

Reincarnation

As a man throweth away old garments and putteth on new, even so the dweller in the body, having quitted its old mortal frames, entereth into others which are new. --*Bhagavad-Gita*

The great mystery of life and its many problems confront every human being, and press more and more strongly upon the minds of men as intelligence increases, and as the complexity of existence becomes increasingly evident. A solution is sadly needed, and in response to the cry for light many panaceas have been offered, none of which, unfortunately, present self-evident truths that lie at the root of all sin, sorrow and suffering, as well as all true enlightenment and progress. Time was, when such questions were left to the self-appointed professors of religion, but the failure of these to answer the questions that bear most directly upon human life, has aroused the human soul to the point where it feels it must "seek and find" a solution to the riddle of existence.

The question of "*Authority*" has been a benumbing weight upon the enquiring soul for many centuries; but now, many minds are awakening to the fact that whatever knowledge is to be gained, must be acquired by each one for himself. Further, true Knowledge must embody unerring justice, present the ideal of human progression, and make plain the cause for the woes of the world. To all such minds, it is apparent that each must be his own authority for what he accepts or rejects; he must, therefore, use all the intelligence he possesses in examining and testing out everything that points out the way to self-knowledge. With this attitude of mind, free from prejudices and preconceptions, he examines each presentation *on its own merits*, and accepts or rejects, as those merits appeal or apply.

The word Reincarnation means that our present life is the result of previous lives, and that our future life will be in accordance with our past lives and the way we are now living. While this idea may be new to many, it is so illuminating that, with its companion doctrine Karma, it solves completely the perplexing problems of life.

Reincarnation or re-embodiment is seen to be the *process* by which all degrees of intelligence express themselves through forms or bodies, and make up the visible world we live in. Evolution of form is brought about by the expanding intelligence *within* which requires a better instrument for its growing comprehension.

Everything in nature points to recurrent efforts in this direction with recurrent rests between; each rest provides the means for the assimilation of the experience gained, which forms a new basis for a further advance. Day, followed by Night, is succeeded by another Day; the seasons, Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter, are followed by similar series with invariable sequence; and Man, under the same universal and therefore spiritual Law, faithfully follows the fluctuations of Birth, Youth, Manhood, Decay and Death, to enter into Birth again with a new body - molded, perchance, to a better purpose than was possible in the old one.

The doctrine of Reincarnation implies a pre-existing Intelligence; one persisting and expanding through all changes of embodiment. Changes of form are but a means towards the great aim and purpose of the intelligent Man within - the gaining of what the ancients called All-Knowledge.

Men, in general, accept Evolution as a proven law of growth, the evidence being drawn from observed changes in physical forms and species, but this general view considers only external evidence of the operation, without any understanding of the moving cause. The word Evolution means *an unfolding from within outwards*, and had not our scientists been so materially inclined, they might have arrived at a knowledge of the truth long ago. The Theosophical doctrines of Karma and Reincarnation make clear the operation of Evolution and carry it to its highest point, by showing that the impelling force behind all evolution of form is *Intelligence*, which itself is evolving to greater and greater heights by means of temporary forms of expression.

The objection most frequently made to Reincarnation is: If we have lived before, why do we not remember it! As a matter of fact, memory of a prior life is not needed to prove that we have passed through that experience. We forget the greater part of the occurrences of this life, few of us being able to exactly reproduce the happenings of a single day. A scar may be the only mark left of our babyhood, the injury which produced it never having been remembered. So although we retain but a few details in the brain, the effect of them remains and shapes our character. One might say that character is composite memory, for it is the sum and essence of all that we have passed through. Also, during sleep, which occupies one-third of human life, we do not remember; still we do not, on that account, imagine we did not live through it. There is a feeling of identity that bridges the interim, as also those gaps in consciousness caused by fainting or by taking an anaesthetic, so that when we return to our normal condition, we know that we are the same being that existed before. If identity depended upon recollection, we should each day have to begin all over again.

The experiments in hypnotism show that all the smallest events of life are registered in what some psychologists call the subconscious mind, thus proving that the memory of them is not lost. All the details of life are flashed before the eyes of a drowning person, as also just before death, when every circumstance of the past arises before the mind. Thus in fact the whole mass of details of a life is preserved in the inner man to be fully recovered in some future incarnation when the evolution of the man permits. Even now many persons remember that they have lived before, poets have sung of it, children know it well, until constant association with those who do not believe it drives the recollection from their minds. However, as our present brain had no part in the life last lived, it is in general unable to bring through the memory of the past; and this is most fortunate, for we should be very miserable if the deeds and scenes of our former lives were not hidden from view until by discipline we become able to bear a knowledge of them. By our living according to the dictates of the soul, the brain may at last be made porous to the soul's recollection, and then our past lives will be an open book to us.

