

REINCARNATION AND ISLAM

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BY
NADARBEG K. MIRZA
Bar-at-Law, Karachi

THEOSOPHICAL PUBLISHING HOUSE
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FOREWORD

SOME years ago, a little before I joined the Theosophical Society, I became interested in the theory of Reincarnation working through the Law of Karma and the other greater Law of Evolution. Even the first casual reading of these Laws appeared to convince me of their truth. But as I am not usually given to taking things on trust, I put down this apparent conviction to the splendidly clear way in which these theories had been explained by their exponents, and reserved final judgment till further consideration.

My own objection to these theories then was, I think, that if these Laws were facts, why was it that they were not more generally known and why had not I, who had received a fair amount of religious education, come across them before? In desperation I ran to the Holy Qurán. What had the Qurán to say about them, and what was the generally accepted theory of Islam with regard to the perfection of the human soul to the stage of union with the Divine? I read all the commentaries I could lay my hands on, and could find nothing but one life, one death and then

the great Day of Judgment. And thereafter? Was it to be heaven or hell? How did I stand with regard to these two places? As I stood, so I believed, must the average Musalman stand at the Day of Judgment; for without appropriating too much credit to myself I believed that I was no better and, certainly also, no worse than the average Musalman.

I looked up the accepted qualifications for admission into heaven. Looking to my inherent weaknesses, having regard also to my surroundings, my capacities, and, above all, my opportunities of doing good during the short span of forty or fifty years of life that might still be left to me, bearing in mind, too, the struggle for existence during this half century, I felt fairly certain of a very warm corner in hell for a fair period, if not quite for all eternity. To be sure, this was not a very cheerful look-out after a life spent in the denial of all manners of worldly pleasures! To make matters worse, it began to dawn on me that if, at best, I was a fair candidate for the warmer regions, then "in for a penny, in for a pound," why should I not make the most of life down here and at least be able to shake hands with our friend, the Devil, on more or less an equal footing instead of being under his thumb in hell! Was this, then, to be the ultimate end of all my Muslim friends?

It was, I think, somewhat in this frame of mind that I began to turn serious attention to the hope held out by the theory of Reincarnation. I read and thought, and thought and read. The more I thought the more was I convinced of its truth till now I cannot imagine how any sane man can hesitate to accept these truths.

But while accepting these beliefs, why was I being singled out by all my Muslim friends and acquaintances as a freak? If, as I understood it, Reincarnation was a law of Nature, it must apply to Musalmans as much as it applied to any other community. Would it make any difference whether the Holy Qurán noticed this Law or not? The Law of Gravitation, I argued as an instance, was also a Law of Nature; but the mere fact that it found no mention in the Qurán did not for a moment prevent its bringing down to Mother Earth any Musalman who might develop the desire to float in the air. Might not this other Law, the Law of Reincarnation, act in the same undisturbed manner? And yet it occurred to me that a law which could and would change the whole outlook of a man's life *must* in some form or another find mention in the ethical books of Islam. It was in this mood that I began to read Islam more critically, in search of light on these great truths.

The following pages are the result. It has taken me some time to collect all the quotations, and the search has not been an easy one; yet if it leads but one Musalman brother of mine to see the great truth, if it leads but one brother to seek and find even more definite proof of the great truth in his own religion and in his own mind, both the time and the labour will have been well spent.

N. K. M.

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I

THE COMMON SOURCE OF RELIGIONS

IT is said that Hazrat Mohomed, on Whom be peace, the Prophet of Islam, was sent not so much to establish a new religion as to revive and re-establish the old, existing ones. The Holy Qurán declares:

He revealed to you the book with truth, verifying that which is before it. . . . III, 3.

The "Book" is also referred to as a "reminder" and not as a new book of religion and ethics.

We have revealed to you the reminder, that you may make clear to men what has been revealed to them, and that happily they may reflect. . . . XVI, 44.

Indeed it is the pride of Islam that, while setting its followers on the right road, it directs them also to believe in other religions and other Prophets. Tolerance to the religion of another, faith in his belief is, or at least was, intended to be the key-note of Islamic teachings. To quote only one of many such

passages, we find the Holy Qurán advocating this belief in no equivocal terms,

Say, we believe in Allah and in that which has been revealed to us, and in that which was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael, and Issac and Jacob and the Tribes, and in that which was given to Moses and Jesus and in that which was given to the Prophets from their Lord; we do not make any distinction between any of them and to Him do we submit. . . . II, 16.

Islam has, therefore, apparently taken in its purview all the religions from the days of Abraham downward and, gathering the central teachings of all religions, has presented them to the world in a form suited to the period at which it was revealed.

That being so, one would expect to find the philosophy of Islam following and corresponding with the philosophy of older religions, making of them a harmonious whole and not adding to the discord which unfortunately had crept into them.

Hinduism is generally believed to be the oldest religion extant. And it is with an agreeable surprise that one meets the suggestion made by W. Wynn Westcott in his book on *Numbers* that Abraham is no other than Brahma of the Hindu philosophy, translated and transposed from the original Samskrit to Hebrew where it first takes that form, and is later converted to "Ibrahim" in the Arabic.

This theory is further supported by the similarity in the names *Sarah* and *Sara-swaty*, the respective wife and *shakti* of Abraham and Brahma. That Abraham is the first prophet mentioned in the verse just quoted and that the name Abraham, omitting only the initial vowel, is identical with Brahma the originator of the oldest known religion is, to say the least, a curious coincidence. Beyond mentioning this peculiarity, the writer does not feel in any way competent to express a definite opinion on the point, and it must be left for the reader to decide how far, if at all, Hinduism and Islam can find a common source of ideas.

The common source of all religions must, it seems to me, be admitted by everybody. The most bigoted and sectarian of Musalmans will concede that all religions emanate from Allah. Truth there can only be one, in whatever garb it is presented. I shall, therefore, be justified in looking for identity of thought in all religions. It is possible to hold that any particular religion discloses only a portion of the truth and that another portion must be looked for in some other religion. But to say that one religion differs fundamentally from or contradicts another is to "make a distinction between them" which a Musalman must not do. It is different with rules regulating the conduct of social affairs. Deaths, marriages,

crimes, etiquette, customs, minor ceremonies, all these must be regulated according to the stage of social evolution at which any particular religion was revealed. But in matters spiritual, in the philosophy of life and death, in broad ethical teachings, no two religions can differ. If they apparently do so, it must be the fault of the understanding and not of the religions.

Let us now examine some facts. Considering Hinduism and Islam, the oldest and the newest religion, side by side, we find that the greatest difference between them lies in the principle of Evolution through Karma and Reincarnation which is openly taught in the one and either ignored or denied in the other. If both these religions are from the same God, as they must be admitted to be, how then arises this fundamental difference? Is it that Hinduism has invented its own theories or is it that Islam has deliberately left them out? Or, may it not be that looking to the times, Islam has sought to conceal behind a veil a principle which Hinduism had openly avowed? The latter appears to be the more consistent and reasonable view to take. We find the Holy Prophet Mohomed Himself saying that:

The Qurán was sent in seven dialects; and in every one of its sentences there is an external and an internal meaning. . . . *Sayings of Mohomed.*

On another occasion He said to His disciples:

I received from the messenger of God two kinds of knowledge: One of these I taught to others and if I had taught them the other it would have broken their throats. . . . *Sayings of Mohomed.*

It is obvious then that the teachings that have been given out openly in Islam are not exactly what they seem, but have some hidden, esoteric meaning which may possibly explain the apparent conflict with the principles of Hinduism.

