

Reincarnation

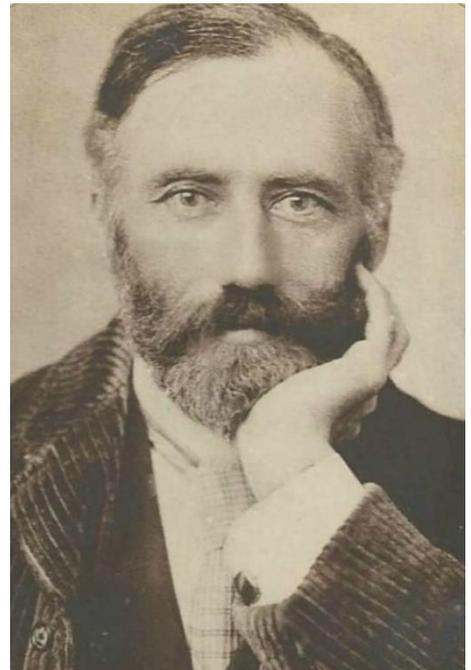
THE GREAT JOURNEY

From the writings of William Q. Judge

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From "The Ocean of Theosophy" chapters 8-10

How man has come to be the complex being that he is and why, are questions that neither Science nor Religion makes conclusive answer to. This immortal thinker having such vast powers and possibilities, all his because of his intimate connection with every secret part of Nature from which he has been built up, stands at the top of an immense and silent evolution. He asks why Nature exists, what the drama of life has for its aim, how that aim may be attained. But Science and Religion both fail to give a reasonable reply. Science does not pretend to be able to give the solution, saying that the examination of things as they are is enough of a task; religion offers an explanation both illogical and unmeaning and acceptable but to the bigot, as it requires us to consider the whole of Nature as a mystery and to seek for the meaning and purpose of life with all its sorrow in the pleasure of a God who cannot be found out. The educated and enquiring mind knows that dogmatic religion can only give an answer invented by man while it pretends to be from God.



What then is the universe for, and for what final purpose is man the immortal thinker here in evolution? It is all for the experience and emancipation of the soul, for the purpose of raising the entire mass of manifested matter up to the stature, nature, and dignity of conscious god-hood. The great aim is to reach self-consciousness; not through a race or a tribe or some favored nation, but by and through the perfecting, after transformation, of the whole mass of matter as well as what we now call soul. Nothing is or is to be left out. The aim for present man is his initiation into complete knowledge, and for the other kingdoms below him that they may be raised up gradually from stage to stage to be in time initiated also. This is evolution carried to its highest power; it is a magnificent prospect; it makes of man a god, and gives to every part of nature the possibility of being one day the same; there is strength and nobility in it, for by this no man is dwarfed and belittled, for no one is so originally sinful that he cannot rise above all sin. Treated from the materialistic position of Science, evolution takes in but half of life; while the religious conception of it is a mixture of nonsense and fear. Present religions keep the element of fear, and at the same time imagine that an Almighty being can think of no other earth but this and has to govern this one very imperfectly. But the old theosophical view makes the universe a vast, complete, and perfect whole.

Now the moment we postulate a double evolution, physical and spiritual, we have at the same time to admit that it can only be carried on by reincarnation. . . .

Alone in reincarnation is the answer to all the problems of life, and in it and Karma is the force that will make men pursue in fact the ethics they have in theory. It is the aim of the old philosophy to restore this doctrine to whatsoever religion has lost it; . . .

Although reincarnation is the law of nature, the complete trinity of *Atma-Buddhi-Manas* does not yet fully incarnate in this race. They use and occupy the body by means of the entrance of *Manas*, the lowest of the three, and the other two shine upon it from above, constituting the God in Heaven. This was symbolized in the old Jewish teaching about the Heavenly Man who stands with his head in heaven and his feet in hell. That is, the head *Atma* and *Buddhi* are yet in heaven, and the feet, *Manas*, walk in hell, which is the body and physical life. For that reason man is not yet fully conscious, and reincarnations are needed to at last complete the incarnation of the whole trinity in the body. When that has been accomplished the race will have become as gods, and the godlike trinity being in full possession the entire mass of matter will be perfected and raised up for the next step. This is the real meaning of "the word made flesh." It was so grand a thing in the case of any single person, such as Jesus or Buddha, as to be looked upon as a divine incarnation. And out of this, too, comes the idea of the crucifixion, for *Manas* is thus crucified for the purpose of raising up the thief to paradise.

