

*Transmigration  
Reincarnation  
Gilgulim*



Occasional Loss of Identity by Rafal Olbinski

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## Foreword

Of several occult philosophies brought to the attention of the public at large by the Theosophical Society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the twin doctrine of Karma and Reincarnation is the most widely known. These two words are now part of everyday language all over the world.

Several terms for Reincarnation are Greek, reflecting the profound influence of Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and their disciples, in the West. Metempsychosis, Metempsychosis, and Palingenesis or Palligenesia are the prevalent ones. Unfortunately, many lexicographers deem them to be equivalent and lump them together with Re-embodiment, Reincarnation, Transmigration. Some are synonymous, others are not.

Only two Sanskrit terms are associated with Reincarnation: *Punarjanman*<sup>1</sup> and *Samsāra*. The former, is synonymous with Palingenesis; the latter, refers to the interplay between Self dying and not-self being born, the succession of which gives rise to the world process.

The aim of this document is to clarify various after death states that are loosely grouped under Reincarnation's wide but poorly understood conceptual umbrella. It does so by teasing out subtle differences and similarities between various post-mortem States of Consciousness so that the depth and seamless unity of this core theosophical doctrine can be fully appreciated.

The multifaceted meanings of Karma as

- 1 Great Breath or Motion, unmanifested and manifested;
- 2 Law of Ethical Causation, Providence, Justice, Harmony;
- 3 Nemesis or Retribution, Adrasteia, Themis;
- 4 Supreme Initiator,

will be examined at a later occasion.

EDITORS

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Secret Doctrine*, I p. 293; [Summing-up]

I.117. . . . the threefold state of existence<sup>2</sup> which arises from actions;

XI.48. Men of evil manners receive an alteration of form, some through the evil (deeds) committed (by them) in this life, some also through (acts) formerly committed.

XII.39. I will tell briefly the transmigrations in due order of this All,<sup>3</sup> which one received through (possessing) any one of these threads.

XII.40 *et. seq.* Always (those creatures) possessed by essentiality attain divinity; those possessed by passion, man's estate; those possessed by darkness, the estate of animals: the threefold course<sup>4</sup> (is explained) in these words.

XII.54 *et. seq.* After receiving (as punishment) horrible hells during many series of years, the great criminals at the end of this (time) enter upon the following transmigrations.

— *The Ordinances of Manu*<sup>5</sup>

## Historical review of the doctrine

We are twitted with the undeniable fact that the doctrine of reincarnation “was not brought up by Theosophy.” No one has ever thought of putting forward any such claim, and every schoolboy must know that belief in reincarnation — flippantly called *metempsychosis* — is as old as the world. Nor would it gain ground as it does were it a new-fangled belief. But as it is a doctrine believed in by the greatest and most intelligent nations of antiquity, by the greatest philosophers and sages, and that it is also the most logical doctrine which leaves no gaps, knows of no missing links, and explains almost every social and human problem — Theosophists, as the most intellectual among the members of the Theosophical Society, believe in it.<sup>6</sup>

- Plutarch taught that at death Proserpine separated the body and the soul entirely, after which the latter became a free and independent *demon* (*daïmon*). Afterward, the good underwent a second dissolution:
- Demeter divided the *psychē* from the *nous* or *pneuma*. The former was dissolved after a time into ethereal particles hence the inevitable dissolution and subsequent annihilation of the man who at death is purely psychical; the latter, the *nous*, ascended to its higher Divine power and became gradually a pure, Divine spirit.

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<sup>2</sup> *I.e.*, being born again as an animal or in some higher form of existence — high, medium, or inferior.

<sup>3</sup> Transmigrations throughout all the universe. The word *samsāra* (transmigration) means the same as course (*gati*).

<sup>4</sup> Transmigration of three kinds. These individuals are not, however, supposed to be exclusively but predominantly possessed by the different threads; an individual may contain essentiality and passion; the preponderance of the latter places him in man's estate; of the former, in divinity, etc.

