

## Contents

Acknowledgements	ix
The Guide to Our Pathway	xi
Foreword by David Lorimer	xv
1. Moving Through Life's Momentum	1
2. The Rounds of our Returning	19
3. Karma, and its Consequence	41
4. Chosen Lives in Childhood	59
5. Spirits and Inspiration	79
6. Mediums and their Messages	103
7. Possession, Depossession	129
8. Withdrawal from the Body	151
9. Tasting Death and Dying	177
10. To Judgement and Connection	197
11. Extensions of Existence	221
12. The Ultimate Expression	247
The Sources of Information	271
Index of Authors, Titles and source codes	291
Bibliography	303

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge and thank every author and publisher whose work has contributed to *Our Pathway of Being*. The details of the authors' names, the publishers, and the titles – numbering one hundred and twenty four books – are given in the Bibliography.

## **The Guide to Our Pathway**

Our Pathway of Being is written as a philosophical and thought-provoking exploration of our lives, both before and beyond death. It examines many interrelated concepts and life-experiences in a way that opens a path through the varied realms of our existence.

- Chapter 1. **MOVING THROUGH LIFE'S MOMENTUM** questions the meaning of life and consciousness, and explores some related concepts of eternal life, pre-existence and reincarnation.
- Chapter 2. **THE ROUNDS OF OUR RETURNING** looks at the subject of reincarnation in greater depth, and studies its wide acceptance by Christian philosophers before the questionable 6<sup>th</sup> century anathemas. The chapter moves on through Eastern and modern philosophies, and finds that many people have had memories of living in the past.
- Chapter 3. **KARMA, AND ITS CONSEQUENCE** discovers some research that suggests that our lives are affected by preceding lives. It studies the concepts of karma, the development of evil and the counteractive force of better choices within free will, our spiritual development through many lives, our pre-selection of the karmic conditions and relationships for the present life, and the emotions of rebirth.
- Chapter 4. **CHOSEN LIVES IN CHILDHOOD** explores the experiences and frustrations of our return to earth-life. It discusses the ideas that learning is often a recollection of previous knowledge,

that our inborn talents are the fruit of our efforts in the past, that our unexpected attitudes to life have been inherited from our past, and that children may retain an awareness of spirit beings.

- Chapter 5. SPIRITS AND INSPIRATION touches on our fear of ghosts, and moves on to consider some helpful spirit communications that have been received through dreams. It studies our subconscious and conscious interactions with spirit influences, the possible origin of true inspiration, our intuitive relationships with spirit guides, and furthering this contact through good mediums.
- Chapter 6. MEDIUMS AND THEIR MESSAGES explores various forms of mediumship, the growth of Western Spiritualism, the development of communication between spirits and people, fraudulent practices, and the contrast between contrived human efforts and the quality of most spirit communications. It gives the examples of a medium's development and a spirit's purpose in returning to work within the earth planes.
- Chapter 7. POSSESSION, DEPOSSESSION describes the risk of possession that is taken by those who communicate with unknown spirits. It discusses the lifestyles that can invite possession, the motives of possessing spirits and the view that some of these spirits had once had good intentions, deposal and the freedom experienced when a possessing spirit leaves the victim's body.
- Chapter 8. WITHDRAWAL FROM THE BODY suggests that the spirit of a living person can withdraw from its sleeping body, and techniques that enable people to leave their bodies at will, despite their tenuous connection with the body until the release of death. It studies some spontaneous out of body experiences, including those that occur when life becomes unbearable or preceding death; and it examines some views on suffering and death, the atonement of sins and the karmic view of our own salvation.
- Chapter 9. TASTING DEATH AND DYING explores the levels of near death experiences, and the first stages of the life reviews that show how our private thoughts and actions have affected others. It

discusses the suppression of bad near death experiences and the subsequent transformation of character that may follow these experiences; and it studies some medical research that confirms the accuracy of the subject's observations and deathbed visions, and some spirit communications that describe death as passing on within a continuing life.

- Chapter 10. TO JUDGEMENT AND CONNECTION studies some accounts of violent deaths, and deaths caused by long illness, as described by the surviving spirits whose personalities are unchanged, and who are with their 'dead' relatives and friends. It studies some life reviews which include self-judgement and a profound empathy with those who were affected by the recent life, and this increases our understanding of the karma of our interconnected lives, the development of individual failing and evil, and the importance of free will in our spiritual evolution. The chapter then describes the guidance of higher beings during these reviews, adding their understanding of the recent life, and hope and strength for the future.
- Chapter 11. EXTENSIONS OF EXISTENCE studies the early levels of the afterlife, and suggests that these planes are energised by thought. It describes the period of rest and recovery, which is followed by the choice of staying on in the higher planes or preparing to return to earth for further development. The chapter then explores the experiences of those who stay on, and their development through working in creative ways and in teaching, healing and caring for the incoming souls from earth. It describes the depth of evil in some of these souls, their initial selection of the hell levels, and the efforts of advanced souls in helping them rise to higher levels. It then describes the increasing connection between the advanced souls and their group-souls, and the extraordinary interactions of their consciousness in sharing knowledge, experience and inspiration in the higher levels and rising towards the overall unity – the consciousness and mystery of God.
- Chapter 12. THE ULTIMATE EXPRESSION explores the concept of God as the Whole that includes all – as Brahman includes all Atman – and describes creation as the unfolding of part of the Divine, the

Mystery of Being lying within and beyond the matter-energy of physics. It studies the belief that a purpose of this universe is that of 'becoming' through the kingdoms of creation at all levels of evolving consciousness, developing through the shared lower levels of consciousness, then through our apparent individuality as humans, and then merging with the higher levels of increasing consciousness. This chapter finally describes the great cosmological force of universal karma, the concepts of oscillating universes, the endless days and nights of Brahma, and the word – the end of the path – God.

**What is this life that we are living?  
What is death – when we are dying?**

Preface: 1. I think ... that although it is very difficult if not impossible in this life to achieve certainty about these questions, at the same time it is utterly feeble not to use every effort in testing the available theories, or to leave off before we have considered them in every way. <sup>1</sup>

Preface: 2. In religion and spirituality, in every human science, and in psychical research, we stand on the shoulders of others in order to try to see further than they have been able to do. If that is what I have done, I shall be satisfied, and if others can use what I have written in such a way as sets their own thoughts into motion, I shall be even more gratified. <sup>2</sup>

*The original English or American English spelling has been retained in the quotations in this book.*

---

Pre: 1. Plato: *The Last Days of Socrates*, pp.138-9. (see *Bibliography*)

[Plato. Greek philosopher; 5/4<sup>th</sup> C. BC.] Source C-a.

Pre: 2. Perry, Archdeacon Michael: *Psychic Studies: A Christian's View*. p.16.

[English theologian; 20<sup>th</sup> C.]

## Foreword

by David Lorimer

The unexamined life not worth living – Socrates.

The 17<sup>th</sup> century French writer and scientist, Blaise Pascal, famously argued that it was worth betting on the exercise of God and immortality. If he was wrong, he would know nothing about it. If, however, he was right, then he would have lived his life according to higher principles, which would benefit others as well as himself. We all know that we will die someday, but very few of us are curious about the possible continuation of our existence. It is as if we knew we were going on a journey but had no interest in finding out about the country of our destination. We make plans for our holidays, but do not think it worth researching our potential post-mortem itinerary.

Nor do we receive much encouragement in this respect either from our society or from science. Modern society is concerned primarily with the acquisition of material goods, while science insists that consciousness is a by-product of brain processes. On this basis, death spells the extinction of consciousness and personality. However, many anomalous experiences point towards a different conclusion, namely that the death of the physical body is a gateway to a new form of existence. In other words, death is not so much an extinction as a transition. I have spent many years pondering the themes that constitute the chapters of Jenny Masefield's book, *Our Pathway of Being*.

Jenny represents the serious seeker of spiritual knowledge while acting as a guide to the reader throughout the book. Hence the

alternation between her own reflections and the extracts that build up the overall picture. She poses the very questions that readers themselves will want to explore and answers them through the texts selected from a wide variety of sources. The sources themselves are indexed under headings and include all the main religious traditions of the world as well as Rosicrucian philosophy, Theosophy, mediumship and psychical research. This means that the book draws on an unusual range of teachings, and that these teachings are juxtaposed in interesting ways. Thus an extract from the Bhagavad Gita might be followed by one from 'Seth', a personality channelled by Jane Roberts developing the same point. The bibliographical references are then listed at the end of the book.