Another objection to Reincarnation arises from a misconception of the real nature of man. Some say they do not wish to be someone else in another life, for how can they recognize their friends if both they and their friends change their personalities. If Reincarnation be the law, our likes and dislikes will make no difference; however, we will not be someone else in another life, but the same individual who lived before, only in another garment. If it is the body of our friend that we loved, it is

true that we cannot possibly hope to see that in a future life; but unless one is grossly materialistic, it is the soul of the friend that he is attracted to. Hence, if the soul that we loved inhabits another physical frame, it is the law that we will again, when incarnated, meet the same soul in the new tenement, although we seldom recognize it. Still, the effect of these former affinities upon us is enormous. It anon saves us and anon damns. For we may meet in our lives a person who has a remarkable effect upon us, either for good or evil, because of the affinities engendered in past lives.

Some assert that heredity invalidates Reincarnation. We urge it as a proof. In the first place, we must see that as the reincarnating Intelligence is immortal, it pre-exists before the birth of any one of its Physical bodies. We have an idea that immortality has only one end; in other words, that we live from now on forever; but immortality means without beginning as well as without end. Therefore the parents do not give the child its soul - he *is* a soul already - and all the parents do is to furnish the incoming soul with a new body. The child brings with him those soul qualities, the intelligence and the tendencies that he has built up during his many preceding lives on earth. Thus he can come only to a family with similar characteristics, which can give him an opportunity for further evolution, by reason of past incarnations in connection with the family, and causes mutually set up.

This will explain how an evil child may come to presently good parents, because parents and child were indissolubly connected by past actions. It is a chance for redemption to the child and the occasion of punishment to the parents. Thus while heredity is the natural rule governing bodies, when we consider the characters within bodies, great inherent differences are seen. We must conclude, then, that the transmission of physical traits and mental peculiarities (whenever it occurs) does not confute Reincarnation, such transmissions being exactly the mode selected by nature for providing the incarnating Intelligence with the proper instrument and environment in which to go on with his work.

Again, those who dwell on the objection to Reincarnation on the ground of heredity are accentuating similarities and overlooking divergences. Every mother knows that the children of a family are as different as the fingers on one hand - they are all from the same parents, but all vary in character and capacity. The appearance of geniuses and great minds in families destitute of these qualities, as well as the extinction from a family of the genius of some ancestor, can be explained only by the law of rebirth. Napoleon came from a family wholly unlike him in power and force. He said himself that he was Charlemagne. Only by assuming for him a long series of lives giving the right line of evolution or cause for his mind and nature, can we have the slightest idea why he or any other great genius appeared at all. Stronger yet is the case of Blind Tom, a negro whose family could not by any possibility have a knowledge of the piano, a modern instrument, so as to transmit that knowledge to the atoms of his body, yet he had great musical power and knew the present mechanical musical scale on the piano, showing that within that body was an Intelligence with superior musical development. In the case of the musician Bach, we have proof that heredity counts for nothing if the Ego within is not advanced, for his genius was not borne down his family line; it gradually faded out, finally leaving the family stream entirely.

In a similar manner, races have attained to great heights of power and glory, and have become decadent. The greatness of any race is due to the intelligence of the souls incarnated in it; and when these have gained all the experience possible in that particular race, they leave it and incarnate elsewhere. The economy of nature will not permit the external, physical race to suddenly disappear, so in the order of evolution other and less progressed Egos come in and use the bodies provided. These lower Egos are not able to keep up to the capacity of their predecessors, and while each new generation gains as much experience as is possible for it, there is a gradual decline and the race in time dies out. The ignorant and degraded Copts in Egypt are such lower Egos, incarnating in a race that once was the glory of the world, while the Egos that created that advanced civilization have reincarnated in the nations of Europe and America. The existence of savages is accounted for in the same way; they are remnants of a dying race, coming in at that period of its decline that fits their stage of evolution. There is an analogous process going on in our modern cities. The residents of a one-time favorite section remove to a new quarter, leaving their houses to others less well-to-do. These people after a time move on and a still poorer class comes in, and so it goes until the dwellings, through long occupancy and neglect, fall into ruin and decay.

The collective thoughts and acts of the Intelligences that make up any nation also bring about its wars, epidemics; famines and even cataclysms of nature. This is the only explanation of the periodic wars in Europe. The so-called cause was merely the occasion for the precipitation of the hidden, pent-up forces of the Egos concerned in the struggle. They had long ago, in other and past civilizations, set up the causes, the destructive effects of which were now to be met. And Egos will go on reincarnating until all hatreds and offences are adjusted and eradicated, however many ages it may take for such a millennium to occur. Hence we see how, possibly in no very distant future, there may be more wars, for other Egos who have instituted causes similar to those that led to the last war, will reincarnate together and have their own disputes to settle. The way in which these will be adjusted will depend upon the enlightenment of the antagonists and also upon the example set for them by ourselves. History tends to repeat itself, and if we can create a basis of individual and national procedure, founded upon justice and comity, we shall have rendered posterity the greatest possible service, for right principles and right action are a surer foundation for national development than commercial prosperity which, without these, only fosters selfish ambition and greed. We must remember, too, that we are building for a future in which we ourselves will share, for as we are now heirs of our past we will come on the scene again heirs of the present and inherit the results of our present action. Therefore the individual in a race or nation is warned if he falls into indifference of thought and action, thus molding himself into the general average of his race or nation, that national and race karma will at last carry him off in the general destiny. This is why teachers of old cried, "Come ye out and be ye separate."

