James G Matlock

James G Matlock (b 1954) is an American anthropologist and leading reincarnation researcher. He has adopted a comprehensive, multicultural and interdisciplinary approach to reincarnation studies, and has advanced a theory on how it happens, the 'processual soul theory'.

Life and Career

James Matlock was born June 1, 1954, in Hanover, New Hampshire, USA, the son of American diplomat Jack F. Matlock, Jr and his wife Rebecca, the eldest of five children. His father's employment necessitated many international moves: Matlock lived as a child in five countries in addition to his native America: Austria, West Germany, the Soviet Union, Ghana and Tanzania. He estimates that he has visited more than thirty nations.[1]

Matlock earned an English BA from Emory University in 1977, and almost acquired a second BA in psychology, before being discouraged by the behaviorism and materialism he was being taught. His first ambition was to be a creative writer; he recalls dictating stories to his mother before he could write.[2] Unable to progress at fiction he visited his local library in Arlington, Virginia, in search of ideas for non-fiction writing and encountered books about reincarnation, a topic he had previously been intrigued by.

Matlock began collecting past-life regression accounts, recording each in detail on an index card. He noticed books by Ian Stevenson in the library stacks, but left them until he had finished his analysis of the regression accounts. When he turned to Stevenson he was impressed by the scientific rigor of work carried out in his field research on spontaneous cases, with its emphasis on careful investigation and documentation of evidence, and verification of claimed past-life memories. Matlock decided to adopt a similarly scientific approach. He became involved with parapsychology, subscribing to journals and attending conferences.[3]

In 1983, Matlock began post-graduate work in library science at the University of Maryland, concentrating in archives. He received his MLS in 1985 and was offered the job of Librarian and Archivist with the American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR) in New York. In 1989, he was commissioned to organize the collection of JB Rhine's Parapsychology Laboratory at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina.

Becoming dissatisfied with a career as an archivist, Matlock began studying for a master’s degree in anthropology at Hunter College in New York. He received his PhD at Southern Illinois University in 2002 and in 2004 returned to the Rhine Research Center for two years.

By this time Matlock was married and had a daughter, Cristina. At the age of three she began saying she remembered a past life. He discussed her memories with her as she became older; this gave him the opportunity to test some of his ideas, and he credits these exchanges as an important influence on his thinking.[4]

Matlock currently resides in Booneville, Lincoln County, Tennessee, and co-owns a Peruvian crafts importing company with his parents and his former wife Carmen.

Work

For his library science work Matlock wrote a survey of archival collections in parapsychology, which was later published.[5] While working as ASPR librarian and archivist, he began writing papers on the
history of parapsychology and on reincarnation. He published the inventory of Rhine's Parapsychology Laboratory in 1991.

At Hunter College Matlock quickly learned that tribal peoples worldwide believed in reincarnation, which in some cases informed their social customs. He arranged to make this the topic of all his term papers as well as his MA thesis. In 1990 he published a paper about reincarnation, naming and inheritance patterns among the Tlingit and Kwakuitl Indians, along with others taking an anthropological approach, including an index of reincarnation beliefs among North American tribal societies co-authored with anthropologist and reincarnation researcher Antonia Mills.

Matlock published on reincarnation regularly through the early 1990s, including a contribution to Stanley Krippner’s Advances in Parapsychological Research 6 that outlined the findings of reincarnation research and defended them against critics. This paper was the first major work supporting the reincarnation research of Stevenson.

In 2011, Matlock was invited to write a historical review of Stevenson’s classic work Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation for the Journal of Scientific Exploration, also to teach a reincarnation course in a proposed graduate program in parapsychology at Atlantic University. The program did not come about, but Matlock completed development of the course nonetheless, and began teaching it online in 2014 under the title 'Signs of Reincarnation', offering it yearly for three more years. He plans to resume offering it in September of 2019.

In 2014, Matlock founded the only Facebook group devoted to discussion reincarnation using the scientific approach, also titled 'Signs of Reincarnation', which he continues to run.

In 2016, he published a book on children’s’ reincarnation cases in collaboration with psychologist and parapsychologist Erlendur Haraldsson, entitled I Saw A Light and Came Here: Children’s Experiences of Reincarnation. He took part in a written debate with skeptical authors conducted by the Journal of Parapsychology in a special book review section edited by John Palmer in 2016 (the first major publication on survival theory undertaken by this journal). In 2017 and 2018, Matlock wrote eleven entries for the Psi Encyclopedia on different aspects of reincarnation (see links below). Increasingly in recent years he has undertaken investigations of individual cases.