The structure of the book enables the reader to examine all the main elements of the perennial philosophy: the nature of consciousness, reincarnation, karma, spirits, mediums, possession, out of body and near death experiences, descriptions of bodily death, life review, post-mortem communications and descriptions of corresponding states of consciousness. Finally, the relationship between the individual mind and universal consciousness. The reader is gradually able to construct a coherent picture of life, and one that certainly corresponds closely with my own understanding of the same material. A number of key case histories are chosen to illuminate the argument: they are not the subject of critical analysis as the author's object is rather to convey her insights and reflections to the reader, who can then research particular themes more deeply.

The final chapter takes the reader into the heart of the mystery of the conscious Cosmos. Paul Brunton reminds us that "Looked at from the outside, the universe comes forth out of nothingness and passes away into nothingness. But looked at from inside, there has always been an internal hidden reality in its background. This reality is Mind. The world is only its manifestation".<sup>1</sup> The science of the last three centuries has given us a detailed picture of what the world looks like from the outside. The new science of consciousness is beginning to enable us to

---

1. Brunton, Dr Paul: *The Wisdom of the Overself*. p. 40.

understand how the world looks from the inside as well. Here it can join forces with the mystics, who are the specialist explorers of the dimensions of inner space. Jenny quotes Elisabeth Haich in this respect: "there is only one eternal being – only one God. In everything alive there lives this one single being, there lives this one single God. God is the indivisible unity, he is present everywhere, he fills the entire universe. The whole universe lives because God animates it with his own eternal being!"<sup>2</sup> God is the ultimate source of life and consciousness, of which the physical Cosmos is a manifestation and expression.

*Our Pathway of Being* is the distillation of a lifetime's reading and reflection. Readers will find between the covers of a single book an immense wealth of wisdom about the nature and purpose of human existence. As far as I can tell, it is a reliable map of the spiritual territory in which we already exist and which will open up new vistas when we make a transition into another dimension of existence. As such, it not only sheds light on our current situation, but also on our long-term prospects and the evolution of consciousness. It is a Michelin guide for the ultimate journey of life.

David Lorimer

Programme Director of the Scientific and Medical Network, and  
Chairman of the International Association for the Near-Death Studies  
(UK)

---

2. Haich, Elisabeth: *Initiation*. p. 174.

## Moving Through Life's Momentum

“Day by day, week by week and year by year we live in this tumble of time that just goes on and on. We all go on until we die,” I said to myself. “Yes, we just keep going on – whatever we believe, or have believed, or will believe – until we die. But is that really the end? Or does death lead on, somehow, to something else? I used to think so, but my ideas were too woolly to be called ‘Belief’. ‘Faith’ would be a better word. Or ‘Hope’. But if we could go on to something after dying, it seems logical to ask if we could have come from something before living in this life. –

“So what is dying, really? Come to that, what is living? –

“And what exactly are we living for? –

“Oh! I’m getting nowhere with all this wondering,” I said with some frustration, “but I really must find out!” So I turned to search the libraries, and there, in the potent stillness of the British Library, and in the London College of Psychic Studies, and in between the dim stacks of the Harvard Libraries I opened up the tomes and found others who were with me in my questioning.

1:1. Albert Schweitzer, for example, had struggled to understand the ‘whys’ and ‘wherefores’ of his life. I knew that he had been a man of many talents as he was a famous doctor who had worked for years in Africa, and a gifted musician and, not least, a philosopher; so I thought his autobiography would help me. But I found it ponderous, till it caught my interest when he described a journey up a West African river to get to his mission hospital.

Schweitzer had failed to find a good boat for this trip, so he boarded a barge that would be towed behind a decrepit steamer. He had also

failed to take enough provisions – but the local passengers were kind, and shared the food from their cooking pots. This was fortunate as the journey of a hundred and sixty miles would be difficult; the river was lower than usual, and the captain had to search for the safer channels between the shifting sandbanks. But Schweitzer was quite unconcerned and retreated into the privacy of his philosophical ruminations – as he explains in his autobiography, saying, “Lost in thought I sat on the deck of the barge, struggling to find the elementary and universal conception of the ethical, which I had not discovered in any philosophy.”<sup>1</sup>

1:2. Schweitzer was not happy at this time. He was a German, and the terrible war – the First World War – was spreading inexorably through Europe. Schweitzer’s concern was that the war was, in reality, the result of a serious breakdown in ethical and social values, and he felt that the guiding concept of the Europeans – their ‘world-view’ – had lost its great strength, and adds:

It had become clear to me that, like so many other people, I had clung to that world-view from inner necessity. ... Only if it offers itself to us as something desired from the depth of thought can it become spiritually our own.

Now ‘the depth of thought’ was Schweitzer’s *métier*, and he was convinced that he could discover some truth or revelation that would counter the decline of the traditional ‘world-view’. But in this instance he describes his increasing frustration:

Without the least success I let my thought be concentrated ... on the real nature of world – and life-affirmation and of ethics, and on the question of what they have in common. I was wandering about in a thicket in which no path was to be found. I was leaning with all my might against an iron door which would not yield.

All that I had learnt from philosophy about ethics left me in the lurch. The conceptions of the Good which it had offered were all so lifeless, so unelemental, so narrow, and

---

1:1. Schweitzer, Dr Albert: *My Life and Thought*. p. 185.  
[German missionary doctor/philosopher; 19/20<sup>th</sup> C.]

so destitute of content. ... [Then] late on the third day, at the very moment when, at sunset, we were making our way through a herd of hippopotamuses, there flashed upon my mind, unforeseen and unsought, the phrase, ‘Reverence for life’. The iron door had yielded: the path in the thicket had become visible. Now I had found my way. ...

What is ‘Reverence for Life’, and how does it arise in us?

If man wishes to reach clear notions about himself and his relation to the world, he must ever again and again be looking away from the manifold, which is the product of his thought and knowledge, and reflect upon the first, the most immediate, and the continually given fact of his own consciousness. Only if he starts from this can he arrive at a thinking world-view. ... The beginning of thought, a beginning which continually repeats itself, is that man does not simply accept his existence as something given, but experiences it as something unfathomably mysterious. Life-affirmation is the spiritual act in which he ceases to live unreflectively and begins to devote himself to his life with reverence, in order to raise it to its true value.<sup>2</sup>

Schweitzer then gave me a vital lead to Descartes, saying:

1:3. Descartes makes thinking start from the sentence “I think; so I must exist” (*Cogito, ergo sum*), and with his beginning thus chosen he finds himself irretrievably on the road to the abstract.<sup>3</sup>

Now Descartes was a French philosopher who had lived in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, and I turned to his work with some hesitation as Schweitzer’s philosophy had been heavy. But Descartes’ argument was charming:

1:4. All that up to the present time I have accepted as most true and certain I have learned either from the senses

---

1:2. Ibid. pp.183-187.  
1:3. Ibid. p. 186.



or through the senses; but it is sometimes proved to me that these senses are deceptive.

Descartes developed his theme, explaining that he knew he was working while sitting in a dressing gown in front of his fire; but he also knew that he often slept:

How often it has happened to me that in the night I dreamt that I found myself in this particular place, that I was dressed and seated near the fire, whilst in reality I was lying undressed in bed! At this moment it does indeed seem to me that it is with eyes awake that I am looking at this paper; that this head which I move is not asleep, that it is deliberately and of set purpose that I extend my hand and perceive it. ... [Yet] I have in sleep been deceived by similar illusions, and in dwelling carefully on this reflection I see so manifestly that there are no certain indications by which we may clearly distinguish wakefulness from sleep that I am lost in astonishment. And my astonishment is such that it is almost capable of persuading me now that I dream.<sup>4</sup>

1:5. What, then, can be esteemed as true? Perhaps nothing at all, unless that there is nothing in the world that is certain. But how can I know that there is not something different? ... Is there not some God, or some other being by whatever name we call it, who puts these reflections into my mind? That is not necessary, for is it not possible that I am capable of producing them myself? ... I hesitate, for what follows from that? Am I so dependent on body and senses that I cannot exist without these? ... Not at all: of a surety I myself exist since I ... think that I am something. So that after having reflected well, and carefully examined all things, we must come to the definite conclusion that the proposition: *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true each time that I pronounce it, or that I mentally conceive it.<sup>5</sup>

---

1:4. Descartes, René: *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*. pp. 145-146.

[French philosopher; 16/17<sup>th</sup> C.]

1:5. *Ibid.* pp. 149-150.

At this point a third writer, Dr Paul Brunton, joins the discussion:

1:6. What is it in us that is conscious? ... Is it the brain? Pah! – a lump of mere flesh not much different from what we can buy in any butcher's shop. The notion that consciousness is an emanation kindled in the cells of the cerebral cortex in the brain is a mistaken one. Out of this superficial notion are born most of our metaphysical illusions ...