Reincarnation does not mean that we go into animal forms after death. "Once a man always a man": Evolution, having brought the immortal Thinker on to this plane, cannot send him back to the brute. For just as the blood in the body is prevented by valves from rushing back and engorging the heart, so in this greater

system of universal circulation the door is shut behind the Thinker and prevents his retrogression.

The objection to Reincarnation by Christians is, perhaps, mainly due to the supposition that Jesus did not teach it. They forget that Jesus was a Jew whose mission, according to his own statement, was only to that people. Now the Jews had always believed in this teaching, hence Jesus must have been familiar with it. Whenever a professed Christian denies it, he thereby sets up his judgment against that of Jesus, who affirmed it on several occasions. In those days many prophets and leaders of men, among whom were Moses and Elias, were expected to return to earth, and the people were looking for their appearance from time to time. This will account for the fact that when the disciples brought the news of the death of John the Baptist, Jesus remarked that Herod had killed John not knowing that he was Elias, "who was for to come." On another occasion mentioned in Matt. xvii, 12, Jesus Said that "Elias is come already, and they knew him not." When there was brought into the presence of the Master the man who had been born blind, the disciples wondered why he was thus punished and asked if he or his parents had sinned, thus implying their common belief in the doctrine of Reincarnation; for as it is certain that a new-born babe cannot sin, the sin therefore must have been committed before the birth in which the blindness occurred. If the teaching was wrong, then was the time for Jesus to deny it and explode it forever; he waived the question, but did not deny the doctrine. In Proverbs viii, 22, Solomon says that when the earth was made he was present and that long before he could have been born as Solomon his delights were in the habitable parts of the earth with the sons of men. St. Paul, Romans ix, 11-13, refers to Jacob and Esau, saying that Lord loved one and hated the other before they were born. It is obvious that the Lord can not love a non-existing thing, and that this means that Jacob and Esau had been in their former lives respectively good and bad, and therefore the Lord - Karma - loved the one and hated the other before their birth as Jacob and Esau. St. John, in Rev. iii, 12, says, that he that overcometh will "go no more out" forever. This is mere rhetoric if Reincarnation be denied; whereas it is quite plain if we construe it to mean that the man who at last overcomes the delusions of matter will have no need to reincarnate any more. Following the disciples came the early church fathers, among whom was Origen who taught the doctrine of Reincarnation. Because of his growing influence, some of the more ignorant fathers became jealous of him and at the Council of Constantinople, 500 A.D., anathematized the doctrine taught by him as pernicious. So it was lost to the Western World.

Viewing life and its obvious purpose, with all the experiences possible for man, one must be forced to the conclusion that a single existence is not enough for carrying out all that is intended by nature, to say nothing of what man himself desires to do. There is a vast range of powers latent in man which may be developed if time and opportunity be given. Knowledge infinite in scope lies before him. We have high aspirations with no time to reach up to their measure, while the great troop of passions and desires, selfish motives and ambitions war with us and among themselves, pursuing us even to the door of death. All these have to be subdued and used. The mere fact of dying cannot eliminate our defects nor bring us knowledge. If we assume that upon entering heaven all knowledge and purity will be ours, we reduce that state to a dead level and shear life of every meaning.

Reincarnation is "the lost chord of Christianity," for in it and its twin doctrine Karma is the answer to all the problems of life. In these two essential teachings lies the force that will make men pursue in fact the ethics they have in theory. The impulse to right conduct must be based not upon mere sentiment or faith, but upon laws that are universally operative and cannot be evaded. Karma and Reincarnation point conclusively to man's responsibility for the conditions in which he finds himself. This is in direct opposition to the irresponsibility inculcated by Christian theologians. They teach that we are inherently weak and sinful and can do nothing of ourselves, but if we believe that Christ died for us, our sins will be forgiven. Such a procedure, were it actually in operation, would be subversive of justice. The fact that we are now trying to dodge the effects of our past actions is largely due to the acceptance of certain Christian doctrines which are misinterpretations of the teachings of Jesus.

The present unrest is but a culmination of centuries of materialistic conceptions, the basis of which has been the idea of one life on earth. From this conception has come the fierceness of the struggle for existence, with its selfishness and suffering. The word Justice has no real meaning among mankind, for men have lost all perception of *Immutable Law* that cannot be turned aside. Though its very working *exhibits what men in their blindness call injustice*, yet it is in fact the Divine Law of justice restoring the equilibrium disturbed by men through ignorance and selfishness. This is KARMA.

While these doctrines seem stern and implacable, they also give us encouragement. Reincarnation gives man an opportunity to try, try again, with the assurance that "each sincere attempt brings its reward in time." So those who sit despairing in the dark places of the earth may take courage. Those who are perplexed and filled with doubt may know that there is a solution to all their difficulties. The mother bereft of her child, the husband or wife left desolately alone may find consolation, for they will meet again and take up the broken threads of affection and weave them into new and fairer fabric. Thus the heart finds satisfaction and the intellect its fullest scope in these teachings of Ancient Wisdom.