Assuming for the moment, for the sake of argument only, that the theories of Reincarnation and Karma which have been expounded and explained in the present day literature on Theosophy are true, it would not be difficult to find a reason which might have influenced the Prophet of Islam to hold back these truths from the "common herd". When materialism was all-powerful, when God was all but forgotten, when pleasures of the body were the only end in life, it would have been a dangerous principle to lay before the people, the idea that if they failed to-day they could make up to-morrow. They would never have been able to realise the advantages of an early attainment—they would hardly have risen to the effort. But these, at the present stage, are all mere hazards. Let us rather go on to something more definite. Let us examine

the teachings of the Holy Qurán and seek the hidden meaning which, when found, will justify the assertion that all religions are unanimous in their declaration of the fundamental and inviolable Laws of Nature.

It is obvious that the teaching that
 have been given and given in Islam are not
 exactly what they seem, but have some hidden
 esoteric meaning which may possibly explain
 the apparent conflict with the principles of
 Islam. It is this hidden meaning which we
 are attempting to discover for the sake of
 our own souls. This is the purpose of this
 book. It is not intended to be a treatise on
 the subject of reincarnation, but rather a
 study of the hidden meaning of the Qurán
 and the Hadith. It is hoped that this
 study will lead to a better understanding
 of the teachings of Islam and to a
 more complete knowledge of the Laws of
 Nature. It is also hoped that this study
 will lead to a more complete knowledge
 of the hidden meaning of the Qurán and
 the Hadith. It is also hoped that this
 study will lead to a more complete
 knowledge of the Laws of Nature.

II

REINCARNATION AND THE HOLY

QURÁN

SIR SYED AMEER ALI, an eminent authority on Islam, in his book *The Spirit of Islam* derives *Islam* from *Salaam* (*Salama*) which, according to him, in its primary sense, means to be tranquil, at rest, to have done one's duty, to have paid up, to be at perfect peace; in its secondary sense, to surrender oneself to Him, with Whom peace is made. The noun *Islam*, derived from it, means peace, greeting, salvation, safety. But *Islam* as a school of ethics and philosophy would mean: "A way to the attainment of salvation, peace or safety"; and a Muslim would then become one who is seeking to pay up, to do his duty, to be at perfect peace and rest and tranquillity.

Judging by the root-meaning of the word *Islam*, it would seem that peace, salvation, and safety are to be attained by doing one's duty and by paying up. Taken in this sense, a student of comparative religion cannot

fail to notice a strong resemblance between the principle laid down here and the principle of *Moksha* or liberation known to the Hindu religion. Liberation from the round of births and deaths, known as *Samsara*, is the final goal of the Hindu devotee, and this liberation cannot be attained until a man has paid up all his karmic debts, till he has risen beyond the Law of Karma, till all his life's work is at an end and he is free either to enjoy the bliss of a continued heaven-life or to return to earth to help the struggling humanity. In any case, according to this school of thought, in order to pay off karmic debts one has necessarily to take the physical body over and over again, which explains the necessity for Reincarnation.

In view of this principle of *Moksha*, it is somewhat strange to find the Prophet of Islam choosing for His religion a name which means and involves the paying up of debts. In its very inception, therefore, it would seem as though there were in Islam some teaching which corresponds to the old Vedantic teaching of Karma and Reincarnation.

On the other hand, Moulvi Mohomed Ali, who is no mean authority on Islamic lore, remarks in three places, while commenting on the Holy Qurán, that "those who are made to taste of death are not sent back into the

world" (footnote 1659, seq 1731, 2165). It may be just as well, therefore, to examine the three verses of the Qurán which lead the learned Maulvi to that conclusion.

I am assuming that those of my readers who are taking any serious interest in the doctrines of Evolution, Karma and Reincarnation which have been very fully treated in Theosophical literature are fairly familiar with them. And for those who wish to add to their knowledge of these truths, a list of books which may with advantage be studied in this connection has been given at the end of this book.

But, to revert to the remarks of Moulvi Mohomed Ali, the first verse on the strength of which he asserts his opinion occurs at XXI. 95, and reads :

It is binding on a town which we destroy that they shall not return.

With due respect, I cannot agree with the learned Moulvi's interpretation of this verse. In my opinion this verse has no reference to Reincarnation. The remark in the foot-note to this verse shows only too clearly that the commentator has either misunderstood the verse or has not studied the doctrine of Reincarnation as carefully as he might have done before contradicting it with such seeming authority.

It must be understood, of course, that the word "town" represents the people of the town. The passage would then read: "The people of the town that we destroy shall not return." "Destroy" then relates to the people, not to the town. The Maulvi also must have placed this construction on the word "town" in order to arrive at the conclusion that the dead do not come back to life. That would indeed be the only construction possible if the word "destroy" were a synonym for "death". As it happens, however, death and destruction are two different things.

The word "dead" is defined as "having lost the vital principle," and "death" as "the state of being, animal or vegetable, in which there is total cessation of the vital function". Death, therefore, is by no means the end of the vital principle itself, the Soul, but of that which the vital principle has left, or to put it in another way, of that in which the vital principle has ceased to function, *viz.*, the body. The Soul, even according to Islam, survives after death:

... do not speak of those who are slain in Allah's way as dead; nay, they are alive but you do not know. . . . II, 154.

As a matter of fact, English dictionaries treat "death" as synonymous for "departure" which is significant, since the departure of the

soul constitutes death of the body. The word "destroy" however is defined as "to put an end to". Naturally then, a soul which has once been destroyed or put an end to, when the vital principle itself has ceased to exist, cannot return to function in a new body. In as much, therefore, as "death" is not "destruction" this verse does not apply, and it cannot be taken as an argument of Islam against Reincarnation.

On taking another view of the matter, it will be found that the principle laid down here is affirmed in the literature above referred to which declares that when, as it does happen rarely, a soul has to be "destroyed," it does not reincarnate. The history of the destruction of Atlantis is a good example and may be studied with advantage. It is too vast a subject to be treated here.

In support of his contention the Maulvi quotes a part of a conversation of the Holy Prophet in which he relates the fact that one Abdullah having requested Allah to send him back to earth after he had died, was told by Him: "The word has gone forth from Me that they shall not return." It will be observed that the request is by a single individual, Abdullah, while the reply is in the plural, that *they* shall not return. This suggests that some others beside Abdullah were also included in

the reply. However, suppose that "they shall not return" is a direct reply to Abdullah to the effect that he shall not return, what does it signify? A careful consideration of this conversation will show that Reincarnation was known to and is here alluded to by the Holy Prophet Mohamed. For if returning to earth were an exception rather than a rule, there would be no need for God to send word that "they shall not return". Let us get this clearer. If it had been a rule that no one who had once died should return to earth, God would not have sent word to say that *they* should not return. His having sent word, on the contrary, implies that others may follow the rule but that *they*, whoever it might have been, shall not return. Why, the very request to be allowed to return suggests such a possibility. It may, of course, be argued that a request to be allowed to return shows that there could have been no such rule but that the concession was asked as a matter of favour. But when it is said that an Ego reincarnates, it does not mean that he can do so when and how he will. There are certain conditions to be fulfilled, some Laws to be obeyed, before he is allowed to return. And surely God's law directs an Ego's return. But to be allowed to return immediately after death, before fulfilling the conditions and the laws, as in the case

of Abdullah, would certainly be regarded as an exception requiring special permission. As to the conditions and laws that must be fulfilled before reincarnating, I must again refer my reader to the books on the subject. But a small passage from the Rt. Rev. C. W. Leadbeater's *Talks on "At the Feet of the Master"* may not be out of place here. He says in the twelfth talk :

Many people have already expressed their wish that they may be able to take an immediate incarnation. Remember that for any variation from the ordinary course of things special permission is required. A man makes what amounts to an application, or it has to be made for him. It has to be submitted to a Higher Authority, who can give permission if He thinks it desirable, but who would also quite certainly refuse it if He did not think it to be in the best interest of the person in question.