Metaphysics and oriental philosophy seemed to be the main subjects in Brunton's work, and I was interested to see that he was a prolific writer from his line of titles on the library shelf. But I should not digress, as Brunton rushes on with his argument that 'consciousness' cannot possibly be 'kindled' in the brain:

By *brain* is meant that touchable and seeable portion of the human body canopied by the bony skull and filled with winding convolutions of grey and white substance, which anatomists handle in the dissecting room. By *consciousness* is meant the sum total of the changing series of sense-impressions, perceptions, thoughts, feelings, images, intuitions, ideas and memories which we know directly as our own and which cannot be got at by any dissection with a surgical knife.

Brunton then explains that consciousness, with its extraordinary range of ethereal qualities and attributes, is such that it must have had its origins from beyond the bounds of our material limitation.<sup>6</sup>

And these ideas are taken even further by a cleric of the Anglican Church, Michael Perry, who says:

1:7. I think most Christians believe that the brain doesn't so much *create* consciousness as act as a kind of receiver or filter for it. There is something – let's call it the 'essential self' for lack of a better term, though many Christians

---

1:6. Brunton, Dr Paul: *The Wisdom of the Overself*. pp. 89-91.

[British writer on ancient philosophy; 19/20<sup>th</sup> C.] Source A-d.

would be traditional and call it the 'soul' – which uses the human brain in order to come to consciousness in this material world of ours.

If the 'brain is damaged' or dysfunctional – Perry continues – the 'soul' is unable to express itself in the normal way. One can understand this by comparing the brain to a 'television set' and the soul to an incoming 'programme' from the transmitting station. If the set is faulty or badly tuned it will not receive the programme properly, though the programme is still being transmitted from the station. And this leads Perry to the intriguing question as to whether our own 'normal' brains could, in fact, be limiting us in some way:

If our brains were perfect instruments, might we perhaps be aware of abilities, consciousness, powers, which at present transcend even our wildest dreams? ... There *are* people about who have strange sensitivities which the rest of us can hardly guess at – people of intuition, of psychic awareness, people with healing powers. ... Perhaps they are indicators that it is possible – and will be possible, after this earthly life of ours is over – for the soul to work, not through a physical brain or a material body, but in another way altogether.<sup>7</sup>

Now this idea intrigued me, as I had been looking through a biography on Emanuel Swedenborg – who was an unusual man of intuition and psychic awareness, and a man who knew something of life after death. He had been an extraordinary mystic and a renowned scientist in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, and I felt that there was a lot to be learnt from his views. But at this early stage of my work I was interested in Swedenborg's analysis of the soul-body relationship – as he says:

1:8. Whoever duly considers the subject can know that ... all rational life that appears in the body belongs to the soul,

---

1:7. Perry, Archdeacon M: *Phschie Studies: A Christian's View*. pp. 207-208.  
[English theologian; 20<sup>th</sup> C.]

and nothing of it to the body; for the body, as said above, is material, and the material, which is the property of the body, is added to and, as it were, almost adjoined to the spirit, in order that the spirit of man may be able to live and perform uses in the natural world, all things of which are material. ... And because the material does not live but only the spiritual, it can be established that whatever lives in man is his spirit, and that the body merely serves it, just as what is instrumental serves a moving living force. An instrument is said indeed to act, to move, or to strike; but to believe that these are acts of the instrument, and not of him who acts, moves, or strikes by means of the instrument, is a fallacy.

As everything in the body that lives, and that acts and feels from that life, belongs exclusively to the spirit, and nothing of it to the body, it follows that the spirit is the man himself. ... In consequence, when the body is separated from its spirit, which is what is called dying, man continues to be a man and to live.<sup>8</sup>

1:9. All this has been said to convince the rational man that viewed in himself man is a spirit, and that the corporeal part that is added to the spirit to enable it to perform its functions in the natural and material world is not the man, but only an instrument of his spirit.<sup>9</sup>

I liked reading Swedenborg; his writing was somewhat slow and solid but his deductions were so logical. And the American Theosophist, William Judge, supports his views on the relative unimportance of the physical body, saying:

1:10. The body is considered by the Masters of Wisdom to be the most transitory, impermanent, and illusionary of the whole series of constituents in man. Not for a moment is it the same. Ever changing, in motion ... in every part, it is in fact never complete or finished though tangible. The

---

1:8. Swedenborg, Emanuel: *Heaven and Hell*. paras. 432-433.  
[Swedish scientist/mystic; 17/18th C.] Source J-a.  
1:9. Ibid. para. 435.

ancients clearly perceived this, for they elaborated a doctrine called Nitya Pralaya, or the continual change in material things, the continual destruction. This is known now to science in the doctrine that the body undergoes complete alteration and renovation. ... [At the end of our days] it is not the same body it was in the beginning. It has changed ...<sup>10</sup>

Shankara's classic, *The Crest Jewel of Wisdom*, now lay before me. Shankara was possibly the greatest of the Indian Brahmins, and is thought to have lived in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC; yet despite all the trials of time, his arguments are still valid:

1:11. The food-formed vesture is this body, which comes into being through food, which lives by food, which perishes without food.

It is formed of cuticle, skin, flesh, blood, bone, water; this is not worthy to be the Self, eternally pure. ... For the Self is the witness of all changes of form; ... [it] is the Life, because its power is indestructible; it is controller, not controlled.

Since the Self is witness of the body, its character, its acts, its states, ... the Self must be of other nature than the body.<sup>11</sup>

1:12. Therefore, O thou mind deluded, put away the thought that this body is the Self.<sup>12</sup>

So what exactly is 'the Self'?

I was really intrigued; but when a friend suggested that a *Seth* book would help me, I opened the volume with some doubt as the cover explained that Seth – a “personality no longer focused in physical reality” – had dictated his book through an entranced Jane Roberts. Despite my cautious approach, however, Seth joined the discussion as his argument was fascinating:

---

1:10. Judge, William: *The Ocean of Theosophy*. p. 36.

[American Theosophist; 19<sup>th</sup> C.] Source 1-a.

1:11. Shankara, Acharya: *The Crest Jewel of Wisdom*. p. 29.

[Hindu teacher; c. 5<sup>th</sup> C. BC.] Source A-c.

1:12. Ibid. p. 32.

1:13. If you could travel within your body, you could not find where your identity resides, yet you say, “This is my body,” and, “This is my name.”

If you cannot be found, even by yourself, within your body, then where is this identity of yours that claims to hold the cells and organs as its own? Your identity obviously has some connection with your body, since you have no trouble distinguishing your body from someone else's, and you certainly have no trouble distinguishing between your body and the chair, say, upon which you may sit.

In a large manner, the identity of the soul can be seen from the same viewpoint. It knows who it is, and is far more certain of its identity, indeed, than your physical self is of its identity.<sup>13</sup>

The Sufi teacher, Hazrat Inayat Khan, also wrote on this theme – saying that when he was young he had struggled and struggled to find his own soul, till he recognised it in the simplest way:

1:14. I realized that that in me which believed and that in me which wondered, that which persevered in me, and that which found, and that which was found at last, was no other than my soul.<sup>14</sup>

1:15. That which holds the conception of 'I', a living entity, is not the body but the soul deluded by the body. The soul thinks that it is the body; it thinks that it walks, sits, lies down when the body does, but it does not really do any of these things. A little indisposition of the body makes it think, 'I am ill'. A slight offence makes it dejected. A little praise makes it think itself in heaven. In reality it is not in heaven nor on earth, it is where it is: ... for the body is nothing but a covering put over our soul.<sup>15</sup>

---

1:13. In Roberts, Jane: *Seth Speaks*. p. 98.

[Seth: Spirit teacher, through medium, Jane Roberts; 20<sup>th</sup> C.]

1:14. Khan, Hazrat Inayat: *The Sufi Message*. Vol. 5. p. 137.

[Indian Sufi teacher, 19/20<sup>th</sup> C.] Source E-b.

1:15. Ibid. p. 41.

1:16. Paul Brunton extends these views, explaining that our thoughts and emotions may be active in the self, but they do not form the whole self.

There is, in addition, a ‘sense of awareness’ that lies within and beyond all we do, think and feel. This sense of awareness does not change, despite the to-ing and fro-ing of our thoughts and actions; it coordinates and maintains our individual self; it is the mystical but consistent watcher that is within each one of us, yet stands above the dealings of our hectic lives:

It is our truest deepest self because it alone outlives unchanged the surface self of changing personality. Thus the witness-self walks through this world *incognito*. ... But the man who has come to genuine self-knowledge knows what he really is *over* and above ... [the] embodied individual; hence he may aptly adopt the expressive term ‘Overself’ when referring to it. Theologians probably mean this when they speak of the ‘soul’.<sup>16</sup>

And Hazrat Inayat Khan comments:

1:17. The soul has no birth, no death, no beginning, no end. ... It has been always, and always it will be. This is the very being of man.<sup>17</sup>

1:18. [For] the soul is alive, it is the spirit of eternal Being.<sup>18</sup>

1:19. Now the *Bhagavad Gita* – which is recommended as being the best-loved Hindu classic – agrees that there is an especially vital and eternal element within our being. “Oh, this really does describe the soul,” I thought, as I read these simple but beautiful words:

---

1:16. Brunton, Dr Paul: *The Wisdom of the Overself*. pp. 120-121.

