

# **WILLIAM ATKINSON**

REINCARNATION AND  
THE LAW OF KARMA

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**the Law of Karma**

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*Reincarnation and the Law of Karma / A Study of the Old-New World-*

*Doctrine of Rebirth, and Spiritual Cause and Effect:*

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# **William Walker Atkinson Reincarnation and the Law of Karma / A Study of the Old-New World- Doctrine of Rebirth, and Spiritual Cause and Effect**

## **CHAPTER I The Early Races**

By "Reincarnation" we mean the repeated incarnation, or embodiment in flesh, of the soul or immaterial part of man's nature. The term "Metempsychosis" is frequently employed in the same sense, the definition of the latter term being: "The passage of the soul, as an immortal essence, at the death of the body, into another living body." The term "Transmigration of Souls" is sometimes employed, the term being used in the sense of "passing from one body into another." But the term "Transmigration" is often used in connection with the belief of certain undeveloped races who held that the soul of men

sometimes passed into the bodies of the lower animals, as a punishment for their sins committed during the human life. But this belief is held in disrepute by the adherents of Reincarnation or Metempsychosis, and has no connection with their philosophy or beliefs, the ideas having sprung from an entirely different source, and having nothing in common.

There are many forms of belief – many degrees of doctrine – regarding Reincarnation, as we shall see as we proceed, but there is a fundamental and basic principle underlying all of the various shades of opinion, and divisions of the schools. This fundamental belief may be expressed as the doctrine that there is in man an immaterial Something (called the soul, spirit, inner self, or many other names) which does not perish at the death or disintegration of the body, but which persists as an entity, and after a shorter or longer interval of rest reincarnates, or is re-born, into a new body – that of an unborn infant – from whence it proceeds to live a new life in the body, more or less unconscious of its past existences, but containing within itself the "essence" or results of its past lives, which experiences go to make up its new "character," or "personality." It is usually held that the rebirth is governed by the law of attraction, under one name or another, and which law operates in accordance with strict justice, in the direction of attracting the reincarnating soul to a body, and conditions, in accordance with the tendencies of the past life, the parents also attracting to them a soul bound to them by some ties in the past, the law being universal, uniform, and equitable to all concerned

in the matter. This is a general statement of the doctrine as it is generally held by the most intelligent of its adherents.

E. D. Walker, a well-known English writer on the subject, gives the following beautiful idea of the general teachings: "Reincarnation teaches that the soul enters this life, not as a fresh creation, but after a long course of previous existences on this earth and elsewhere, in which it acquired its present inhering peculiarities, and that it is on the way to future transformations which the soul is now shaping. It claims that infancy brings to earth, not a blank scroll for the beginning of an earthly record, nor a mere cohesion of atomic forces into a brief personality, soon to dissolve again into the elements, but that it is inscribed with ancestral histories, some like the present scene, most of them unlike it and stretching back into the remotest past. These inscriptions are generally undecipherable, save as revealed in their moulding influence upon the new career; but like the invisible photographic images made by the sun of all it sees, when they are properly developed in the laboratory of consciousness they will be distinctly displayed. The current phase of life will also be stored away in the secret vaults of memory, for its unconscious effects upon the ensuing lives. All the qualities we now possess, in body, mind and soul, result from our use of ancient opportunities. We are indeed 'the heir of all the ages,' and are alone responsible for our inheritances. For these conditions accrue from distant causes engendered by our older selves, and the future flows by the divine law of cause and effect from

the gathered momentum of our past impetuses. There is no favoritism in the universe, but all have the same everlasting facilities for growth. Those who are now elevated in worldly station may be sunk in humble surroundings in the future. Only the inner traits of the soul are permanent companions. The wealthy sluggard may be the beggar of the next life; and the industrious worker of the present is sowing the seeds of future greatness. Suffering bravely endured now will produce a treasure of patience and fortitude in another life; hardships will give rise to strength; self-denial must develop the will; tastes cultivated in this existence will somehow bear fruit in coming ones; and acquired energies will assert themselves whenever they can by the Law of Parsimony upon which the principles of physics are based. Vice versa, the unconscious habits, the uncontrollable impulses, the peculiar tendencies, the favorite pursuits, and the soul-stirring friendships of the present descend from far-reaching previous activities."

The doctrine of Reincarnation – Metempsychosis – Rebirth – has always been held as truth by a large portion of the human race. Following the invariable law of cyclic changes – the swing of the pendulum of thought – at times it has apparently died out in parts of the world, only to be again succeeded by a new birth and interest among the descendants of the same people. It is a light impossible to extinguish, and although its flickering flame may seem to die out for a moment, the shifting of the mental winds again allows it to rekindle from the hidden spark, and lo!

again it bursts into new life and vigor. The reawakened interest in the subject in the Western world, of which all keen observers have taken note, is but another instance of the operation of the Cyclic Law. It begins to look as if the occultists are right when they predict that before the dawn of another century the Western world will once more have embraced the doctrines of Rebirth – the old, discarded truth, once so dear to the race, will again be settled in popular favor, and again move toward the position of "orthodox" teaching, perhaps to be again crystallized by reason of its "orthodoxy" and again to lose favor and fade away, as the pendulum swings backward to the other extreme of thought.

But the teaching of Reincarnation never has passed away altogether from the race – in some parts of the world the lamp has been kept burning brightly – nay, more, at no time in human history has there been a period in which the majority of the race has not accepted the doctrine of Rebirth, in some of its various forms. It was so one thousand years ago – two thousand – five thousand – and it is so to-day. In this Twentieth Century nearly if not quite two-thirds of the race hold firmly to the teaching, and the multitudes of Hindus and other Eastern peoples cling to it tenaciously. And, even outside of these people, there are to be found traces of the doctrine among other races in the East, and West. So Reincarnation is not a "forgotten truth," or "discarded doctrine," but one fully alive and vigorous, and one which is destined to play a very important part in the history of Western thought during the Twentieth Century.