We can therefore now agree that a soul or a nation that has once been *destroyed*, or put an end to, does not return to earth. But whether Islam admits of return to earth after death is a question still open to argument.

The next verse relied upon by Maulvi Mohomed Ali occurs at XXIII, 99, 100.

Until when death overtakes one of them he says :
Send me back, my Lord, send me back. . . . 99.

Happily I may do good in that which I have left.

By no means. It is a mere word that he speaks ; and before them is a barrier until the day they are raised. . . . 100.

The commentator remarks: "That the dead do not return to life is a principle which is reaffirmed here." (footnote, 1731.) No doubt the last sentence, "before them is a barrier," leads him to that conclusion. As I read the passage, however, that very sentence proves the contrary.

The expressed desire to be sent back is put into the mouth of a man who has obviously only just died. "Until when death overtakes one of them" can refer to no other occasion. And the reply, "before them is a barrier until the day they are raised," is also made at the same time. That is to say, it means that there is a barrier against their return, but the barrier is not permanent and lasts only "until" the day they are raised.

We may now ask what is the exact force of the word "until" here. It places a limit to the barrier and asserts that there *is to be* a time when the barrier will be removed, and they will then be raised and sent back. Had this not been the idea intended to be conveyed, the verse would no doubt have stopped at the words "it is a mere word that he speaks". But the addition of the words "before them is a barrier..." leaves to the imagination of a thinking man (and man, surely, is asked to think) the words that are implied. When these words are supplied in order to make the sense complete, the verse would read: "And before

them is a barrier, until the day they are raised, *when they shall be sent back.*" So that we get some hope of being sent back to do good in that which we have left, although there is a condition precedent to that happy event, *viz.*, when we are raised.

This, then, naturally leads us to the next question: when are we raised?

Do you suppose "until the day we are raised" refers to the Day of Judgment? Certainly not. If that were so, it is a false hope that is implied in the word "until". If the barrier is removed on the Day of Judgment, then how could we come back? Indeed it would be no use, for there would be nothing for us to do then. We want to return "to do good in that which we have left," but when that which we have left (the physical world) has ceased to exist (as it is supposed to do on the Day of Judgment) we cannot do good or evil in it. Moreover if the day were intended to refer to the Day of Judgment, then in place of the word "until" we would have found some word that would convey a sense of finality. "Raised" then refers to some period before the Day of Judgment. Perhaps had the learned Maulvi studied more closely the intermediate stage which he himself refers to as *Burzakh* in his foot-note, he might have found a better explanation than he has been able to put forward.

Let us, for a moment, divert from the main point to consider in brief the "process," if one might call it by that name, of Reincarnation, as it is explained by those who assert its existence. They maintain that when a man dies his consciousness passes immediately to the Astral Plane. There he dwells for a certain number of days or months or years, but more often centuries, according to the life he had been leading on earth. Thence he proceeds from plane to plane until at last he is *raised* to the consciousness of his real Self, if only for a moment of time. The Soul then begins to descend and, gathering material from every plane, he is ultimately reborn in a physical body. Here it is that the Law of Karma takes a hand. The man's birth is decided according to his own acts in the past. He will be born among surroundings wherein he is best able to pay off his karmic debts. To obtain a satisfactory result it follows that the surroundings of his birth are settled with reference to his past.

All this takes place in the intermediate stage known to Islam as *Burzakh* and undoubtedly the words "until they are raised" refer to the time when the Ego is raised to the consciousness of his true Self. All the conditions and laws will then have been complied with. The barrier (conditions and

laws) having thus been removed, the Ego is permitted to return to try to do good in that which he had left. Thus alone can one justify the use of the word "until".

It is further suggested that after a man's birth has been decided upon, his lot is cast in good surroundings if his previous life has been a good one. If, on the other hand, his actions in the past life had been cruel, selfish or bad, and deserving of "punishments," his life can become a "hell" on earth. When the Maulvi, therefore, says (footnote 24) that "degradation is the result of man's own action and the Divine Law only brings about the consequences of evil that man does," he is but voicing the opinion of the Hindu philosophers who declare that when a man is ready to take up a new incarnation, God's Law of Karma chooses for him the surroundings in which he is to be born and which are best calculated to work out the "consequences" of the evil (or the good) that man has done.

Keeping these principles of Karma and Reincarnation well in view, we can with better understanding read the verses which follow verse 100 just quoted.

The Holy Qurán, after intimating that on account of the barrier they cannot return, goes on to affirm :

So, when life is breathed into forms (the trumpet is blown), there shall be no ties of relationship

between them on that day, nor shall they ask of each other. . . . 101.

Then as for him whose good deeds are preponderant, these are the successful. . . . 102.

And as for him whose good deeds are light, these are they who shall have lost their souls, abiding in hell. . . . 103.

The third passage relied upon by the learned Maulvi finds place in XXXIX, 42.

Allah takes the souls at the time of death, and those that die not during their sleep; then He withholds those on whom He has passed the decree of death and sends the others back for an appointed term; most surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect. . . .

While commenting on this verse, the learned Maulvi remarks (footnote 2165) that "the soul is taken away either in sleep in which case it is returned, or at death in which case it is withheld and is not allowed to return."

This verse also would not appear to have any bearing on the point. While distinguishing sleep from death it simply compares the two and, by doing so, proves the ancient assertion that "sleep is the younger brother of death". In that sense the meaning of the words is quite clear. It cannot be denied that both during sleep and after death the soul passes to the Astral Plane which is sometimes erroneously referred to as "the land from which there is no returning". But the Holy Qurán definitely asserts that the soul that

goes into the "valley of the shadow of death" can and does return to earth as, for example, after sleep. And unless a soul which has passed into the Astral Plane is sometimes withheld, there can be no such thing as death, for then the soul would keep on returning. Herein lies the distinction between sleep and death. In the one the soul returns to the body which it has left, while in the other it does not. But it does not, therefore, follow that because at the time of death the soul is withheld and is not allowed to return to the body it has left, it can never return to occupy a fresh body. At the first reading this verse would certainly seem to support the construction put upon it by the learned commentator, but it is equally clear that the obvious meaning of this verse is not to be taken as a guide. The concluding words "most surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect" suggest that some hidden meaning lies behind the words.

III

REINCARNATION AND THE HOLY QURÁN

(Continued)

THERE are several verses in the Holy Qurán which indicate that the Prophet of Islam recognised the great Law and gave it to His followers in a guarded manner. Says the Book :

How do you deny Allah, you were dead and He gave you life? Again He will cause you to die and again bring you to life, then shall you be brought back to Him. . . . II, 28.

It is suggested that the initial words "you were dead and He gave you life" refer to the beginning of life in a mother's womb. The rest of the verse can then be explained by saying that having been brought to life you will be made to die and brought back to life, as is popularly believed in Islam, on the Day of Judgment when "you shall be brought back to Him".

But in order to properly appreciate the spirit of this verse we have to bear in mind (1) that it is the soul and not the body that

reincarnates, and (2) that "death" is always of the body. So that, obviously, when we speak of one as "dead" we presume that *he had a body which lived and died*. Had this not been the meaning the verse would scarcely have commenced with the assertion "you were dead". Elsewhere in the Qurán, whenever the beginning of life is referred to in the sense of creation, the word employed is derived from *khalq*, to create. If, therefore, the Holy Qurán had meant this to be the beginning of a new life altogether, surely the construction would have been: "How do you deny Allah, He *created* you. . . ."