[British writer on ancient philosophy; 19/20<sup>th</sup>C.] Source A-d.

1:17. Khan, Hazrat Inayat: *The Sufi Message*. Vol. 5. p. 237.

[Indian Sufi teacher; 19/20<sup>th</sup> C.] Source E-b.

1:18. *Ibid.* p. 239.

Unborn, undying,  
Never ceasing,  
Never beginning,  
Deathless, birthless,  
Unchanging for ever,  
How can It die  
The death of the body?

Knowing It birthless,  
Knowing It deathless,  
Knowing It endless,  
For ever unchanging. ...

Innermost element,  
Everywhere, always,  
Being of beings,  
Changeless, eternal,  
For ever and ever.<sup>19</sup>

There are other poets who are calling from the past – as in this ancient script from Egypt:

1:20. Thou art from old, O Soul of man, yea, thou art from everlasting.<sup>20</sup>

And from Proverbs, one of the Judaic books in the Old Testament:

1:21. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.

When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water.

---

1:19. *Bhagavad, Gita: The Song of God*. pp. 41-42.

[Krishna's teaching; pre-5<sup>th</sup> C. BC.] Source A-b.

1:20. In Head, Joseph and Cranston, Sylvia: *Reincarnation*. p. 557.

[Egyptian hermetic fragment; a few C. BC.] Source F-a.

Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth:

While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world.

When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth:

When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep:

When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth:

Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him.<sup>21</sup>

These concepts are found in many traditions, as in this North American Indian legend:

1:22. At the beginning, all things were in the mind of [God]. ... All creatures, including man, were spirits. They moved about in space between the earth and the stars. ... They were seeking a place where they could come into a bodily existence. They ascended to the sun, but the sun was not fitted for their abode. They moved on to the moon and found that it also was not good for their home. Then they descended to the earth. ... The hosts of spirits descended and became flesh and blood.<sup>22</sup>

And Edgar Cayce takes up the theme:

1:23. We were all created in the beginning as spiritual beings, children of God, born of His desire for companionship, with the potential to become co-creators with Him. As souls, we were given minds with which to

---

1:21. *Holy Bible*. Proverbs. Ch. 8. vs. 23-30.

[Ancient Judaic scripture in the *Holy Bible*; c. 6<sup>th</sup> C. BC.] Source D-a.

1:22. Seton, Ernest Thompson: *Gospel of the Redman*. pp. 73-74.

[American Indian teaching; compiled in the 19<sup>th</sup> C.] Source G-a.

build, wills with which to choose, and access to the Spirit, the one great force of the universe.

Edgar Cayce, who was described as the greatest American mystic in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, believed that we then became proud, self-centred and “rebellious”; and this led to our descent. We explored the cosmos “as a wave of souls” and when we reached the earth we “were attracted to, and projected our consciousness into an ongoing evolutionary development of life”. The earth, of course, was part of God’s great creation; but in projecting ourselves into its dimensions, we restricted ourselves:

Our *entrapment* in the earth was not at all due to the evil nature of the flesh but rather to the limiting effect of our own thought forms and desire patterns. Imagine a swimmer who ties a rock around his waist so that he may walk on the ocean floor. He struggles to the surface for a breath but is drawn down again by the weight. There is nothing evil about experiencing the ocean floor but the rock about his waist draws him away from his true source of life. He is no longer free. The rocks about our waists are our own thought forms and desire patterns. Even after death, they may focus our consciousness away from an awareness of our oneness with God and draw us back again into the earth experience.<sup>23</sup>

Plotinus – who was a Roman philosopher in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century – held a similar view, saying –

1:24. ... the soul, though of divine origin, and proceeding from the regions on high, becomes merged in the dark receptacle of the body; ... it descends hither through a certain voluntary inclination.<sup>24</sup>

---

1:23. In Puryear, Herbert: *The Edgar Cayce Primer*. pp. 19-20.

[Cayce, Edgar. American healer; 19/20<sup>th</sup> C.]

1:24. Plotinus: *Five Books of Plotinus*. p. 273.

[Roman philosopher; 3<sup>rd</sup> C.] Source C-b.

1:25. Yet our souls are able alternately to rise from hence, carrying back with them an experience of what they have known and suffered in their fallen state; from whence they will learn how blessed it is to abide in the intelligible world, and, by a comparison, as it were, of contraries, will more plainly perceive the excellence of a superior state.<sup>25</sup>

Plotinus's words reminded me of the spirit, Seth – the 'personality no longer focused in physical reality' – who had inspired Jane Roberts to write *Seth Speaks*. "I suppose he could be a soul who has risen from our 'fallen state'," I said to myself, less doubtfully. But Seth's philosophy had intrigued me, despite my early scepticism; so I searched the shelves and found a book that claimed to contain teaching from another spirit, Silver Birch. It looked quite interesting, and I turned the pages – and read:

1:26. You are an eternal spirit, part of the life force that sustains the whole universe ... [and] transcends all material conceptions. It transcends all physical limitations. It is greater than anything you can conceive.

You are indeed mighty atoms – infinite, yet expressing yourselves in a finite manner. Within you there is a power that one day bursts all its bonds and insists that it shall express itself in a body more fitting to its reality. That you call death. ... But death has no power over life; death cannot touch life; death cannot destroy life; ... death is but a stepping-stone, a door through which you enter into the larger freedom of the realms of the spirit.<sup>26</sup>

The Greek philosopher, Euripedes, wrote in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC:

1:27. Who knows if to be alive is not really to die, and if dying does not count in the nether world as being alive?

---

1:25. Ibid. pp. 279-280.

1:26. In Ortzen, Tony (Ed.): *Silver Birch Companion*. pp. 28-29.  
[Silver Birch: Spirit teacher, through medium, Barbanell; 20th C.]

Who knows if this experience that we call dying is not really living, and if living is not really dying?<sup>27</sup>

And the Irish poet, W.B. Yeats, adds:

1:28. Many times man lives and dies  
Between his two eternities.<sup>28</sup>

The mystic healer, Edgar Cayce, takes this even further – saying:

1:29. It is not all of life to live, nor all of death to die; for one is the birth of the other when viewed from the whole or the center, and is but the experience of the entity in its transitions to and from the universal center from which all radiation takes place.<sup>29</sup>

Paul Brunton now returns to guide our views:

1:30. Nature circles infinitely. If she destroys it is only that she may create afresh. This is true of every part of her domain, whether in the life and fate of human beings or whether among the lands and waters of the globe.

And Brunton quotes from an ancient Egyptian transcript that says: "Nothing in the world perishes and death is not the destruction but only the change and transformation of things." He develops this theme by explaining that it is a misconception to view death as the end of life. Life is indestructible and carries on without any interruption, flowing through all its countless forms of being. Life is a stable 'principle', a force that is within and supportive of all created forms. The life-force is vast and eternal:

---

1:27. In Lorimer, David: *Survival?* p. 270.

[Euripedes: Greek philosopher; 5<sup>th</sup> C. BC.]

1:28. Yeats, William Butler: *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*. p. 398.

[Irish poet; 19/20<sup>th</sup> C.]

1:29. In Cerminara, Dr Gina: *Many Mansions*. p. 290.

[Cayce, Edgar: American healer; 19/20<sup>th</sup> C.]

It does not die with these forms but, like an everflowing river bearing all things uninterruptedly along its surface, bears them along without a break in its own existence ... Thus the very idea of immortality arises for us because there actually exists an immortal principle within us.<sup>30</sup>

1:31. Now the writer, Elisabeth Haich, had recognised her immortality when she was very young. She had just been told about death, and she went straight to a mirror and stared into it, trying to see her inner self - her *real* self - which, she knew, would live beyond her death:

I wanted to see where this 'I' was that was thinking things and did not want to die. I kept looking into the mirror, moving closer and closer until my nose touched the glass. I looked into my own eyes from as near as I could get. I wanted to see this 'I'! Even though there was a black hole in my eye, I couldn't see 'me'. The 'I' - myself - was invisible, just as I had always imagined it to be ever since I first became conscious on this earth. Even in the mirror I could not see *me*, only my face, my *mask* and the two black holes in my eyes out of which I was looking. "... but what will you be looking at the world through, when these eyes are some day closed?"

"Through two other eyes!" I answered without a moment's hesitation. "Here I will close these eyes, and in a new body I will open two new eyes."