<sup>5</sup> Burnell A.C. (*Tr.*). *The Ordinances of Manu*. (Completed & ed. by E.W. Hopkins) London: Trübner & Co, 1884

<sup>6</sup> *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE THERSITES OF FREETHOUGHT) XI p. 426

- Kapila, in common with all Eastern philosophers, despised the purely psychical nature. It is this agglomeration of the grosser particles of the soul, the mesmer-ic exhalations of human nature imbued with all its terrestrial desires and propensities, its vices, imperfections, and weakness, forming the astral body — which can become objective under certain circumstances which the Buddhists call *skandhas* (the groups), and Colonel Olcott has for convenience termed the “soul.”
- The Buddhists and Brahmanists teach that the man’s individuality is not secured until he has passed through and become disembarrassed of the last of these groups, the final vestige of earthly taint. Hence their doctrine of the metempsychosis, so ridiculed and so utterly misunderstood by our greatest Orientalists.
- Even the physicists teach us that the particles composing physical man are, by evolution, reworked by nature into every variety of inferior physical form. Why, then, are the Buddhists unphilosophical or even unscientific, in affirming that the semi-material *skandhas* of the astral man (his very *ego*, up to the point of final purification) are appropriated to the evolution of minor astral forms (which, of course, enter into the purely physical bodies of animals) as fast as he throws them off in his progress toward *Nirvāna*? Therefore, we may correctly say, that so long as the disembodied man is throwing off a single particle of these *skandhas*, a portion of him is being reincarnated in the bodies of plants and animals. And if he, the disembodied astral man, be so material that “Demeter” cannot find even one spark of the *pneuma* to carry up to the “divine power,” then the individual, so to speak, is dissolved, piece by piece, into the crucible of evolution, or, as the Hindus allegorically illustrate it, he passes thousands of years in the bodies of impure animals. Here we see how completely the ancient Greek and Hindu philosophers, the modern Oriental schools, and the Theosophists, are ranged on one side, in perfect accord; and the bright array of “inspirational mediums” and “spirit guides” stand in perfect discord on the other. Though no two of the latter, unfortunately, agree as to what is and what is not truth, yet they do agree with unanimity to antagonize whatever of the teachings of the philosophers we may repeat!<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (MADAME BLAVATSKY ON THE VIEWS OF THE THEOSOPHISTS) I pp. 294-95; [bullets inserted by ED. PHIL.]

# Transmigration, metempsychosis, metaggismos

*The passing of an unspecified entity into another body.*

## Transmigration of life-atoms or skandhas

*The passing of lower entities<sup>8</sup> to the crucible of evolution.*

**Every single atom in the universe, being endowed with memory, will, and sensation, is a “life-atom,” an integral part of the One Life.**

When consciousness is active, Occultists speak of “life-atoms”; “organic” in science. When passive (latent), of “sleeping-atoms,” “inorganic.”<sup>9</sup>

We know and speak of “life-atoms” — and of “sleeping-atoms” — because we regard these two forms of energy — the kinetic and the potential — as produced by one and the same force or the ONE LIFE, and regard the latter as the source and mover of all. But what *is it* that furnished with energy, and especially with *memory*, the “plastidular souls”<sup>10</sup> of Haeckel? The “wave motion of living particles” becomes comprehensible on the theory of a Spiritual ONE LIFE, of a universal Vital principle independent of *our* matter, and manifesting as *atomic energy* only on *our* plane of consciousness. It is that which, individualized in the human cycle, is transmitted from father to son.<sup>11</sup>

Thus what is “meant by the life-atom going through endless transmigrations” is simply this: we regard and call in our occult phraseology those atoms that are moved by Kinetic energy as “life-atoms,” while those that are for the time being passive, containing but *invisible* potential energy, we call “sleeping atoms,” regarding at the same time these two forms of energy as produced by the one and same force, or life.<sup>12</sup>

In Buddhist philosophy life-atoms are known as Skandhas or bundles of attributes.

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<sup>8</sup> Lower, in terms of Consciousness.

<sup>9</sup> Life-atoms defining note:

“[The Occult Doctrine says] . . . the same infinitesimal *invisible lives* compose the atoms of the bodies of the mountain and the daisy, of man and the ant, of the elephant, and of the tree which shelters him from the sun. Each particle — whether you call it organic or inorganic — *is a life*. Every atom and molecule in the Universe is both *life-giving* and *death-giving* to that form, inasmuch as it builds by aggregation universes and the ephemeral vehicles ready to receive the transmigrating soul, and as eternally destroys and changes the *forms* and expels those souls from their temporary abodes. It creates and kills; it is self-generating and self-destroying; it brings into being, and annihilates, that mystery of mysteries — the *living body* of man, animal, or plant, every second in time and space; and it generates equally life and death, beauty and ugliness, good and bad, and even the agreeable and disagreeable, the beneficent and maleficent sensations. It is that mysterious LIFE, represented collectively by countless myriads of lives, that follows in its own sporadic way, the hitherto incomprehensible law of Atavism; that copies family resemblances as well as those it finds impressed in the aura of the generators of every future human being, a mystery . . .”