As we have already noticed, at death there is a cessation of the vital principle. A person or a thing is said to be dead when it has lost this vital principle. Obviously also one cannot lose the vital principle without having first possessed it; nor could there be a cessation of the vital principle unless it had once existed. It follows that one cannot start an argument on "life" with "death". Death presupposes life. When, therefore, the verse begins "you were dead and He gave you life," it undoubtedly means that you had lived and died and then once again He gave you life, again He will cause you to die and again bring you to life and so on, until you are fit to be brought back to Him.

We shall consider later some more verses of the Holy Qurán bearing directly on the point. There are, however, several other verses which suggest by inference the existence of the Law of Reincarnation and Karma. As an example, let us take verse II, 10 which runs:

There is a disease in their hearts; so Allah added to their disease and they shall have a painful chastisement because they lied.

In his commentary on this verse Maulvi Mohomed Ali rightly remarks: "the increase in the disease or the aversion was the result of their own act in each case . . . the degradation is the result of man's own action and the Divine Being brings about the consequences of the evil that man does." (Footnote 24.) Although the verse quoted refers to a certain set of people under special circumstances, yet, since the Holy Qurán is meant for all time, we can safely take it as a general principle laid down in Islam that those who lie shall be severely punished. The word "lie" in the verse cannot be intended to be confined to the meaning "stating a falsehood," but must have a much wider significance. It must mean and include those who stray from the path of truth or righteousness. That is to say, those who stray from the right, or those who do wrong, shall have a painful

chastisement. The commentator himself must have taken that view when he remarks in general terms that degradation is the result of man's own action. Thus we arrive at a clear principle of Islam which can be stated in various terms, as "a man who lies or does wrong shall be chastised," or a man whose acts are deserving of it will suffer degradation.

Notice also that degradation is the result of man's own act and "*they* shall be chastised because *they* lied". This takes us a step further and lays it down positively that the man sinning is the man to be chastised. Divine Justice demands that the sins of the father should not be visited on the son. Indeed, this is quite clearly stated in the following verse:

This is a people that have passed away; they shall have what they earned and you shall have what you earned, and you shall not be called upon to answer for what they did. . . . II, 134.

From all that has been said it follows that a soul (man) that has been or is being chastised or degraded has done some act which deserves the degradation and chastisement. So far perhaps even the most orthodox will agree. But now take the instance of a child who from the moment of its birth is either maimed, or blind, or an idiot. Any of these afflictions, surely, is a degradation,

a chastisement of the most severe kind. When, then, has that poor child sinned or transgressed against the Divine Laws so as to deserve the degradation, or the chastisement, if not in a former life? Remember the Holy Qurán says that chastisement is to him who lies and not to his son or grandson. We cannot, therefore, argue that the defect or the disease is hereditary. It must be the child itself who has sinned. But when? Chastisement or degradation is merely an effect following upon a sin which, in this instance, is stated to be lying or wrongdoing. And if the cause could not have originated in this life it must have occurred in some previous incarnation. This, virtually, is an illustration of how the Law of Karma works through Reincarnation. Quotations from the Holy Qurán could easily be multiplied to show that this doctrine is not altogether strange to Islam.

Going further into the Holy Qurán, we find that a direct reference is made to the dead coming to life again. Take, for example, verse II, 259.

He said, when will Allah give it life after its death? So Allah caused him to remain in a state of death for a hundred years, then raised him. He said: How long have you tarried? He said: I have tarried a day or a part of a day. Said He: Nay, you have tarried a hundred years. Then look at your food and drink. Years have not passed over it; and look at your ass; and that we may make you a

sign to men, look at the bones, how we set them together, then clothed them with flesh; so that it became clear to him and he said: I know that Allah has power over all things . . . II, 259.

Note here the words: "Allah caused him to remain in a state of death for a hundred years, then raised him." All that follows is simply by way of explanation. It is also interesting to compare with this verse the teaching of Theosophy that a period of a hundred years may appear even as a "day or a part of a day" on the Astral Plane. The words "and that we may make you a sign to men" are also worthy of note as showing that this incident was made an example of reincarnation. Indeed if still there be any doubt on the point, it is easily set at rest in the very next verse in which Abraham asks:

My Lord! show me how Thou givest life to the dead?

to which God replies in astonishment:

What! and do you not believe? . . . II, 260.

There is yet another verse in the Holy Qurán which would seem to support the theory of Reincarnation in plain terms.

Have you not considered those who went forth from their homes and they were a congregation, for fear of death; Allah said to them: die! Again He gave them life. Most surely Allah is gracious to people, but most people are not grateful. . . . II, 243.

It is suggested that the words "Allah gave them life" refer to the next generation of the Israelites who ran away from Egypt to avoid death at a period known to history as the Exodus, when Pharaoh gave orders that all their male offspring be killed. According to this version, the words "death" and "die" must be taken to mean intellectual and moral death rather than physical death. In fact, Maulvi Mohomed Ali remarks in his commentary "but they were also kept in a state of bondage which would soon have brought them to a state of intellectual and moral death" (footnote 319).

No doubt this version is correct in as much as only one generation died and the other rose out of it. The whole construction would then turn upon the question: Is it intellectual and moral, or is it physical death that is referred to in this verse? Now, when the Israelites were running away from Egypt, it was not merely for fear of intellectual and moral death. Pharaoh, it will be remembered, had ordered their male offspring to be *killed*, not only kept in bondage. So, undoubtedly, the Israelites were running away from physical death. When, therefore, the Holy Qurán follows up the narration of this incident with the words "Allah said to them, die," nothing but physical death could have been meant. By

adopting this version nothing of the historical significance is lost; on the contrary it becomes more consistent with the verse. In the light of Reincarnation the explanation to this verse would be that the Israelites who were running away from death were caused to die, and were again reincarnated in a future generation as is always the case when a nation is destroyed. Note particularly that Allah caused *them* to die and gave *them* life again; that is to say, the same people who died were raised to life, and not their sons or grandsons or a new set of souls altogether.

IV

REINCARNATION AND THE HOLY QURÁN

(Continued)

THE usual objection that a Musalman takes to the doctrine of Reincarnation is that we do not remember any or all of the incidents of our former lives. The simplest explanation to this objection is that memory, as such, pertains to the body, the brain. With every incarnation a soul is clothed in a new body, or rather a set of bodies—physical, astral, mental, etc. It is perhaps to this fact that the Holy Qurán refers when it declares that:

As for those who are disbelievers . . . so often as their skins are thoroughly burned, we will change them for other skins that they may taste of chastisement . . . IV, 56.

Since the brain of man belongs to his physical body merely, it cannot reasonably be expected to carry within its cells the recollection of events that transpired when that particular brain itself was non-existent. But the

soul has brought down with it impressions and experiences gathered in past lives which, in ordinary parlance, we term the inherent character of man. It is also said to be possible, by long and continued practice, to bring down the memory (more correctly the knowledge) of the events of past lives into the present brain. That, however, has nothing to do with the physical memory of man, but rather with the memory of Nature, which has recently been recognised even by material science. The subject is more fully and satisfactorily dealt with in the Theosophical literature for those who care to go into it. It is not the purpose of this essay to convince its readers of the truth of the assertion made by Theosophy and the Hindu philosophy, but rather to see how far these are borne out or contradicted by the philosophy of Islam.

In view of these statements, verse XVI, 70 of the Holy Qurán must take on a new significance for its readers.

