

The Psychology of Reincarnation

Selections from articles by H.P.Blavatsky chosen to illustrate:

- (a) how the beliefs we (as the personal mind) hold during our waking life in the *existence of a self-conscious after-death state* are largely self-fulfilling in the after death programme;
- (b) the sort of post-mortem experience materialists may have;
- (c) the connection during life and after death between our waking self-conscious state and the consciousness of the immortal Ego;
- (d) corroboration by evidence from recent scientific research on the states of consciousness and unexplained feats of memory of previous lives, and how they may be most easily and reasonably accounted for by the form of reincarnation taught in the original writings of theosophy.

“Life and Death”

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN A GREAT EASTERN TEACHER, H. P. B.,
COLONEL OLCOTT AND AN INDIAN (Narayan); REPORTED BY H. P. BLAVATSKY

<http://www.ultindia.org/pamphlets/hpb/PsychOfReinc.pdf>

[In this article “Life and Death” the *Sûtrâtmâ* is used for the principle later called the *Higher Manas*, and Manas for that later called the Lower or Kama-Manas.—Eds.]

[on the question of the survival of consciousness at death; largely undecided in 21st c.]

MASTER," said Narayan to Thakur,¹ in the midst of a very hot dispute with the poor Babu, "what is it he is saying, and can one listen to him without being disgusted? He says that nothing remains of the man after he is dead, but that the body of the man simply resolves itself into its component elements, and that what we call the soul, and he calls the temporary consciousness, separates itself, disappearing like the steam of hot water as it cools."

"Do you find this so very astonishing?" said the Master. "The Babu is a Chârvâka² and he tells you only that which every other Chârvâka would have told you."

"But the Chârvâkas are mistaken. There are many people who believe that the real man is not his physical covering, but dwells in the mind, in the seat of consciousness. Do you mean to say that in any case the consciousness may leave the soul after death?" (Narayan)

[how current beliefs programme our after death states]

"In *his* case it may," answered Thakur quietly: "because he firmly believes in what he says."

Narayan cast an astonished and even frightened look at Thakur, and the Babu—who always felt some restraint in the presence of the latter—looked at us with a victorious smile.

"But how is this?" went on Narayan.³ "The Vedânta teaches us that the spirit of the spirit is immortal, and that the human soul does not die in Parabrahman. Are there any exceptions?"

"In the fundamental laws of the spiritual world there can be no exceptions; but there are laws for the blind and laws for those who see." (T)

"I understand this, but in this case, as I have told him already, his full and final disappearance of consciousness is nothing but the aberration of a blind man, who, not seeing the sun, denies its existence, but all the same he will see the sun with his spiritual sight after he is dead." (N)

¹ Thakur is an Indian title used by many princes meaning lord or master; here it is a name used for one of the Masters.

² A sect of Bengali Materialists. [The value of this article is twofold, firstly that the position of the Chârvâkas is not dissimilar to our modern day skeptics and materialistic scientists, and secondly it shows their materialism is unconnected to their integrity and personal virtue, which may be beyond reproach and still win its own rewards for the Sûtrâtmâ.]

³ [Narayan is an Indian name, and also the Supreme Being in Vaishnava Hinduism, followers of *Vishnu*. In this narrative he seems to represent the *orthodox believer* who struggles to understand the nuances of other beliefs. Eds.]

"He will not see anything," said the Master. "Denying the existence of the sun now, he could not see it on the other side of the grave."

Seeing that Narayan looked rather upset, and that even we, the Colonel and myself, stared at him in the expectation of a more definite answer, Thakur went on reluctantly:

"You speak about the spirit... about the Atmâ, confusing this spirit with the soul of the mortal, with Manas. No doubt the spirit is immortal, because being without beginning it is without end; but it is not the spirit that is concerned in the present conversation. It is the human, self-conscious soul (Manas). You confuse it with the former..."

