

According to Stevenson, a child begins to talk about a past life very early, almost as soon as it learns to talk; but between the ages of 5 and 8, active memories of the past life are generally gone.

At the end of the volume, Stevenson repeats his caveat: "I do not propose reincarnation as a substitute for present or future knowledge of genetics and environmental influences. I think of it as a third factor contributing to the formation of human personality and of some physical features and abnormalities. I am, however, convinced that it deserves attention for the additional explanatory value that it has for numerous unsolved problems of psychology and medicine. ... We may, after all, be engaged in a dual evolution — of our bodies and of our minds or souls" (pp. 186-7). The last sentence above, with which Stevenson ends the book directed to a general reader, states a purpose for reincarnation with which the Theosophical tradition is wholly in accord. The purpose of our many lives is to further the evolutionary development of our minds and souls. It is remarkable, though not unique, to see such agreement between the careful investigation of a scientist and the hundred and twenty-five year old tradition of modern Theosophy.

A popular, well-written, and perceptive account of Ian Stevenson's work is *Old Souls: The Scientific Evidence for Past Lives*, by Tom Shroder (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999). Shroder is a Pulitzer-Prize winning editor of the *Miami Herald* and later of the *Washington Post*. While with the *Miami Herald*, he wrote an article on the Miami psychiatrist Brian Weiss, whose use of hypnotic retrogression to elicit putative memories of past incarnations resulted in a popular 1988 book *Many Lives, Many Masters*. Shroder found Weiss's work unconvincing as evidence for reincarnation, but through it he came into contact with Ian Stevenson, and thereby wrote this book.

Shroder accompanied Stevenson on two trips, in 1997 to Lebanon and later to India, to observe Stevenson's methods of fieldwork as he investigated cases of reported child memories of former lives. After returning to America, Shroder investigated some cases of the same sort in the South. Shroder's account of those experiences is set forth with the skill of a master reporter. The reader of this book learns both the facts of the cases and their value as evidence as analyzed by a neutral observer. Shroder's account also gives the reader a feeling for the frustration, the danger, and the culture shock of doing such research in third-world countries.