

Hidden Treasure in Reincarnation Cases

In some cases of spontaneous past-life memory, children recall having hidden valuables in their previous lives and show where these may be found. If no one but the previous person knew where the treasure was hidden, it is difficult to explain such cases as the results of parental shaping of behaviour or other normal means. Hidden treasure is a specific example of what may be termed 'private knowledge,' information known only to the previous person.

'Hidden Treasure' and Private Knowledge

'Hidden treasure' is a term introduced by researcher [Ian Stevenson](#) for money or other valuables secreted by the previous person of a reincarnation case in a location known only to him or her, and then pointed out by the case subject who remembers that person's life.

Stevenson noted that banks are unavailable to most Asians living in the villages where many reincarnation cases develop. For that reason, people place coins or other negotiable instruments in a bottle or tin and bury it in the ground, hide it in a wall or conceal it in some other fashion. Often they tell no one else where they have placed these assets until shortly before they die, but sometimes they pass without having informed anyone else. Hidden treasure cases develop under the latter circumstance.¹

The term 'hidden treasure' (alternatively, 'buried treasure') may be generalized to include any items whose hiding place was known only to the person whose life a case subject recalls.² In the cases of Mahmut Ekici³ and Kuldip Singh,⁴ the subjects specified hiding places of weapons that were not known to others. In a Chinese case from the third century CE, a five-year-old boy asked his nanny for a gold ring with which he used to play. The nanny told him that he had never had any such thing, whereupon he went to a mulberry tree near a neighbour's wall and pulled out a gold ring. The surprised neighbour announced that the ring had been lost by her deceased child.⁵ Indian researcher KS Rawat has investigated 23 cases in which case subjects revealed knowledge of some hidden objects, generally money or ornaments.⁶

More broadly, hidden treasure is a specific variety of what may be called 'private knowledge,' knowledge of things known only to the previous person before they were divulged by the case subject. For instance, in the American case of Rylann O'Bannon reported by researcher [James Matlock](#), Rylann recalled sitting on a swing in the carport of her house, talking on a telephone, and seeing a crashing aeroplane coming towards her. She told Matlock that she thought she had been electrocuted over the telephone line. Although when the previous person's body was recovered from the floor of the carport, it was 100% charred and so a determination of cause of death could not be made, an electrocution is consistent with known facts and with the previous person's autopsy report. These details however were nowhere

reported in print and were unknown to any other person, so if true, they came from knowledge that only the previous person possessed.[7](#)

Sometimes the private knowledge is something known to only one other person, usually the previous person's spouse. Typically this is something of an intimate nature. KS Rawat studied an Indian case in which a boy surprised everyone by telling them that his previous-life wife had a mole on her thigh and another case in which a widow became convinced of a case subject's identity on the basis of intimate knowledge he communicated to her when they met alone.[8](#)

Examples of Hidden Treasure in Reincarnation Cases

Syrian Druze Boy (1800s)

A Syrian Druze boy was the first to mention literally buried treasure, in the 1800s. Physician John Wortabet recounted the story, one of many incidences of past-life memory he heard about during his time in Syria.

A boy from a mountain village claimed that he had lived before as a wealthy man in Damascus. When taken to that city, he led the way to a certain house, where he recognized several people, amongst them a woman he said was his widow. After talking about his memories for a while, convincing the previous family he had indeed been their husband and father, he asked the widow if she had found the money he had buried in the cellar. When she said she had not, he led the way there and dug it up. It was found to be of exactly the amount and in the same denominations he said it was.[9](#)

Vishwa Nash / Bishen Chand Kapoor (India, 1920s)

In the 1920s, an Indian lawyer, KKN Sahay, published reports of seven reincarnation cases he had investigated. One of them was that of Vishwa Nath, whose case had not been solved before he learned about it and he was able to record the boy's statements about the previous life before verifying them. Sahay took Vishwa Nash back to the town he said he had lived and they located his previous family. The things the boy had been saying turned out to be correct for a man named Laxmi Narain. Laxmi Narain had inherited a fortune and had been a profligate playboy before he died of illness in his thirties.