[the Master clarifies that the real nub of the question is whether there is a loss of 'consciousness and self-feeling' in the case of a confirmed materialist after death. He positively affirms Babu's materialist view that there is, but with important conditions...]

Thakur, the Master: "Whether it is one year or a million that this *entr'acte*⁴ lasts between the two acts of the illusion life, the posthumous state may be perfectly similar to the state of a man in a *very deep fainting-fit*, without any breaking of the fundamental rules. Therefore the Babu in his personal case is perfectly right."

"But how is this?" said Colonel Olcott⁵; "since the rule of immortality does not admit of any exceptions, as you said."

"Of course it does not admit of any exceptions, but only in the case of things that really exist... if in talking about Buddhi we may say that it is unconditionally immortal, we cannot say the same either about Manas (the personal mind, or kama-manas), or about Taijasi. Neither the former nor the latter have any existence separated from the Divine Soul, because the one is an attribute of the terrestrial personality, and the second is identically the same as the first, only with the additional reflection in it of the Buddhi.

"In its turn, Buddhi would be an impersonal spirit without this element, which it borrows from the human soul, and which conditions it and makes out of it something which has the appearance of being separate from the Universal Soul, during all the cycle of the man's incarnations. If you say therefore that Buddhi-Manas cannot die, and cannot lose consciousness either in eternity or during the temporary periods of suspension, you would be perfectly right; but to apply this axiom to the qualities of Buddhi-Manas is the same as if you were arguing that as the soul of Colonel Olcott is immortal the red on his cheeks is also immortal.

"And so it is evident you have mixed up the reality, Sat, with its manifestation. You have forgotten that united to the Manas only, the luminosity of Taijasi becomes a question of time, as the immortality and the posthumous consciousness of the terrestrial personality of the man become conditional qualities, depending on the conditions and beliefs created by itself during its lifetime.

"Karma acts unceasingly, and we reap in the next world the fruit of that which we ourselves have sown in this life." (T) (ibid 4-5)

⁴ "Between the acts," meaning an intermission between two parts of a stage production, often *a piece of music*.

⁵ Col. Olcott was a co-founder of the Theosophical Society and accompanied HPB on many of her Indian trips.

[a loss of consciousness after death robs the ego of its “happiness and rest”. Colonel Olcott asks Thakur how is the materialist’s Ego punished for sins committed during life if after physical death it loses consciousness?]

"Our Philosophy teaches us," answered Thakur, "that the punishment reaches the Ego only in its next incarnation, and that immediately after our death we meet only the rewards for the sufferings of the terrestrial life, sufferings that were not deserved by us. So, as you may see, the whole of the punishment *consists in the absence of reward, in the complete loss of the consciousness of happiness and rest.* Karma [as an *effect*] is the child of the terrestrial Ego, the fruit of the acts of his visible personality, even of the thoughts and intentions of the spiritual I. But at the same time it [those effects under *Karmic law*] is a tender mother, who heals the wounds given in the preceding life before striking this Ego and giving him new ones.

"In the life of a mortal there is no mishap or sorrow which is not a fruit and direct consequence of a sin committed in his preceding incarnation; but not having preserved the slightest recollection of it in his present life, and not feeling himself guilty, and therefore suffering unjustly, the man deserves consolation and full rest on the other side of the grave. For our spiritual Ego Death is always a redeemer and a friend. It is either the peaceful sleep of a baby, or a sleep full of blissful dreams and reveries." (T)

"As far as I remember, the periodical incarnations of Sûtrâtmâ⁶ are compared in the Upanishads to the terrestrial life which is spent, term by term, in sleeping and waking. Is that so?" I asked, wishing to renew the first question of Narayan." (HPB)

"Yes, it is so; that is a very good comparison." (T)

(pages 5-6)

[HPB questions this comparison: when we wake from sleep we remember most of our yesterday, but not so in the next life when we have not the slightest recollection of the previous one, having a new brain, personality and different moral qualities.]