It is interesting to trace the history of the doctrine among the ancient peoples – away back into the dim recesses of the past. It is difficult to ascribe to any particular time, or any particular race, the credit of having "originated" Reincarnation. In spite of the decided opinions, and the differing theories of the various writers on this subject, who would give Egypt, or India, or the lost Atlantis, as the birthplace of the doctrine, we feel that such ideas are but attempts to attribute a universal intuitive belief to some favored part of the race. We do not believe that the doctrine of Reincarnation ever "originated" anywhere, as a new and distinct doctrine. We believe that it sprang into existence whenever and wherever man arrived at a stage of intellectual development sufficient to enable him to form a mental conception of a Something that lived after Death. No matter from what source this belief in a "ghost" originated, it must be admitted that it is found among all peoples, and is apparently an universal idea. And, running along with it in the primitive peoples, we find that there is, and always has been, an idea, more or less vague and indistinct, that somehow, someway, sometime, this "ghost" of the person returns to earthly existence and takes upon itself a new fleshly garment – a new body. Here, then, is where the idea of Reincarnation begins – everywhere, at a certain stage of human mental development. It runs parallel with the "ghost" idea, and seems bound up with that conception in nearly every case. When man evolves a little further, he begins to reason that if the "ghost" is immortal, and survives the death of the body, and returns to

take upon itself a new body, then it must have lived before the last birth, and therefore must have a long chain of lives behind it. This is the second step. The third step is when man begins to reason that the next life is dependent upon something done or left undone in the present life. And upon these three fundamental ideas the doctrine of Reincarnation has been built. The occultists claim that in addition to this universal idea, which is more or less intuitive, the race has received more or less instruction, from time to time, from certain advanced souls which have passed on to higher planes of existence, and who are now called the Masters, Adepts, Teachers, Race Guides, etc., etc. But whatever may be the explanation, it remains a truth that man seems to have worked out for himself, in all times and in all places, first, an idea of a "ghost" which persists after the body dies; and second, that this "ghost" has lived before in other bodies, and will return again to take on a new body. There are various ideas regarding "heavens" and "hells," but underlying them all there persists this idea of re-birth in some of its phases.

Soldi, the archaeologist, has published an interesting series of works, dealing with the beliefs of primitive peoples, who have passed from the scene of human action. He shows by the fragments of carving and sculpture which have survived them that there was an universal idea among them of the "ghost" which lived after the body died; and a corresponding idea that some day this "ghost" would return to the scene of its former activities. This belief sometimes took the form of a return into the former

body, which idea led to the preservation of the body by processes of mummifying, etc., but as a rule this belief developed into the more advanced one of a re-birth in a new body.

The earlier travelers in Africa have reported that here and there they found evidences and traces of what was to them "a strange belief" in the future return of the soul to a new body on earth. The early explorers of America found similar traditions and beliefs among the Red Indians, survivals of which exist even unto this day. It is related of a number of savage tribes, in different parts of the world, that they place the bodies of their dead children by the roadside, in order that their souls may be given a good chance to find new bodies by reason of the approaching of many traveling pregnant women who pass along the road. A number of these primitive people hold to the idea of a complex soul, composed of several parts, in which they resemble the Egyptians, Hindus, Chinese, and in fact all mystical and occult philosophies. The Figi Islanders are said to believe in a black soul and a white soul, the former of which remains with the buried body and disintegrates with it, while the white soul leaves the body and wanders as a "ghost," and afterward, tiring of the wandering, returns to life in a new body. The natives of Greenland are said to believe in an astral body, which leaves the body during sleep, but which perishes as the body disintegrates after death; and a second soul which leaves the body only at death, and which persists until it is reborn at a later time. In fact, the student finds that nearly all of the primitives races, and those

semi-civilized, show traces of a belief in a complex soul, and a trace of doctrine of Reincarnation in some form. The human mind seems to work along the same lines, among the different races – unless one holds to the theory that all sprang from the same root-race, and that the various beliefs are survivals of some ancient fundamental doctrine – the facts are not disturbed in either case.

In the last mentioned connection, we might mention that the traditions concerning Ancient Atlantis – the lost continent – all hold to the effect that her people believed strongly in Reincarnation, and to the ideas of the complex soul. As the survivors of Atlantis are believed to have been the ancestors of the Egyptians on the one hand, and of the Ancient Peruvians on the other – the two branches of survivors having maintained their original doctrines as modified by different environments – we might find here an explanation of the prevalence of the doctrine on both sides of the ocean. We mention this merely in passing, and as of general interest in the line of our subject.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **The Egyptians, Chaldeans, Druids, Etc**

After considering the existence of the doctrines of Reincarnation among the primitive peoples, and its traditional existence among the vanished peoples of the past, we find ourselves irresistibly borne toward that ancient land of mystery – the home of the mystics and occultists of the past – the land of Isis – the home of the builders of the Pyramids – the people of the Sphinx. Whether these people were the direct descendants of the people of destroyed Atlantis, the home of the Ancient Wisdom – or whether they were a new people who had rediscovered the old doctrines – the fact remains that when tracing back any old occult or mystic doctrine we find ourselves gradually led toward the land of the Sphinx as the source of that hidden truth. The Sphinx is a fit emblem of that wonderful race – its sealed lips seem to invite the ultimate questions, and one feels that there may be a whispered answer wafted from those tightly closed lips toward the ear that is prepared to hear and receive it. And so, in our search for the origin of Reincarnation, we find ourselves once more confronting the Egyptian Sphinx as we have done so often before in our search after Truth.

