

Chapter Two

The Hidden Mind

The unconscious

The human brain has been investigated by philosophers and scientists for centuries. They have dissected, probed, examined, discussed, weighed and tested it; they have subjected it to closer scrutiny than perhaps any other organ of the body. Yet despite these efforts, we are still far from any proper definition of what we call 'the mind'—the function, both conscious and unconscious, which is at the very centre of all we know to be human.

People like Ray Bryant, who have undergone hypnotic regression to reach back to past lives, are aware that the mind contains mysteries far greater than they ever imagined. They know that within the unconscious, the hidden mind, there is a source of knowledge, and possible power, that is only just beginning to be tapped.

The conscious and the unconscious: two quite separate components of the mind. But they are by no means equal. Scientific tests reveal that the conscious mind—the part that responds to external stimuli and which delivers commands to the body—makes up only one eleventh of the mind. The unconscious, a full ten–elevenths of the whole, is by far the dominating element. In other words, we are able to think and operate every day on a fraction of our capacity, like a high–powered engine forever running in low gear.

The body's automatic reflexes and safety circuits are kept within the unconscious. It is this which operates 'when we are not thinking', when our conscious minds are concerned with something else. If we become frightened, our heart–beat increases, stimulating the production of adrenalin to give us extra strength for 'flight or fight'; this is not a process set into motion deliberately by the conscious mind.

We may not understand this hidden power within us, but we can observe its peculiar effect. The next time you go to what you expect to be a large and noisy party, take a tape recorder and make sure it is recording when the party is in full swing. When you play it back, you'll be surprised to hear only a loud hubbub from which it is impossible to pick out any one voice. Yet while you were there, you were talking to people, having a conversation and clearly hearing people's responses. It is the conscious mind in such a situation which lets you concentrate only on the person or persons you wish to hear; the unconscious, like the tape, records everything.

Herein lie the mystery and the wonder which are the subject of this book. The unconscious stores everything it experiences. No matter how trivial the information, it is just waiting to be recalled from memory. The cases of hypnotic regression described later provide irrefutable evidence for this extraordinary ability. For if we can gain access to the material contained in the unconscious, we can revolutionize the very concept of memory.

For example, we might want to remember the telephone number of a friend. His number is written down in an address book, which we can visualize. By calling on our unconscious memory, we can also visualize exactly where the book is now, and what is written on each page. (Remember, we wrote every entry in that book, so our unconscious contains the memories of each entry as we made it.) In other words, we can remember something we had 'forgotten'. As we will show later, this is not as preposterous as it may sound: it is a technique used by those who have learned how to gain access to the unconscious.

There is nothing mysterious about using powers that are already within us. In the chapter on physical healing, we will show how many people have conquered illnesses previously diagnosed as incurable, just as animals do and just as we used to before we became sophisticated. The unconscious could be the key to a new age of health, and a way out from much of the oppressive currency of modern medical drugs.

The optic nerves, like photographic film, are sensitive to light energy and are constantly reacting to external stimuli around us. Every day we 'see' our world as it is translated into a visual image in our conscious mind. The pictures we 'see' are then stored away in the unconscious, just as any

other kind of information that is not of immediate use to the conscious mind is recorded. And in the same way as a projector will show a picture from a slide onto a screen, our unconscious visual memory can project a scene, perhaps from many years ago, as clearly as if we were 'seeing' it now.

This normally occurs when we are sleeping and dreaming, although of course everyone has experienced those curious flashes of visual memory which appear unbidden and unexpected. Closed eyelids are like a cinema screen, showing us only memories from the past, but visual memories in our waking state can be superimposed on everyday life: a rose can be conjured up while sitting at an office desk, a house from childhood recalled in precise detail many years later.

Visual memories such as these probably explain most claims for ghostly sightings. One volunteer at our sessions had 'seen' a ghost with no legs. Under hypnosis, he revealed that at the time he had been thinking of a colleague sitting at his desk. Superimposed on his line of vision, this visual memory appeared as a legless apparition! A person from one's own life, a person from a character drama or film on television: either could produce a very authentic-looking 'ghost' in the right circumstances.

The implications are dramatic: if visual memory functions as effectively as factual memory, how much is waiting to be discovered within the memory banks of the unconscious? A man of fifty is capable of recalling everything from his tenth year, his fifth year, his first year, and is capable of 'seeing' his experiences again just as he first saw them.

But he can, if he wants, see more.

