

My dear Friends,

One of my correspondents tells me that she hates getting old. Now I am getting very old myself, as I shall be 90 soon, but, personally, I do not mind getting old at all. It is true that one has not quite the same energy and vigour, but on the other hand one is a great deal wiser through experience. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote a beautiful essay on "Compensation". There are many compensations which come to one with old age. Emerson studied the ancient sacred scriptures of India, and their influence shows in his works.

Another correspondent asks me to explain the verse in the Bible "That whosoever believeth in him (Jesus Christ) should not perish, but have eternal life." (St. John 3, 16) Now this is where the Ageless Wisdom, Theosophy, comes to our help and enlightenment. No scriptures are infallible, especially scriptures like ours which are translations of translations. It was to deliver man from superstition, with its consequent cruelty and fear, that the Perfected Men put out into the world some of their knowledge of life garnered down through the ages. Let us perceive what is mortal and what is immortal. Our physical brain, with all its thoughts and ideas, is certainly mortal. After death it will cease to exist for evermore. But the thoughts and feelings did not originate there. The brain and nervous system only transmitted them and in doing so, damped them down as an electric transformer does. The real person who thought and felt was the soul or psychic self, and that lives for some long time after death happily realising all its ideals. But that again is not immortal. What is?

St. Paul said that we were a trinity, body, soul and spirit. Let us look at each in turn. The word "body" comes from the Anglo-Saxon "bodig", from which comes our word "abode". "Here we have no continuing city," says St. Paul, "but we seek one to come." The body is not truly us though we have completely identified ourselves with it. St. Francis called it "Brother Ass," though I think that the real ass is the one who rides it! Mr. Arnold Bennett called it the "human machine" which we, the engineer, drove. Genesis calls it the "coat of skin." The Master K.H. calls it "the horse on which you ride" and that is the best definition of all. Supposing we could not move except on horseback? What pains we would take to keep that horse properly fed and exercised. That is how we should regard our bodies. H.P.B. told us to regard them as our temporary habitation.

What is the soul, and what is the difference between soul and spirit? The word "soul" is the translation of the Greek word from which we get the word "psychic." It is the body which belongs to the surrounding, interpenetrating worlds of psychic matter, and which withdraws from its physical counterpart at death. This is the body which really thinks and feels. It lives for a long time after death, but is gradually drawn back to merge with the spiritual man in us which alone is immortal and undying. This true "son of God," or spark of the immortal light, is the only thing in us which can never die. He has put something of himself down here to gather the fruits of experience and to bring it back to him after death. When that process of heavenly assimilation is complete, he puts down again another bit of himself which we call a new personality. Life after life the thought and feeling gather a richness of experience until one day they realise that they are not him and aspire to union with him in whose great consciousness, one with the life and consciousness of the universe, alone lies conscious immortality and bliss. That is the aim of all forms of Yoga exercises. That part of us alone is immortal and eternal. The putting forth of personalities is like the Divinity in us, never leaving the Garden of Eden - Heaven - sending out Adam and Eve to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, or, in the concept of the more metaphysical East, to come under the play of the endless pairs of opposites, to evolve self-consciousness and self-motivation. Adam is the symbol of the body, Eve of the soul.

There was another tree, guarded by a seraph with a flaming sword. But when the hour is ripe, the redeemed body and soul will be able to reach the consciousness of the spirit within, and thus taste of the tree of immortal life. This is the great cycle of the journey of the soul out from eternal life and back to it "bearing its fruits with it." That spiritual consciousness lying deep within us and awaiting our finding, is called by St. Paul "Christ in you the hope of glory." (Col. 1, 27) This is the eternal man.

My friend is troubled about the word "perish." I think I have tried to show what perishes in us. He asks what reference it has to reincarnation. The path to spiritual realisation is a straight and narrow one. You remember the words of the Christ, "Strait is the gate and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." The majority, said the Lord, went by the broad and wide way which led to destruction. That means the apparent destruction of memory in a new incarnation. Many people say that they do not believe in the truth of reincarnation because they do not remember anything about another life. What do we mean by remembering? Recalling the details of everything that happens to us? If that were so we have already forgotten most of our life, even most of this day when we reach every evening. Yet the effect and result of every thought, desire and action is with us. We are slightly different people tonight because of that which happened today. The ancient Greeks called coming back to a new life, drinking the waters of Lethe or forgetfulness. But nothing is ever really forgotten. And it would be an intolerable burden if we had to remember every detail.

These are the ways we remember, in essence, not in detail:

1. Our inborn faculties. Genius is the collective memory of many lives of effort. Says The Voice of the Silence: "Learn that no efforts, not the smallest — whether in right or wrong direction -- can vanish from the vjorld of causes." Character is the same. A St. Francis or a Shakespeare are the fruit of many lives.

2. Instinctive likings and dislikings. We are meeting again old friends and enemies. A "marriage made in heaven" is an old happy one renewed. Friendship at first sight as the one between David and Jonathan, is the same.

3. Sometimes an unreasoning phobia is a memory of past disaster. I once knew a man who had an invincible dislike for the countryside covered with snow. He had been one of Haoleon's officers and had died in the snow during the disastrous retreat from Moscow.

4. Change of sex. Most people change their sex about every seven lives. For we have both sexes in us all the time, though one is in abeyance like the little woman and man who come out of the clock alternately when it is fine or wet. Some people do not like this thought, generally one of the stronger sex! But think for a moment. The division of the two sexes came about during the Third Root Race, because it is easier to evolve complementary characteristics in complementary bodies. A man's life generally develops decision, courage, enterprise, etc. A woman's life is more inward, developing patience, tenderness, love, self-sacrifice. But if one thinks of the Perfect Men, one for instance like the Lord Christ, it is at once to be observed that they possess the great qualities of both sides in evolution. And they developed them by incarnations on both sides of life. But does this not explain a common phenomenon? A little girl who is a tomboy and a little boy who furtively wants to play with dolls.

5. Recognition of places. You will remember Rossetti's poem, "I have been here before, But when or how I cannot tell." Dickens said he had similar memories. And then too Browning's poem of Bvelyn Hope.

During my long wanderings over this world I have met many people who clearly remember past lives. Sometimes a memory comes back in a dream. Once, when I was lecturing in Bristol a young man came up to me and said, "You have explained a dream I often get (these dreams occur at regular intervals). In it I am dressed in a toga with a red border and am walking about with a number of men in a big pillared house, I suppose," he said, "I am remembering a life in ancient Greece?" I remembered enough history to place it. "That was ancient Rome," I said, "for only the Roman senators had the right to wear the red-bordered togas." I could tell you many more stories like that, but now I must stop.

Remember that the "Christ in us" is the immortal man who can never die, and that to reach his consciousness and awake it here, as we all will one day, is to realise immortality here and now. But that consciousness is not like our everyday one. But that is another story. Another time.

Your affectionate friend,

Clara Codd