It is because the trinity is not yet incarnate in the race that life has so many mysteries, some of which are showing themselves from day to day in all the various experiments made on and in man. . . .

Suffering comes to nearly all men, and a great many live lives of sorrow from the cradle to the grave, so it is objected that reincarnation is unjust because we suffer for the wrong done by some other person in another life. This objection is based on the false notion that the person in the other life was some one else. But in every life it is the same person. When we come again we do not take up the body of some one else, nor another's deeds, but are like an actor who plays many parts, the same actor inside though the costumes and the lines recited differ in each new play. Shakespeare was right in saying that life is a play, for the great life of the soul is a drama, and each new life and rebirth another act in which we assume another part and put on a new dress, but all through it we are the self-same person. So instead of its being unjust, it is perfect justice, and in no other manner could justice be preserved.

But, it is said, if we reincarnate how is it that we do not remember the other life; and further, as we cannot remember the deeds for which we suffer is it not unjust for that reason? Those who ask this always ignore the fact that they also have enjoyment and reward in life and are content to accept them without question. For if it is unjust to be punished for deeds we do not remember, then it is also inequitable to be rewarded for other acts which have been forgotten. Mere entry into life is no fit foundation for any reward or punishment. Reward and punishment must be the just desert for prior conduct. Nature's law of justice is not imperfect, and it is only the imperfection of human justice that requires the offender to know and remember in this life a deed to which a penalty is annexed. In the prior life the doer was then quite aware of what he did, and nature affixes consequences to his acts, being thus just. We well know that she will make the effect follow the cause whatever we wish and whether we remember or forget what we did. If a baby is hurt in its first years by the nurse so as to lay the ground for a crippling disease in after life, as is often the case, the crippling disease will come although the child neither brought on the present cause

nor remembered ought about it. But reincarnation, with its companion doctrine of Karma, rightly understood, shows how perfectly just the whole scheme of nature is.

Memory of a prior life is not needed to prove that we passed through that existence, nor is the fact of not remembering a good objection. We forget the greater part of the occurrences of the years and days of this life, but no one would say for that reason we did not go through these years. They were lived, and we retain but little of the details in the brain, but the entire effect of them on the character is kept and made a part of ourselves. The whole mass of detail of a life is preserved in the inner man to be one day fully brought back to the conscious memory in some other life when we are perfected. And even now, imperfect as we are and little as we know, the experiments in hypnotism show that all the smallest details are registered in what is for the present known as the sub-conscious mind. The theosophical doctrine is that not a single one of these happenings is forgotten in fact, and at the end of life when the eyes are closed and those about say we are dead every thought and circumstance of life flash vividly into and across the mind.

Many persons do, however, remember that they have lived before. Poets have sung of this, children know it well, until the constant living in an atmosphere of unbelief drives the recollection from their minds for the present, but all are subject to the limitations imposed upon the Ego by the new brain in each life. This is why we are not able to keep the pictures of the past, whether of this life or the preceding ones. The brain is the instrument for the memory of the soul, and, being new in each life with but a certain capacity, the Ego is only able to use it for the new life up to its capacity. That capacity will be fully availed of or the contrary, just according to the Ego's own desire and prior conduct, because such past living will have increased or diminished its power to overcome the forces of material existence.

By living according to the dictates of the soul the brain may at least be made porous to the soul's recollections; if the contrary sort of a life is led, then more and more will clouds obscure that reminiscence. But as the brain had no part in the life last lived, it is in general unable to remember. And this is a wise law, for we should be very miserable if the deeds and scenes of our former lives were not hidden from our view until by discipline we become able to bear a knowledge of them. .