Allah created you; then He causes you to die; and of you is he who is brought back to the worst part of life so that after having knowledge he does not know . . .

Here we cannot fail to notice a clear reference to Reincarnation. After being caused to die, we, or at least some of us, are brought back to the worst part of life, presumably for

our "sins" committed in the past incarnations and, to revert to the question of memory, having thus acquired a knowledge of the Law, we do not yet know anything. Still we in Islam question and doubt whether the Law of Reincarnation is a fact in Nature!

The learned commentator of the Holy Qurán remarks in connection with this verse, "as in the individual, so in the Nations, those who before the Holy Prophet had been given the knowledge of Divine revelation had lost or corrupted it at the time of His advent, hence the necessity for a new revelation". (Footnote 1380.) Even so the fact remains that, because of this loss of knowledge, it is thought necessary to bring some of us back "to the worst part of life," so that we might acquire this knowledge more thoroughly and with more of a lasting benefit to ourselves.

There is yet another verse in the Holy Qurán which, going further back into evolution, declares that notwithstanding all these experiences through various states of being man "does not know anything".

O people! If you are in doubt about the raising, then surely We created you from dust, then from a small life germ, then from a clot, then from a lump of flesh, complete in make and incomplete that We may make clear to you, and We cause what We please to stay in the womb till an appointed time, when We bring you forth as babies, then, that you may attain your maturity; and of you is he who

is caused to die and of you is he who is brought back to the worst part of life, so that after having knowledge he does not know anything . . . XXII, 5.

Judging by the commentary (footnote 1672-3-4) it would seem that the orthodox interpretation of this verse is that it shows the humble origin of man. So far as we know the humble origin of man has never been denied by any philosophy. The only difference is that according to the one philosophy, from his humble origin man has risen to his present stage in evolution through various stages of growth, gaining experience in each state; while Islam, according to the orthodox construction placed on its teachings, would appear to suggest that having originated from dust, man was at once raised to his present high state.

Maulvi Mohomed Ali also admits that the verse shows the "ultimate springing up of *all* life from dust" (footnote 1672). He goes on to remark that "by the various elements from which man is said to be created here, are meant the various stages through which every human child passes, the object being to show his humble origin". But if that were so, why create all this confusion by the use of words which are not clear? And then, why only a human child? Do not even animals pass through the stages shown in this

verse? Are the animals, therefore, to be considered to be on the same level as human beings because, in order to be born, they have to follow the same process? No! The philosophy of Islam is surely not so defective! The opening words of this verse, "O people, if you are in doubt about the raising," would also tend to show that all that follows refers to the state of consciousness and degrees of matter which man has passed in the course of his evolution.

As to the ultimate springing up of all life from earth, indeed the Holy Qurán has many times made the "dead earth coming to life" an example and an illustration of how a man may be said to reincarnate. The very verse just quoted (XXII, 5) after stating and bemoaning the fact that even after having knowledge (of being reborn) a man does not know anything, adds by way of illustration,

And you see the earth sterile land; but when we send down on it water, it stirs and swells and brings forth of every kind a beautiful herbage.

The next verse brings home the comparison and explains:

This is because Allah is the truth and because He gives life to the dead and because he has power over all things, and because Allah shall raise up those who are in the graves... XXII, 6.

We wonder after this how any commentator can affirm with positive authority that the

Holy Qurán refutes the doctrine of Reincarnation. In almost every case where this simile has been employed a reference is made to its application to renewed life after death. A verse in point would be:

Allah has sent down water from the clouds and therewith given life to the earth after its death. Most surely there is a sign in this for a people who would listen... XVI, 65.

The concluding words of this verse are significant in that they make it clear that the simile stands for some deeper truth which it seeks to conceal behind commonplace words.

Of the same nature is another verse:

Know that Allah gives life to the earth after its death. Indeed We have made the communication clear to you that you may understand... LVII, 17.

That the revival of the dead earth bears reference to the doctrine of Reincarnation may be surmised from the following verse which declares that man is like a growth out of the earth:

Allah has made you grow out of the earth. Then He returns you to it, then will He bring you forth a (new) bringing forth... LXXI, 17, 18.

Even more pertinent to the issue are the following two verses as they contain a direct reference to man being brought forth after death in the same way as the herbage grows out of the once sterile land:

He it is who sends forth the winds bearing good news before His mercy, until when they bring

up a laden cloud, we drive it to a dead land, then We send down water on it, then bring forth with it of fruits of all kinds. *Thus shall We bring forth the dead that you may be mindful . . .* VII, 57.

Notice particularly the last sentence in this verse, "Thus shall We bring forth the dead that you may be mindful." This shows that the ordinary conception of Islam that the dead are brought to life only on the Day of Judgment is neither reasonable nor justified. Since the object of bringing forth the dead is that "we should be mindful," it would scarcely serve the intended purpose if we are all brought forth only on the Day of Judgment.

And, again, says the Holy Qurán:

He brings forth the living from the dead and the dead from the living and gives life to the earth after its death and thus shall you be brought forth. . . . XXX, 19.

Here also the reference is clear. As Allah gives life to a dead earth over and over again, so "shall you be brought forth" again and again.

Another simile frequently employed by the Holy Qurán in illustrating the working of the Law of Reincarnation is that of the night and the day passing into each other. One such reference will suffice:

Thou makest the night to pass into the day and Thou makest the day to pass into the night, and Thou bringest forth the living from the dead and Thou bringest forth the dead from the living. . . . III, 26.

We have noticed that at the time Islam was revealed, faith had fled the land. People were incredulous and a principle like that of Reincarnation would scarcely have been a wise or a welcome one to preach to all and sundry. Some such spirit of incredulity and disbelief is referred to in the following verses which refer to the dead coming to life.

And he who says to his parents, Fie on you! Do you threaten me that I shall be brought forth when generations have already passed away before me? And they both call for Allah's aid. Woe to you! Believe, surely this promise of Allah is true. But he says: this is nothing but the stories of the ancients . . . XLVI, 17.

Thus we may understand that people were neither prepared nor ready to receive this teaching which was given only to the chosen few. The learned Maulvi has offered to remark on this verse. True, it could be argued that the disbelief and credulity expressed in this verse is with regard to the Day of Resurrection and that there is nothing here to suggest the principle of Reincarnation, but when read with verse 19 which follows, the significance of this verse cannot be lost.

And, for all are degrees according to what they did and that He may pay them back fully their deeds and they shall not be wronged. . . . XLVI, 19.

Reincarnation, according to this verse then, is no hardship or injustice, but an opportunity

to do good in that which they have left. Notice also that a man is sent back not in any way as a reward or a punishment for his past deeds, but in order that he may be paid back his deeds so that he shall not be wronged.

Of the same nature are verses 49, 50 and 51 in Ch. XVII, which read:

And they say: What! when we shall have become bones and decayed particles, shall we then certainly be raised, being a new creation? . . . 49.

Say: be ye dome stones or iron, . . . 50.

Or some other creature of those which are too hard to receive life in your minds! But they will say: Who will return us? Say: He who returned you first. . . . 51.

We have seen that the aim of a *Yogi* is to attain liberation from the round of births and deaths by paying back all his karmic debts; and that the very word Islam, according to Sir Syed Ameer Ali, means to have paid up. In view of these facts the following verses deserve a very careful consideration.

O man, surely you must strive to your Lord, a hard striving until you meet Him! . . . LXXXIV, 6.