"And what if there is a time delay between the two bodies; what if you ... have to wait a week, or perhaps months, years, even thousands of years?"

"That just cannot be," answered the little girl that I was then, "for when I fall asleep, I do not know, on awakening, how long I have been asleep. In sleep there is no time, and

---

1:30. Brunton, Dr Paul: *The Wisdom of the Overself*. pp. 143-145.

[British writer on ancient philosophy; 19/20<sup>th</sup> C.] Source A-d.

in death it will be the same. ... But my ceasing to exist just cannot be!"<sup>31</sup>

This intuitive child had understood reincarnation!

1:32. But the film star and writer, Shirley Maclaine, asked the question that was now gnawing at my mind: "Do you believe all this? ... Do you really believe in reincarnation?" Shirley was with a friend, looking at a library bookshelf labelled Reincarnation and Immortality, and she saw the *Egyptian Books of the Dead*, the *Bhagavad Gita* and some specialist books on the *Holy Bible* and the *Kabala*. Her friend replied:

"Why, yeah, I do. It's the only thing that makes sense. ... You should read some of the works not only on this shelf but also of Pythagoras, Plato, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, Goethe, and Voltaire."

"Did those guys believe in reincarnation?"

"Sure, and they wrote extensively about it. ... [Voltaire] said he didn't find it any more surprising to be born lots of times than to be born once. I feel the same way. ... Do you want me to compile a kind of reading list for you?" ...

"Sure," I said ...

"Great. ... For me, real intelligence is open-mindedness."<sup>32</sup>

"Oh! I do hope that's true!" I thought, and realised that I had been caught up on a roller coaster of ideas. "But where have all these concepts come from - in terms of history and religion? And how can they all hang together and relate so well, when they've come from such a wide variety of sources?"

Then I knew that I would have to learn something about the origins of these concepts, in order to answer my own questions, and that I should compile them for useful reference from time to time, as 'The Sources'.

---

1:31. Haich, Elisabeth: *Initiation*. pp. 81-82.

[Swiss writer/yoga teacher; 19/20<sup>th</sup> C.]

1:32. Maclaine, Shirley: *Out on a Limb*. pp. 48-49.

[American filmstar/writer; 20<sup>th</sup> C.]

“But I can’t do that just now,” I exclaimed. “All these library books are calling me, and there’s so much to read! But the really important thing – *the most important thing* – is to remember that ‘real intelligence is open-mindedness’ – as I have the feeling that these books may explore life and death in some very strange ways.”

## 2

### **The Rounds of our Returning**

2:1. Shirley Maclaine had been intrigued by her friend’s interest in reincarnation, and his suggestion that she should read more on the subject, so she started with an encyclopaedia and discovered that the concepts of rebirth were really very old as they had been found in some of the earliest scripts that had survived through the centuries. Many of these concepts were based on the understanding that the evolution of mankind is directed towards our return to the ‘common source and origin of all life’: that is to God. And reincarnation is the repeated embodiment of a soul-entity during this evolutionary progress, with the entity existing in some kind of disembodied state – or ‘astral form’ – between its incarnations. Maclaine then explains that the encyclopedia said –

... the companion subjects of karma – that is, working out one’s inner burdens – and reincarnation – the physical opportunity to live through one’s karma – were two of the oldest beliefs in the history of mankind and more widely accepted than almost any religious concepts on earth.

So countless generations have believed in the concepts of reincarnation and karma; the ancient Egyptians and Greeks did, and so did the early Hindus and Buddhists – in fact, the present-day Hindus and Buddhists still do. And there are references to reincarnation in the Judaic scriptures; but these beliefs seem to have disappeared in the



transition from Judaism to present-day Christianity – and Maclaine wondered how this might have affected her own ideas, saying: “Hundreds of millions of people believed in the theory of reincarnation (or whatever the term might be); but I, coming from a Christian background, hadn’t even known what it actually meant.”<sup>1</sup>

Guy Playfair discusses this point in his book, *The Indefinite Boundary*, and says:

2:2. To many intelligent people in the Western Christian world, the idea of reincarnation is still anathema.

“But I don’t really know what ‘anathema’ means,” I said as I scanned the fine print of the dictionary. Its definition was brief but explicit, saying that ‘anathema’ was something ‘accursed or detested’ by the Christian church. Playfair, however, suggests that reincarnation should not be regarded in this way. In the first place, millions of people from non-Christian religions have believed in reincarnation for more than 2,500 years; and secondly, he stresses the point that some Jews – including some of Jesus’ followers – discussed the concept quite openly. And Playfair goes even further, saying:

The Bible is full of clear references to reincarnation as an established belief, and while it is true that this belief is never explicitly stated, it is never attacked or contradicted. Such remarks as “Ye must be born again” may perhaps be considered as symbolic but there was nothing symbolic about Jesus’s disciples’ reactions on being asked what people were saying about their master’s origins.<sup>2</sup>

To my surprise, I found this to be true when I looked up the Gospel accounts in the *Holy Bible*. For example:

---

2:1. Maclaine, Shirley: *Out on a Limb*. pp. 51-52.

[American filmstar/writer; 20<sup>th</sup> C.]

2:2. Playfair, Guy: *The Indefinite Boundary*. pp. 158-159.

[British writer; 20<sup>th</sup> C.]

2:3. Jesus ... asked his disciples, saying, “Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?”

And they said, “Some say that Thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others Jeremias, or one of the prophets.”<sup>3</sup>

2:4. And ... Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John [the Baptist], ... “this is he, of whom it is written, ‘Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.’ ...

“For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.

“He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”<sup>4</sup>

2:5. And his disciples asked him, saying, “Why ... say the scribes that Elias must first come?”

And Jesus answered and said unto them, “Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things.

“But I say unto you, that Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed.” ...

Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist – [who had been beheaded].<sup>5</sup>

As I studied these accounts, I found myself thinking that they might have been based on inaccurate memories of the disciples and not on factual conversations. This could be the case, as there is evidence that the Gospel of Matthew was written many, many years after Jesus had died. But the fact that these accounts are found in the New Testament implies that the writer – or Jesus or His followers – thought reincarnation could be feasible. One can therefore conclude that reincarnation was mooted in their society, and this would explain why Jesus did not condemn their discussion on reincarnation – let alone curse it. On the contrary, these accounts suggest that Jesus invited such discussions and even added to them Himself, and it seems reasonable to suspect that it was the Christians who changed their views on reincarnation at some later date.

---

2:3. *Holy Bible*. Matthew. Ch. 16. vs. 13-14.

[St. Matthew’s Gospel in the New Testament.] Source D-b.

2:4. *Ibid*. Ch.11. vs. 7; 10; 13-15.

2:5. *Ibid*. Ch. 17. vs. 10-13.

Now the writers, Joseph Head and Sylvia Cranston, provide some important evidence that shows that the early Christian churches did not treat reincarnation as if it were a forbidden or anathematised subject. In their book, *Reincarnation*, they say that the concept was discussed quite openly by several Church Fathers until the year 553 AD, but that all this changed when a special meeting – the Fifth Ecumenical Council – was set up. There is further evidence that suggests that the decisions of this Council were biased, and that some of their documents were falsified – as explained by Head and Cranston:

2:6. Recently disclosed evidence advanced by Catholic scholars – who now have access to the original records – throws an entirely new light on what actually occurred at this council, as shall be seen shortly. The story surrounding the anathemas is an engrossing one, and as these curses brought in their wake serious consequences affecting for many centuries the life and thoughts of millions in the West, the whole matter seems worth exploring ... at length.

The early history of Christianity was apparently peppered with power struggles and protracted arguments on theological doctrine, and church councils were arranged from time to time in an attempt to discuss and smooth over these problems; but their repeated efforts were in vain, and the Christians were finally divided in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, with Pope Vigilius remaining as head of the Western Church, based in Rome. Emperor Justinian headed the breakaway Eastern Church, which was based in Constantinople; but he was dissatisfied as the division had not ended the conflict between the churches, and it was not long before the Pope suffered the great indignity of being kidnapped from Rome, and taken to Constantinople as Justinian's prisoner.

The Pope was incarcerated there for eight long years. Then Justinian released him, and tried to repair their damaged relationship by setting up the historic Fifth Ecumenical Council. The Council, however, was flawed from the start as Justinian arranged the agenda on his own terms, and he included an item that was designed to anathematise certain beliefs that were held by the influential and beloved Western Church Father, Origen – including his concept that souls exist *before* their incarnation. Origen was not alone in holding such beliefs, and

one can only assume that Justinian was jealous or afraid of his doctrinal influence.

There were other things that were incorrect at this Council – and Head and Cranston make a dramatic statement, saying:

The *Catholic Encyclopaedia* gives some rather astonishing information concerning this Fifth Ecumenical Council, permitting the conclusion, on at least technical grounds, that there is no barrier to belief in reincarnation for Catholic Christians. With the exception of six Western bishops from Africa, the council was attended entirely by Eastern bishops; no representative from Rome was present. Although Pope Vigilius was in Constantinople at the time, he refused to attend.

