

Reincarnation

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[Page 12] LIFE on this particular globe and in this particular portion of it is so very unsatisfactory to a large number of us that we, naturally enough, continually ask, "What is the good of it ? Why are we here at all and what is to be the next move? " And the religion of the country says, "It is the Will of God, who created Man to glorify Himself". And the next move for the wicked man who declines to praise the works of this God is Hell, which is not satisfactory, and smacks of priestly invention, besides leaving the question where it was. Others tell us we are a product of a tendency of atoms to congregate and form complex beings, and that we are going nowhere in particular for no particular reason — and this is not comforting either.

Then the doctrine of Reincarnation is put before us, and a good many of us jump at it and are sure that now we know all about it and it is quite easy and simple. We are here because we want to be, and we don't enjoy it much because we have tried to have a good time in previous lives, and have to bear the reaction now, like a man who gets gloriously drunk one day and realises next day that life is an empty fraud and a police cell is lacking in comfort. Then we see that by skilful avoidance of evil in this life, we may contrive to get a pretty comfortable time in the succeeding life, just as the good young man avoids getting drunk because of the headache to follow. But somehow this view of life is not ennobling either, and though egotism tells us in the name of common-sense that it is enough to live and be happy, yet there is an unsatisfied yearning in our nature for something more, a nobler, fuller life. But why ? Having learned the doctrines of Reincarnation and Karma, and seeing for ourselves that morality ensures a comfortable life: why not live and be moral and make comfortable Karma for future lives ? It seems good enough, and admirably suited to the commercial instincts of the noble British nation. There is this little trouble about it. We *cannot* be satisfied. Experience teaches that very soon, and only when one has abandoned hope and expectation can any satisfaction come. All this of course only applies to those in whom the thinking mind has begun to work, for the others, whose minds (?) are mere reflectors as yet, do not ask questions but simply seek their daily food and comfort, and for them almost any simple form of superstition is enough, whether it be called Religion or Science, and the priests of either class will provide all the creeds that are required. Sometimes, however, the whole mass of a race seems to outgrow its creeds, and the priesthoods who always lead from behind, keeping [Page 13] well in the rear of the march of evolving mind, find themselves out of tone with even the rearguard of their followers (?) and then there is trouble, and a new set of creeds has to be fixed up. Fortunately the great thinkers are always ready to grant the priesthoods the loan of some cast off doctrines, and so the game goes on, and the wheel of Evolution rolls heavily round. But the man who has begun to think for himself rejects all creeds, seeking to know the why and the how of Life and the reason of his own existence and of his apparently useless aspirations. Then if he study Theosophy he finds light on these points. He finds that his own high aspirations are accounted for by the theory of a high Spiritual Entity overshadowing and endeavouring to completely incarnate in that centre of forces which appears as his mind and body. His

efforts to reach up are the reflected efforts of this Entity to express itself on the earth plane, and then the failure to respond to these efforts results in unhappiness, dissatisfaction and the necessity of the repeated attempts at reincarnation made by this Entity. He learns that Humanity is indissolubly united in its essence and that it is eternally evolving, and that the men and women of today are but the outer garments of the same Spiritual Beings whose efforts and failures have peopled the past ages with human beings, and that the object of Life on this globe is to bring the whole of the race into a fitting state to pass on to a better sphere of action, and that to accomplish this object one thing is absolutely necessary, Brotherhood amongst men. And so he finds the starting point of all progress is also the final word, Brotherhood, and on that all the ethics of the world are built. The recognition of the synthesising force is Love, the watchword of the great Saviours of the World.

Then the doctrine of Re-incarnation becomes of more importance and the thinker begins to see not merely a way to escape suffering temporarily, but the way to become a conscious and active instrument in the evolution of the race.

Now the teachings of the Esoteric Philosophy make man a complex being — and this complexity is classified under seven heads, these divisions being called his principles. But as only a part of these seven is active in ordinary mankind, he is in reality, perhaps, represented as a three-fold being during life. Then we might say that the two extremes which we may call Spirit and Matter are only active when united by the really active energy of the middle one — the Soul — which is the incarnating Ego. This Ego, however, appears to be more a bundle of qualities, or characteristics, than a simple entity, Thus we have certain peculiar characteristics which make each of us distinguishable from one another to those who are acquainted with us, and again for ourselves, apart from the fundamental consciousness of "I am I" which makes our individual existence a certainty to each of us, there is memory which alone enables us to identify the *I* of today with the *I* of yesterday, or of an hour ago. [Page 14]

So I would say, that there is an inherent sense of *individuality* which is inseparable from a man, and may be the man himself, and there is memory, an attribute of the man by which he links a certain series of experiences together and so builds up a *personality* which, is the outward expression of the inherent feeling of *individuality*.