This verse urges man to try his utmost to reach the goal that has been set before him—to attain liberation and peace, to return to Him. This is stated to be a hard striving and, as is natural, while some

succeed, others fail. The fate of each is clear, for:

As to him who is given his book in his right hand, . . . 7;

(*i.e.*, he who has striven well),

He shall be reckoned with an easy reckoning . . . 8.
And he shall go back to his people joyfully . . . 9.

Is this not definite enough for "a people who understand," as showing that he whose efforts have been successful shall be re-born among pleasant and congenial surroundings and happy circumstances? On the other hand, the Qurán proceeds:

As to him who is given his book behind his back . . . 10;

(*i.e.*, he who has not striven well),

He shall call for perdition . . . 11.

And shall enter into burning fire . . . 12.

Surely he was (erstwhile) joyful among his fellows . . . 13.

Surely he thought he would never return . . . 14.

These verses show the other side of the picture. Those who have believed that one life is all that there is to enjoy will realise, when too late, that the very life that they enjoyed has become to them in reality "perdition" and "burning fire".

Having explained thus far in terms which are not difficult to understand, as though to

clinch the argument, the Holy Qurán goes on to say :

I call to witness the sunset, and that which it drives on; and the moon when it grows full. . . .

That you shall most certainly enter one state after another . . . LXXXIV, 18-19.

Maulvi Mohomed Ali appears to be of opinion (footnote 2702-2703) that verses 16 to 19, above quoted, refer to the rise and fall of the Arab nation. But, in view of the preceding verses, the phrase "you shall enter one state after another" cannot but mean "you shall enter one life after another".

V

KARMA

THE doctrine of Reincarnation cannot be considered apart from that other doctrine known as Karma. It is the Law of Justice that demands "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." It is on the basis of this Law it is said that "whatsoever a man soweth that also shall he reap." This idea of hardship and punishment as a compensation for a wrong done, or joy and happiness as a reward for a good deed, is not unknown to Islam. The main difference between the Islamic and Hindu theory of cause and effect is that, whereas in Islam a man is said to receive his dues in a life beyond the grave, according to Hinduism one has to return to his original field of action in order to repay and receive repayment of karmic debts. If I wrong a man, apart from the punishment I might receive in hell, it can be no kind of satisfaction, compensation, or justice to the injured person that I am roasted in burning fires of hell for a day or a month or even for a

century or two. Moreover, this practically amounts to an encouragement of the spirit of revenge which itself is wrong. Therefore not until I return to earth to expiate the sin and to set right the wrong I have done, could I be said to have compensated the injured person and to have balanced the good and the bad karma.

Looking at the Divine Law of Justice even from this point of view, we find it receiving some corroboration from the teaching of the Holy Qurán. From the verses which have been already quoted, some such principle can be made out. In addition, the following verses may show clearly that in order to pay back one's karmic debts, as is required in Islam, one is expected to reincarnate. Consider:

Allah does not impose upon any soul a duty but to the extent of its ability; for upon it is the benefit of what it has earned, and upon it the evil of what it has wrought . . . II, 286.

And also,

Whatever misfortune befalls you, (O man), it is from yourself . . . IV, 79.

In both these verses we see that what is known as *kismet* is not simply blind fate, but rather the inevitable result of man's own action which could only have been performed in some previous existence. It is said in Islam that a man is born with his destiny tied around his

neck. His destiny is nothing more or less than a bundle of debts which have to be paid out in large or small instalments, according to the extent of the man's ability to endure suffering without breaking down, or to enjoy the fruits of his good deeds without losing his head.

Consider also another verse which re-affirms this statement:

Whatever affliction befalls you, it is on account of what your hands have wrought . . . XLII, 30, 31.

Indeed were it not for our conviction that "degradation is the result of man's own action," we would have no option but to believe in the injustice of Allah. As it is, however, we are, or we ought to be, fully satisfied with the assurance of the Holy Qurán that:

Allah does not do any injustice to men, but men are unjust to themselves . . . X, 44.

Not only is this misfortune the result of evil, confined to individuals alone, but even nations suffer from the action of Karma. The evil Karma of people as a whole must recoil upon the nation as well as on individuals. Evidence of the Law of Karma working itself out among a nation in the above manner, as a result of cruelty and injustice of individuals and the nation, is also not wanting in Islam.

Corruption has appeared in the land and in the sea on account of what the hands of men have wrought, that He may make them taste part of

that which they have done, so that they may return . . . XXX, 41.

Both the need for this great Law and the way in which it works are briefly outlined in this short verse. Since the nation as a whole has collected or earned the evil karma through the evil acts of individuals, the result bursts upon a nation. Part of that suffering or affliction is borne by each individual in proportion, presumably, to the part he contributed towards its creation. It is only by the realization of this Law that men, or even nations, would "return" to the sense of that which is right and learn to distinguish the right from the wrong.

Even when after a number of incarnations, a man has learnt to discriminate between right and wrong, and has definitely made up his mind to follow the right at all costs, he has still to be born and re-born several times before he can reach that stage in evolution where he rises above and beyond the wheel of births and deaths—when death exists for him no more. He can then, if he wills, reincarnate in order to give a helping hand to his fellow-beings. But then he is controlled by no Law, and he can himself select the place, the surroundings and the circumstances under which he would be born. To reach this high level, however, man has to tread an uphill path.

What man has to accomplish in order to attain to this "perfection" (the much-desired Paradise of Islam) is shown in Chapter XC of the Holy Qurán. The line of action suggested by the Holy Qurán would seem to be identical with what is known to Theosophy as the path of Action and Service through which a man receives liberation from the round of births and deaths. Nor, having shown the way, is the Holy Qurán silent as to the end to be achieved. The end is not indeed the Paradise where Hüris await the faithful, where rivers flow and where the delicious fruits of heaven fall into the open mouths of men; but, to quote from the Holy Qurán, after all the hardship and toiling, after all the effort and striving,

You shall be made free from the obligations in this city . . . XC, 2.

Now, "city," as we all know, has, in all ancient philosophies, symbolised the physical body, as the five senses stand for the five gates thereof. Freedom from obligation in this "city of five gates" can, therefore, mean nothing but *Moksha*; the liberation from *Sam-sara*, the wheel of births and deaths.

VI

EVOLUTION

REINCARNATION and Karma, great Laws as they are, are but the means to an end, that end being evolution. While considering the means, therefore, we cannot ignore the end. If Islamic teaching agrees with the Hindu philosophy so far as Karma and Reincarnation are concerned, is it the same with the theory of Evolution also?

It is obvious that nothing can evolve unless it is subject to some definite law which it rigidly follows. It is said that of all that there is, God has prepared archetypes, and the Devas and the Archangels, while carrying out the plan of the Logos, do but endeavour to reproduce the archetype from the "raw material," so to speak, which is placed in their hands. Thus it is that as civilization progresses we see better and better types of humanity. We notice an improvement both in life and form; and that not only in man but in every other kingdom as well, in mineral,

vegetable and animal. If we accept this point of view it is not difficult to believe that "God has a plan and that plan is evolution," and nothing that ever happens is outside this plan.

This would appear to be the spirit in which the Holy Qurán declares:

No evil befalls on earth nor in your soul but it is in a book before We bring it into existence. Surely that is easy to Allah . . . LVII, 22.

Even the evil that man does, or which befalls the earth, is not therefore without a definite purpose. The "book" in this verse might be the archetype or the plan which the Lords of Karma are trying to follow.

