

OF REINCARNATION

Selections from Chapter VIII in
“Answers to Questions on the Ocean of Theosophy”
by Robert Crosbie

pages 101 to 113, full text at <http://www.phx-ult-lodge.org/AOOcea.htm#8> with thanks to Phoenix ULT

WHY is man as he is and how did he come? What the Universe is for. Spiritual and physical evolution demand reincarnation. Reincarnation on the physical plane is re-embodiment or alteration of form. The whole mass of matter of the globe will one day be men in a period far distant. The doctrine ancient. Held by the early Christians. Taught by Jesus. What reincarnates. Life's mysteries arise from incomplete incarnation of the higher principles. It is not transmigration to lower forms. Explanation of Manu on this.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

This chapter and the two following deal with reincarnation. While the word “reincarnation” is in very general use these days, having filtered into the public mind from Theosophic teachings, there still exists a lamentable ignorance in regard to its scope and meaning. A very common idea is that the “personality” reincarnates, but there could hardly be a more unphilosophical, illogical and obviously incorrect one. Some spiritualists, dogmatic Christians, and even minds of a materialistic bent have adopted the word and given it their own peculiar applications, so that when one of these says “I believe in reincarnation”, little or no knowledge of “What reincarnates” is most likely to be found. The world therefore needs students who learn correctly and apply their knowledge, so that ‘in time by their numbers and knowledge, the true understanding may filter through to those less learned. We are students, it is true, but from the very first we can and should be teachers to those who know still less than we do; we can tell what we know, but we should be very careful that we are so well informed that we will not convey false impressions. Chapters VIII, IX and X, are devoted to Reincarnation, and Chapter XI, to Karma; these two doctrines are what the world most needs and we as students should devote ourselves to a full understanding of them for the sake of others, as well as our own understanding and progress.

Q. If the law of reincarnation is just, why is it that the Jewish race has been so persecuted ?

A. In considering any question of experience we have first of all to take into account the Law of Karma—action and re-action, or sowing and reaping; this on the face of it cannot be anything else but exact justice. Reincarnation is the result of karmic action, and also offers the opportunity to set better causes in motion. If selfishness rules in any one life, evil causes are set in motion the results of which must be adjusted either in that life or a following one. The tendency of selfishness is to increase with each incarnation, and if a people or individuals continue in that course, they will continually injure others and bring about their own re-actions at the hands of those injured. So if we find any people particularly marked out for persecution, we may be sure that as egos in other times they had been the offenders and are reaping what they sowed.

Q. What was it that began evolution?

A. The course of Being is an ever-becoming. Ever-becoming is endless, therefore beginningless. This solar system and its planets of course had a beginning and will have an ending, but every manifestation is but a further becoming of that which had been. Periods of Manifestation and Non-Manifestation succeed each other in Infinite Space, to which neither beginning nor ending can be applied (see the Second Fundamental Proposition of the Secret Doctrine). The ancient way of stating any beginning is, “the Desire first arose in It”: IT referring to Spirit, which is the cause and sustainer of all that was, is, or shall be. There is a beginning to the first glimmerings of external consciousness, which ever tends to widen its range of perception and manifestation until it encompasses and becomes at one with All; Potential Spirit having become Potent Intelligence. The ending of the process results in a new beginning based upon the totality of intelligence attained. Whatever begins in time ends in time. Time is clue to perceptions of Consciousness; as the Secret Doctrine says, “Time is an illusion produced by the procession of events before our consciousness”; beginnings and endings pertain to that “illusion”, and not to the beginningless and endless Spirit which is the Perceiver. As the Gita says, “The Spirit in the body is called Maheswara, the great Lord, the Spectator, the admonisher, the sustainer, the enjoyer, and also the Paramatma, the highest soul”; itself without beginning or ending, it makes beginnings and endings in manifestations, which as manifestations are beginningless and endless in their turn.

Q. What does it mean on page 68 where it says, “And as all the matter which the human Ego gathered to it retains the stamp or photographic impression of the human being, the matter transmigrates to the lower level when given an animal impress by the Ego?”