"There are some people who do remember some things," enigmatically answered Thakur, without giving a straight answer to my question.

"I have some suspicions on this point," I answered, laughingly, "but it cannot be said about ordinary mortals. Then how are we, who have not reached as yet the Samma Sambuddha,⁷ to understand this comparison?"

"You can understand it when you better understand *the characteristics of the three kinds of what we call sleep.*" (T)

"This is not an easy task you propose to us," said the Colonel, laughingly. "The greatest of our physiologists got so entangled in this question that it became only more confused."

⁶ In the Vedânta, Buddhi, in its combinations with the moral qualities, consciousness, and the notions of the personalities in which it was incarnated, is called Sûtrâtmâ, which literally means the "thread soul," because a whole long row of human lives is strung on this thread like the pearls of a necklace.

The Manas must become Taijasi (radiant, filled with light) in order to reach and to see itself in eternity, when united to Sûtrâtmâ. But often, owing to sin and associations with *the purely terrestrial reason*, this very luminosity disappears completely.

⁷ Samma Sambuddha: the knowledge of one's past incarnations. Only Yogis and Adepts of the Occult Sciences possess this knowledge, by the aid of the most ascetic life. However see note at the end of this collation.

"It is because they have undertaken what they had no business to undertake, the answering of this question being the duty of the psychologist, of whom there are hardly any among your European scientists. A Western psychologist is only another name for a physiologist,⁸ with the difference that they work on principles still more material. *I have recently read a book by Maudsley which showed me clearly that they try to cure mental diseases without believing in the existence of the soul.*"

"All this is very interesting," I said, "but it leads us away from the original object of our questions, which you seem reluctant to clear for us, Thakur Sahib. It looks as if you were confirming and even encouraging the theories of the Babu. Remember that he says he disbelieves the posthumous life, the life after death, and denies the possibility of any kind of consciousness exactly on the grounds of our not remembering anything of our past terrestrial life." (HPB)

"I repeat again that the Babu is a Chârvâka, who only repeats what he was taught. It is not the system of the Materialists that I confirm and encourage, but the truth of the Babu's opinions in what concerns his personal state after death." (T)

"Then do you mean to say that such people as the Babu are to be excepted from the general rule?"

"Not at all. *Sleep is a general and unchangeable law for man as well as for every other terrestrial creature, but there are various sleeps and still more various dreams.*"

[on the effect after death of materialistic beliefs held during life]

"But it is not only the life after death and its dreams that he (Babu) denies. He denies the immortal life altogether, as well as the immortality of his own spirit." (N)

Thakur, the Eastern Master: "In the first instance he acts according to the canons of modern European Science, founded on the experience of our five senses. In this he is guilty only with respect to those people who do not hold his opinions. In the second instance again he is perfectly right. Without the previous interior consciousness and the belief in the immortality of the soul, the soul cannot become Buddhi Taijasi [Buddhi-Manas]. It will remain Manas.⁹ But for the Manas alone there is no immortality. In order to live a conscious life in the world on the other side of the grave, the man must have acquired belief in that world, in this terrestrial life.

"These are the two aphorisms of the Occult Science, on which is constructed all our Philosophy in respect to the posthumous consciousness and immortality of the Soul. Sûtrâtmâ [Higher Manas] gets only what it deserves. After the destruction of the body there begins for the Sûtrâtmâ either a period of full awakening, or a chaotic sleep, or a sleep without reveries or dreams. Following your physiologists who found the causality of dreams in the unconscious preparation for them, in the waking state, *why should not we acknowledge the same with respect to the posthumous dreams?* I repeat what Vedânta Sara teaches us: *Death is sleep.*

⁸ [Physical biology dealing with the functions of living organisms and their mechanisms!]

⁹ [Terrestrial lower manas cannot live a conscious eternal life unless it is assimilated to the Divine. It will become Buddhi-Taijasi only if its tendencies during life lead it towards the spiritual world.]...