According to this plan, so Theosophy tells us, man has evolved from "dust". It is suggested that originally, when God began to manifest Himself in forms, the Divine Life first ensouled the mineral kingdom, including liquids, gases and many other etheric matters. For centuries these minerals evolved from simple forms to forms more complex, the life evolving with the forms. When the mineral evolution had reached a certain stage of perfection, the Divine Life began to ensoul vegetable forms, from vegetable to animal, from animal to man, and the same Divine Life has evolved to its present stage. This process is continually going on in the world. What is a

mineral to-day will be a vegetable to-morrow, an animal the day after and next a man. "Educated men and women you already are," says Dr. Besant in her *Introduction to Yoga*, "already you have climbed up that long ladder which separates the present outer form of the Deity in you from His form in dust . . . the manifested Deity sleeps in the mineral and the stones. He becomes more and more unfolded in the vegetable and the animal and lastly in man. He has reached what appears as His culmination to ordinary man." "But having done so much," she also asks, naturally, "shall you not do more?"

Somewhat the same sentiment is expressed by the Sufi poet, Roubi, in his well-known, though much-abused lines :

From the inorganic we developed into the vegetable,

Dying from the vegetable we rose to animal,
And leaving the animal, we became man.

Then why fear that death will lower us?

The next transition will make us an angel,
Then shall we rise from angels and in the
Nameless.

All existence proclaims, "unto Him shall we
return."

Let us see how these lines compare with the teaching of Islam. The Holy Qurán at one place asks :

Do you believe in Him who created you from dust, then from a small life germ, then made you perfect man? XVII, 37.

Notice here the repetition of the conjunction "then". It is generally acknowledged in Islam that "man is created from dust". But the popular belief with regard to this phrase is that the physical body is built of clay. This verse, however, contradicts that idea. The use of the word "then" at every stage marks out a different stage in evolution. The construction as seen in this verse is not that "you were made from clay, in which was introduced a life germ which made you a man," but rather that "first the life that is in you was in dust, *then* it manifested in a small life germ such as one might find in the seeds of small plants, insects and animals, and *then* you became a human being".

This construction is still further supported in another verse where it is stated that:

Indeed He created you through various grades.
LXXI, 14.

The words "through various grades" are given by the commentators to mean "by various steps," or in "various conditions". In his footnote (2573) Maulvi Mohomed Ali remarks "these words may be taken as alluding to the theory of evolution. The commentators generally take them to refer to the various conditions through which the foetus passes. But they may as well imply that man

has been brought to the present stage of physical perfection through various conditions."

If that much is admitted, may we not ask with Dr. Besant, "having done so much, shall man not do more?" It cannot be denied that man is yet very far from perfection, and it may not therefore be unreasonable to believe man has to evolve still further. Happily the Qurán holds out an assurance which gives us hope that one day we may yet reach the goal of perfection that is set before Humanity. Says the Holy Qurán.

Nay I call to witness the sunset redness and the night it drives on and the moon when it grows full that you shall enter one state after another . . . LXXXIV, 16, 19.

According to the commentary of the learned Maulvi, this verse refers to "the growth of Islam". But when applied to life it cannot but mean the evolution of man from his present stage to that of perfection.

So far as Theosophy has been able to point out, at the topmost rung of the human ladder stand those mighty Beings, members of the Great White Brotherhood, known to Theosophy as The Masters of the Divine Wisdom, who guide and direct the affairs of Humanity and who, having "risen from the ranks," know well the troubles and difficulties which man has to meet and can, with better understanding,

sympathy and knowledge stretch out a helping hand to their younger brethren.

It is undoubtedly to these Great Beings that reference is made in the Holy Qurán in the following verse:

On the most elevated place there shall be men who know all by their mark . . . VII, 46.

We find yet another verse in the Holy Qurán which establishes beyond doubt the existence of the Masters of Divine Knowledge, part of whose duty it is to guard the secrets of Nature, the esoteric knowledge of things, and give it to Humanity as and when it is ready to receive it. This verse is, therefore, important and, at least so far as Islam is concerned, ought to put an end to the controversy on the point.

We, "revealed prophets who submitted themselves to Allah and judged matters for those who were Jews and *The Masters of Divine Knowledge* and the Doctors, because they were required to guard a part of the book of Allah." . . . V, 44.

"The book of Allah," in the commentaries, is said to be the *Torah*. But surely, Allah has a Book greater than the *Torah* which required the Masters of Divine Knowledge to guard. And it is not too much to believe that the "Book of Allah" is the "great plan of God" and "the laws of nature" about which the Holy Prophet of Islam had said:

If I had taught them . . . it would have broken their throats.

VII

EVIDENCE FROM THE HADIS AND THE SUFI POETS

IT is possible to add to the quotations from the Qurán the evidence of the Hadis and the Sufi poets. Most of the quotations from the Hadis are taken from either the book *Muajrul Nabuvat* or *Madarajul Nabuvat*. The former is by the famous Alamah Mullameen, while Maulana Shah Abdul Haq Dahilivi is the author of the latter. Both books are available in print.

The first Hadis declares :

The first thing that God created was my essence or spirit (Nur),

which is commonly known as the Nur-e-Mohamadi or the real essence. The second Hadis adds :

Verily, I was listed with God as the last of the prophets when even Adam was no more than dust.

Yet a third Hadis maintains :

I was a prophet while Adam was still hovering between spirit and matter,

or, as it is stated elsewhere, "when Adam was still between earth and water." A further variation of this fact is also found in the following quotation:

For forty days I myself kneaded the clay from which the body of Adam was built.

Jabir bin Abdullah Ansari relates in his memoirs that on one occasion he asked the Prophet Mohamed what God created first, and the Prophet replied:

The essence of the spirit (Nur) of your prophet.

Another saying of the Holy Prophet which is equally well-known runs:

I (God) could not have created the worlds had I not created the Prophet,

meaning that the worlds have been created from the essence of God.

All these sayings of the Holy Prophet go to show that God had laid out a plan for the world He was about to create, long before the actual creation, and He made the essence of life which pervades all.

This essence or spirit, known to Islamic philosophy as Nur, sent out by God, manifested in Adam after a period of 12,000 or 70,000 years according to various commentators, *i.e.*, it took twelve or seventy thousand years for the first life-wave to reach the stage of Humanity. The Hadis then goes on to state

that after passing through the offspring of Adam, the Essence or the life manifested or shone out again in Idris after a lapse of some thousands of years. Then, after another age, it appeared again in "Houd," coming down later into Abraham and Ishmael and through him, about 2,600 years later, it finally shone out in the Prophet Mohomed. Indeed the Holy Prophet himself often declared that in him was the soul of Abraham. When it is said that this Essence or Nur appeared in a particular Prophet it means, according to these commentators, that the Prophet taking the soul or essence which had passed out of his predecessors in office was born into the world in the usual way of all Humanity. On these sayings is built the theory, that though the Spirit is one the Prophets are many, who in different ages have appeared in the world to carry forward and complete the plan of God, until the time of the Prophet Mohomed when, as stated in the Qurán,

to-day, I have perfected your religion.

This is only another way of saying that the same Spirit of God has incarnated many times on earth to carry on His plan to perfection from age to age. It is generally believed that for this age the Prophet Mohomed was the last Prophet who completed the plan so far as it was intended to affect it.

According to the general belief in Islam, before the end of the world Imam Mehdi is to be born. In the Theosophical circles, however, it is believed that a great Teacher appears to start every New Age and in pursuance of this belief many people have formed themselves into a group to prepare for the coming of a World Teacher who is to commence a New Age and not, as is believed in Islam, to end the world. The following passage from the Hadis would seem to bear out the Theosophical view:

Verily, God will send to His people at the beginning of each age Him who shall renew its religion.