*Secret Doctrine*, I p. 261; cf. *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (TRANSMIGRATION OF THE LIFE-ATOMS) V p. 113

<sup>10</sup> [I.e., Haeckel’s small particles or organic molecules of protoplasm. See *Die Perigenesis der Plastidule*, 1876, (The Generation of Waves in the Small Vital Particles), where Haeckel credits heredity with a “vital molecular movement.”]

<sup>11</sup> *Secret Doctrine*, II p. 672

<sup>12</sup> *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (TRANSMIGRATION OF THE LIFE-ATOMS) V p. 113

The “old being” is the sole parent — father and mother at once — of the “new being.” It is the former who is the creator and fashioner of the latter, in reality; and far more so in plain truth than any father in flesh. And once that you have well mastered the meaning of *Skandhas* you will see what I mean.<sup>13</sup>

### Transmigration or “recycling” of life-atoms after death

Upon dissolution of the physical body, the life-atoms of the deceased transmigrate to kingdoms of nature, including the human, that are fit for their own stage in evolution.

Gods, men, Gandharvas, Pisāchas, Asuras, Rākshasas, all have been created by nature<sup>14</sup> [Prakriti, or plastic nature], not by actions, nor by a cause [not by any physical cause].<sup>15</sup>

Occultism explains this perpetual “recycling” of elemental life as follows:

(a) the life-atoms of our life-principle (*Prāna*) are never entirely lost when a man dies. That the atoms best impregnated with the life-principle (an independent, eternal, conscious factor) are partially transmitted from father to son by heredity, and partially are drawn once more together and become the animating principle of the new body in every new incarnation of the Monads. Because,

(b) as the *individual* Soul is ever the same, so are the atoms of the lower principles (body, its astral, or *life double*, etc.), drawn as they are by affinity and Karmic law always to the same individuality in a series of various bodies, etc., etc.<sup>16</sup>

But the karmic affinities of life-atoms with their old soul are set aside while their master rests in Devachan. Upon reincarnation, they are attracted to the new-born like iron filings to a magnet and shape its personality by imparting their karmic content, the fulfilment of which has been interrupted by death.

### Transmigration of life-atoms during life by intense feeling

Life-atoms are also disseminated during life by hot temperaments. Beware!

Heat is produced whenever visible energy is transformed into molecular energy we are told, and it may be thrown out by any material composed of sleeping atoms or inorganic matter as it is called: whereas the magnetic fluid projected by a living human body *is life itself*. “Indeed it is life atoms” that a man in a blind passion throws off, unconsciously, and though he does it quite as effectively as a mesmeriser who transfers them from himself to any object consciously and under the guidance of his will. Let any man give way to any intense feeling,

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<sup>13</sup> *Mahātma Letter* 68 (16) p. 108; 3<sup>rd</sup> Combined ed. [See also p. 5, last bulleted point. — ED. PHIL.]

<sup>14</sup> [The original word in the *Anugītā* is *svabhāva*, which is the technical term for the propensities and predilections of the life-atoms.]

<sup>15</sup> *Secret Doctrine*, I p. 571; [quoting *Anugītā* 36, tr. Telang.]

<sup>16</sup> See “Transmigration of the Life Atoms,” in *Five years of Theosophy*, pp. 531-39 [*Collected Writings*, Vol. V, pp. 109-17]. The collective aggregation of these atoms forms thus the *Anima Mundi* of our Solar system, the *soul* of our little universe, each atom of which is of course a *soul*, a monad, a little universe endowed with consciousness, hence with *memory*. (See Vol. I, Part III, “Gods, Monads and Atoms.”) *Secret Doctrine*, II pp. 671-72 & *fn.*

such as anger, grief, etc., under or near a tree, or in direct contact with a stone; and many thousands of years after that any tolerable Psychometer will see the man and sense his feelings from one single fragment of that tree or stone that he had touched. Hold any object in your hand, and it will become impregnated with your life atoms, indrawn and outdrawn, changed and transferred in us at every instant of our lives. Animal heat is but so many life atoms in molecular motion. It requires no adept knowledge, but simply the natural gift of a good clairvoyant subject to see them passing to and fro, from man to objects and *vice versa* like a bluish lambent flame.<sup>17</sup>

