

a psychophore comes from the occurrence of phantom limbs in congenital amputees — persons born with parts of limbs missing” (pp. 183-4).

The tenor of the long, though abridged, quotation above will seem very familiar to anyone versed in the Theosophical tradition. For that tradition holds that in addition to our dense physical body, we have several other bodies or vehicles composed of matter of various kinds different from ordinary physical stuff: etheric or vital, astral or emotional, and manasic or mental matter. These bodies exist on the “inner” or “higher” planes or in other “fields” than the dense physical. They carry the “diathanatic” or “skandhic” qualities from one incarnation to the next, and the etheric or vital body serves in particular as a template for the growth and development of the dense physical body.

Although the cases reported in Stevenson’s volumes show a great deal of variation, some features are characteristic, and those features are of interest in suggesting why some children remember their prior incarnation and even have signs of it in their new body. In a large number of these cases, the earlier life ended prematurely by violence. The reincarnation then happened quickly and in the same culture as the preceding life. And the violent ending of the earlier life so impressed the psychophore that it in turn passed on the impression to the new body in the form of a birthmark or defect.

It is as though a life was ended before its purpose had been achieved, so the individual was drawn back into the same milieu to finish the uncompleted experience. The Theosophical tradition is that normally a long period of time (centuries or even millennia) elapse between incarnations, during which time the psychophore (or collection of bodies on the inner planes) undergoes a process by which its experience in the past life is absorbed into the permanent individuality.

When the normal process is violently interrupted, however, it would seem natural that the individual might be quickly attracted back into the same circumstances as the last life. In that case, there would not be time between lives for the psychophore to be “cleansed” of its past memories, which would therefore be incorporated into the new personality. As the individual settles into the new body and new impressions come from the senses into the new brain, however, the old memories from the past life are overwritten and die out.