The Pope had been treated so badly that one can understand his refusing to attend; yet despite this, he tried to insist that an equal number of Western and Eastern bishops should be present at the Council. Justinian, however, would not agree to this, so the Pope decided to have no more dealings with him. And Head and Cranston add their own conclusion:

When we learn that of the 165 bishops at the final meeting, 159 were from the Eastern Church, it can safely be concluded that the voting during all the sessions was very much in Justinian's hands.<sup>6</sup>

When I had read this revealing study, I turned to the relevant pages of the *Catholic Encyclopaedia* and found the following statements:

2:7. In the next General Council of Constantinople (680 AD) it was found that the original Acts of the Fifth Council had been tampered with, ... [and it is not] certain that in their present shape we have them in their original completeness. This has a bearing on the much disputed

---

2:6. Head, Joseph; Cranston, Sylvia: *Reincarnation*. pp. 156-157.  
[American writers; 20<sup>th</sup> C.] Source D-e.

question concerning the condemnation of Origenism at this council.<sup>7</sup>

2:8. Were Origen and Origenism anathematized? Many learned writers believe so; an equal number deny that they were condemned; most modern authorities are either undecided or reply with reservations.<sup>8</sup>

Head and Cranston, however, clearly believe that Origen's concepts were not anathematised properly, and they say that –

2:9. ... one far-reaching result ... still persists, namely, the exclusion from consideration by orthodox Christianity of the teaching of the pre-existence of the soul and, by implication, reincarnation. Probably many a good Christian would have another look at the whole subject if he were only aware of the foregoing facts. ... [And] it seems likely that these doctrines must have been widely held, else why go to the trouble of condemning them?<sup>9</sup>

2:10. The writer Guy Playfair now takes his turn in describing Origen as a confident and influential philosopher, whose teaching included the concept of pre-existence, and he quotes Origen as saying that the soul “puts off one body and exchanges it for a second” which is determined by “the soul's previous merits or demerits”.<sup>10</sup>

2:11. Plato had also taught his followers that their souls would be reincarnated, and that “if you become worse, you will go to the worse souls, and if better to the better souls”. He had been highly respected as a Greek philosopher in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, and his influence was considerable. Some notable Christians respected his views in later years, and Saint Augustine hinted that Plotinus – who was a Roman

---

2:7. *Catholic Encyclopaedia*: Vol. 4. pp. 308-309.

[*Catholic Encyclopaedias*; 20<sup>th</sup> C.] Source D-d.

2:8. *Ibid.* Vol. 11. pp. 311-312.

2:9. Head, Joseph; Cranston, Sylvia: *Reincarnation*. pp. 158-159.

[American writers; 20<sup>th</sup> C.] Source D-e.

2:10. Playfair, Guy: *The Indefinite Boundary*. p. 160.

[British writer, 20<sup>th</sup> C.]

philosopher in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD – was possibly a reincarnation of Plato. And Playfair adds: “Plotinus taught that the soul entered the body ‘through a certain voluntary inclination’ in order to acquire experience of both good and evil, and that it rose again after death to its former non-material condition.”

These concepts never faded completely from the West, despite the increasing public interest in the realms of science and education, and Playfair lists some of the proponents of reincarnation in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries – including Schopenhauer, Kant, Hume, Shelley, Browning, Tennyson and Masefield.<sup>11</sup>

John Masefield – who was a relative of mine, by marriage – penned this view:

2:12. I held that when a person dies  
His soul returns again to earth;  
Arrayed in some new flesh-disguise  
Another mother gives him birth.  
With sturdier limbs and brighter brain  
The old soul takes the roads again.<sup>12</sup>

Masefield wrote this poem at a time when there was a marked revival of European interest in the concept of reincarnation. Several travellers had returned from the East, and some wanted to share their appreciation of the philosophies of Hindu and Buddhist literature. There were many allusions to rebirth in these works – as in these extracts from the *Bhagavad Gita*, the favourite Hindu classic that was written before the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC:

2:13. Just as the dweller in this body passes through  
childhood, youth and old age, so at death he merely passes  
into another kind of body ...<sup>13</sup>

---

2:11. *Ibid.* pp. 159-160.

2:12. Masefield, John: *The Collected Poems of John Masefield*. p. 69.

[British Poet Laureate; 19/20<sup>th</sup> C.]

2:13. *Bhagavad Gita: The Song of God*. p. 40.

[Krishna's teaching; pre-5<sup>th</sup> C. BC.] Source A-b.

2:14. Worn-out garments  
Are shed by the body:  
Worn-out bodies  
Are shed by the dweller  
Within the body.  
New bodies are donned  
By the dweller, like garments.<sup>14</sup>

2:15. Buddhists also hold these views – as Dr Rahula explains in his book, *What the Buddha Taught*. When a body dies, he says, its functions simply cease, but its inner energy never dies as it continues to exist in some other ‘shape or form’. So reincarnation is a continuing process through which this energy evolves, –

... like a flame that burns through the night: it is not the same flame nor is it another. A child grows up to be a man of sixty. Certainly the man of sixty is not the same as the child of sixty years ago, nor is he another person. Similarly, a person who dies here and is reborn elsewhere is neither the same person, nor another.<sup>15</sup>

This changing, evolving nature of the personality between death and rebirth is also described by the American theosophist, Henry Olcott:

2:16. In each birth the *personality* differs from that of the previous or next succeeding birth, ... now in the personality of a sage, again as an artisan, and so on throughout the string of births. But though personalities ever shift, the one line of life along which they are strung like beads runs unbroken; it is ever *that particular line*, never any other.<sup>16</sup>

---

2:14. Ibid. p. 42.

2:15. Rahula, Dr Walpola: *What the Buddha Taught*. pp. 33-34.

[Buddha’s teaching; 6<sup>th</sup> C. BC.] Source B-a.

2:16. Olcott, Henry S: *The Buddhist Catechism*. p. 65fn.

[American Founder: Theosophical Society; 19/20<sup>th</sup> C.] Source I-b.

Now the English Buddhist, John Blofeld, takes up the theme:

2:17. What we call ‘life’ is a single link in an infinitely long chain of ‘lives’ and ‘deaths’.

And Blofeld plays with this idea, wondering whether we might be able to look back over the chains of all our lives. Perhaps we could do this if our subconscious memories were lifted, somehow, into our conscious minds. Would the chains of our lives be so long that they could reach right back to a time before we were humans on this earth? And his questions flow on, –

... why just this earth? Why should not many of our previous lives have been passed upon other earths contained within this stupendous universe? Perhaps the recollection would include hundreds or thousands of millions of lives lived here or elsewhere, and at this or other levels of consciousness, perhaps in states of being previously unsuspected. Only, it is hard to understand how any mind could encompass so vast an accumulation of memories.<sup>17</sup>

Blofeld’s ideas were mind-boggling! But I came down to earth when I remembered reading about some children in the West, who had surprised their parents by mentioning specific names, details and incidents that did not relate in any way to their present lives. It is sad that such innocent remarks are so often ignored, or thought to be amusing.

2:18. In some other societies, however, people believe that memories of this kind have been carried over from earlier incarnations. Jeffrey Iverson makes this point in his book, *In Search of the Dead*, and says that many cases of reincarnation have been documented in scientific studies. For example, Dr Ian Stevenson is a professor of psychiatry at the University of Virginia, and he has done a great deal of research with around 2,500 children who have retained such memories. Stevenson’s work has taken him to distant parts of the world to meet these children – and their

---

2:17. Blofeld, John: *The Wheel of Life*. pp. 28-29.

[British Buddhist; 20<sup>th</sup> C.] Source B-d.

families, neighbours and associates – and he has checked their accounts against any records that were held by police, doctors, government officials and others. In describing Stevenson’s research, Iverson says:

He has a compelling dossier of children who recall the life and death of someone else – sometimes they have the mannerisms and habits of the dead person, and some even bear physical marks that correspond with aspects of that person’s life.<sup>18</sup>

2:19. Having read this, I turned with interest to one of Stevenson’s books, *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*, and found an account that fitted this description exactly. It described a North American Tlingit family in which the father, William George, was a firm believer in the concepts of rebirth, and on one occasion, he said to his daughter-in-law:

“I will come back and be your son. ... And you will recognize me because I will have birthmarks like the ones I now have. ... Keep this watch for me. I am going to be your son.”