#### What happens to the life-atoms of Kama-Manas, the “middle principle”?

They, too, undergo various transmigrations in Kama-Rupa. Those that were associated with noble aspirations and high ethics in life withdraw for a period of spiritual recuperation in Devachan before re-assembling as part of a fresh Kama-Manas in the next incarnation.<sup>18</sup>

## Transmigration of the human soul or metempsychosis

**Μεταγγίζω** (Gr.) Metaggizō, *i.e.*, pour from one vessel into another. Cf. “μεταγγισθείσα η ψυχή.”<sup>19</sup> Pythagorean metempsychosis proper. NB. Vessel is synonymous with soul in this respect.

**Μεταγγισμός** (Gr.) Metaggismos, *i.e.*, transmigration [of the soul]. Cf. “Ο εξ αλόγων ζώων μεταγγισμός.”<sup>20</sup> “*Metangismos* was the technical term for metempsychosis or reincarnation among the Pythagoreans.”<sup>21</sup>

**Μετεμψυχόμαι** (Gr.) Metempsychomai (passive), *i.e.*, [of the soul] passing from one “body” or “sphere” into another.<sup>22</sup>

**Μετεμψύχωσις** (Gr.) Metempsychōsis, *i.e.*, transmigration of the soul.<sup>23</sup>

Cf. “*Μετεμψύχωσιν* primus invenit Pythagoras.”<sup>24</sup>

**Keynotes by HP Blavatsky:** [Metempsychosis is] the progress of the soul from one stage of existence to another. Symbolized and vulgarly believed to be rebirths in animal bodies. A term generally misunderstood by every class of European and American society, including many scientists. The kabalistic axiom, “A stone becomes a plant, a plant an animal, an animal a man, a man a spirit, and a spirit a god,” receives an explanation in Manu’s *Mānava-Dharma-Śāstra*, and other Brāhmanical

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (TRANSMIGRATION OF THE LIFE-ATOMS) V pp. 115-16

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, V p. 117

<sup>19</sup> Eustathius 1090.32

<sup>20</sup> Hierocles, *Proverbs* 172b

<sup>21</sup> *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (COMMENTARY ON THE PISTIS-SOPHIA) XIII, p. 79; [PS 248, Note 1]

<sup>22</sup> Olympiodorus, in *Platonis Phaedonem commentaria* 55n (al.)

<sup>23</sup> Alexander Aphrodisiensis, *de Anima Liber* 27.18; Diodorus Siculus, 10.6; Galenus, 4.763; Hermes Trismegistus, *Apud Strobæum* I.40.69 (tit.); Hieronymus Cardianus, *Epistulae* 124.4; Olympiodorus, in *Platonis Phaedonem commentaria* 54n; Porphyrius Turius, *de Abstinencia* 4.16; Proclus, in *Platonis Rempublicam commentarii* 2.340k; *Theologumena Arithmeticae* [Iamblichus] 40 (pl.); Sallustius 20 (pl.); Scholia Euripides Hippolytus, 736; Scholia Iamblichus Protrepticus, 14

<sup>24</sup> Andrea Alciato: *Emblemata*, Padua: Petro Paulo Tozzi, 1621; 104a

books.”<sup>25</sup> . . . “The stone has now become changed, by metempsychosis, into a plant.”<sup>26</sup> The last human Monad incarnated before the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> Root-Race. The cycle of *metempsychosis* for the human monad is closed, for we are in the Fourth Round and the Fifth Root-Race.<sup>27</sup>

### Metempsychosis, setting A

*A virtuous, but not entirely pure, soul withdraws to high realms of Subjectivity for a period of rest before submitting to a further period of imprisonment in the flesh.*

Some late theosophical authors refer to that period as metempsychosis. But because Atman, the spiritual yet individualised self, is maintained throughout there is no change in the status of the soul implicit in the Pythagorean sense of the term.