Stevenson reinvestigated this case in the 1960s and reported it under the name Bishen Chand Kapoor. He learned that Laxmi Narain's father had shown him where he had left a large cache of gold coins before he died, but Laxmi Narain had not passed on this information before his own death. Stevenson was told that Bishen Chand led his past-life mother to the room in which the coins were later found, although it is not clear that he pointed out the location in which they were hidden.[10](#)

Shanti Devi (India, 1930s)

An Indian girl, Shanti Devi, became famous in the 1930s for her past-life memories, whose verity was probed by a government committee appointed by Mahatma

Gandhi. She had talked a lot about her life as a woman named Lugdi Devi, and her father had confirmed her memories through correspondence, but she had not been to the town where she said she had lived. The committee accompanied her there so that they could observe her reactions.

Shanti Devi recognized several people known to Lugdi Devi. She led the way to Lugdi Devi's former home and showed that she was familiar with its interior. While in the house, she said she would show where Lugdi Devi had hidden money. She went to Lugdi Devi's old room and indicated a loose floorboard. When raised, this board revealed a deep cavity, which turned out to be empty. She had had 150 rupees deposited there, Shanti Devi insisted. Her past-life husband later admitted that he had discovered the money after Lugdi Devi's death and retrieved it.[11](#)

Shanti Devi convinced Lugdi Devi's husband of her identity by demonstrating the special sexual position she had adopted in conceiving their daughter, due to her arthritis.[12](#)

Savitri Devi Pathak (India, 1950s)

Another Indian girl, Savitri Devi Pathak, remembered that she had buried money near a drain in her former house. When she went there, she correctly pointed out the place where the money had been hidden, although it had been discovered and dug up after the previous person's death. Stevenson interviewed two witnesses to this event.[13](#)

Indian Boy (1960s)

In the 1960s, an Indian writer, Swami Krishnanand, saw a ten-year-old boy without a history of seizures convulse and fall to the ground following a lecture on the virtues of right living. When the boy rose, he was in a trance, and in that state led the way to what he said was his home, recognized the woman who came to the door as his wife, and answered questions sufficient to convince her of his identity. He indicated where the previous person had secreted some money in a pillar by the door. When the woman left to get refreshments for her visitors, the boy emerged from his trance without any awareness of what he had said and done.[14](#)

Maung Zaw Thein Win (Burma, 1960s)

Maung Zaw Thein Win was a Burmese boy who identified himself as the reincarnation of a man who had died after falling from the roof of a pagoda. Zaw Thein recalled the man's name and sufficient details for his family to be traced and his memories of the man's life were found to be correct in all respects. In addition, he claimed to recall the period between death and rebirth. He said that during this intermission he had appeared to the man's widow in a dream and communicated where he had left money wrapped in a white handkerchief. The widow confirmed that she had had such a dream, which included the detail that the handkerchief was in a box containing basket work, leading her to look for and find the money in that place.[15](#)

Disna Samarasinghe (Sri Lanka, 1970s)

A Sri Lankan girl, Disna Samarasinghe, remembered the life of a woman named Babanona. She recalled that Babanona had hidden a small amount of money in a cigarette box, although she may not have mentioned the location in which she left it. About three months after Babanona's death, a cigarette tin containing money was discovered near the hearth of the house in which she lived, during routine repairs. The family were surprised to find the tin, as no one had known it was buried there, but because Babanona was in the habit of hiding money, they assumed it was her doing.[16](#)

A Spurious Case: The Boy Who Knew Where His Body Lay

All the previous cases were carefully observed or investigated and there is no good reason to doubt that the events transpired as described. This is not true of another case, one which unfortunately has received a great deal of attention on the internet and in social media.

The story first appeared in a book by German writer Trutz Hardo, who says he heard about it from a physician working on the Golan Heights in Israel. According to the tale, a Druze boy was born with a mark that stretched from his upper forehead to the center of his skull. When he was three years old, he told his family that it was the result of having been struck with an axe in his previous life. No one in his village had heard of such a murder, but on the assumption that it had occurred nearby, a group set out with him on a tour of the area a few months later.

When they came to a certain village, the boy said that is where he had lived. Suddenly he recalled his past-life name and the name of the man who had killed him. An elderly man recognized the name he gave for himself as that of a man who had disappeared four years earlier. The boy led the way to his former house. He approached a man in the crowd that had gathered round and accused him of being the killer. The boy added that he knew where the man had buried his body, and led the way to a pile of stones in a field. A skeleton was discovered under the stones and the murderer confessed to the crime. The boy then pointed out where the axe was buried and it too was found where he said it was.[17](#)