Notwithstanding its obvious prehistoric origin, many have claimed that Metempsychosis has its birthplace in old Egypt, on

the banks of the Nile. India disputes this claim, holding that the Ganges, not the Nile, gave birth to the doctrine. Be that as it may, we shall treat the Egyptian conception at this place, among the ancient lands holding the doctrine, for in India it is not a thing of the past, but a doctrine which has its full flower at the present time, and which flower is sending forth its subtle odor to all parts of the civilized world. And so we shall defer our consideration of India's teachings until we reach the present stage of the history of Reincarnation. Herodotus, many centuries ago, said of the Egyptians that: "The Egyptians are the first who propounded the theory that the human soul is imperishable, and that where the body of any one dies it enters into some other body that may be ready to receive it; and that when it has gone the round of all created forms on land, in water, and in air, then it once more enters the human body born for it; and that this cycle of existence for the soul takes place in three thousand years."

The doctrine of Reincarnation is discernible though hidden away amidst the mass of esoteric doctrine back of the exoteric teachings of the Egyptians, which latter were expounded to the common people, while the truth was reserved for the few who were ready for it. The inner circles of the Egyptian mystics believed in and understood the inner truths of Reincarnation, and although they guarded the esoteric teachings carefully, still fragments fell from the table and were greedily taken up by the masses, as we may see by an examination of the scraps of historical records which have been preserved, graven in the stone,

and imprinted on the bricks. Not only did these people accept the doctrine of Reincarnation, but Egypt was really the home of the highest occult teachings. The doctrines and teachings regarding several "sheaths" or "bodies" of man, which are taught by occultists of all times and races, are believed to have been fully taught in their original purity on the banks of the Nile, and in the shadow of the Pyramids – yes, even before the days of the Pyramids. Their forty centuries of history saw many modifications of the philosophical and religious beliefs, but the fundamental doctrine of Reincarnation was held to during the entire period of history in Ancient Egypt, and was not discarded until the decadent descendants of the once mighty race were overwhelmed by stronger races, whose religions and beliefs superseded the vestiges of the Ancient Doctrine. The Egyptians held that there was "Ka," the divine spirit in man; "Ab," the intellect or will; "Hati," the vitality; "Tet," the astral body; "Sahu," the etheric double; and "Xa," the physical body (some authorities forming a slightly different arrangement), which correspond to the various "bodies of man" as recognized by occultists to-day.

The Ancient Chaldeans also taught the doctrine of Rebirth. The body of Persian and Chaldean mystics and occultists, known as "the Magi," who were masters of the Hidden Wisdom, held to the doctrine of Reincarnation as one of their fundamental truths. In fact, they managed to educate the masses of their people to a much higher point than the masses of the Egyptians,

and, escaping the idolatrous tendencies of the Egyptian populace, they manifested a very high degree of pure philosophical, occult, and religious knowledge. The Magi taught that the soul was a complex being, and that certain portions of it perished, while certain other parts survived and passed on through a series of earth and "other-world" existences, until finally it attained such a degree of purity that it was relieved of the necessity for further incarnation, and thenceforth dwelt in the region of ineffable bliss – the region of light eternal. The teaching also held that just before entering into the state of bliss, the soul was able to review its previous incarnations, seeing distinctly the connection between them, and thus gaining a store of the wisdom of experience, which would aid it in its future work as a helper of future races which would appear on the face of the earth. The Magi taught that as all living things – nay, all things having existence, organic or inorganic – were but varying manifestations of the One Life and Being, therefore the highest knowledge implied a feeling of conscious brotherhood and relationship toward and with all.

Even among the Chinese there was an esoteric teaching concerning Reincarnation, beneath the outer teaching of ages past. It may be discerned in the teachings of the early philosophers and seers of the race, notably in the work of Lao-Tze, the great Chinese sage and teacher. Lao-Tze, whose great work, the "Tao-Teh-King," is a classic, taught Reincarnation to his inner circle of students and adherents, at least so many



authorities claim. He taught that there existed a fundamental principle called "Tao," which is held to have been identical with the "primordial reason," a manifestation of which was the "Teh," or the creative activity of the universe. From the union and action of the "Tao" and the "Teh" proceeded the universe, including the human soul, which he taught was composed of several parts, among them being the "huen," or spiritual principle; and the "phi," or semi-material vital principle, which together animate the body. Lao-Tze said: "To be ignorant that the true self is immortal, is to remain in a grievous state of error, and to experience many calamities by reason thereof. Know ye, that there is a part of man which is subtle and spiritual, and which is the heaven-bound portion of himself; that which has to do with flesh, bones, and body, belongs to the earth; earthly to earth – heavenly to heaven. Such is the Law." Some have held that Lao-Tze taught the immediate return of the "huen" to the "tao" after death, but from the writings of his early followers it may be seen that he really taught that the "huen" persisted in individual existence, throughout repeated incarnations, returning to the "tao" only when it had completed its round of experience-life. For instance, in the Si Haei, it is said that: "The vital essence is dispersed after death together with the body, bones and flesh; but the soul, or knowing principle of the self, is preserved and does not perish. There is no immediate absorption of the individuality into the Tao, for individuality persists, and manifests itself according to the Law." And Chuang-Tze said:

"Death is but the commencement of a new life." It was also taught by the early Taoists, that the deeds, good and evil, of the present life would bear fruit in future existences; in addition to the orthodox heavens and hells, in which the Chinese believed, and of which they had a great variety adapted to the requirements of the various grades of saints and sinners, the minute details of which places being described with that attention to minor details and particulars peculiar to the Chinese mind. The teachings of a later date, that the soul of the ancestor abided in the hall of the ancestors, etc., were a corruption of the ancient teaching. Other Chinese teachers taught that the soul consists of three parts, the first being the "kuei," which had its seat in the belly, and which perished with the body; the second being the "ling," which had its seat in the heart or chest, and which persisted for some time after death, but which eventually disintegrated; and the third, or "huen," which had its seat in the brain, and which survived the disintegration of its companions, and then passed on to other existences.