Deserving personalities are rewarded in Devachan by the Higher Ego or Self, who is “the sole Bearer of all its *alter Egos* on earth and their sole representative in the mental state called Devachan.”<sup>28</sup>

Briefly, following death of the physical body, the higher aspects of the human or worldly soul (Kama-Manas) are assimilated within the Spiritual Soul (Atma-Buddhi-Manas) thus marking a rebirth in the rūpa-loka of Devachan; its ratio to earth life is 21:1, on average.

If the Egyptian dogma of the *metempsychosis* or the transmigration of soul taught that there were *seven* states of purification and progressive perfection, it is also true that the Buddhists took from the Aryans of India, not from Egypt, their idea of *seven* stages of progressive development of the disembodied soul, allegorized by the *seven* stories and umbrellas, gradually diminishing towards the top on their pagodas.<sup>29</sup>

When an old soul assumes a new body, former karmic links are renewed through the agency of life-atoms, energised by the bipolar power or force of Fohat (Kundalinī-Śakti). Thus Spencer’s “continuous adjustment of *internal relations to external relations*” is brought about the “transmigration of souls or *punarjanman* (re-birth) according to the doctrines of the ancient Hindu philosophers.”<sup>30</sup>

It is appropriate to end this section with D’Olivert & Redfield’s interpretation of Hierocles’ commentary on Pythagoras’ last Golden Verse, where he portrays the splendour of a virtuous soul basking in its own light. This is a rehearsal for the infinitely brighter domain of Unconscious Subjectivity in Metempsychosis B which, of course, is beyond words and common experience.

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<sup>25</sup> *Isis Unveiled*, I pp. xxxvii-viii; [Glossary of Terms]

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, I p. 389

<sup>27</sup> *Secret Doctrine*, I pp. 184-85; [see “The last three Root-Races” and Appendices in our Secret Doctrine’s Third Proposition Series.]

<sup>28</sup> *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (E.S. INSTRUCTION NO. III) XII p. 627; [on Exoteric “Blinds” and “The Death of the Soul.”]

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, (THE NUMBER SEVEN) II p. 409; [on the *sapta lokas* of the Brāhmanical religion.]

<sup>30</sup> *Secret Doctrine*, I p. 293; [quoting T.S. Row on Kundalinī-Śakti. Cf. *The Theosophist*, Vol. III, November, 1881, pp. 41-44; *Five Years of Theosophy* (1885), pp. 110-11; See T.S. Row’s “The Twelve Signs of the Zodiac,” complete with footnotes by H.P. Blavatsky, in our Secret Doctrine’s First Proposition Series.]

So that, ascending into radiant Ether,  
Midst the Immortals, thou shalt be thyself a God.

Here, said Hierocles, in terminating his commentaries, is the blissful end of all efforts: here, according to Plato, is the hope which enkindles, which sustains the ardour of him who fights in the career of virtue: here, the inestimable prize which awaits him.<sup>31</sup> It was the great object of the mysteries, and so to speak, the great work of initiation.<sup>32</sup> The initiate, said Sophocles, is not only happy during his life, but even after his death he can promise himself an eternal felicity.<sup>33</sup> His soul purified by virtue, said Pindar, unfolds in those blessed regions where reigns an eternal spring time.<sup>34</sup> It goes on, said Socrates, attracted by the celestial element which has the greatest affinity with its nature, to become united with the immortal Gods and to share their glory and their immortality.<sup>35</sup> This deification was, according to Pythagoras, the work of divine love; it was reserved for him who had acquired truth through his intellectual faculties, virtue through his animistic faculties, and purity through his instinctive faculties. This purity, after the end of his material body, shone forth and made itself known in the form of a luminous body,<sup>36</sup> that the soul had been given during its confinement in its gloomy body; for as I finish these Examinations, I am seizing the only occasion which may still be presented of saying that, this philosopher taught that the soul has a body which is given according to his good or bad nature, by the inner labour of his facilities. He called this body the subtle chariot of the soul, and said that the mortal body is only the gross exterior. He adds,

“The care of the soul and its luminous body is, in practicing virtue, in embracing truth and abstaining from all impure things.”<sup>37</sup>