Now the ordinary memory employed by us is a faculty that almost entirely deals with the experiences of the body we are using for this particular lifetime, and as we mostly assume that all which comes to us in the form of memory really does only refer to this one life, it matters little whether it is really the case or not. But the result of this limitation of the memory is that we make in this manner a one-life personality, which is at the same time confused by the ever-present sense of *I am*, which makes us feel that we are not temporary products of memory alone, but permanent entities; we cannot indeed think of the time when we did not exist, although we may be intellectually convinced that there was such a time, and will be again a time when we shall cease to be.

Consequently, when we begin to consider the Re-incarnation theory, and ask "What is it of all these principles and qualities and so on, that really continues, that incarnates and re-incarnates", we find that the answer is naturally, that it is that principle in which the individualizing faculty or tendency exists, and this is called Manas — we readily see that the ordinary memory being concerned with things of one life only, cannot give any clue to the events of preceding lives, and that the memory of such lives must reside

in a faculty which is independent of the life of the body and bodily mind and memory.

But now comes a difficulty. If the re-incarnating Ego is this individualizing tendency, it implies that this too is but a quality or characteristic of something beyond; and as moreover we find upon enquiry of each and all that, when closely pressed home, the question "What are you?" meets with the same answer in the end, "I am I", then we naturally ask "Is there only one ultimate I?" and is that the same I in all, or is the sense of I am in one different to the sense of I am in another. The differences being all in the qualities, attributes, appearances and limitations of the experiences of I and not in it itself, for it still remains simply I under all circumstances.

Now here is the difficulty, how are we to say that the I of a past life is the I of today, and not an appearance on the face of the one great I which speaks and declares itself in each one? How are we to understand the teaching that is given in Theosophical writings to the effect that a human being is an individual who carries his own character and progresses or retrogresses through countless lives on this one earth, on the one hand, and the teaching that all that *is*, is but the appearance to itself of the One Reality. I do not pretend to offer an explanation of this problem, but merely point [Page 15] out that if *That* which is unchangeable and undifferentiated is the One Reality, then obviously the stronger the sense of separate existence becomes, the farther away is it from the One Reality. And at the same time the apparent contradiction must be true, that the stronger the sense of individual permanence and immutability, the nearer the realization of the Great Unity. And this is not so hard to see, for if the Unity of the Universe be a fact (and it seems a necessity of thought to me that it should be so), then that fact must be eternally and universally present in every centre of consciousness in the universe, as its latent and fundamental reality; and it is perhaps this ever present abstraction which baffles us in our efforts to find the individuality in man, and to say it is this or it is that.

But leaving that question, we may take it that there is the greater I which is back of all individuality, and which remains apparently unchanged and the spectator of actions done by its reflections or shadows, the separate individualities, then let us assume that there are a number of differentiated individualities which are the re-incarnating Egos of our Humanity, and let us try to see what relation these Egos bear to the personalities they produce and the bodies the latter wear as their outward garments.

Now in this philosophy we find the law of Karma and the law of cycles, which in modern science are, I suppose, represented by the law of the conservation of energy and the law of periodicity. And these laws, or theories, are very important in considering this question of Re-incarnation.

Why are we today here in this spot, in this body, and with this character?

First, there seems to be the desire for sentient existence, which impels the Ego to leave its home of spiritual passivity, and, like the knights of old legends, to seek adventure in the world of matter and sensation.

Now there are two ways of regarding this "descent into matter", this fall of the angels, this incarnation of Spirit in matter — we may either say that the Ego seeks experience and goes out to get it, or we may say

that the Spiritual Ego looks down on the chaos of matter, and in the spirit of divine compassion descends from its pure state to bring light into darkness and order into the conflicting elements; in fact, to make a cosmos out of chaos. Both these views seem to me to be true, but there is an apparent contradiction in them.

I think that if we push our thought back to its beginning, we have to accept the idea that our first emergence from a state of passive rest into one of active experience is caused by a "desire for sentient existence". because we cannot in thought get behind the origin of thought, so we start with what appears manifest, and we say the Ego seeks experience. Well, the Egos get that, and become so interested in the experiences of the sense world that they forget all about their spiritual origin, and become [Page 16] almost as material as the beings of the lower planes, so returning to a stage passed through in previous cycles of evolution. Then the Egos who have safely passed through the stage of the material world, looking down, see the failure of their brothers and go down to their rescue, and take on such bodies as are available for the purpose, and these bodies being produced by inferior Egos for lower purposes, may fail to work well in the hands of purer spirits, and so perhaps the attempt may be a failure, and the result may be a genius doing and saying magnificent things in an aimless and rather useless manner, and while wrapt in spiritual abstraction allowing the body to run wild in every kind of excess — or else the personal mind of the man is so elated by the flashes of inspiration, that he asserts himself and takes such possession of his own personality as to shut out the light of his own real genius by his own vanity; or perhaps it might be truer to say that the Ego in doing his work identifies himself with his instrument and forgets his real nature and purpose, so looking on himself as a separate entity, and losing his way as others have done.

