

# Reincarnation

As we observe nature, we become aware of a cyclic order of existence in the universe. Season follows upon season, and night follows day in rhythmic sequence. We cannot imagine a night that does not return to day, or a winter that does not become another spring. The phases of the moon, the cycles of growing plants and trees, the wheeling dance of the stars, all hint of a universal pattern of cyclic existence in the evolutionary progress of life.

## Cyclic Patterns

We can trace a similar cyclic pattern in our own lives, in the twenty-four hours of each day, periods of rest alternate with periods of activity. The science of medicine tells us that the body has its cycles—the systole and diastole of the heart, the growth and renewal of cell life. The brain, it has been discovered, also functions in rhythms. Psychology points to cycles of depression followed by periods of exhilaration, cycles of mental activity followed by times of quiet contemplation. Physically, emotionally, and mentally, for each of us periods of activity alternate with periods of comparative rest.

Historians and sociologists trace cyclic patterns in world events. The occurrences of wars, world depressions, climatic changes, the fluctuations of trade, the cycles of light and sound waves (frequencies), cycles in crime, recurrence of epidemics, geological periods—all can be charted. Research carried on for several decades by the Foundation for the Study of Cycles, Inc., has made significant advances in charting the patterns of events in accordance with this principle.

## Cycle of Evolution

In the large scheme of the evolutionary pattern, the law of recurrent or cyclic manifestation also operates. Life evolves (unfolds) through a series of rhythmic and recurring patterns. There is a great rhythm of life with which we may identify ourselves. The immortal Self has alternating periods of rest and action, in-breathing and out-breathing of the pulse of life. That Self seeks the expression of itself in thought, desire, and action—the arena of existence. But rest and refreshment also are needed, that the Self may review the experiences of existence and mold them into new capacities and powers. This cycle of activity and rest is termed reincarnation. It is the process by which the immortal Self discovers its full capabilities and eternal qualities.

Reincarnation is simply the assurance of the indestructibility of the soul and the certainty that all of time is at our disposal for the unfolding of our eternal Selfhood.

It is the coming again into flesh, the taking of a new abode in matter, the word “body” being derived from the Anglo-Saxon word *bodig* or “abiding place.”

### **Method of Transportation**

We may think of reincarnation as our method of transportation through evolution. It is thus a means rather than an end. If we are going, for example, from Chicago to New York, there are several modes of transportation that we may choose for the journey. We may decide to fly, or we may take a train, or preferring a more leisurely trip, we may pack our car full and drive along the broad highways spanning the two points of our beginning and our destination. We might even hitchhike, if time is of no concern to us. The distance always remains the same, but the time taken in traversing it differs with the will and desire of the individual traveler.

So in the journey of life, the great journey of evolution, the distance we must travel is the same for all, but we may choose our rate of progress. Our choice is based on many factors: our desires, our thoughts, our actions, and our accumulated capacities (in short, our karma). We may travel the air lanes of spiritual living, or we may hitchhike along the way, traveling for a while by means provided by others, until we learn that, for steady progress, we must make our own efforts. And as with travel facilities in the world about us, so with the journey of life itself—there are rules to be observed. When we fly overseas, for example, we must limit our baggage, and so we must discipline our desires in what we may wish to take along. On the air lanes of spiritual evolution there are also disciplines, for in this realm our “baggage” is the karma we have created—the accumulation of action and reaction through our thoughts, desires, and actions.

### **Reincarnation as Opportunity**

Reincarnation comes, then, as an opportunity for each of us to travel the way according to our own uniqueness. It is less a set number of lives than a series of opportunities for the realization of our spiritual goal. It is the technique life uses for the gaining of experience, for the Self in learning how to live. In understanding it, we learn not to identify ourselves with the mode of travel nor even with the traveling, but with that immortal Spirit that has chosen to tread the path of life. Reincarnation comes, then, as a certainty of future achievements and a challenge of present action.

We may picture humanity as marching up a giant stairway, the lower part of which can be seen emerging from the twilight of the beginning of time and the upper part

vanishing into the glory of Divinity. At every moment there must be beings at every point of that stairway.

### **Immortality of Soul**

The first fundamental fact of reincarnation, then, is that the soul or conscious self exists before birth and will continue after death. Existence before birth is a necessary corollary to existence after death. The second fundamental fact is that the soul is a growing thing, and its development from its first awakening to the gaining of its splendid maturity is extended over an enormous period of time. With the knowledge of reincarnation, we see life as a pilgrimage through which we tread our way to the perfection of the human stage of our evolution.