. . . Furthermore, Pythagoras believed that there existed celestial goodness proportionate to each degree of virtue, and that there is for the souls, different ranks according to the luminous body with which they are clothed. The supreme happiness, according to him, belongs only to the soul which has learned how to recover itself, by its intimate union with the intelligence, whose essence, changing its nature, has become entirely spiritual. It is necessary that this soul be raised to the knowledge of universal truths, and that it should have found, as far as it is possible for it, the Principle and the end of all things. Then having attained to this high degree of perfection, being drawn into this immutable region whose ethereal element is no more subjected to the descending movement of generation, it can be united by its knowledge to the Universal All, and reflect in all its being the ineffable light with which the Being of beings, God Himself, fills unceasingly the Immensity.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Hierocles, *Aur. Carm.*, v. 70

<sup>32</sup> Procl., in *Tim.*, 1.v., p. 330

<sup>33</sup> *Apud*, Plutar., *De Audiend. Poetis*

<sup>34</sup> Pind., *Olymp.*, iii.; *Apud*, Plutar., *Consol. ad Apoll.*

<sup>35</sup> Plat., in *Phædon*

<sup>36</sup> [*I.e.*, Αυγοειδής (Augoeides), Higher Self's luminous radiation when freed from the flesh. It alone can redeem the soul. See "Nous Augoeides of the Neoplatonists" in our Constitution of Man Series. — ED. PHIL.]

<sup>37</sup> Hiérocl., *Aur. Carm.*, v. 68

<sup>38</sup> D'Olivet, A.F. (*Tr. & Com.*). *The Golden Verses of Pythagoras*, etc. (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1813) *Tr.* by N.L. Redfield. GP Putnam's Sons, New York & London, 1817; vs. 37, pp. 276-78

## Metempsychosis, setting B

*A virtuous soul, purified by “self-induced and self-devised efforts,”<sup>39</sup> realises its essential unity with the Self of All, and annihilates its self-conscious Materiality in favour of the true peace and justice that dwells in Unconscious Immateriality.*

This is the exoteric version of the “Marriage made in Heaven” and antipode of Metempsychosis C.<sup>40</sup> The esoteric, which is the grandest of ideals and apotheosis of self-sacrifice, is outlined in the middle part of *The Voice of the Silence*.<sup>41</sup>

Thus *annihilation* means, with the Buddhistical philosophy, only a dispersion of matter, in whatever form or *semblance* of form it may be; for everything that bears a shape was created, and thus must sooner or later perish, *i.e.*, change that shape; therefore, as something temporary, though seeming to be permanent, it is but an illusion, *Māyā*; for, as eternity has neither beginning nor end, the more or less prolonged duration of some particular form passes, as it were, like an instantaneous flash of lightning. Before we have the time to realize that we have seen it, it is gone and passed away for ever; hence, even our astral bodies, pure ether, are but illusions of matter, so long as they retain their terrestrial outline. The latter changes, says the Buddhist, according to the merits or demerits of the person during his lifetime, and this is metempsychosis. When the spiritual *entity* breaks loose for ever from every particle of matter, then only it enters upon the eternal and unchangeable Nirvāna. He exists in Spirit, in *nothing*; as a form, a shape, a semblance, he is completely *annihilated*, and thus will die no more, for Spirit alone is no *Māyā*, but the only REALITY in an illusionary universe of ever-passing forms.<sup>42</sup>

## Metempsychosis, setting C

*An irredeemably vicious soul that has been cut off from its Spiritual Master and Saviour, is downgraded to infernal worlds for punishment and terminal demise.*

“This is the real meaning of the doctrine of Metempsychosis,” says HP Blavatsky.<sup>43</sup>

When one falls into a love of self and love of the world, with its pleasures, losing the divine love of God and of the neighbour, he falls from life to death. The higher principles which constitute the essential elements of his humanity perish, and he lives only on the natural plane of his faculties. Physically he exists, spiritually he is dead.<sup>44</sup>

Expelled forever from the consciousness of the Individuality (the reincarnating Ego), the physical atoms and psychic vibrations of the now separate personality are immediately reincarnated on the same earth, only in a lower and still more

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. *Secret Doctrine*, I p. 17

<sup>40</sup> See paradigms under the same title in our Secret Doctrine’s Third Proposition Series.

<sup>41</sup> See full text and analysis in our Higher Ethics and Devotion Series.