As strange as it may appear to many readers unfamiliar with the subject, the ancient Druids, particularly those dwelling in ancient Gaul, were familiar with the doctrine of Reincarnation, and believed in its tenets. These people, generally regarded as ancient barbarians, really possessed a philosophy of a high order, which merged into a mystic form of religion. Many of the Romans, upon their conquest of Gallia, were surprised at the degree and character of the philosophical knowledge possessed

by the Druids, and many of them have left written records of the same, notably in the case of Aristotle, Cæsar, Lucan, and Valerius Maximus. The Christian teachers who succeeded them also bore witness to these facts, as may be seen by reference to the works of St. Clement, St. Cyril, and other of the early Christian Fathers. These ancient "barbarians" entertained some of the highest spiritual conceptions of life and immortality – the mind and the soul. Reynaud has written of them, basing his statements upon a careful study of the ancient beliefs of this race: "If Judea represents in the world, with a tenacity of its own the idea of a personal and absolute God; if Greece and Rome represent the idea of society, Gaul represents, just as particularly, the idea of immortality. Nothing characterized it better, as all the ancients admit. That mysterious folk was looked upon as the privileged possessor of the secrets of death, and its unwavering instinctive faith in the persistence of life never ceased to be a cause of astonishment, and sometimes of fear, in the eyes of the heathen." The Gauls possessed an occult philosophy, and a mystic religion, which were destroyed by the influences of the Roman Conquest.

The philosophy of the Druids bore a remarkable resemblance to the Inner Doctrine of the Egyptians, and their successors, the Grecian Mystics. Traces of Hermeticism and Pythagoreanism are clearly discernible, although the connecting link that bound them together has been lost to history. Legends among the Druids connected their order with the ancient Aryan creeds and

teachings, and there seems to have been a very close connection between these priests and those of Ancient Greece, for there are tales of offerings being sent to the temples of Greece from the priests of Gaul. And it is also related that on the island of Delphos there was once a Druidic tomb in the shape of a monument, believed to have been erected over the remains of Druid priestesses. Herodotus and others speak of a secret alliance between the priests of Greece and those of the Druids. Some of the ancient legends hold that Pythagoras was the instructor of the Druidic priests, and that Pythagoras himself was in close communication with the Brahmins of India, and the Hermetists of Egypt. Other legends have it that the Druids received their first instruction from Zamolais, who had been a slave and student of Pythagoras. At any rate, the correspondence between the two schools of philosophy is remarkable.

Much of the Druidic teachings has been lost, and it is difficult to piece together the fragments. But enough is known to indicate the above mentioned relationship to the Pythagorean school, and of the firm hold of the doctrine of Reincarnation upon the Druids. The preserved fragments show that the Druids taught that there was in man an immaterial, spiritual part, called "Awen," which proceeded from an Universal Spiritual Principle of Life. They taught that this "Awen" had animated the lower forms of life, mineral, vegetable and animal, before incarnating as man. In those conditions it was entangled and imprisoned in the state of "abysmal circling," called "Anufu," from which it finally escaped

and entered into the "circle of freedom," called "Abred," or human incarnation and beyond. This state of "Abred" includes life in the various human races on this and other planets, until finally there is a further liberation of the "Awen," which then passes on to the "Circle of Bliss," or "Gwynfid," where it abides for æons in a state of ecstatic being. But, beyond even this transcendent state, there is another, which is called the "Circle of the Infinite," or "Ceugant," which is identical with the "Union with God" of the Persians and Greek Mystics, or the "Nirvana" of the Hindus. Rather an advanced form of philosophy for "barbarians," is it not? Particularly when contrasted with the crude mythology of the Roman conquerors!

The Gauls were so advanced in the practical phases of occultism that they gave every condemned criminal a respite of five years, after sentence of death, before execution, in order that he might prepare himself for a future state by meditation, instruction and other preparation; and also to prevent ushering an unprepared and guilty soul into the plane of the departed – the advantages of which plan is apparent to every student of occultism who accepts the teaching regarding the astral planes.

The reader will understand, of course, that the degree of advancement in spiritual and philosophical matters evidenced by the Gauls was due not to the fact that these people were generally so far advanced beyond their neighbors, but rather to the fact that they had been instructed by the Druid priests among them. Tradition has it that the original Druidic priests came to

Gaul and other countries from some far-off land, probably from Egypt or Greece. We have spoken of the connection between their teachings and that of the Pythagoreans, and there was undoubtedly a strong bond of relationship between these priests and the occultists of other lands. The Druidic priests were well versed in astronomy and astrology, and the planets had an important part in the teachings. A portion of their ritual is said to have correspondences with the early Jewish rites and worship. Their favorite symbol – the mistletoe – was used as indicating rebirth, the mistletoe being the new life springing forth from the old one, typified by the oak. The Druids traveled into Ancient Britain and Ireland, and many traces of their religious rites may still be found there, not only in the shape of the stone places-of-worship, but also in many curious local customs among the peasantry. Many a bit of English folk-lore – many an odd Irish fancy concerning fairies and the like; symbols of good-luck; banshees and "the little-folk" – came honestly to these people from the days of the Druids. And from the same source came the many whispered tales among both races regarding the birth of children who seemed to have remembrances of former lives on earth, which memory faded away as they grew older. Among these people there is always an undercurrent of mystic ideas about souls "coming back" in some mysterious way not fully understood. It is the inheritance from the Druids.

