

# Is Reincarnation True?

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THERE is a curious tendency, which springs up now and again in our ranks, to criticize occasionally the early writings of Madame Blavatsky, and to take a delight in finding therein a certain of what might be called error. And yet the last few decades have taught us, again and again, that where Madame Blavatsky seemed wrong, it was not really so, but that we were wrong in misunderstanding what she wrote. Our present leaders have cleared up one by one many of the obscurities of her writings and doctrine, and now present them to us in pre-digested form, in simple terminology since invented and perfected. We are beginning to learn that Madame Blavatsky was face to face, in her attempt to launch, as gently as possible, the Ancient Wisdom once more upon the world, with the stupendous difficulty of conveying accurately to other minds, in a language almost unknown to her, many unfamiliar things which she knew to be true. That she could have been less in error than many suppose is evident from her words in a little article 'My Books', which she wrote in *Lucifer* shortly before her passing from the body. There she says, with reference to *Isis Unveiled*:

Save quotations and misprints, every word of information found in this work comes from our eastern Masters, and many a passage in it has been written by me under their dictation.

And speaking of the proof 'corrections' that were often made in her absence, she adds:

Witness the word 'plane' for 'cycle' as originally written, corrected by some unknown hand (I.347), a 'correction' which shows Buddha teaching *that there is no rebirth on this planet* (!! ) when the contrary is asserted on page 346, and the Lord Buddha is said to teach how to 'avoid' reincarnation; the use of the word 'planet' for plane, of 'monas' for *manas*; and the sense of the ideas sacrificed to grammatical form, and changed by the substitution of wrong words and erroneous punctuation, etc.

Sir Thomas More and the Nilgiri Master, who are spoken of in *Man: Whence, How and Whither* as Adepts, are both said to have taken part in the writing of *Isis Unveiled*, and they certainly understood what they were about, and most surely knew what they were attempting to describe. And without deification on the one hand or irreverence on the other, we may say that Madame Blavatsky was at least this much advanced, that she could not deliberately pretend to knowledge where she had none. Yet sometimes smaller minds, unable to leap the obstacles of terminology that her unusual difficulties of exposition involved, and unable to

intuit the meaning behind her words, strike their heads against the barriers, and blame her for the carelessness, ignorance or pretension with which they have hurt themselves. Let us rather find what foothold we can in the heap of rubbish that our imperfect language has raised in our path, so that presently we may reach the top and, peeping over, obtain a glimpse of the realms of truth that she had explored.

Perhaps in no subject more than that of Reincarnation has Madame Blavatsky been so misunderstood. Again and again we hear it said that Madame Blavatsky denied the truth of reincarnation when she wrote *Isis Unveiled*, or at least that she did not know it to be a fact. We venture to affirm that she would not have categorically stated, 'It is not true', unless she had known herself to be speaking truth. That she, a true Messenger of the great Masters, could have pretended to knowledge that she did not possess, or could have blankly denied what she did not know to be false, is absurd; and to say that she did not know of the Indian beliefs on the subject is ridiculous, when she speaks of them so definitely in the same work. But did she say that reincarnation was not a fact? If so, then in the sense in which she was using the word, she spoke truly. Let us see what she has to say on the subject in *Isis Unveiled* (Volume I, page 351):

We now present a few fragments of this mysterious doctrine of reincarnation - as distinct from metempsychosis - which we have from an authority. Reincarnation, i.e., the appearance of the same individual, or rather of his astral monad, twice on the same planet [plane], is not a rule in nature; it is an exception, like the teratological phenomenon of a two-headed infant.

Here she indicates that the doctrine of reincarnation is a mysterious one, that it is not the same thing as metempsychosis, that she has it from an authority, and that she is prepared to give only a few fragments of it. What does she mean here by reincarnation? The appearance of the same astral monad, that is to say, of the same ego working in the same astral body; and this, twice on the same plane, is not a rule in Nature.

Does this disagree with the highly philosophical conception of reincarnation that we have at the present day? First of all we have the man living in what we call the causal body, on the higher mental plane. When he is ready for birth he puts forth a ray ( a minute fragment of himself) into the lower mental world. That ray draws round itself the matter of that world or plane until it has gathered enough to form the mental auric egg for its new earth-life. After the short stay necessary for this purpose, the ray of consciousness, not the whole ego, descends still further into the astral world, and again stays long enough to draw round itself enough matter of that plane to form its astral auric egg. Once more the ray of consciousness descends on to the earth-plane, as it attaches itself to a body that is being prepared for birth, so that presently this centre of consciousness, this 'I' within the body, is born and it looks forth and says: 'This am I', and it identifies itself with the body in which it sees and feels and thinks and moves. Then, as it

grows in experience, it builds a new personality round the 'I', and, as its body grows, its counterpart also appears in the middle of the astral and the mental auric eggs. This personality, when complete, manifests in its life its triple capacity of acting, feeling and thinking, all three of which *ought* to be developed in the course of the life, and to be to some extent harmonized as the personality grows to old age.

