

Reincarnation

It has been said that "possibly the most widely-held 'belief' in the world is belief in reincarnation". (New Philosophy, Oct. 71, page 140). Surprised though you may be by this, yet, on thinking about it, it must be so. The Hindu religion, for example, with all its millions of adherents, has as one of its main doctrines the idea of a cycle of lives, teaching that after death people are reincarnated, perhaps in the form of an animal. And when Buddhism arose in the 6th century B.C., it accepted reincarnation and, as you may know, teaches it to this day.

Because of the interest in the subject which is always there, and the appeal it has to many people even in the western world, I would like to speak about reincarnation and examine with you at least something of what is involved. I do so, not with the intention of quarrelling with those who hold this belief, but rather that light might be thrown on the subject and that there be some understanding of the undeniable and well-documented experiences of people who have spoken about and believed they have remembered previous lives they have lived on this earth.

A moment ago, in introducing the subject, I spoke of how widely-held the belief in reincarnation is. Not only is it the central teaching of the major eastern religions, but it has long had a place in Jewish thought and there are Christians who accept it as well. We read of the Jews, in the Gospel, that they expected David would be incarnated again; and it is obvious that they thought of John the Baptist as Elijah in a later incarnation. It is interesting to note also that in the story of the man born blind the disciples questioned Jesus. "Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind." It can be argued that what they had in mind was a previous existence when the man must have done something which accounted for his present sad dilemma.

And concerning belief in reincarnation amongst Christians and in Christendom, there have been apologists for it as prominent as the well-known London preacher, the late Dr. Leslie Weatherhead who, in his booklet "The Case for Reincarnation" cites the poet Longfellow and Rudyard Kipling as believers in it also.

In earlier talks I have given on the Programme on the life after death, I emphasised, you may remember, the reality of the spiritual world of which we shall become conscious and into which we shall "go" when we die. Man is essentially a spiritual being clothed with a body for the extent of his life in this world. In time, and in the normal course of events, the body grows feeble and, as we say, we "die". But by

dying what is meant is that we are withdrawn from consciousness of this natural world, and at the same time, awakened to consciousness of the spiritual world. In reality we do not die. Death is the switching off of consciousness at one level and switching on at another, higher level.

As well as this I have spoken of the Lord's purpose in creation, the whole idea behind it all, that there should be a heaven of angels from the human race. This, in fact, is the goal He has in mind in the case of every one of us. We are born into the world, and the Lord so strives to influence our lives while we are here, that we might in time find a place in heaven and be happy there. This world is the means to an end. We are here for no more basic reason than that in the midst of the experiences that come our way we might prepare ourselves for life in heaven. And in the course of a normal life-time ample opportunity is given for such preparation to take place.

During His conversation with Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, Jesus said, "You must be born again". Do you remember the incident? We are born children of our parents and, by the process of regeneration, we must be re-born children of the Lord. All that the Lord asks of us is that we commence that process of rebirth in this world and get it under way while we are here. Once we are in the spiritual world we will go on being perfected, growing in love and understanding.

We are only ever once in this world and when the essential purpose of our being here has been accomplished we pass on into the spiritual world. Human life, is very much an on-going thing. We are here for a certain time and for a certain, fundamental reason - to freely make of ourselves the type of person we want to be. A selfish person or an unselfish person. An angel or a devil. And every opportunity is given to us while we are here to make that choice. We do not need a second round and another opportunity. Once we die we are withdrawn from this world forever, and we then enter upon life in the spiritual world, in possession of a spiritual body as completely human as the natural body we have left behind. A person in every sense of the word.

Earlier I spoke of the well-documented experiences of people who have spoken about and sincerely believed that they have remembered previous lives they have lived on this earth. They have described certain things with amazing clarity. If in fact we live in this world only once how can such experiences be explained? Some say only be reincarnation. The teachings given in the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, however, offer another alternative explanation.

In this regard, this must be said first of all. While we live in this world we are in unconscious contact with the spiritual world and with those who have died and are living there. The fact is that our lives are continually being influenced from the spiritual world from which we feel impulses and are stirred to do good or to do evil. We live our lives in the midst of unseen spiritual associates who are constantly at hand, inspiring and suggesting, attacking and defending. The Bible itself speaks of this and of these associations. In Genesis, Chapter 24, for example, we read of the presence of an angel with the servant of Abraham. In Psalm 91, God promises to give His angels charge over us, and elsewhere, in Psalm 35, those forces are spoken of which "seek after my soul". "Let their way be dark and slippery" says the writer of the Psalm, "and let the angels of the Lord persecute them". Swedenborg writes: "In order that the life of the Lord may flow in and be received in man according to all law, there are continually present with him angels and spirits - angels from heaven, and spirits from hell... The spirits cause him to be in communication with hell and the angels cause him to be in communication with heaven". (*Arcana Caelestia* 5848/9). This, though, is to be carefully noted. It is a general provision of the Lord that the earthly memories of our spiritual associates should not be active when they are present with us. Indeed, the earthly memory of all people who die gradually becomes quiescent in the spiritual world and in time is no longer active. We forget there, because it is not important for us to remember, where we were from and many of the experiences we have known here. Occasionally, however, those memories are activated and come alive again with one or other of those associates in the spiritual world near at hand to a person in this world. And this is the cause of these people recollecting what they believe are the experiences of a previous existence. (See *Heaven and Hell* 256 and 298).

There have been people who have "remembered" a particular house and locality of which they have had absolutely no experience in this present life. There are many people who, usually under hypnosis, have, it is thought, "regressed" into a previous life, and "remembered" experiences from it. What in fact has happened is that the angel or spirit has been present with them who, himself or herself, lived in that house or locality and went through those experiences, and whose memory of them has been temporarily awakened.

One of our great difficulties, I believe, is that thinking about man's immortality is so vague and indefinite. The soul itself is sometimes thought to be no more than something mindless and dehumanised; like the vapour from a chemical combination or little more than a breath of wind. But the human soul is not like this. The human soul is the real person which each of us is, and we go on thinking and sensating, learning and striving, in the spiritual world, when we die. We are and will continue to be individual personalities and characters and, as I've tried to explain, no purpose would be served by reincarnation nor could our personalities be so neutralized (as they would need to be) for reincarnation to take place.

That I might draw together the points made and summarise them I would like to conclude by directing your attention to, and quoting from, paragraph 256 of the book, *"Heaven And Hell"*. We read there:

"An angel or spirit is not permitted to speak with a man from his own memory, but only from the man's memory, for angels and spirits have a memory as well as man. If a spirit were to speak from his own memory with a man, the man would not know otherwise than that the thoughts then in his mind were his own, although they were the spirit's thoughts. This would be like the recollection of something which the man had never heard or seen. That this is so has been given me to know from experience. This is the source of the belief held by some of the ancients that after some thousands of years they were to return into their former life, and into all its activities, and in fact, had returned. This they concluded because at times there came to them a sort of recollection of things they had never seen or heard. This came from an influx from the memory of spirits into their ideas of thought."

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