"Then full of the essence and penetrated by the light of its Divine Soul, the Manas will disappear in Buddhi, will assimilate itself with Buddhi, *still preserving a spiritual consciousness of its terrestrial personality*; otherwise Manas, that is to say, the human mind [kama-manas?], founded on the five physical senses, our terrestrial or our personal soul, will be plunged into a deep sleep without awakening, without dreams, without consciousness, till a new reincarnation.

After death, there begins before our spiritual eyes a representation of a programme that was learned by heart by us in our lifetime, and was sometimes invented by us, *the practical realization of our true beliefs, or of illusions created by ourselves....*" (T)

"I begin to understand. The Materialists, disbelieving everything that cannot be controlled by their five senses and their so-called scientific reason and denying every spiritual phenomenon, point to the terrestrial as the only conscious existence. Accordingly they will get only what they have deserved. They will lose their personal I; they will sleep the unconscious sleep until a new awakening. Have I understood rightly?" (HPB)

"Nearly. You may add to that that the Vedântins, acknowledging two kinds of conscious existence, the terrestrial and the spiritual, point only to the latter as an undoubted actuality. As to the terrestrial life, owing to its changeability and shortness, it is nothing but an illusion of our senses. Our life in the spiritual spheres must be thought an actuality because it is there that lives our endless, never-changing immortal I, the Sûtrâtmâ. Whereas in every new incarnation it clothes itself in a perfectly different personality, a temporary and short-lived one, in which everything except its spiritual prototype is doomed to traceless destruction."

"But excuse me, Thakur. Is it possible that my personality, my terrestrial conscious I, is to perish tracelessly?" (HPB)

"According to our teachings, not only is it to perish, but it must perish in all its fullness, except this principle in it which, united to Buddhi, has become purely spiritual and now forms an inseparable whole. But in the case of a hardened Materialist it may happen that neither consciously nor unconsciously has anything of its personal I ever penetrated into Buddhi. The latter will not take away into eternity any atom of such a terrestrial personality. Your spiritual I is immortal, but from your present personality it will carry away only that which has deserved immortality, that is to say only the aroma of the flowers mowed down by death." (T)

"But the flower itself, the terrestrial I?"

"The flower itself, as all the past and future flowers which have blossomed and will blossom after them on the same maternal branch, Sûtrâtmâ, children of the same root, Buddhi, will become dust. Your real I is not, as you ought to know yourself, your body that now sits before me, nor your Manas Sûtrâtmâ, but your Sûtrâtmâ-Buddhi."

[HPB notes posthumous life is based "on perfect justice, on the merited recompense for all the terrestrial sorrows" but asks for clarification whether immortality is lost forever]

"... how can you admit that the spiritual personality of our Babu, the personality of this boy, *who is so ideally honest and noble, so perfectly kind, in spite of all his disbeliefs*, will not reach immortality...?"

"Who, except himself," answered the Master, "ever doomed him to such a fate? I have known the Babu from the time he was a small boy, and I am perfectly sure that the harvest of the Sûtrâtmâ in his case will be very abundant. Though his Atheism and Materialism are far from being feigned, still he *cannot* die for ever in the whole fullness of his individuality."

"But, Thakur Sahib, did not you yourself confirm the rectitude of his notions as to his personal state on the other side of the grave, and do not these notions consist in his firm belief that after his death every trace of consciousness will disappear?" (HPB)

"I confirmed them, and I confirm them again. When travelling in a railway train you may fall asleep and sleep all the time, while the train stops at many stations; but surely there will be a station where you will awake, *and the aim of your journey will be reached in full consciousness*. You say you are dissatisfied with my comparison of death to sleep, but remember, the most ordinary of mortals knows three different kinds of sleep--dreamless sleep, a sleep with vague chaotic dreams, and at last a sleep with dreams so very vivid and clear that for the time being they become a perfect reality for the sleeper.