Then we get these men and women, who have identified themselves with their personalities, doing deeds and thinking thoughts which are powerful causes, or seeds sown in the seed time, and these seeds, being not only their own children, but even more truly their own bodies, are so intimately connected with them, that they are inseparable, and the ripening of the crop from these seeds implies the presence of the Ego that planted the seed, for they are of one essence. So that the thought or act is like a seed sown, not in a field far away, but in our own aura, in our very body of bodies, and there lying latent till the recurrence of the conditions favourable to its germination and growth.

Now seeds do not all germinate or grow at the same rate, nor come to maturity at the same season, and the time of germination may be almost indefinitely postponed if the conditions are favourable to that, — just as we have all heard of the peculiar wheat grown from some grain taken from the coffin of a five-thousand-year-old mummy. So the thoughts, words, and acts of a man may mature in his aura under favourable conditions at enormously long periods from their first sowing, and also by altering the conditions the crop may be hurried and brought to a harvest in a very short time.

Now it seems to me that while the "desire for sentient existence" is the constant cause of incarnation, yet that is not sufficient alone to account for the special appearance of a particular Ego in a particular time, place, and condition. But the periodic recurrence of favourable conditions causes the ripening of the seeds of particular desires, and so draws the Ego back into the net of its own weaving, and forces it to accept a body which is the expression of a certain bundle of desires and tendencies, and which form the [Page 17] character of the personality for that life — but not necessarily at all the real character of the Ego. For the real character of the Ego would be represented by all the desires, tendencies, aspirations, and so on, of all past lives, and I do not see how it can be possible for all these to find expression in any

one ordinary life time. Nor do I see how all these varying causes set in motion can all come to maturity in one short life.

Therefore it seems to me that any particular incarnation will represent only some one side of the real character of the incarnating Ego; and as so very large a part of ordinary life goes no further than the mere gratification of quite personal desires and wants, I cannot see that there is very much to be gained by the Ego except a repetition of old experiences, serving only to intensify or gradually satiate the original desire, and as the next group of qualities come to maturity and forms again a body (astral) for a new incarnation, a new personality is formed, and the Ego compelled to take up that body finds itself so strongly bound by old habits that it stupidly repeats the old acts in almost the old manner, and not asserting itself strongly fails to make any real connection between the life just past and the present one, the only common factor perhaps being the desire for sensation and the attempt to gratify it.

So there may be thus a number of types of character belonging to each Ego, and these recurring at definite intervals may perhaps account for the varying time periods said to lie between each incarnation.

Thus, suppose the real character of the Ego follows the law said to rule this planet, and arranges itself into seven groups of qualities, these would represent seven personalities or characters, and be like seven character parts played by an actor, the influence of one upon the other being only perceptible in the effect made upon the actor, the Ego. Suppose, for instance, we give names to a few of these characters — Hamlet, Othello, Rosalind, and so on — these may follow each other in pretty close succession and yet the interval between the appearance on the scene of Hamlet and his return to the stage of life might be very considerable, and as Hamlet represents really the Hamlet side of the Ego's character, it would be untrue to say that Hamlet reincarnates as Rosalind, and yet true to say that the Ego has reincarnated when the next character appears on the scene. And if the Ego has begun to re-assert its supremacy over these habits of character and to show itself strongly in each one, then the link between these lives becomes stronger and more manifest, the Ego begins to have a real sway over the life of each, so that they all begin to work in the same direction, and the energy of the Ego is concentrated and its return is prepared. The prodigal is on his way home, rich in experience from one point of view, and with soiled garments from another.

If this suggestion has any truth in it, then we can see why man is [Page 18] continually told, "Know thyself", "Look within", "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you", and so on, for the way to what the religionists call salvation, and the Socialists progress, and the Theosophists evolution, lies by way of the real Ego and not by way of the personal appearance of it. It is necessary for the Ego to cease to identify itself with each of its temporary characters and to be true to itself in all of them, so it recollects its own object and ceases to tread the useless round of repeated experience.