A. Mr. Judge had been explaining how the erroneous idea of the transmigration of souls to the animal kingdom had arisen. The substance which composes our astral and physical bodies is the embodiment of innumerable small “lives”; while we use these “lives” as points of contact with the astral and physical world, we at the same time impress them with our feelings, whether these be low or high, and when the “lives” depart from our bodies to be replaced by others, as is continually being done, the impress we have given them will carry them to whatever kingdom the impress is

related to. According to the impress we give these “lives” we advance or retard evolution.

Q. If there is an inharmonious condition of the lives in the body, do they attack proportionately every life within that body, or only certain organs?

A. Any inharmony in the body disturbs the whole. There is not only obstruction, but a vitiation of the bodily processes in a progressive way if the cause of the diseased condition is not found, and causal and remedial measures are not adopted.

Q. It has been found in post-mortem examinations that every tissue in the body is affected.

A. That would naturally follow because of the circulatory system. The blood is representative of and carries with it an essence from all the organs; any unhealthy organ distributes vitiation throughout the body.

Q. The lives of the lower kingdoms go back to their own kingdoms on the dissolution of the body. Would that not be retrogression? What is the Karma of those lives?

A. It would be a mistake to suppose that the lives which compose our bodies go back to their respective kingdoms only on the dissolution of the body; there is a constant coming and going during our lifetime, through the food and in other ways. The “lives” are not the same when they go as when they come; they may remain on the human plane or may go to lower kingdoms according to the impress given them by the human being. It is the impress given them that determines their destination; the Karma is that of the human being who gave the impress and impulse; the retrogression—if it may be so called—is due to the human being. The “lives” having no sense of responsibility nor volition are not karmically responsible; their nature is action, but action under impulsion; their degree of consciousness is not changed, but their modes of action may be. Retrogression applies to consciousness, not to form; for example, a being in human form may ascend to divine heights or descend below the brute in consciousness.

Q. Does Man use the same material or lives over and over again ?

A. He uses the same kind of lives, those that are of the same nature as his tendencies. “Lives” that he has used and impressed may be in other forms of the human kingdom, or in lower kingdoms as the case may be. There is a constant interchange going on, like attracting like.

Q. Then Man really can change the nature of the lives which compose his body?

A. If he could not, he would be at the mercy of his body—subject to its condition. We know that good habits can be acquired through thought and effort in those directions;

similarly with bad habits; these changes are due to the impress given the lives in our body by Thought, Feeling and Effort. But the body is the least of our troubles. Were our thoughts based upon the Eternal Verities, our efforts would be for true understanding and right purpose; the bodily conditions would follow in due course. If our thoughts are concerned with the body, the possibilities are very limited, because of the limitation of thought to the bodily plane.

Q. The chapter speaks of the "personality"; will we have the same personality again ?

A. The word "Personality" comes from the Latin word "Persona" — a mask, by means of which we conceal or express our inward feelings. It is the inner ideas, and feelings, the general character — that is meant by the word "personality": the latter is in a constant state of change, whether that be great or small. The "way we used to think and feel" is not "as we feel now or think". The personality in the next life will be made up of tendencies engendered in past lives with the addition of those of the present one, subject to the conditions into which those tendencies have brought us; those conditions may include change in sex, condition and environment. The feeling of "identity" that all have is not due to the body or its environment, but to the Egoic nature of each.

Q. Why do they condemn reincarnation in the Christian churches?

A. Because they have followed the lead of the Church Fathers who anathematized the doctrine in the early centuries of the Christian Era. There is evidence throughout the Old and New Testament that Reincarnation was a doctrine generally accepted; the Jews were constantly expecting "the return" of their prophets, that is, the re-embodiment or reincarnation of one who had occupied a body before. In the New Testament there are a number of allusions to it such as that when the disciples asked where is the prophet Elias who was expected to come before Jesus, and Jesus replied that Elias had been with them, but they knew him not, and the disciples knew "that he spake of John the Baptist".