Many years of investigation have shown me that the factual and visual memory-banks of our unconscious minds may contain the details of more than just our own lives. I say 'may' because I am not in the business of making broad claims or sweeping generalizations and, as later chapters show, I am keen to assess every explanation for the phenomenon we call hypnotic regression. Nevertheless, I am sure no reader could finish this book and still feel confident that he 'knows his own mind'.

Before we go on to study these cases of regression, however, it is useful to remember the context within which we are working.

'The past,' said LP Hartley, 'is a foreign country: they do things differently there.'

True enough, but not so foreign, and not so different, that we may not gain access to it. Take a walk through any graveyard and you will see how many of our ancestors achieved the biblical standard of three score years and ten. Ten lifetimes therefore will take us back to the thirteenth century; twenty to the sixth century. In fact, it is only approximately twenty-eight lifetimes which separate us from the life of Jesus Christ. Anyone today who is a hundred years old was alive at the time of the first incandescent gas mantle, the first electric tramcar, the fall of Khartoum, the Ripper murders. They saw the first television receivers, telephones, wireless sets, underground railways, and have lived through dozens of wars.

In other words, what gives us a greater sense of perspective is not chronology but the links between ourselves and the past.

History is also transmitted by word of mouth, as folklore and legend within families and cultures. Stories are passed down from generation to generation, and a child might hear of the exploits of a great-great-great-grandfather as though he were still alive. Of course, the stories become distorted with the retelling, but remember that, in theory, it would be possible for a story to have been told only twenty-eight times for it to be passed down from the first century to the present day. By this method the past is kept alive, and we maintain our links, however tenuous, with events from before our time.

History, too, is not a fixed, unchanging discipline but is as contingent as the present upon human interpretation. The accounts that we read of the past are riddled with distortion and bias, as succeeding generations attempt to impose their own stamp upon their times. The Tudors rewrote the history of Edward IV, the Germans rewrote the history of the Jews, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* presents a picture of eighth-century England which is as 'true' as we decide.

Similarly, the recording of information is by no means scientific. Even today, many individuals find themselves left off the census figures: how much more inaccurate must earlier census returns have been? Public records of births and deaths can occasionally be wrong on dates, and deliberate falsification of information can preserve inaccuracy for posterity.

Consider what happens when we research our family tree. We start with the birth certificates of our parents, grandparents and so on, in the national register of births, marriages and deaths. Beyond this, we resort to the parish records. But what if we want to go further? How far *can* we research back, before all sources of information dry up? And even if we could research back as far as we wanted, how could we keep control of the mushrooming numbers involved: first two parents, then four grandparents, eight great-grandparents, sixteen great-great-grandparents, sixty-four great-great-great-grandparents. And what of cousins, uncles, aunts? We could soon get back to the time when the entire population of the world was insufficient to have been the ancestors of any one person.

Think of the distortion that would be bound to occur within such a family tree! But our sense of history, our feeling for the separation between past and present, is also a casualty of this method and cannot be so straightforward, so linear, as the history books would have it. The past is within us now, within the genetically inherited cells which make up our bodies; the fact of having ancestors presupposes continuity and permanence. The past is a kaleidoscope of events, reports, impressions, characters, sights and colours, all of which are passed down on paper, by word of mouth and by memory. The past is, in fact, anything but secure, and it is up to us to reclaim it.

The cases which follow of past-life regression go some way towards bridging that invisible gap between now and then. They could offer proof that, far from being stranded in our own time, we are joined with everything that has ever happened and with everyone who has ever lived.

The mechanics of hypnosis

There is so much nonsense talked about hypnosis that it is probably wisest to begin by destroying a few myths.

All hypnosis is self-hypnosis. No one can be induced into a hypnotic state against his or her will, and the idea that a weak mind is taken over by a stronger, more manipulative mind is simply not true. Hypnotists do not possess the power to control other people's minds; they just point the way to a deep state of relaxation which is available to everyone. And the final myth to be disposed of is this: under hypnosis, you do not say things you do not believe; you merely dispense with the inhibitions which normally prevent your saying what you feel. But you are always in full control of what you say, and if you do not want to reveal your most intimate secrets, you won't.

There are various states of the mind which are often considered to be forms of hypnosis, particularly suggestion and meditation. But, unlike true—or deep—hypnosis, these states operate only on the conscious level; they do not reach down into the unconscious mind.

Suggestion is the lightest state and strictly speaking is not an altered state of consciousness at all. It is the state which was used so much in the past by doctors when prescribing a placebo. Patients would swallow a sugar-coated pill which contained no drugs, in the belief that it was a highly effective medicine. Usually they were cured of their ailment, but only because they believed in the 'cure'. This kind of suggestion operates throughout our daily lives. In the supermarket, certain goods are placed in optimum selling positions, so that those with the highest profit margin are sold first. We call this 'impulse buying' but forget that the impulse was planted in us first. Bottles are designed to look bigger and better, packages produced which seem more attractive than others. This is all deliberate suggestion, which of course operates most effectively in advertising.