William George gave her his gold watch, and two months later – ‘in August 1949’ – he met his end. He had been fishing out at sea in his boat, and was thought to have drowned. His body was never found, but the strong currents along that coastline would have carried him away. His daughter-in-law, Mrs Reginald George, was soon expecting a baby, and her son was born in May 1950. He had small moles on his body – which were like those of his grandfather, and in the same positions – and his parents were so impressed that they named the baby William George Junior.

As the years passed by, the family became more and more convinced that the child was the true reincarnation of his grandfather: he had the same behaviour and mannerisms, and he liked and disliked the same

---

2:18. Iverson, Jeffrey: *In Search of the Dead*. p. 145.  
[British writer; 20<sup>th</sup> C.]

things; he was good at the same activities and appeared to know all about boats; he seemed to understand how fishing nets should be used, and he knew about the local fishing conditions and the coastline when he was very young; but despite his love of boats, he was very afraid of the sea.

In addition to this, William George treated his family in the way that his grandfather had: he behaved in the same way with each one of them, mixing the generations by addressing ‘his uncles and aunts’ as though they were ‘his sons and daughters’, and he was rather concerned – as his grandfather would have been – when two of his uncles became too fond of their drink. His mother was much impressed when William George laid claim to the watch that had been given to her by his grandfather. The boy was only four when he found her sorting out the jewel-box in which she kept the treasured watch. “That’s *my* watch,” he said as he snatched it up, and his mother retrieved it with difficulty. And as the boy grew older he liked to examine the watch, saying that it should be returned to him. But the years were passing, and he was changing – as Stevenson explains:

By 1961, William George, Jr. had largely lost his previous identification with his grandfather, and apart from his occasional requests for ‘his watch’ ... he behaved like a normal boy of his age. I talked with him in Alaska and hoped that he would have more to say about the watch which his mother brought out in my presence. He handled it fondly, but did not talk about it. I cannot say whether his reticence arose from shyness with me or from a fading of the images that originally led him to claim it as his own.<sup>19</sup>

Now Stevenson is only one amongst a number of psychiatrists who are interested in reincarnation, and another is Dr Guirdham, who found that he was involved with several patients who knew that they had lived in the past. In his book, *The Cathars and Reincarnation*, Guirdham describes his first case:

---

2:19. Stevenson, Dr I: *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*. pp. 232-235.  
[Canadian Professor of Psychiatry; 20<sup>th</sup> C.]

2:20. This is not just another tale of reincarnation. The justification for writing it is that its origins and substance are unique [as my patient recalled her past] ... by direct experience through visions, dreams and intuitions, without having studied the period or subject. The major proportion of her revelations occurred twenty-six years ago, in an intensive uprush of memory in her early teens. It gave her a detailed knowledge of Catharism.

Catharism was a Gnostic tradition that was cruelly suppressed by the Inquisition in France in the 13<sup>th</sup> century – and Guirdham explains that children were not taught about the horrors of persecution when his patient was at school in England in the early 1940s. And he adds:

Nor is it, nor has it ever been, a practice for English girls of thirteen to transcribe their thoughts, visions and feelings in mediaeval French.<sup>20</sup>

2:21. Yet this patient had written poetry and notes in this language when she was only thirteen and – “a few were found, with her school reports, among a few special possessions her father kept in an old dispatch box.”<sup>21</sup>

2:22. Guirdham also explains that she had neither studied French medieval history nor Gnostic beliefs, saying, –

... she herself had at that time no realisation whatever that she had been a Cathar. Her ignorance of mediaeval history was such that although she recollected perfectly and in detail certain Cathar rituals, she did not know that they characterised a particular sect to which she had belonged.<sup>22</sup>

2:23. In addition to this, her notes revealed the fact that she was familiar with certain details that were not recognised by the historians

---

2:20. Guirdham, Dr Arthur: *The Cathars and Reincarnation*. pp. 9-10.

[British psychiatrist; 20<sup>th</sup> C.]

2:21. Ibid. p. 176.

2:22. Ibid. p. 20.

of Cathar history in the 1940s. For example, these historians were convinced that Cathar priests always wore black; but Guirdham explains that his patient knew better:

For twenty-six years, including her six years correspondence with me, she stubbornly maintained that they wore dark blue. She was proved correct by Jean Duvernoy of Toulouse, but only in the last four years. In editing the register of the Inquisition of Jacques Fournier, Monsieur Duvernoy revealed that Cathar priests wore sometimes dark blue or dark green. [His] ... book was published in 1965. The truth was known to my patient as far back as 1944.<sup>23</sup>

Many more of her memories were found to be accurate, but several of them were making her present life difficult – and she wrote to Guirdham in January 1965, saying:

2:24. “I vowed to myself years ago, when at the age of thirteen these inexplicable occurrences started to take place, that no one should ever know. I feared, as perhaps I fear now, that I would be regarded as a crank and eventually go mad.”<sup>24</sup>

Although she was able to unburden herself to Dr Guirdham in this way, she remained haunted and confused by her dreams and memories, and sent the following note to him when he was about to travel:

2:25. “If when you are in France you should meet Fabrissa, Roger, Pierre de Mazerolles or any of this mad crowd, tell them to go to hell. They’ll be better off there than in my imagination.”

But Guirdham comments, quite simply, that they were not imaginary people. They were people whom she had known in the past:

---

2:23. Ibid. pp. 10-11.

2:24. Ibid. p. 44.

“You can read about them in various depositions made to the Inquisition.”<sup>25</sup>

2:26. And in another note, she said that she was extremely troubled by switching to and fro between past and present times: “It has always landed me in trouble, caused me great unhappiness, and I hate it.”<sup>26</sup>

2:27. These experiences were all distressing; but her worst memory of all was of being burnt at the stake, when the Church Inquisitors had condemned her to death – and Guirdham received her tragic and yet revealing account of dying:

“I must have committed a fearful crime to deserve such an agonising death. So must the others. ... We all walked barefoot through the streets towards a square where they had prepared a pile of sticks all ready to set alight. There were several monks around [who sided with the Inquisition] singing hymns and praying. I didn’t feel grateful. I thought they had a cheek to pray for me. ... I hated those monks being there to see me die ...

“The pain was maddening. You should pray to God when you’re dying, if you can pray when you’re in agony. In my dream I didn’t pray. ... I thought of Roger and ... I knew he was dead. – I felt suddenly glad to be dying. ... [But] I hate the thought of going blind. ... In this dream I was going blind. I tried to close my eyelids but I couldn’t. They must have been burnt off, and now those flames ... weren’t so cruel after all. They began to feel cold. Icy cold. ... I was numb with the cold and suddenly I started to laugh. I had fooled those people who thought they could burn me.”<sup>27</sup>

2:28. “She was dying – but not dying. She was staying alive,” I thought, remembering the words of a Hottentot legend in which the

---

2:25. Ibid. pp. 59-60.

2:26. Ibid. p. 62.

2:27. Ibid. pp. 88-89.

moon says: “As I die and rise to life again, so shall you die and rise to life again.”<sup>28</sup>

And the Buddhist teacher, Lama Govinda, carries this even further:

2:29. In fact, we all have died many deaths before we came into this incarnation. And what we call birth is merely the reverse side of death, like one of the two sides of a coin, or like a door which we call ‘entrance’ from outside and ‘exit’ from inside a room. ... Not everybody remembers his or her previous death; and, because of this lack of remembering, most persons do not believe there was a previous death. But, likewise, they do not remember their recent birth – and yet they do not doubt that they were recently born. They forget that active memory is only a small part of our normal consciousness, and that our subconscious memory registers and preserves every past impression and experience which our waking mind fails to recall.<sup>29</sup>

Now the Cambridge philosopher, John McTaggart, was particularly interested in the subconscious and the influence that it bears on our present lives, and he discusses this point with some deliberation, saying –

2:30. ... it might be said that our chief ground for hoping for a progressive improvement after death would be destroyed if memory periodically ceased. Death, it might be argued, ... would deprive us of all memory of what we had done, and therefore whatever was gained in one life would be lost at death. ... We must ask, therefore, what elements of value ... can be carried on *without* memory ...

Let us consider wisdom first. Can we be wiser by reason of something which we have forgotten? Unquestionably we can. Wisdom is not merely, or chiefly, amassed facts, or even recorded judgements. It depends primarily on a mind

---

2:28. In Lorimer, David: *Survival?* p. 26.

[South African Hottentot proverb.] Source F-e.

2:29. In Evans-Wentz, Dr W.Y: *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. p.liii.

[Lama Govinda: Buddhist teacher; 19/20<sup>th</sup> C.] Source B-b.

qualified to deal with facts, and to form judgements. ... And so a man who dies after acquiring knowledge – and all men acquire some – might enter his new life deprived indeed of his knowledge, but not deprived of the increased strength and delicacy of mind which he had gained in acquiring the knowledge. And, if so, he will be wiser in the second life because of what has happened in the first ...