We see then that the soul does not enter this life as a fresh creation, but after a long course of previous existences, in which it acquired its unique characteristics, and it is on its way to future transformations which this existence is now shaping. Infants are not like blank sheets of paper, on which anything can be written, nor are they a mere cohesion of atomic forces. They are inscribed with ancestral histories, stretching back into a remote past. All the qualities we now possess—of body, mind, and soul—are the result of our use of opportunities in previous existences, and the use we make of our present opportunities will determine our future character and capacity.

### **Process of Reincarnation**

The immortal Self sets forth upon its journey. Thirsting for the experiences which will make it a perfect being, a conscious reflector of its divine Creator, the soul enters upon the stream of existence. It gathers around itself a mental and emotional field appropriate to its stage of evolution, and fashions a physical vehicle according to the laws of heredity and in consonance with its needs developed out of its past living. The soul moves through the experiences of existence, learning first this lesson and then another: birth, maturity, old age, and death constituting the cycle of growth in one lifetime.

Death comes then as only the laying aside of a physical instrument for rest and the assimilation of experiences into the capacities and maturer wisdom with which the soul may begin another incarnation. So life proceeds in a cyclic pattern, existence on earth for the gathering of experience being followed by existence in other realms of living. Our eternal purposes reflect themselves in time, and the transitory vehicles we use—mental, emotional, and physical—gather the experiences by which we become conscious of our divine nature and purpose.

## **Law— an Inspiration**

Realizing the truth of reincarnation should be an inspiration to us, for then we know that the great men and women of the world tell us in their persons and achievements what we with effort may become. For the future flows from the gathered momentum of the past, governed by the law of cause and effect. In its passage through earthly personalities, the spiritual Self accumulates a fund of individual character that remains as a permanent thread stringing together all the separate lives.

There is a majestic satisfaction in knowing that the present life is but one in a grand series in which every individual is going the round of infinite experience for a glorious outcome. This is not transmigration (return in animal form) and must never be confused with that theory, for once the individualized soul has inhabited human form it can never return to any lesser expression in the kingdom below the human. There may be many wanderings before the prodigal child reaches the home of the Father, but having entered upon the path of humanity, we can never again be less than human.

The great lesson of reincarnation is that our powers are infinite, our opportunities eternal, and our goal godlike. As we look at life from the standpoint of its opportunities for growth, from the vantage point of the immortal being that we are, then we are eager to set forth upon our way, taking the air lanes of spiritual living. There is no goal so high but that we may one day reach it with persistent effort, although many lives may be needed for the winning. There is no real failure in life except the lack of courage to try again. Opportunities come back to us, life after life. There is time for the climbing, time for the growing.

Reincarnation is the very rhythm of existence. Each moment dies that another may be given birth. To live in awareness of this universal law of cyclic rhythm is to be free from fear and doubt, confident that the future can hold all possibilities as the opportunities of the present are fully lived. Reincarnation affirms that all life is meaningful, that everything has significance and enduring value. It is the great emancipator, freeing us from the prison of the temporary personality into the noble vision and realization of our eternal purposes. Life is the great romance, the high adventure of evolution. Birth and death are but the markers along the road.

In the light of reincarnation, we may discover a technique for living more and more completely, utilizing every experience as an opportunity for greater development, seeing in every moment of time the doorway to the Immortal.

## FOR FURTHER READING

Popular introductions to the subject of reincarnation include the following:

- *Life Cycles*, by Christopher Bache
- *Reincarnation*, by Annie Besant
- *Reincarnation in Christianity*, by Geddes MacGregor
- *Theosophy: An Introductory Study Course*, by John Algeo

The most important scholarly studies of reincarnation have been made by Dr. Ian Stevenson, Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Virginia School of Medicine. His books on the subject include the following:

- *Cases of the Reincarnation Type*, 4 vols., 1975-83.
- *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*, 1980
- *Unlearned Language*, 1984.
- *Children Who Remember Previous Lives: A Question of Reincarnation*, 1987.
- *Where Reincarnation and Biology Intersect*, 1997.
- *Reincarnation and Biology: A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birth Defects*, 2 vols., 1997.
- *European Cases of the Reincarnation Type*, 2003.