"Why should not you admit that exactly the analogous case happens to the soul freed from its body? After their parting there begins for the soul, according to its deserts, *and chiefly to its faith*, either a perfectly conscious life, a life of semi-consciousness, or a dreamless sleep which is equal to the state of non-being. This is the realization of the programme of which I spoke, a programme previously invented and prepared by the Materialist." (T)

[the article finishes with these two important ideas:

1st how good and kind materialists will come to a realisation of spiritual consciousness]

"... there are Materialists and Materialists. A bad man, or simply a great egotist, who adds to his full disbelief a perfect indifference to his fellow beings, must unquestionably leave his personality for ever at the threshold of death. He has no means of linking himself to the Sûtrâtmâ... but such Materialists as our Babu will sleep only one station. There will be a time when he will recognize himself in eternity..." (T)

[and 2nd the manner in which after-death spiritual consciousness is purely subjective]

"... our accepted views of material life the words 'live' and 'exist' are not applicable to the purely subjective condition after death.... [However the Spiritualists do use them and] preach about spirits marrying among themselves and with mortals. As amongst the true, not nominal Christians, so amongst the Vedântins--the life on the other side of the grave is the land where there are no tears, no sighs, where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage, and where the just realize their full perfection." (T)

A note on recollection of past lives

Samma Sambuddha is the full knowledge of one's past incarnations that is only available – in full – to Adepts of the Occult Sciences “by the aid of the most ascetic life.”

(“Life & Death” footnote 3)

Compare this to what H.P.Blavatsky quotes in the article “Theories About Reincarnation and Spirits” about the exceptional cases of reincarnation with the same astral body. Can this provide a reasonable explanation of such feats of memory as past life recall by the ordinary and untrained?

Reincarnation i.e., the appearance of the same individual, *or rather of his astral monad, twice on the same planet* is not a rule in nature, it is an exception... happens only when... *seeking to restore its disturbed equilibrium, (it) violently throws back into earth-life the astral monad which had been tossed out of the circle of necessity* (the karmic duties of life) **by crime or accident**. Thus in cases of abortion, of **infants dying before a certain age**, and of congenital and incurable idiocy, nature's original design to produce a perfect human being, has been interrupted. Therefore... *the astral monad of the individual—...having been set apart to animate a frame...—must try a second time to carry out the purpose of the creative intelligence.*

(*Isis Unveiled* 1:351, emphasis added)

Young children are soon reborn with the same astral body, and thus have some access to the memory of the previous life. This seems to be statistically borne out by the analysis of the large amount of data collected by Dr. Ian Stevenson, whose work is maintained by Dr. Jim Tucker. Here Jim Tucker is interviewed by the *Skeptiko* website. During the interview Tucker talks about the database he has compiled:

Jim Tucker: Ian (Stevenson) started studying these cases in the early 60s and the work just continued ever since and it has been 50 years now. So we have got over 2,500 cases from essentially all over the world. **Wherever anyone has looked for cases they have been found.** They are easiest to find in cultures with a belief in reincarnation but they are found everywhere. And what we started doing a number of years ago now is coding each case on 200 variables and putting them in to a database for analysis. And it has taken us years to get the cases in. We still haven't quite finished but we have over 2,000 of them in the database now. So then you can look at patterns in the cases that you can't see just on an individual level. So for instance we know that in 70% of the cases the previous person died by unnatural means, meaning murder, suicide, or accident. So that certainly seems to be a distinct factor in these cases. **We also know that even in the natural death cases that the people tend to die quite early where a quarter of the natural death cases is under the age of 15. So again, there is something about dying an unnatural death or dying young that makes it more likely that these memories will then appear down the road.**

<http://skeptiko.com/239-dr-jim-tucker-database-of-past-life-memories/>

Return to Life: Extraordinary Cases of Children Who Remember Past Lives, by Dr. Jim Tucker, M.D., Professor of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences teaching at the University of Virginia, USA.