Then the man dies. He loses this physical body. But the counterpart remains on the astral plane, and on that he finds himself living, feeling and thinking just as before, though he can no longer move the dense physical objects of the world that he has left. In other words, such part of him as is fitted to exist in the astral world as a conscious being survives, and he lives on for some time according to his desires. Then comes the death of the astral body, and the person now lives on the mental plane, in the devachanic state. There he has all that is the outcome of the higher emotions and thoughts that he had during earth-life, and he has lost only the power to move the objects of the lower planes and the ability to be swayed by lower feelings and emotions. And, once more, he loses his mental body on the mental plane, and all that is left of him is with the ray of the man which was put forth at the beginning of this cycle of necessity. Just as a swimmer, diving from a high bank into a lake with cliffs on one side and a sandy beach on the other, must swim to the low shore on the opposite side or be drowned; so must the soul, the ego, the man, having plunged a ray of himself into birth, permit that ray to pass through the cycle of necessity of that birth, through the mental to the astral and then to the physical; through the physical to the astral and then to the mental, and through that back to its true parent - or else lose that birth altogether.

Then, when the personality has finished this cycle of necessity, and the ray is thus indrawn again, then the personality, having left to it only such part of itself as is pure enough to live in that high state - all that is noble and true and wise, and is fit to be immortal - will enter into that immortal life of the true man, and will *never come forth again, but enjoy for ever the immortality of the spiritual life*. Yet the same *man*, thus enriched, will again put forth a ray to enrich himself with still further experience; but it will be another ray, not the same one, for that is joined with its parent and can never be reincarnated again. The immortal man thus does not reincarnate; the personal man does not reincarnate; but the immortal man puts forth from time to time a slender ray from himself, until he no more needs or seeks further experience or traffic with the earth. He is then free from any desire for worldly objects, having fully realized the greater value of the things of his spiritual life; he no longer needs successive births; he is an Arhat and, as Madame Blavatsky says: 'At his death the Arhat is never reincarnated' - unless, of course, he chooses to descend.

So then, was not Madame Blavatsky right in saying that reincarnation, in the sense in which she used the word, is not the rule, but the exception? Let us see how this bears out the rest of her statement on the subject:

It (reincarnation) is preceded by a violation of the laws of harmony of Nature, and happens only when the latter, seeking to restore its disturbed equilibrium, violently throws back into earth-life the astral monad which had been tossed out of the circles of necessity 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, while the gross matter of each of these several entities is suffered to disperse itself at death through the vast realm of being, the immortal spirit and astral monad of the individual - the latter having been set apart to animate a frame, and the former to shed its divine light on the corporeal organization - must try a second time to carry out the purpose of the creative intelligence.

It is perfectly clear that the writer is here referring to the reincarnation of the man in the same astral body. She gives some of the reasons for what she here calls reincarnation - what we usually now call rebirth from the astral plane. We can easily see that unless there is in the personality at least some fragment of experience which is good enough for immortality, for union with the immortal man, the whole birth will be a failure, and that this something can only be gained when the three principles of bodily experience, feeling and thought work together, or are to some extent harmonized. If the earthly body is injured or destroyed before the intelligence has thus harmonized itself with the lower principles, a new attempt must be made to reincarnate with the same astral body, so that the ray may come back enriched. Madame Blavatsky interprets the words of the Christ as given in the Gospel story in exactly the same manner, emphasizing the divine man within as a worker through bodies on earth, and denying any recurrent incarnations of the personal man, the illusive and essentially decaying personal self. In [\*The Secret Doctrine, III. 66\*](#) she writes:

The most suggestive of Christ's parables and 'dark sayings' is found in the explanation given by him to his apostles about the blind man: 'Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered: 'Neither hath this [blind, physical] man sinned nor his parents; but that the works of [his] God should be made manifest in him.' Man is the 'tabernacle', the 'building' only, of his God; and of course it is not the temple but its inmate - the vehicle of 'God' (the conscious Ego, or Fifth Principle, Manas, the vehicle of the divine Monad or 'God' - that had sinned in a previous incarnation, and had thus brought the karma of cecity upon the new building. Thus Jesus spoke truly; but to this day his followers have refused to understand the words of wisdom spoken. The Saviour is shown by his followers as though he were paving, by his words and explanation, the way to a preconceived programme that had to lead to an intended miracle. For such is the true sense of the words 'that the works of God should be made manifest in him', in the light of theological interpretation, and a very undignified one it is, if the esoteric explanation is rejected

Returning once more to the text of *Isis Unveiled*, we find that the passage continues:

If reason has been so far developed as to become active and discriminative, there is no reincarnation on this earth, for the three parts of the trine man have been united together, and he is capable of running the race.