# **CHAPTER III**

## **The Romans and Greeks**

One unfamiliar with the subject would naturally expect to find the Ancient Romans well advanced along the lines of philosophy, religion, and spiritual speculation, judging from the all-powerful influence exerted by them over the affairs of the whole known world. Particularly when one considers the relationship with and connection of Rome with ancient Greece, it would seem that the two peoples must have had much in common in the world of thought. But such is not the case. Although the exoteric religions of the Romans resembled that of the Greeks, from whom it was borrowed or inherited, there was little or no original thought along metaphysics, religion or philosophy among the Romans. This was probably due to the fact that the whole tendency of Rome was toward material advancement and attainment, little or no attention being given to matters concerning the soul, future life, etc. Some few of the philosophers of Rome advanced theories regarding the future state, but beyond a vague sort of ancestor worship the masses of the people took but little interest in the subject. Cicero, it is true, uttered words which indicate a belief in immortality, when he said in "Scipio's Dream": "Know that it is not thou, but thy body alone, which is mortal. The individual in his entirety

resides in the soul, and not in the outward form. Learn, then, that thou art a god; thou, the immortal intelligence which gives movements to a perishable body, just as the eternal God animates an incorruptible body." Pliny the younger left writings which seem to indicate his belief in the reality of phantoms, and Ovid has written verses which would indicate his recognition of a part of man which survived the death of the body. But, on the whole, Roman philosophy treated immortality as a thing perchance existing, but not proven, and to be viewed rather as a poetical expression of a longing, rather than as an established, or at least a well grounded, principle of philosophical thought. But Lucretius and others of his time and country protested against the folly of belief in the survival of the soul held by the other nations. He said that: "The fear of eternal life should be banished from the universe; it disturbs the peace of mankind, for it prevents the enjoyment of any security or pleasure." And Virgil praised and commended the philosophical attitude which was able to see the real cause of things, and was therefore able to reject the unworthy fear of a world beyond and all fears arising from such belief. But even many of the Roman philosophers, while denying immortality, believed in supernatural powers and beings, and were very superstitious and childlike in many respects, so that their philosophy of non-survival was evidently rather the result of temperament and pursuit of material things than a height of philosophical reasoning or metaphysical thought.

And so, the Romans stand apart from the majority of the



ancient peoples, in so far as the belief in Reincarnation is concerned. While there were individual mystics and occultists among them, it still remains a fact that the majority of the people held no such belief, and in fact the masses had no clearly defined ideas regarding the survival of the soul. It is a strange exception to the general rule, and one that has occasioned much comment and attention among thinkers along these lines. There was a vague form of ancestor worship among the Romans, but even this was along the lines of collective survival of the ancestors, and was free from the ordinary metaphysical speculations and religious dogmas. Roughly stated, the Roman belief may be expressed by an idea of a less material, or more subtle, part of man which escaped disintegration after death, and which in some mysterious way passed on to combine with the ancestral soul which composed the collective ancestral deity of the family, the peace and pleasure of which were held as sacred duties on the part of the descendants, sacrifices and offerings being made toward this end. Nevertheless, here and there, among the Romans, were eminent thinkers who seemingly held a vague, tentative belief in some form of Reincarnation, as, for instance, Ovid, who says: "Nothing perishes, although everything changes here on earth; the souls come and go unendingly in visible forms; the animals which have acquired goodness will take upon them human form"; and Virgil says: "After death, the souls come to the Elysian fields, or to Tartarus, and there meet with the reward or punishment of their deeds during life. Later, on

drinking of the waters of Lethe, which takes away all memory of the past, they return to earth." But it must be admitted that Rome was deficient in spiritual insight and beliefs, on the whole, her material successes having diverted her attention from the problems which had so engrossed the mind of her neighbor Greece, and her older sisters Persia, Chaldea, and Egypt.

Among the Greeks, on the contrary, we find a marked degree of interest and speculation regarding the immortality of the soul, and much interest in the doctrines of Metempsychosis or Reincarnation. Although the great masses of the Grecian people were satisfied with their popular mythology and not disposed to question further, or to indulge in keen speculation on metaphysical subjects, still the intellectual portion of the race were most active in their search after truth, and their schools of philosophy, with their many followers and adherents, have left an indelible mark upon the thought of man unto this day. Next to the Hindus, the Greeks were the great philosophers of the human race. And the occultists and mystics among them were equal to those of Persia, India, Chaldea or Egypt. While the various theories regarding the soul were as the sands of the sea, so many were the teachers, schools and divisions of thought among these people – still the doctrine of Reincarnation played a very important part in their philosophy. The prevailing idea was that the worthy souls pass on to a state of bliss, without rebirth, while the less worthy pass the waters of the river of Lethe, quaffing of its waters of forgetfulness, and thus having the recollection

of their earth-life, and of the period of punishment that they had undergone by reason of the same, obliterated and cleansed from their memories, when they pass on to re-birth. One of the old Orphic hymns reads as follows: "The wise love light and not darkness. When you travel the journey of Life, remember, always, the end of the journey. When souls return to the light, after their sojourn on earth, they wear upon their more subtle bodies, like searing, hideous scars, the marks of their earthly sins – these must be obliterated, and they go back to earth to be cleansed. But the pure, virtuous and strong proceed direct to the Sun of Dionysus." The teachings of the Egyptians left a deep impression upon the Grecian mind, and not only the common form of belief, but also the esoteric doctrines, were passed along to the newer people by the elder.

Pythagoras was the great occult teacher of Greece, and his school and that of his followers accepted and taught the great doctrine of Reincarnation. Much of his teaching was reserved for the initiates of the mystic orders founded by himself and his followers, but still much of the doctrine was made public. Both Orpheus and Pythagoras, although several centuries separated them, were students at the fount of knowledge in Egypt, having traveled to that country in order to be initiated in the mystic orders of the ancient land, and returning they taught anew the old doctrine of Rebirth. The Pythagorean teaching resembles that of the Hindus and Egyptians, in so far as is concerned the nature of man – his several bodies or sheaths – and the survival

of the higher part of his nature, while the lower part perishes. It was taught that after death this higher part of the soul passed on to a region of bliss, where it received knowledge and felt the beneficent influence of developed and advanced souls, thus becoming equipped for a new life, with incentives toward higher things. But, not having as yet reached the stage of development which will entitle it to dwell in the blissful regions for all eternity, it sooner or later reaches the limit of its term of probation, and then passes down toward another incarnation on earth – another step on the Path of Attainment.