Not till this point of return is reached is the true individualising process begun. It is said that there are seven stages of initiation in occultism, and perhaps at each of these stages a candidate makes acquaintance with a new aspect of his seven-fold character and conquers it or frees himself from the habit of that character by taking his stand in his real nature and refusing to be blinded by the passions and desires of that personality; so robbed of its vitalising essence, the personality becomes extinct and disintegrates, the causes being met and balanced on the plane of cause and not allowed to reach the plane of effect, so that no longer will any physical embodiment of that character be produced, and the

Ego gathers to itself the essence of the experience of that character; and when at last the seventh personality is dissolved and the fruit gathered in, then the Ego is freed from the necessity of rebirth on the physical plane and the work of redemption is accomplished. The at-one-ment is made, and the higher is united to the lower, as it is sometimes said.

The teachings of the Theosophy of today for the most part adopt the plan of speaking of two Egos in man, the Higher and the lower, but I have tried to express the same thing in different terms, for I do not think we shall ever learn the meaning of any teaching so long as we merely learn the rules and let the rules become chains to bind us instead of signs to guide us along the path. We must take all the teachings into account, and the one that is sometimes apt to be forgotten, is that each *must* think for himself, and how can he do that if he slavishly binds himself to any formula? So I think that we should not hesitate to try and work out by ourselves and with one another, theories developed out of our efforts to understand these matters.

For we must remember that the whole truth upon spiritual matters could not be expressed in any form of words or in any terms of thought but could at best be only symbolised by these forms of expression. And if we wish to know whether we have any understanding of a doctrine which we have learned, it is a good plan to try and explain the thing in entirely different terms to someone else. For we only know a thing when we can express it in our own language and in different ways.

Although the method of dividing man into seven principles and then, crediting him as I have suggested with at least seven personalities and an [Page 19] indefinite number of incarnations appears complicated, it is only an analytical way of looking at the entity man who is One eternally as humanity, and in a narrower cycle is one as a conscious individual. And as soon as we have mastered the seven principles and classified all these things we should then try to look at them all as so many phases of the one conscious man, to do which we have to imagine a single centre of individuality passing up and down between and through all these different planes of consciousness, then we must go a step further and try to realise that all these principles are active at once in their own states of time and no time, which is so difficult, that after spending some of our time on the effort to realise in thought that we are actually consciously existing in a state that is not governed by any of our notions of time and space, we shall probably be more willing to say that in every attempted explanation of any problem of life there must always remain a balance of the unknown. And then we shall not be so apt to think we know all about it because we have learned a few rough rules on the general action of the principles.

We are frequently told that all these speculations and reasonings about these difficult questions are no use, and that Jesus and Buddha taught simple morality and so on that anybody could understand. Well, in the first place it is not true that the great teachers taught *simply* morality; for their followers had most complicated and profound systems of philosophy. But also there is something always implied which is not true. People say we don't want any intellectual theories and talk about principles and such things to help us to lead good lives. This implies that people have no intellectual theories and notions already in their minds and that they do succeed in leading good lives — which in a general way I don't believe. It is just because our minds are clogged up with mistaken notions about things, about the world we live in, and about ourselves, that it is necessary to administer more theories and doctrines to enable the mind to cure itself by the diet that it can best assimilate. Look, for instance, at the result of giving phenomenal manifestations to people whose psychic faculties are atrophied, why they rise in revolt and take their stand on their misconceptions of the law of Nature, they call on their conjurers to imitate these

phenomena by other means, and go on their way more than ever convinced of the non-existence of that which you seek to show them. When a person has been accustomed all his life to recognise other states of being and other beings than the physical earth and mankind, then it may be possible for a master to teach such a pupil by direct demonstration of the thing in itself, but so long as we keep our mind lumbered up with formulas, creeds whether scientific or religious, theories and speculations, we can only clear the ground by studying better theories and by generally attempting an intellectual clearance before we [Page 20] can even make a fair start on the road to the gaining of a spiritual perception of the truth about ourselves.

So let us take such a doctrine as this one of Reincarnation and not erect it as a crystallised dogma, as an object of worship, but try to keep it in a fluid state so that it may blend with our minds and become a principle in life to us rather than a dogma or creed. Even in its roughest form and crudest expression the theory of Reincarnation appears to me as a ray of light in the darkness and a foundation on which to build hope of future progress, hope of a better and greater humanity and a truer and more intelligent life, than this senseless almost idiotic struggle for existence in which the winner loses as much as the loser, and death the inevitable is the gate to nowhere, and we live for no purpose and die when we can't live any longer.

If the life of Madame Blavatsky had served no other purpose than to bring forward once more this old teaching, even then we should owe her a debt of gratitude which we could only pay by doing as she did, and striving to give to others the light that has brightened our own lives with hope.