There are altogether seventy-two or seventy-three sects in Islam. The *Rafziah* sect is the sixth of these. The eighth sub-sect of the *Rafziah* Musalmans openly accept Reincarnation, on which account they are termed *Munashkhiyah* or believers in Reincarnation. The fifth sub-sect of the *Rafziah* Musalmans also believe that at no time is the world left without a Teacher as a guide, that in some person or another this Spirit of God, this great Soul, is manifesting all the time. For this reason they dispute the claim of Hazrat Mohomed of being the last of the Prophets.

The people of *Ismaili* faith, in which are now included many Boras and Khojas, also

believe in the principles of Reincarnation and Karma. They even go so far as to say that Shri Krishna was an incarnation of Lord Buddha, and the same soul incarnated as Hazrat Mohomed. Others believe that Hazrat Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet, was the incarnation of Shri Krishna while others maintain that he was the incarnation of Vishnu.

The Behais of Iran believe that the great Soul, known to the world as the Christ, reincarnated in their leader Abdul Beha, while in India the Kadyanis claim the same distinction for their head, Mirza Ahmed.

Many Musalman Sufi poets, too, have declared their belief in the Law of Reincarnation.

Hasan Sabah and Hakim Nasir Khusru Alvi, who were both of *Ismaili* sect of Islam, openly believed in the great Law, while Zamani Yazdi, another well-known poet, claimed that he was Nizami Ganjvi in a new body. He writes :

Like the sun I set at Ganj and rose again at Yazd.

It might here be explained that Nizami was the inhabitant of a place called Ganj, while Zamani lived at Yazd.

There are many other ancient Sufi poets who believe in Reincarnation. But while some believe that after having passed through the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms when

a life-wave reaches the human stage and it stops there, others go further and declare that even after reaching Humanity a man is re-born several times in a new body before he attains to perfection.

The chief of the Sufi poets is Maulvi Jalaluddin Rumi, the disciple of Shamsuddin Tabraizi. His poetry would seem to suggest that he was a believer in Reincarnation through evolution. In one of his couplets he writes:

I am but one soul but I have a hundred thousand bodies. Yet I am helpless, since Shariat (exoteric religion) holds my lips sealed. Two thousand men have I seen who were I; but none as good as I am now,

i.e., with each birth I have gone on improving.

Out of a large number of verses of similar nature, the following may also be found interesting.

I am but one soul yet I have a hundred thousand bodies. But the Soul and the bodies are all I. I have found myself to be another, but the other cares not to know that I am I.

Yet another verse which refers to Reincarnation is also ascribed to Rumi.

If I look to the Spirit, I have seen 970 bodies, but if I look only to my state, I, like the herbs, have grown again and again.

Judging by his poetry it would seem that Rumi also believed that God created matter first, in which lay the seed of the grosser physical matter of the worlds that we know.

He maintains that everything that is, always was and always will be. According to him nothing ever perishes, but everything goes on evolving from one stage to another. We may take the following lines as examples of this belief:

Although I am descended from Adam, in truth I am his grandfather. It may therefore be said that my father is my son and out of a tree grows a seed.

And also:

For a million years I floated in ether, even as the atom floats uncontrolled. If I do not actually remember that state of mine, I often dream of my atomic travels.

The poet goes more into detail in the following, which reads as treating of Evolution and Reincarnation.

On account of this change in outer form the stage following takes the plan of the preceding form. In this manner there have been thousands of changes and each has always been better than the one before it. Look always to the form in the present; for, if you think of the forms in the past, you will separate yourself from your true Self. These are all states of the permanent which you have seen by dying. Why then do you turn your face from death? When the second stage has always been better than the first, then die happily and look forward to taking up a new and a better form. Remember, and make no haste. You must die before you improve. Like the sun, only when you set in the West can you rise again with brilliance in the East.

We have purposely taken so many quotations from Rumi's *Masnavi* because he is said to be

the master of Sufi poetry. His *Masnavi* is reckoned next in rank to the Holy Qurán. It is said that Moulvi's *Masnavi* is the Qurán in Persian, since all his arguments are based on the verses of the Qurán and the sayings of the Prophet.

Let us now examine the poetry of Shamsuddin Tabrazi, the Murshid or guide of Rumi. He declares:

Like the trees I am fed from water flowing through the bowels of the earth. For although the trees and grass grow but once, I have grown several times. Like the unborn child I am also fed through the mother's blood, since although man is born once, I have been born a number of times.

In another couplet he declares:

Like the seed which when buried in the earth becomes a thousand seeds, I by dying have also become a hundred thousand persons.

We may consider one more of Tabrazi's couplets on the same theme:

You can experience the evening only after sunset. Has the moon ever lost by the setting of the sun? What appears as the setting is but the rising in another world. The grave is truly a narrow prison, but it is the only prison which sets you truly free. What seed is there which does not multiply and increase by being buried? Why then should you doubt the potentiality of the human seed?

Evidence of the existence of Reincarnation and the belief of it in Islam comes also from another well-known Sufi poet, Mansoor Hallaj, whose claim of *Inal Haq*, being one with

God, cost him his life. In one of his couplets he writes :

Like the herbage I have sprung up many a time on the banks of flowing rivers. For a hundred thousand years I have lived and worked and tried in every sort of body.

In another place the same poet writes :

For years on end, like a drop of water, I was merged in the Sea, yet behold how I have emerged therefrom. I was as the dew hovering over the great ocean of eternity and have appeared as a surging wave upon the ocean.

Ahmed Jam, more commonly known as "the mad elephant" among Persian poets, also adds his testimony to these principles when he says :

Like a water-skin full of water, though I have become separated from the great ocean, I am still the same water living in the skin or the body. Originally I was fuel, but behold, to what height I have risen. By burning in the fire the fuel became the fire itself. From fire I became the Light (*Nur*). I was but a ray, I am now the Sun Himself. I was the ocean and I became a wave.

Referring to the principle of Evolution a well-known Sufi teacher, Hakim Senai, writes :

In the world of faith and wisdom death of the body is the life of the soul. Sacrifice thou thine body for thus alone canst thou live in the world of spirits.

On the same theme Khakani declares :

The ultimate aim of life was humanity in which it appeared after manifesting in the mineral, the vegetable and the animal kingdom. Like the Qurán which was revealed after three books, humanity also evolved from three kingdoms of Nature.

In addition to the poets already mentioned and quoted, the reader might with advantage study the works of Sheikh Bahlool who claims to have existed two years before God Himself, of Sheikh Abdulhussein Kharkani who declares that he remembers events which happened while he was still an embryo, and of several other Sufi poets. These are but a few instances taken from volumes that have been written upon the subject. Names could be multiplied in support of this contention, but already enough has been said to convince the reader that Islam is not altogether a stranger to the doctrine of Reincarnation.

A LIST OF BOOKS BEARING UPON
THE SUBJECT

Reincarnation, by Dr. Annie Besant.

Karma, by Dr. Annie Besant.

And portions of the following :

An Introduction to Theosophy, by Dr. Annie Besant.

A Textbook of Theosophy, by the Rt. Rev. C. W. Leadbeater.

An Outline of Theosophy, by the Rt. Rev. C. W. Leadbeater.

Theosophy Explained, by P. Pavri.

Some Problems of Life, by Dr. Annie Besant.

Popular Lectures on Theosophy, by Dr. Annie Besant.

Birth and Evolution of the Soul, by Dr. Annie Besant.

Evolution of Life and Form, by Dr. Annie Besant.

Inner Life, Vol. I. (Sections 6, 7 and 8), by the Rt. Rev. C. W. Leadbeater.

All these books are available at any circulating Library attached to a branch of the Theosophical Society, or can be purchased either from any branch of the Society maintaining a book depot or from the Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, S.