The teaching was, further, that the conditions, circumstances and environments of the new earth-life were determined by the actions, thoughts, and mental tendencies of the former life, and by the degree of development which the several previous earth-lives had manifested. In this respect the teaching agrees materially with the universal doctrine regarding Reincarnation and Karma. Pythagoras taught that the doctrine of Reincarnation accounted for the inequality observable in the lives of men on earth, giving a logical reason for the same, and establishing the fact of universal and ultimate justice, accountable for on no other grounds. He taught that although the material world was subject to the laws of destiny and fatality, yet there was another and higher state of being in which the soul would rise above the laws of the lower world. This higher state, he taught, had laws of its own, as yet unknown to man, which tended to work out the imperfect laws of the material

world, establishing harmony, justice, and equality, to supply the apparent deficiencies manifested in the earth life.

Following Pythagoras, Plato, the great Grecian philosopher, taught the old-new doctrine of Rebirth. He taught that the souls of the dead must return to earth, where, in new lives, they must wear out the old earth deeds, receiving benefits for the worthy ones, and penalties for the unworthy ones, the soul profiting by these repeated experiences, and rising step by step toward the divine. Plato taught that the reincarnated soul has flashes of remembrance of its former lives, and also instincts and intuitions gained by former experiences. He classed innate ideas among these inherited experiences of former lives. It has been well said that "everything can be found in Plato," and therefore one who seeks for the ancient Grecian ideas concerning Reincarnation, and the problems of the soul, may find that which he seeks in the writings of the old sage and philosopher. Plato was the past master of the inner teachings concerning the soul, and all who have followed him have drawn freely from his great store of wisdom. His influence on the early Christian church was enormous, and in many forms it continues even unto this day. Many of the early Christian fathers taught that Plato was really one of the many forerunners of Christ, who had prepared the pagan world for the coming of the Master.

In "Phaedo," Plato describes the soul, and explains its immortality. He teaches that man has a material body which is subject to constant change, and subject to death and

disintegration; and also an immaterial soul, unchangeable and indestructible, and akin to the divine. At death this soul was severed from its physical companion, and rose, purified, to the higher regions, where it rendered an account of itself, and had its future allotted to it. If it was found sufficiently untainted and unsullied by the mire of material life, it was considered fit to be admitted to the State of Bliss, which was described as Union with the Supreme Being, which latter is described as Spirit, eternal and omniscient. The base and very guilty souls undergo a period of punishment, or purgation, to the end that they may be purged and purified of the guilt, before being allowed to make another trial for perfection. The souls which were not sufficiently pure for the State of Bliss, nor yet so impure that they need the purging process, were returned to earth-life, there to take up new bodies, and endeavor to work out their salvation anew, to the end that they might in the future attain the Blissful State. Plato taught that in the Rebirth, the soul was generally unconscious of its previous lives, although it may have flashes of recollection. Besides this it has a form of intuition, and innate ideas, which was believed to be the result of the experiences gained in the past lives, and which knowledge had been stored up so as to benefit the soul in its reincarnated existence.

Plato taught that the immaterial part of man – the soul – was a complex thing, being composed of a number of differing, though related, elements. Highest in the hierarchy of the soul elements he placed the Spirit, which, he taught, comprised

consciousness, intelligence, will, choice between good and evil, etc., and which was absolutely indestructible and immortal, and which had its seat in the head. Then came two other parts of the soul, which survived the dissolution of the body, but which were only comparatively immortal, that is, they were subject to later dissolution and disintegration. Of these semi-material elements, one was the seat of the affections, passions, etc., and was located in the heart; while the other, which was the seat of the sensual and lower desires, passions, etc., was located in the liver. These two mentioned lower elements were regarded as not possessed of reason, but still having certain powers of sensation, perception, and will.

The Neo-Platonists, who followed Plato, and who adapted his teachings to their many conflicting ideas, held firmly to the doctrine of Reincarnation. The writings of Plotinus, Porphyry, and the other Mystics, had much to say on this subject, and the teaching was much refined under their influence. The Jewish philosophers were affected by the influence of the Platonic thought, and the school of the Essenes, which held firmly to the idea of Rebirth, was a source from which Christianity received much of its early influence.

# **CHAPTER IV**

## **The Jews, Essenes and Early Christians**

The early Jewish people had an Inner Teaching which embraced certain ideas concerning Reincarnation, although the masses of the people knew nothing of the doctrine which was reserved for the inner circles of the few. There is much dispute concerning the early beliefs of the Jewish people regarding the immortality of the soul. The best authorities seem to agree that the early beliefs were very crude and indefinite, consisting principally of a general belief that after death the souls are gathered up together in a dark place, called Sheol, where they dwell in an unconscious sleep. It will be noted that the earlier books in the Old Testament have very little to say on this subject. Gradually, however, there may be noticed a dawning belief in certain states of the departed souls, and in this the Jews were undoubtedly influenced by the conceptions of the people of other lands with whom they came in contact. The sojourn in Egypt must have exerted an important influence on them, particularly the educated thinkers of the race, of which, however, there were but few, owing to the condition in which they were kept as bondsmen of the Egyptians. Moses, however, owing to his education and training among the Egyptian priests, must have



been fully initiated in the Mysteries of that land, and the Jewish legends would indicate that he formed an Inner Circle of the priesthood of his people, after they escaped from Egypt, and doubtless instructed them fully in the occult doctrines, which, however, were too advanced and complicated for preaching to the mass of ignorant people of which the Jewish race of that time was composed. The lamp of learning among the Jews of that time was kept alight but by very few priests among them. There has always been much talk, and legend, concerning this Inner Teaching among the Jews. The Jewish Rabbis have had so much to say regarding it, and some of the Early Fathers of the Christian Church were of the opinion that such Secret Doctrine existed.