It is true that so far as concerns this globe the number of Egos belonging to it is definite; but no one knows what that quantity is nor what is the total capacity of the earth for sustaining them. The statisticians of the day are chiefly in the West, and their tables embrace but a small section of the history of man. They cannot say how many persons were incarnated on the earth at any prior date when the globe was full in all parts, hence the quantity of egos willing or waiting to be reborn is unknown to the men of today. The Masters of theosophical knowledge say that the total number of such egos is vast, and for that reason the supply of those for the occupation of bodies to be born over and above the number that die is sufficient. Then too it must be borne in mind that each ego for itself varies the length of stay in the *post-mortem* states. They do not reincarnate at the same interval, but come out of the state after death at different rates, and whenever there occurs a great number of deaths by war, pestilence, or famine, there is at once a rush of souls to incarnation, either in the same place or in some other place or race. The earth is so small a globe in the vast assemblage of inhabitable planets there is a sufficient supply of Egos for incarnation here. . . .

Each man feels and knows that he has an individuality of his own, a personal identity which bridges over not only the gaps made by sleep but also those sometimes supervening on temporary

lesions in the brain. This identity never breaks from beginning to end of life in the normal person, and only the persistence and eternal character of the soul will account for it.

So, ever since we began to remember, we know that our personal identity has not failed us, no matter how bad may be our memory. This disposes of the argument that identity depends on recollection, for the reason that if it did depend alone on recollection we should each day have to begin over again, as we cannot remember the events of the past in detail, and some minds remember but little yet feel their personal identity. And as it is often seen that some who remember the least insist as strongly as the others on their personal identity, that persistence of feeling must come from the old and immortal soul.

Viewing life and its probable object, with all the varied experience possible for man, one must be forced to the conclusion that a single life is not enough for carrying out all that is intended by Nature, to say nothing of what man himself desires to do. The scale of variety in experience is enormous. There is a vast range of powers latent in man which we see may be developed if opportunity be given. Knowledge infinite in scope and diversity lies before us, and especially in these days when special investigation is the rule. We perceive that 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 tried, conquered, used, subdued. One life is not enough for all this. To say that we have but one life here with such possibilities put before us and impossible of development is to make the universe and life a huge and cruel joke perpetrated by a powerful God who is thus accused, by those who believe in a special creation of souls, of triumphing and playing with puny man just because that man is small and the creature of the Almighty. A human life at most is seventy years; statistics reduce this to about forty; and out of that little remainder a large part is spent in sleep and another part in childhood. Thus in one life it is perfectly impossible to attain to the merest fraction of what Nature evidently has in view. We see many truths vaguely which a life gives us no time to grasp, and especially is this so when men have to make such a struggle to live at all. Our faculties are small or dwarfed or weak; one life gives no opportunity to alter this; we perceive other powers latent in us that cannot possibly be brought out in such a small space of time; and we have much more than a suspicion that the extent of the field of truth is vastly greater than the narrow circle we are confined to. It is not reasonable to suppose that either God or nature projects us into a body simply to fill us with bitterness because we can have no other opportunity here, but rather we must conclude that a series of incarnations has led to the present condition, and that the process of coming here again and again must go on for the purpose of affording us the opportunity needed.

The mere fact of dying is not of itself enough to bring about development of faculties or the elimination of wrong tendency and inclination. If we assume that upon entering heaven we at once acquire all knowledge and purity, then that state after death is reduced to a dead level and life itself with all its discipline is shorn of every meaning. Some of the churches teach of a school of discipline after death where it is impudently stated that the Apostles themselves, well known to be ignorant men, are to be the teachers. This is absurd and devoid of any basis or reason in the natural order. Besides, if there is to be such subsequent discipline, why were we projected into life at all? And why after the suffering and the error committed are we taken from the place where we did our acts? The only solution left is in reincarnation. We come back to earth because on it and with the beings upon it our deeds were performed; because it is the only proper place where punishment and reward can be justly meted out; because here is the only natural spot in which to

continue the struggle toward perfection, toward the development of the faculties we have and the destruction of the wickedness in us. Justice to ourselves and to all other beings demands it, for we cannot live for ourselves, and it would be unjust to permit some of us to escape, leaving those who were participants with us to remain or to be plunged into a hell of eternal duration. . . .