If you are the sort of person who always leaves a supermarket with only the goods you went in for, you can proudly boast that you are not a suggestive type. However, you will probably be an excellent subject for hypnosis, because it is the suggestive type who has the most difficulty in achieving this deep state of relaxation.

Successful practitioners of yoga and transcendental meditation report feeling relaxed after a session, and there is no reason to doubt them. But it does appear that this state does not last long and that all too soon they are back to the normal stress of modern living. The chapter on physical therapy shows the huge difference between conscious and unconscious forms of relaxation, and those who do succeed in meditating usually find difficulty with true hypnosis because, again, true hypnosis works on the unconscious mind.

True hypnosis dispenses with these superficial notions. In the real, deep state of hypnosis, the body is relaxed but the mind is alert. Think of a dog coming into a room. It will walk across to

where it wants to sit, lie down and immediately seem to have entered a state of deep sleep. Yet it will be aware of sounds around it long before we humans are, and will snap out of its sleep the moment it hears anything unusual.

This is the kind of relaxation that can be achieved under hypnosis. It is no miracle, it involves no trickery, but it releases us from our self-imposed limitations. In the times when we were hunters, we had the same ability to relax, and relied upon our unconscious minds to watch over us while we rested. Hypnosis has been proved to bring about a heightened sense of hearing, and even people with hearing difficulties experience an improvement. While we are hypnotized, we recover the powers which, over the centuries, ensured our survival.

Evolution is described as the survival of the fittest: those creatures which adapted successfully to their environment survived, and those which failed to improve on their weaknesses became extinct. It is a cruel process, conducted on an arbitrary basis by the method of genetic inheritance. The shape of our bodies is a witness to this haphazard but logical progression; we are living proof of the value of change.

But we are still evolving. We may have achieved a physique which is suitable for our surroundings, but we are vulnerable to disease, a hostage to the stresses of society. Hypnosis offers us the chance to harness all the strengths we have ever possessed and to use them in the fight for survival.

Look around our world: are we winning the fight or losing it?

The sessions I conduct, many of which are described in this book, begin the same way. Those who wish to undergo hypnosis gather in a room, an ordinary room with no special lighting or furniture. A chair is allocated, and the first subject sits down. I speak in a clear, unhurried tone, guiding the person down into a state of deep relaxation. Sometimes this can happen immediately; sometimes it takes a few minutes. If the person wants to discover that state of relaxation and is not excessively nervous or distracted, he will reach it.

With eyes closed, but always fully aware of his surroundings, the subject will respond as he wishes to any questions I may ask. He may refuse to speak about something, and if so I simply move on to a new topic. I may ask him to remember times when he was younger and, calling on his unconscious memory, he will see, hear and feel again just as he did then. A grown man may stamp his feet and yell like a child, an elderly woman may smile at the recollection of her mother's face—if I ask them to remember, then it is in their power to do so, absolutely. And remember, everything is taped so we may share in the experience afterwards.

For those who wish to experience it, another past is also waiting. I will ask a subject to go back to times before he was born; then I, and everyone else in the room, must wait. Not everyone can do so. Many people retain 'blocks' within their unconscious minds, enforced areas of forgetfulness which protect them from going beyond that point. In the chapter on psychological healing we will examine this self-defence mechanism in detail and show how, by clearing these blocks, we can rid ourselves of unnecessary trauma.

Clearing the blocks can take time, sometimes demanding many sessions, but eventually they will be cleared. The road then lies open to the extraordinary phenomenon known as hypnotic regression. Everyone in the room will have the opportunity to question the person whose memories have been recalled by the subject in the chair. Gradually, often over many sessions, we will begin to build up a picture of this person and, as was shown in Chapter 1, come to know them as we would a friend.

True or false? Reality or fantasy? The next chapter will let you decide for yourself. But remember, the cases we are about to describe really happened, in a room just as I have described, and witnessed by changing groups of observers and participants. The tests we conducted were rigorous, sometimes resulting in a subject under hypnosis being questioned at speed by different people on different subjects for hours at a time. Facts were checked, false trails laid, tricks played and, as you will see, many cases of apparent past-life regression turn out to be the astonishing imagination of the unconscious mind at work.

But there remain the cases, and many are included here, where our cross-questioning draws a blank, leaving, it seems, only one possible explanation.

That we are talking to the dead.