Scholars have noted that in important passages in the Jewish Bible, three distinct terms are used in referring to the immaterial part, or "soul," of man. These terms are "Nichema," "Rouach," and "Nephesh," respectively, and have been translated as "soul," "spirit" or "breath," in several senses of these terms. Many good authorities have held that these three terms did not apply to one conception, but that on the contrary they referred to three distinct elements of the soul, akin to the conceptions of the Egyptians and other early peoples, who held to the trinity of the soul, as we have shown a little further back. Some Hebrew scholars hold that "Nichema" is the Ego, or Intelligent Spirit; "Rouach," the lower vehicle of the Ego; and "Nephesh," the Vital Force, Vitality, or Life.

Students of the Kaballah, or Secret Writings of the Jews,

find therein many references to the complex nature of the soul, and its future states, as well as undoubted teachings regarding Reincarnation, or Future Existence in the Body. The Kaballah was the book of the Jewish Mysteries, and was largely symbolical, so that to those unacquainted with the symbols employed, it read as if lacking sense or meaning. But those having the key, were able to read therefrom many bits of hidden doctrine. The Kaballah is said to be veiled in seven coverings – that is, its symbology is sevenfold, so that none but those having the inner keys may know the full truth contained therein, although even the first key will unlock many doors. The Zohar, another Secret Book of the Jews, although of much later origin than the Kaballah, also contains much of the Inner Teachings concerning the destiny of the soul. This book plainly recognizes and states the three-fold nature of the soul, above mentioned, and treats the Nichema, Rouach and Nephesh as distinct elements thereof. It also teaches that when the soul leaves the body it goes through a long and tedious purifying process, whereby the effect of its vices is worn off by means of a series of transmigrations and reincarnations, wherein it develops several perfections, etc. This idea of attaining perfection through repeated rebirths, instead of the rebirths being in the nature of punishment as taught by Plato, is also taught in the Kaballah, showing the agreement of the Jewish mind on this detail of the doctrine. The essence of the Kaballic teaching on this subject is that the souls undergo repeated rebirth, after long intervals of rest and

purification, in entire forgetfulness of their previous existences, and for the purpose of advancement, unfoldment, purification, development, and attainment. The Zohar follows up this teaching strictly, although with amplifications. The following quotation from the Zohar is interesting, inasmuch as it shows the teaching on the subject in a few words. It reads as follows: "All souls are subject to the trials of transmigration; and men do not know which are the ways of the Most High in their regard. They do not know how many transformations and mysterious trials they must undergo; how many souls and spirits come to this world without returning to the palace of the divine king. The souls must re-enter the absolute substance whence they have emerged. But to accomplish this end they must develop all the perfections; the germ of which is planted in them; and if they have not fulfilled this condition during one life, they must commence another, a third, and so on, until they have acquired the condition which fits them for reunion with God."

The mystic sect which sprung up among the Jewish people during the century preceding the birth of Christ, and which was in the height of its influence at the time of the Birth – the sect, cult, or order of The Essenes – was an important influence in the direction of spreading the truths of Reincarnation among the Jewish people. This order combined the earlier Egyptian Mysteries with the Mystic Doctrine of Pythagoras and the philosophy of Plato. It was closely connected with the Jewish Therapeutæ of Egypt, and was the leading mystic order of the

time. Josephus, the eminent Jewish historian, writing of the Essenes, says: "The opinion obtains among them that bodies indeed are corrupted, and the matter of them not permanent, but that souls continue exempt from death forever; and that emanating from the most subtle ether they are unfolded in bodies as prisons to which they are drawn by some natural spell. But when loosed from the bonds of flesh, as if released from a long captivity, they rejoice and are borne upward." In the New International Encyclopedia (vol. vii, page 217) will be found an instructive article on "Essenes," in which it is stated that among the Essenes there was a certain "view entertained regarding the origin, present state, and future destiny of the soul, which was held to be pre-existent, being entrapped in the body as a prison," etc. And in the same article the following statement occurs: "It is an interesting question as to how much Christianity owes to Essenism. It would seem that there was room for definite contact between John the Baptist and this Brotherhood. His time of preparation was spent in the wilderness near the Dead Sea; his preaching of righteousness toward God, and justice toward one's fellow men, was in agreement with Essenism; while his insistence upon Baptism was in accordance with the Essenic emphasis on lustrations." In this very conservative statement is shown the intimate connection between the Essenes and Early Christianity, through John the Baptist. Some hold that Jesus had a still closer relationship to the Essenes and allied mystic orders, but we shall not insist upon this point, as it lies outside of the

ordinary channels of historical information. There is no doubt, however, that the Essenes, who had such a strong influence on the early Christian Church, were closely allied to other mystic organizations with whom they agreed in fundamental doctrines, notably that of Reincarnation. And so we have brought the story down to the early Christian Church, at which point we will continue it. We have left the phase of the subject which pertains to India for separate consideration, for in India the doctrine has had its principal home in all ages, and the subject in that phase requires special treatment.

That there was an Inner Doctrine in the early Christian Church seems to be well established, and that a part of that doctrine consisted in a teaching of Pre-existence of the Soul and some form of Rebirth or Reincarnation seems quite reasonable to those who have made a study of the subject. There is a constant reference to the "Mysteries" and "Inner Teachings" throughout the Epistles, particularly those of Paul, and the writings of the Early Christian Fathers are filled with references to the Secret Doctrines. In the earlier centuries of the Christian Era frequent references are found to have been made to "The Mysteries of Jesus," and that there was an Inner Circle of advanced Christians devoted to mysticism and little known doctrines there can be no doubt. Celsus attacked the early church, alleging that it was a secret organization which taught the Truth to the select few, while it passed on to the multitude only the crumbs of half-truth, and popular teachings veiling the Truth. Origen, a pupil