It has been often thought that the opposition to reincarnation has been solely based on prejudice, when not due to a dogma which can only stand when the mind is bound down and prevented from using its own powers. It is a doctrine the most noble of all, and with its companion one of Karma, . . . it alone gives the basis for ethics. There is no doubt in my mind that the founder of Christianity took it for granted and that its present absence from that religion is the reason for the contradiction between the professed ethics of Christian nations and their actual practices which are so contrary to the morals given out by Jesus.

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From the article “Respecting Reincarnation”

If the soul that we do love inhabits another physical frame, it is the law – a part of the law of Reincarnation not often stated or dwelt on – that we will again, when incarnated, meet that same soul in the new tenement. We cannot, however, always recognize it. But that, the recognition or memory of those whom we knew before, is one of the very objects of our study and practice. Not only is this the law as found in ancient books, but it has been positively stated, in the history of the Theosophical Society, in a letter from an Adept addressed not many years ago to some London theosophists. In it he asked them if they imagined that they were together as incarnated beings for the first time, stated that they were not, and laid down the rule that the real affinities of soul life drew them together on earth. . . . By living up to the highest and best of our convictions, for humanity and not for *self*, we make it possible that we shall at last recognize in some earth-life those persons whom we love, and to lose whom forever seems such a dreary and uninviting prospect.

From “Echoes from the Orient” p. 59

“This is the “wheel of rebirth,” from which no man can escape unless he conforms to true ethics and acquires true knowledge and consciousness while living in a body. It was to stop this ceaselessly revolving wheel that Buddha declared his perfect law, and it is the aim of the true Theosophists to turn his great and brilliant “Wheel of the Law” for the healing of the nations.



DEVOTIONAL READING

From “The Voice of the Silence”

To reach Nirvana’s bliss, but to renounce it, is the supreme, the final step – the highest on Renunciation’s Path.

Know, O Disciple, this is the *Secret* PATH, selected by the Buddhas of Perfection, who sacrificed The SELF to weaker Selves.

Yet, if the “Doctrine of the Heart” is too high-winged for thee. If thou need’st help thyself and fearest to offer help to others, – then, thou of timid heart, be warned in time: remain content with the “Eye Doctrine” of the Law. Hope still. For if the “Secret Path” is unattainable this “day,” it is within thy reach “to-morrow.” Learn that no efforts, not the smallest – whether in right or wrong direction – can vanish from the world of causes.

E’en wasted smoke remains not traceless. “A harsh word uttered in past lives, is not destroyed but ever comes again.” The pepper plant will not give birth to roses, nor the sweet jessamine’s silver star to thorn or thistle turn.

Thou canst create this “day” thy chances for thy “morrow.” In the “Great Journey,” causes sown each hour bear each its harvest of effects, for rigid Justice rules the World. With mighty sweep of never erring action, it brings to mortals lives of weal or woe, the Karmic progeny of all our former thoughts and deeds.

Take then as much as merit hath in store for thee, O thou of patient heart. Be of good cheer and rest content with fate. Such is thy Karma, the Karma of the cycle of thy births, the destiny of those, who, in their pain and sorrow, are born along with thee, rejoice and weep from life to life, chained to thy previous actions.

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Act thou for them to “day,” and they will act for thee, “to morrow.”

Explanatory Notes

“To-morrow” means the following rebirth or reincarnation.

“Great Journey” or the whole complete cycle of existences, in one “Round.”

~ from p. 33-35 of the original 1889 edition,
translated by H. P. Blavatsky from the Book of the Golden Precepts

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