Q. What did Christ mean when he said he brought not Peace but a Sword?

A. It is stated in the New Testament that he said these words. We must remember all the time that the one known as Jesus left no writings, and that all we know of him is contained in writings of men who are presumed to have heard the words and correctly inscribed them. We are therefore not in a position to know that anything written about Jesus is correctly transcribed; we can only interpret such sayings on the basis of the general character of the teachings of Jesus. It is evident from the records found, that some One in the world of men had uttered the doctrines generally ascribed to Jesus; there is no historical evidence, however, of the existence of such an one at the time agreed upon by the Christian world. None of these things militate against the truth and merit of such sayings as are reputed to have been uttered by him; the truth and the merit must lie in the sayings themselves, and not in the identity of the one who said

them. We have to Compare, for instance, the statement that Jesus came to bring “peace on earth and good-will towards men” with the one which says he came not to bring peace but a sword, and endeavor to reconcile them. If, as the teachings ascribed to him show, he taught Charity, Forgiveness and an all-inclusive Altruism, together with a recognition of the divinity in all, what could he have meant by the “sword”, an implement of destruction? The records regarding his sayings and acts point to a struggle against the false religions of the day; the over turning of the tables of the money-changers in the temple; the violation of the prevailing ideas in regard to the Sabbath day and other acts bespeak a war against false conceptions. Further — as a divine incarnation — he must have known what would follow from a misunderstanding and misuse of his teachings, for he spoke of that generation as perverse and wicked, and that while his mission was intended to bring peace, its misunderstanding and misuse would bring its opposite, the sword. In connection with this, is it not a fact that wherever Christianity has gone, a sword has accompanied it? And is it not before our eyes at this time that the world-war was brought about by and fought between so-called Christian nations? We must conclude then that the saying was a true one, and that while his mission was one of peace and good will, mankind has done and is doing to his teachings what they did to his body and his clothing: They “divided his garments among them, and for his vesture cast lots”. His “garments” is a symbol for his teachings, and his vesture for “his name.”

Q. The Gita says there is no existence for what does not exist, nor is there any non-existence for what exists. Everything must have existed at all times surely?

A. Whatever is has become what it is; whatever is to be will also be a “becoming.” Evolution is the process of becoming, an unfolding from within outwards; having “unfolded” there is no non-existence for it, but an extension of unfoldment. The great Ocean of Life contains infinite possibilities of existence, but itself is not ex-istent, for the word means to emerge, to stand forth, to stand out (ex-sistere). The Ocean of Life is the source and sustainer of all existences; that which has emerged exists; that which has not emerged has no existence.

Q. There being the One Life and the One Law, it would appear that all would start at the same time?

A. We are confronted by the fact of the kingdoms of beings below Man and that of Man himself; the present state of these kingdoms shows that there was a difference in the beginnings of them as beings — or existences. What we need to do is to study and apply the philosophy of life as it is given to us, so that we may know why things are as they are and what the real purpose of existence is. Law rules in all this, not sentiment.

Q. If Consciousness — the Perceiver, never changes, what is it that evolves?

A. The Perceiver has the power to perceive and to increase his range of perceptions. His power to perceive is not changed by reason of any perceptions gained; he can always continue to increase his field of perceptions. As his perceptions increase in range, he evolves a better instrument through which to give and receive impressions. An ever-increasing Intelligence and a betterment of form constitute the evolution.

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Q. Mr. Judge says that the entrance to incarnation is through food. What is meant by that?

A. A hint is given in the chapter in regard to the actual physical processes which have to be undergone by the Ego in passing from the unembodied to the embodied state. It is clear that our bodies are formed from and sustained by food from conception to the death of the body. This food is drawn from the physical kingdoms of nature and is transmuted into the various elements that go to make up and sustain the body and its processes. Reproduction is going on all the time in the blood, cells, organs and finer constituents of the body, and is necessarily influenced and characterized by the ideas and feelings of the conscious entity inhabiting the body. It is not difficult to conceive of a transmutation of all these reproductions into one synthetic condition, such as will provide a point of contact for the astral body of the reincarnating entity, and a means for the gradual concretion of the physical body, organs and processes before birth.

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Q. What would you say is the reason that men in general adhere to their religions?

A. The ethics that are contained in every religion worthy of the name. These ethics are the same in all religions, and are recognized as true and essential by all thinking people because they make for true happiness and progress, and because they are perceptions of the spiritual man within. Men differ as to the source of the ethics only, some esteeming them as commands or revelations from some God, prophet, reformer or what not, while the more intelligent perceive them to be expressions of spiritual law and inherent in every spiritual being. The existence of the same ethics in the various religions contravenes the promulgated differences of extraneous sources. There is but one source, the spiritual and essential nature of Man himself.

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see Chapter IX for more on Reincarnation:

Objections considered; Early Arrivals in Heaven; Heredity; No Injustice in Re.; Memory; Population increases.