of St. Clement, answered Celsus, stating that while it was true that there were Inner Teachings in the Christian Church, that were not revealed to the populace, still the Church in following that practice was but adhering to the established custom of all philosophies and religions, which gave the esoteric truths only to those who were ready to receive them, at the same time giving to the general mass of followers the exoteric or outer teachings, which were all they could understand or assimilate. Among other things, in this reply, Origen says: "That there should be certain doctrines, not made known to the multitude, which are divulged after the exoteric ones have been taught, is not a peculiarity of Christianity alone, but also of philosophic systems in which certain truths are exoteric and others esoteric. Some of the followers of Pythagoras were content with his 'ipse dixit,' while others were taught in secret those doctrines which were not deemed fit to be communicated to profane and insufficiently prepared ears. Moreover, all the mysteries that are celebrated everywhere through Greece and barbarous countries, although held in secret, have no discredit thrown upon them, so that it is in vain he endeavors to calumniate the secret doctrines of Christianity, seeing that he does not correctly understand its nature." In this quotation it will be noticed that not only does Origen positively admit the existence of the Inner Teachings, but that he also mentions Pythagoras and his school, and also the other Mysteries of Greece, showing his acquaintance with them, and his comparison of them with the Christian Mysteries,

which latter he would not have been likely to have done were their teachings repugnant to, and at utter variance with, those of his own church. In the same writing Origen says: "But on these subjects much, and that of a mystical kind, might be said, in keeping with which is the following: 'It is good to keep close to the secret of a king,' in order that the entrance of souls into bodies may not be thrown before the common understanding." Scores of like quotations might be cited.

The writings of the Early Fathers of the Christian Church are filled with many allusions to the current inner doctrine of the pre-existence and rebirth of souls. Origen in particular has written at great length regarding these things. John the Baptist was generally accepted as the reincarnation of Elias, even by the populace, who regarded it as a miraculous occurrence, while the elect regarded it as merely another instance of rebirth under the law. The Gnostics, a mystic order and school in the early church, taught Reincarnation plainly and openly, bringing upon themselves much persecution at the hands of the more conservative. Others held to some form of the teaching, the disputes among them being principally regarding points of doctrine and detail, the main teachings being admitted. Origen taught that souls had fallen from a high estate and were working their way back toward their lost estate and glory, by means of repeated incarnations. Justin Martyr speaks of the soul inhabiting successive bodies, with loss of memory of past lives. For several centuries the early Church held within its bosom many earnest

advocates of Reincarnation, and the teaching was recognized as vital even by those who combatted it.

Lactinus, at the end of the third century, held that the idea of the soul's immortality implied its pre-existence. St. Augustine, in his "Confessions," makes use of these remarkable words: "Did I not live in another body before entering my mother's womb?" Which expression is all the more remarkable because Augustine opposed Origen in many points of doctrine, and because it was written as late as A. D. 415. The various Church Councils, however, frowned upon these outcroppings of the doctrine of Reincarnation, and the influence of those who rose to power in the church was directed against the "heresy." At several councils were the teachings rebuked, and condemned, until finally in A. D. 538, Justinian had a law passed which declared that: "Whoever shall support the mythical presentation of the pre-existence of the soul and the consequently wonderful opinion of its return, let him be Anathema." Speaking of the Jewish Kaballists, an authority states: "Like Origen and other church Fathers, the Kaballists used as their main argument in favor of the doctrine of metempsychosis, the justice of God."

But the doctrine of Reincarnation among Christian races did not die at the orders and commands of the Christian Church Councils. Smouldering under the blanket of opposition and persecution, it kept alive until once more it could lift its flame toward Heaven. And even during its suppression the careful student may see little flickers of the flame – little wreathings of



smoke – escaping here and there. Veiled in mystic phrasing, and trimmed with poetic figure, many allusions may be seen among the writings of the centuries. And during the past two hundred years the revival in the subject has been constant, until at the close of the Nineteenth Century, and the beginning of the Twentieth Century, we once more find the doctrine openly preached and taught to thousands of eager listeners and secretly held even by many orthodox Christians.

# CHAPTER V

## The Hindus

While Reincarnation has been believed and taught in nearly every nation, and among all races, in former or present times, still we are justified in considering India as the natural Mother of the doctrine, inasmuch as it has found an especially favorable spiritual and mental environment in that land and among its people, the date of its birth there being lost in the cloudiness of ancient history, but the tree of the teaching being still in full flower and still bearing an abundance of fruit. As the Hindus proudly claim, while the present dominant race was still in the savage, cave-dwelling, stone-age stage of existence – and while even the ancient Jewish people were beginning to place the foundation stones of their religion, of which the present Christian religion is but an offshoot – the great Hindu religious teachers and philosophers had long since firmly established their philosophies and religions with the doctrine of Reincarnation and its accompanying teachings, which had been accepted as Truth by the great Aryan race in India. And, throughout forty centuries, or more, this race has held steadfastly to the original doctrine, until now the West is looking again to it for light on the great problems of human life and existence, and now, in the Twentieth Century, many careful thinkers consider that in the study and

understanding of the great fundamental thoughts of the Vedas and the Upanishads, the West will find the only possible antidote to the virus of Materialism that is poisoning the veins of Western spiritual understanding.

The idea of reincarnation is to be found in nearly all of the philosophies and religions of the race, at least in some period in their history – among all peoples and races – yet, in India do we find the doctrine in the fullest flower, not only in the past but in the present. From the earliest ages of the race in India, Reincarnation in some of its various forms has been the accepted doctrine, and today it is accepted by the entire Hindu people, with their many divisions and sub-races, with the exception of the Hindu Mohammedans. The teeming millions of India live and die in the full belief in Reincarnation, and to them it is accepted without a question as the only rational doctrine concerning the past, present and future of the soul. Nowhere on this planet is there to be found such an adherence to the idea of "soul" life – the thinking Hindu always regarding himself as a soul occupying a body, rather than as a body "having a soul," as so many of the Western people seem to regard themselves. And, to the Hindus, the present life is truly regarded as but one step on the stairway of life, and not as the only material life preceding an eternity of spiritual existence. To the Hindu mind, Eternity is here with us Now – we are in eternity as much this moment as we ever shall be – and the present life is but one of a number of fleeting moments in the eternal life.

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