To the words 'there is no reincarnation on this earth', we must add 'for this personality'. Now, what is this race of which she speaks? For a clue to this we may turn to [pages 345 and 346 of the same volume:](#)

This philosophy teaches that Nature never leaves her work unfinished; if baffled at the first attempt, she tries again. When she evolves a human embryo, the intention is that a man shall be perfected - physically, intellectually, and spiritually. His body is to grow mature, wear out, and die; his mind to unfold, ripen, and be harmoniously balanced; his divine spirit to illuminate and blend easily with the *inner* man. No human being completes its grand cycle, or the 'cycle of necessity', until all these are accomplished. As the laggards in a race struggle and plod in their first quarter while the victor darts past the goal, so, in the race of immortality, some souls out-speed all the rest and reach the end, while their myriad competitors are toiling under the load of matter, close to the starting point. Some unfortunates fall out entirely, and lose all chance of the prize; some retrace their steps and begin again. This is what the Hindu dreads above all things - *transmigration* and *reincarnation*; only on other and inferior planets [planes], never on this one.

That he is capable of running the race means that he is capable of entering the immortal life and sharing in that effort of the man within, who is at once his father and himself, to gain that immortality which is called Arhatship. The average Hindu greatly fears the opposite possibility, his sinking back into a lower condition of life, or becoming a *bhuta* or spook, an unwholesome class of entities left severely alone by self-respecting believers; whereas the human birth is regarded as giving an opportunity to reach Moksha or liberation (truly, Arhatship), and thus to cease reincarnating.

Our author does not say that when a man has united his three parts and has perfected or completed his human or personal nature, he has *finished* the race and become an Arhat, but that he is capable of running the race for the achievement of perfect immortality. There is a vast field of growth between the imperfection of an idiot and the perfection of an Arhat, as we may see by her further explanation:

But when the new being has not passed beyond the condition of Monad, or when, as in the idiot, the trinity has not been completed, the immortal spark which illuminates it has to re-enter on the earthly plane, as it was frustrated in its first attempt. Otherwise, the mortal or astral, and the immortal or divine, souls, could not progress in unison and pass onward to the sphere [plane] above.

The Monad which was imprisoned in the elementary being- the rudimentary or lowest astral form of the future man - after having passed through and quitted the *highest* physical shape of a dumb animal - say an orangutan, or again an elephant, one of the most intellectual of brutes - that Monad, we say, cannot skip over the physical and intellectual sphere of the terrestrial man, and be suddenly ushered into the spiritual sphere above.

Does not the writer here show that the Monad which passes through the animal kingdom must incarnate in the human kingdom, and that before that which is now in the lower animals can do so, it must pass into and through the highest order of animals, such as the orangutan or elephant, and is this not what we now mean by reincarnation? And does she not mean that the essence of which the personality is built in the astral and lower mental planes cannot enter in to the spiritual sphere above (the higher mental, the plane of immortality) then or at any other time, without passing through the development of the intellect in the human kingdom? And she winds up with a strong statement in favour of reincarnation:

No need to remark that even if [regarded as ] hypothetical, this theory is no more ridiculous than many others considered as strictly orthodox.

One more passage and we have done. [On page 347](#) , we read:

This *former life* believed in by the Buddhists, is not a life *on this* planet [cycle], for, more than any other people, the Buddhistical philosopher appreciated the great doctrine of cycles.

It is on this paragraph that Madame Blavatsky comments in the note to 'My Books':

Witness the word 'planet' for 'cycle' as originally written, corrected by an unknown hand, a 'correction' which shows Buddha teaching that *there is no rebirth on this planet* (!!), when the contrary is asserted [on page 346](#), and the Lord Buddha is said to teach how to 'avoid' reincarnation.

And the cycle that is here mentioned is again the cycle of necessity, which the ray must go through in the course of one birth.

There is thus more than enough to show that Madame Blavatsky, at the time of writing *Isis Unveiled*, had nothing to say against the great truth of reincarnation as we hold it today, and she certainly did know a great deal about the cycle of birth. It is not clear that the writer desired most emphatically to deny the doctrine of metempsychosis, but yet not launch suddenly upon an unprepared world the full and staggering truth? Even more is this evident when we are told by Colonel Olcott, in the midst of a mass of misunderstanding, that the passages relating to the subject were approved, if not actually written, by one of the Mahatmas. He writes in *Old Diary Leaves, I, 288*:

Why she and I were permitted to put the misstatement into *Isis*, and, especially, why it was made to me by the Mahatma, I cannot explain... They certainly did not teach us what we now accept as the truth about Reincarnation; nor bid us keep silent about it, nor resort to any vague generalities capable of being now twisted into an apparent agreement with our present views; nor interpose to prevent us from writing and teaching the heretical and unscientific idea that, save it in certain few cases, the human entity was not, and could not be, reincarnated on one and the same planet.

Madame Blavatsky was not a tyro, and surely the Mahatma was not ignorant for we read in C.W. Leadbeater's *Invisible Helpers* that an Initiate of even the first degree is required to learn, not theoretically but of his own certain and direct knowledge, of the truth of reincarnation. The conclusion is obvious; Madame Blavatsky was neither deceiving nor deceived; but she was misunderstood in this, as in many other of the teachings that she offered to an unprepared world.