The power of this story derives from the boy's showing the location of the skeleton and the axe, which no one but the murderer and his victim would have known (the victim on the assumption that he had observed the scene after his death). The story has features similar to many documented reincarnation cases and is obviously based on them. However, inquiries among the Druze turned up nothing resembling it. Perhaps there was a real case at the basis of the story but Hardo either did not understand what the physician related to him or misremembered it. In any event, it is remarkable that this story has attracted so much attention when it has so little substance.[18](#)

Explaining Private Knowledge in Reincarnation Cases

Parental Influence, Misreporting, Fraud

Sceptics of reincarnation cases often allege that parents shape their children's behaviour to conform to their preconceived beliefs in and about reincarnation. However, that argument is problematical when applied to cases of hidden treasure: When neither the parents nor anyone else living knew where the valuables the children talked about were hidden, it is hard to understand the basis on which parents could guide their children's statements and behaviours.

The next sceptical recourse is to charge that the cases have not been correctly reported, due to memory errors, or even that they are fraudulent. However, most of these hidden treasure cases were investigated and documented by outside observers. Investigation revealed that the story of the Druze boy on the Golan Heights lacked foundation, but several of the other cases have stood up to scrutiny. In fact, Vishwa Nath's memories of the past life were recorded in writing before they were confirmed and Shanti Devi's identification of the place Lugdi Devi had secreted money was observed by a government committee. Krishnanand, also, personally observed the boy he wrote about identifying the place he had secreted money in his previous life.

Clairvoyance

When all 'normal' explanations are shown to be untenable as explanations for reincarnation cases, some critics resort to alternative 'paranormal' ones. Perhaps the children who identify where valuables are hidden have located them through clairvoyance, they suggest. However, it is not easy to see how clairvoyance would help in several cases of this type. Sunita Singh recalled having buried money in a field, but was unable to say precisely where.¹⁹ The first thing Nasruddin Shah said was that he had money buried 'under the door', but it is not clear whether that is where it was found. One of Stevenson's informants said yes, another said no.²⁰

These cases provide more evidence of past-life memory than those cases in which valuables were found after children had given the location of the hiding place, because it is less easy to explain through appeal to clairvoyance. If the children had become aware of the location of the valuables through clairvoyance, one would not expect them to have vague or faulty impressions of the exact place. Similarly, we would not expect children not to have known that money had been removed after the previous person's death, as in the cases of Shanti Devi and Savitri Devi Pathak.²¹

Unfinished Business

If hidden treasure cases represent true past-life memory, they are examples of something researchers since Stevenson have called 'unfinished business'. Stevenson noticed many cases in his large collection at the University of Virginia had evidence of some sort of unfinished or continuing business.²² The desire to communicate to widows or others where valuables are hidden is one way this manifests.

Importantly, this desire demonstrates that the psychology of the previous person can be a factor in explaining why past-life memories force themselves into the conscious awareness of a case subject, contrary to the idea advanced by some critics that the motive for past-life memory lies entirely on the side of the case subject.²³

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Endnotes

Footnotes

- [1](#). Stevenson (1997), vol. 1, 939n.

- [2.](#) Matlock (2017).
- [3.](#) Stevenson (1997), vol. 1, 274.
- [4.](#) Pasricha (1998), 276.
- [5.](#) De Groot (1904), 143.
- [6.](#) Rawat & Rivas (2021), 157.
- [7.](#) Matlock (2019).
- [8.](#) Rawat & Rivas (2021), 157.
- [9.](#) Wortabet (1860), 308-9n.
- [10.](#) Sahay (1927), 9-15; Stevenson (1975), 194-95.
- [11.](#) Lönnerstrand (1998), 72-73.
- [12.](#) Rawat & Rivas (2021), 61-62, 157.
- [13.](#) Stevenson (1997), vol. 1, 566.
- [14.](#) Krishnanand (1968).
- [15.](#) Stevenson (1997), vol. 1, 255. This case is significant also for Zaw Thein Win's birthmark. The person whose life he recalled the boy appeared to remember died from a fall that caused a severe injury on the right back side of his head. Maung Zaw Thein Win was born with large corresponding birthmark in this area.
- [16.](#) Stevenson (1977), 90-91.
- [17.](#) Hardo (2005).
- [18.](#) Haraldsson & Matlock (2016), 255-56.
- [19.](#) Stevenson (1997), vol. 1, 395.
- [20.](#) Stevenson (1997), vol. 1, 400-9.
- [21.](#) Matlock (2017).
- [22.](#) Stevenson (2001), 212-13.
- [23.](#) Matlock (2017, 2019).