With virtue the point is perhaps clearer. For the memory of moral experiences is of no value to virtue except in so far as it helps to form the moral character, and if this is done, the loss of memory would be no loss to virtue. Now we cannot doubt that a character may remain determined by an event which has been forgotten. I have forgotten the greater number of the good and evil acts which I have done in my present life. And yet each must have left a trace on my character. And so a man may carry over into his next life the dispositions and tendencies which he has gained by the moral contests of this life.<sup>30</sup>

“But this could explain why Blofeld was so fascinated by Buddhism, despite his being born and brought up as a Christian,” I said to myself. “Buddhism would have left a ‘trace on his character’ in the past, and it’s now come through into this life.” Blofeld’s book, *The Wheel of Life*, was obviously significant – so I flicked through its pages and found these relevant passages:

2:31. Teachers have held that this present life leads us forwards or backwards from precisely the point reached by the end of the preceding life. (Thus, the belief that a man may immediately be reborn as a pig or, conversely, as a god would seem to be a popular misunderstanding of the implications of the doctrine of reincarnation – an oversimplification of a little-understood truth.)

---

2:30. McTaggart, John E: *Human Immortality and Pre-Existence*. pp. 105-108.  
[British philosopher; 19/20<sup>th</sup> C.]

Our human characters, however, evolve ‘from life to life’ – Blofeld continues – yet every baby has to relearn the ordinary things of its new life. If this were not the case, ‘babies would be born as wise as their grandparents’. But we return to earth-life with ‘abstract propensities’, these being our –

... talents, bents, abilities, personal likes and dislikes, and a host of others. ... It is the method of applying these propensities to the exterior world which has to be relearned. Thus ... it follows that, if for some Karmic reason a devout Hindu or Buddhist is reborn in a Christian community, though the spiritual aspect of RELIGION may appeal strongly to him even in his childhood, the form of his religion will be Christian. He will normally remain a Christian all his life – probably a very good one – unless the thinness of the dividing curtain enables him to re-establish links with his former faith.

Blofeld is convinced that he was a Buddhist in the past, and that he had attained a degree of ‘spiritual advancement’ in that life, as he felt an extraordinary surge of ‘subconscious recognition’, reverence and traditional respect when he first saw a Buddha-statue in this life. He also believes that the great Gurus can recall their earlier incarnations as they have developed themselves, in spiritual terms, and the memories from their past lives are now accessible within their conscious minds. Then Blofeld adds:

My years of seesawing between Buddhism and Christianity resulted from an unconscious conflict between a faith ‘remembered’ below the surface of normal consciousness and that other faith bequeathed to me by my parents and strengthened by the presence of its adherents all around me. Thus, my conversion to Buddhism was in fact a RECONVERSION, which took place after the veil separating me from a conscious recollection of my previous life had now and then been momentarily blown aside.<sup>31</sup>

---

2:31. Blofeld, John: *The Wheel of Life*. pp. 29-30  
[British Buddhist; 20<sup>th</sup> C.] Source B-d.



The Jewish writer, Sholem Asch, suggests that we all experience fragmented memories of the past, as –

2:32. ... our senses are haunted by fragmentary recollections of another life. They drift like torn clouds above the hills and valleys of the mind, and weave themselves into the incidents of our current existence.<sup>32</sup>

2:33. And Carl Jung – the German-Swiss psychiatrist – understands this too, saying: “I might have lived in former centuries.”<sup>33</sup>

2:34. Jung came to this conclusion because he had had some very strange experiences. Once, when he was a schoolboy, he went to stay with a friend whose family lived by a lake, and he was delighted to find that they owned a small boat. The two boys were given permission to go rowing on condition that they would be very careful, but Jung stepped onto the seat and thrust the boat from the shore with an oar. His friend’s father was furious and immediately summoned them back. He was really angry, and this somehow triggered Jung’s subconscious memory – as he says:

I was thoroughly crestfallen but had to admit that ... his lecture was quite justified. At the same time I was seized with rage that this fat, ignorant boor should dare to insult ME. This ME was not only grown up, but important, an authority, a person with office and dignity, an old man, an object of respect and awe. Yet the contrast with reality was so grotesque that in the midst of my fury I suddenly stopped myself, for the question rose to my lips: “Who in the world are you, anyway? You are reacting as though you were the devil only knows how important! ... You are barely twelve years old, a schoolboy.” ... This ‘Other’ was an old man who lived in the eighteenth century, wore buckled shoes and a white wig and went driving in a fly with high,

---

2:32. Asch, Sholem: *The Nazarene*. p. 3.

[Jewish writer; 19/20<sup>th</sup> C.]

2:33. Jung, Dr Carl G: *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. p. 294.

[German-Swiss psychiatrist; 19/20<sup>th</sup> C.]

concave rear wheels between which the box was suspended on springs and leather straps.

Then Jung switched to an earlier memory – a little boy’s memory – of watching a vintage carriage that was driven past his home:

It was truly an antique, looking exactly as if it had come straight out of the eighteenth century. When I saw it, I felt with great excitement: “That’s it! ... That comes from *my* times.” It was as though I had recognised it because it was the same type as the one I had driven in myself. ... The carriage was a relic of those times! I cannot describe what was happening in me or what it was that affected me so strongly: a longing, a nostalgia, or a recognition that kept saying “Yes, that’s how it was! Yes, that’s how it was!”

Jung had also been fascinated by an 18<sup>th</sup> century statuette of a doctor from Basel, saying:

This statuette of the old doctor had buckled shoes which in a strange way I recognised as my own. I was convinced that these were shoes I had worn. The conviction drove me wild with excitement. “Why, those must be my shoes!” I could still feel those shoes on my feet, and yet I could not explain where this crazy feeling came from. I could not understand this identity I felt with the eighteenth century. Often in those days I would write the date 1786 instead of 1886, and ... I was overcome by an inescapable nostalgia.<sup>34</sup>

So Jung had been assailed by all these memories while being summoned from the boat, and realised that he had been behaving in quite a dangerous way; but he was a boy whose antics had been foolish, and he was duly punished.

Sholem Asch would have sympathised with Carl Jung, as he says:

---

2:34. Ibid. pp. 44-46.

2:35. Not the power to remember, but its very opposite, the power to forget, is a necessary condition of our existence. ... But it sometimes happens that the Angel of Forgetfulness himself forgets to remove from our memories the records of the former world. ... They assert themselves, clothed with reality, in the form of nightmares which visit our beds.<sup>35</sup>

The writer and healer, Allegra Taylor, would understand this too. She had just joined a training course and met a fellow student called Patrick – and then the unexpected happened:

2:36. That night in the limbo land between sleeping and waking, I suddenly ‘knew’ with suffocating crushing horror, with anguished certainty, that Patrick and I had both been children together in a very recent incarnation and had died a violent and horrible death, snuffed out, bewildered, in the flower of innocence in a Nazi concentration camp. It entered my mind as a vivid subliminal flash like a scene lit up by lightning on a dark night – me with ratty pigtailed, taller than him; both of us thin and raggedy, holding hands by a muddy trench. Palpitating, heart-stopping fear followed by blackness ...

I sat up in bed profoundly shaken and pondered this revelation: it could explain a lot of puzzling aspects to this intense relationship. He frees me to feel very young and truthful. I have only known him for such a short time and yet, more than anyone I have ever met, he really sees me as I am. ... We can lark about with the artless daftness of kids, and there is also between us a grave childlike quality of reverence and awe. ... I feel as if I’ve found him again, and that we can now finish our childhoods together and finally be allowed to grow up.

I guess that the whole episode is probably a symbol somewhere in the deep rivers of my psyche, a metaphor in my subconscious, for the omnipresent melancholy about

---

2:35. Asch, Sholem: *The Nazarene*. p. 3.  
[Jewish writer; 19/20<sup>th</sup> C.]

the holocaust that infiltrated my childhood to a degree where unbearable feelings and unendurable realities had to be suppressed in order for life to go on. The knowledge of that horror and evil was always there at the back of my mind no matter how much I refused to face it, the burden of it somehow robbing me of the lighthearted innocence of childhood.<sup>36</sup>

And the American writer, Emmet Fox, concludes:

2:37. Nature has drawn a veil of forgetfulness over our beginnings on this plane, and for excellent reasons she hides away the memory of previous lives until we are sufficiently developed to be ready to remember them. ... so the past is mercifully withheld from us until we can regard our own histories impersonally and objectively, and when we do reach that stage it is possible to remember.<sup>37</sup>

---

2:36. Taylor, Allegra: *I Fly Out with Bright Feathers*. pp. 159-160.

[British novice healer; 20<sup>th</sup> C.]

2:37. Fox, Emmet: *Power Through Constructive Thinking*. pp. 245-246.

[American writer; 19/20<sup>th</sup> C.]