

# Reincarnation Explained

A Short Study Course for Groups or Individuals

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## REINCARNATION

By Annie Besant

THERE are but three explanations of human inequalities, whether of faculties, of opportunities, of circumstances:

1. Special Creation by God, implying that man<sup>1</sup> is helpless, his destiny being controlled by an arbitrary and incalculable will.
2. Heredity, as suggested by science, implying an equal helplessness on man's part, he being the result of a past over which he has no control.
3. Reincarnation, implying that man can become master of his destiny, he being the result of his own individual past, being what he has made himself.

Evolution is taken for granted in everything except in the life of spiritual intelligence, called man; he has no individual past, although he has an individual endless future. The character he brings with him—on which more than on anything else his destiny on earth depends—is, on this hypothesis, specially created for him by God, and imposed on him without any choice of his own; out of the lucky bag of creation he may draw a prize or a blank, the blank being a doom of misery; such as it is he must take it.

Further, science can offer no explanation of the facts of high intelligence and saintly life. The child of a saint may be a profligate; the child of a genius may be a dolt. Genius “comes out of the blue.”

Reincarnation restores justice to God and power to man. Every human spirit enters into life a germ, without knowledge, without conscience, without discrimination. By experience, pleasant and painful, man gathers materials, and builds them into mental and moral faculties. Thus the character with which he is born is self-made, and marks the stage he has reached in his long evolution. The good disposition, the fine capacities, the noble nature, are the spoils of many a hard-fought field, the wages of heavy and arduous toil. The reverse marks an early stage of growth, the small development of the spiritual germ.

### MEMORY

No question is more often heard, when reincarnation is mentioned, than: “If I have been here before, why do I not remember it?” A little consideration of facts will answer the question.

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<sup>1</sup> This article was written in the early 1900s when the word “man” was often used in its gender neutral sense as being inclusive of both men and women.

First of all, let us note the fact that we forget more of our present lives than we remember. Many people cannot remember learning to read; yet the fact that they can read proves the learning. Incidents of childhood and youth have faded from our memory, yet they have left traces on our character. A fall in babyhood is forgotten, yet the victim is none the less a cripple. And all this is true, even though we are using the same body in which the forgotten events were experienced.

If this be true of experiences encountered in the present body, how much more must it be true of experiences encountered in former bodies, which died and decayed many centuries ago. Our present body and brain have had no share in those far-off happenings; how should memory assert itself through them? Our permanent body, which remains with us throughout the cycle of reincarnation, is the spiritual body; the lower garments fall away and return to their elements ere we can become reincarnated. The new mental, astral, and physical matter in which we are re-clothed for a new life on earth receives from the spiritual intelligence, garbed only in the spiritual body, not the experiences of the past but the qualities, tendencies, and capacities which have been made out of those experiences. Our conscience, our instinctive response to emotional and intellectual appeals, our recognition of the force of a logical argument, our assent to fundamental principles of right and wrong, these are the traces of past experiences. A man of low intellectual type cannot “see” a logical or mathematical proof; a man of low moral type cannot “feel” the compelling force of a high moral ideal.

### **GROWTH OF CAPACITY**

When a philosophy or a science is quickly grasped and applied, when an art is mastered without study, memory is there in power though past facts of learning are forgotten; as Plato said, it is reminiscence. When we feel intimate with a stranger on first meeting, memory is there. Whenever we shrink back with strong repulsion from another stranger, memory is there, the spirit’s recognition of an ancient foe.

These affinities, these warnings, come from the undying spiritual intelligence which is yourself. We remember, although working in the physical body we cannot impress it on our brain memory. The mind, body, and the brain are new; the spirit furnishes the mind with the results of the past, not with the memory of its events.

As a merchant, closing the year’s ledger and opening a new, one does not enter in the new one all the items of the old, but only its balances, so does the spirit hand on to the new brain his judgments on the experiences of a life that is closed, the conclusions to which he has come, the decisions at which he has arrived. This is the stock handed on to the new life, the mental furniture for its new dwelling—a real memory.

## SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Moreover, memory of past lives can be gained. But the gaining is a matter of steady effort, of prolonged meditation, whereby the restless mind, ever running outwards, may be controlled and rendered quiescent, so that it may be sensitive and responsive to the spirit and receive from him the memory of the past. Only as we can hear the still small voice of the spirit may the story of the past be unrolled, for the spirit alone can remember, and cast down the rays of his memory to enlighten the darkness of the fleeting lower nature to which he is temporarily attached.

Pain follows on mistakes and is ever remedial; strength is developed by struggle; we reap after every sowing the inevitable result, with happiness growing out of the right, sorrow out of the wrong.

A high moral standard, though placing a man at a disadvantage in the struggle for existence, perhaps even leading to the sacrifice of his physical life, builds a noble character for his future lives and shapes him to become a servant of the nation.

In every case the individual past explains the individual present, and when the laws of growth are known and obeyed a man can build with a sure hand his future destiny, shaping his growth in lives of ever increasing beauty until he reaches the stature of the Perfect Man.

### FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION:

1. Human faculties are not equally developed in everybody and often vary considerably. Give some examples to illustrate this.
2. Special talents or abilities are often said to be "God given." Have you ever thought about the inherent unfairness of the idea that some people receive gifts from God at birth while others are denied, and for no apparent reason? What does such a theory say about such a Creator?
3. The author is using figurative language when she states: "Every human spirit enters into life a germ . . ." In what sense is the word *germ* being used here? What alternate word or words might have been used to convey the same idea?
4. Why does the absence of detailed memories from our past lives not undermine the theory of reincarnation?
5. What do we bring with us from our past lives?
6. What is the purpose of pain? What can we learn from it?
7. In what way might high ethical standards place a person at a disadvantage in today's competitive world?