparitions in Psi Research \(Overview\)](#), Braude’s [Theories about Collective Apparitions](#), and Haraldsson’s [Deathbed Visions Research](#). There is also a summary of the [Cheltenham Ghost](#), authored by the SPR, I assume McLuhan.

Other Topics

Several other topics are included with information relevant to survival of death. This includes near-death experiences (Nancy Evans Bush's, [Distressing Near-Death Experience](#); Penny Sartori's [Near-Death Experience](#)), possession (Wehrstein [Shiva-Sumitra](#); [Sharada](#)), terminal lucidity (Michael Nahm [Terminal Lucidity](#)), and transplant cases (Braude [Transplant Cases Considered as Evidence for Postmortem Survival](#)). Other relevant articles are Douglas Stokes' [Physicalism and the Soul](#) and Patricia Pearson's [Phenomena Relating to Danger, Death, Bereavement](#).

Much about survival is found in entries about various individuals. Some of them are Alvarado's [Ernesto Bozzano](#), and [Charles Richet](#), Braude's [C.J. Ducasse](#), and Tymn's [Richard Hodgson](#). With one exception (SPR's [Erlendur Haraldsson](#)) there are no entries about modern researchers. There is also material relevant about survival in my comments about a book by Bozzano: [Ernesto Bozzano's Phénomènes Psychiques au Moment de la Mort \(Psychic Phenomena At the Moment of Death\)](#). Hopefully future articles will focus on many other important works.

Other Additions

In addition to more discussions of phenomena favorable to the survival interpretation, there is also need of more articles about specific alternative explanations of the phenomena. While the topic is not ignored, it would be useful to have long entries about these explanations. An example is an essay about cryptomnesia such as Stevenson's (1983) systematic overview, which I wonder if it could be reprinted in the encyclopedia. The same may be said about personation dissociative phenomena. An entry presenting a good overview of the topic of personation in hypnosis and various cases of secondary personalities would inform readers that such personalities can be very realistic, even when there is no reason to consider them to be spirits of the deceased (see Braude's entry [Mediumship and Multiple Personality](#)).

Although survival can be a polarized issue, and one sometimes bordering on fundamentalism, I find that the articles in the encyclopedia tend to be balanced. Even when their authors favor a particular view, they do not fail to mention the opposite argument. In this way the encyclopedia is effective as a reference source in presenting information about the variety of existing theoretical issues about survival.

Because this is a work in progress it is not hard to find topics that need to be included. This could include articles about specific phenomena in particular time periods, countries or

cultures, an example of which already published being Matlock's [Reincarnation Accounts Pre-1900](#). Similar entries should be written for such topics such as apparitions, mediumship, and NDEs. Similarly, overviews of the writings of influential individuals about survival, such as those of J.B. Rhine and Ian Stevenson, would be welcome. Furthermore, it could be very informative to have entries comparing different approaches to the study of survival.

Concluding Remarks

I have offered various suggestions for new entries in the spirit of offering constructive suggestions for future developments. But I recognize that it is all too easy to point at omissions in a publication like the *Psi Encyclopedia* when the overall area is so multifaceted and the project is, of course, ongoing. Its editor, Robert McLuhan, is actively working to increase the number of entries by qualified individuals not only in the area of survival of death, but also in the rest of parapsychology. This is a very time consuming task and one, I believe, that is going well.

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