In 2019 under the title Signs of Reincarnation: Exploring Beliefs, Cases, and Theory. He considers this the culmination of his work so far.

**Processual Soul Theory**

Matlock retains the goal of many others in parapsychology: to convince scientists outside the field to recognize its validity and learn about its results. Feeling that a theory of reincarnation was crucial for such acceptance, he proposed and continually revised what he calls the 'processual soul theory', based largely on the child case data from Stevenson and other researchers, and developed within his ‘Signs of Reincarnation’ course and book.

The theory holds that what survives death is the 'mind', 'soul', 'psyche' or 'stream of consciousness', terms which Matlock uses interchangeably. It is comprised of both of what Frederic WH Myers called the supraliminal mind (or waking consciousness) and subliminal mind (subconscious). Information of all types – memories of facts and experiences, skills, habits, preferences, emotions and residues of physical injuries, which can then manifest upon reincarnation as birthmarks that resemble scars – are held permanently in the subliminal mind. The subliminal mind customizes each new body by
psychokinetic actions affecting the genome, tissues, brain and physiological aspects, while the supraliminal mind undergoes a ‘reset’ upon entering each new body, losing the ability to retrieve remembered information from prior to the start of the new life.

Processual soul theory rejects retributive karma as an active mechanism, though Matlock acknowledges what he calls ‘processual karma’, the carryover of psychological dispositions and conflicts from one life to the next. The theory rejects also the possibility that reincarnation can occur between species that cannot interbreed, arguing that consciousness has evolved along with the physical body. Neither does it support New Age ideas of ‘soul groups’, detailed life planning and mandatory spiritual learning or development, evidence for which Matlock does not see in the cases he and other researchers have studied. However, it understands reincarnation to play a role in species adaptation and hence evolution.\[14\]

**Publications**

For a full list of publications see [here](#); for reviews, see [here](#); for blogposts and other information, visit Matlock’s website, [jamesgmatlock.com](http://jamesgmatlock.com).

**Books**


**Select Journal Papers and Book Chapters**

(All Internet items retrieved May 12, 2019).


**Psi Encyclopedia Articles**

2018, August. *Reincarnation*

2018, January. *Announcing Dreams and Related Experiences*

2018, June. *Physical Signs in Reincarnation Cases*

2017, October. *Behavioural Memories in Reincarnation Cases*

2017, October. *Buried Treasure in Reincarnation Cases*

2017, August. *Xenoglossy in Reincarnation Cases*

2017, July. *Reincarnation Accounts Pre-1900*

2017, June. *Experimental Birthmarks and Birth Defects*

2017, May. *Intermission Memories*

2017, March. *Replacement Reincarnation*

2017, February. *Patterns in Reincarnation Cases*

**Videos**

Matlock recorded twelve interviews with Jeffrey Mishlove, based on Matlock's ‘Signs of Reincarnation’ course. They were released in 2017 and 2018 on Mishlove’s ‘New Thinking Allowed’ YouTube channel:

- *How Researchers Approach Reincarnation*
- *Patterns Found in Reincarnation Cases*
- *Alternative Explanations for Reincarnation Evidence*
- *Behavioral Signs of Reincarnation*
- *Birthmarks and Physical Signs of Reincarnation*
- *The Interval between Death and Rebirth*
Reincarnation and Possession

The Psychology of Past Life Memory

Reincarnation in Tribal Societies

Reincarnation in the Ancient World

Reincarnation Cases and Karma

The Process of Reincarnation

He also made a video for the Parapsychology Foundation’s ’Psi Byte’ series: What Evidence do we have for Reincarnation? In addition, the Rhine Research Center has posted a video of a talk he gave on July 12, 2019 (membership required): https://www.rhineonline.org/video-library?fbclid=IwAR2No-AFjOQoNnK5qD79-oGfSh4nAw8c6M0KvEIp1If83NkaR7pJxqoo.

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KM Wehrstein

Literature

(All Internet items retrieved May 12, 2019).


Matlock, J.G. (n.d.) About Me. Published online on his website, retrieved May 10, 2019 from http://jamesgmattlock.com/home/about-me/.


**References**

**Footnotes**

2. Matlock (n.d.). All information in this section and the next are drawn from this source except where otherwise noted.
8. See Matlock (1993)