<sup>42</sup> *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (NIRVĀNA-MOKSHA) XIV, p. 420

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, (TRANSMIGRATION OF THE LIFE-ATOMS) V p. 114

<sup>44</sup> *Isis Unveiled*, I p. 318; [see “Woe for the living dead” in our Constitution of Man Series.]

object creature, a human being only in form, doomed to Karmic torments during the whole of its new life.<sup>45</sup>

He who kills or extinguishes in himself the light of Parabrahman, *i.e.*, severs his personal Ego from the Atman and thus kills the future Devachanee, becomes a “Brahman-killer.” Instead of facilitating through a virtuous life and spiritual aspirations the mutual union of the *Buddhi* and the *Manas*, he condemns by his own evil acts every atom of his lower principles to become attracted and drawn in virtue of the magnetic affinity, thus created by his passions, into the forming bodies of lower animals or brutes. This is the real meaning of the doctrine of Metempsychosis.<sup>46</sup>



Landscape with Peace and Justice embracing (1654) Laurent de la Hire, Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio

<sup>45</sup> *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (E.S. INSTRUCTION NO. III) XII p. 635; [Philosophical rationale of the tenet]

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, (TRANSMIGRATION OF THE LIFE-ATOMS) V p. 114

## Human souls do not enter animal bodies, for Nature will not reverse the order of her kingdoms

*Only the life-atoms of a dissolved physical body do so*<sup>47</sup> . . .

. . . so long as there remains one spiritual deed, or potentiality, to link up the human soul with its Spiritual Overseer. But the moment this last spark is extinguished, and the last potentiality exhausted, then comes a permanent severance between the two.

[The Esoteric Buddhists of China] certainly reject most emphatically the popular theory of the transmigration of human entities or Souls *into* animals, but not the evolution of men *from* animals — so far, at least, as their lower principles are concerned.<sup>48</sup>

*Metempsychosis* should apply to animals alone.<sup>49</sup>

### Metempsychosis and reincarnation differ

Says HP Blavatsky about a carper posing as a genuine inquirer:

He talks reincarnation before he has even learned the difference between *metempsychosis*, which is the transmigration of the human Soul into an animal form,<sup>50</sup> and Reincarnation, or the rebirth of the same Ego in successive human bodies. Ignorant of the *true* meaning of the Greek word, he does not even suspect how absurd, in philosophy, is this purely exoteric doctrine of transmigrations into animals. Useless to tell him that Nature, propelled by Karma, never recedes, but strives ever forward in her work on the physical plane; that she may lodge a human soul in the body of a man, morally ten times lower than any animal, but she will not reverse the order of her kingdoms; and while leading the irrational monad of a beast of a higher order into the human form at the first hour of a Manvantara, she will not guide that Ego, once it has become a man, even of the lowest kind, back into the animal species — not during that cycle (or Kalpa) at any rate.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Plus those soul-less individuals who, having severed their lower self from the Higher, are “spiritually dead”: for, their glorious Aegoeides has left them bringing about the so-called “Second Death” or death of the soul. Having been expelled forever from the Spiritual Consciousness, yet human beings only in form, they are doomed to awful Karmic torments while sliding down towards the “Eighth Sphere” (the antipode of Devachan) for their final demise. See Metempsychosis C above, and “Woe for the living dead” in our Constitution of Man Series.

<sup>48</sup> *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE “DOCTRINE OF THE EYE” & THE “DOCTRINE OF THE HEART,” OR THE “HEART’S SEAL”) XIV p. 448 *fn*; [commenting on Joseph Edkin’s views. See full text of Blavatsky’s article in our Higher Ethics and Devotion Series.]

<sup>49</sup> *Theosophical Glossary*: Metempsychosis

<sup>50</sup> [Through the agency of the life-atoms. *Cf.* Metempsychoses A and C above. — ED. PHIL.]

<sup>51</sup> Occult Science teaches that the same order of evolution for man and animals — from the first to the seventh planet of a chain, and from the first to the end of the seventh round — takes place on every *chain* of worlds in our Solar system from the inferior to the superior. Thus the highest as the lowest Ego, from the monads selected to people a new chain in a Manvantara, when passing from an inferior to a superior “chain” has, of course, to pass through every animal (and even vegetable) form. But once started on its cycle of births no human Ego will become that of an animal during any period of the seven rounds. — Vide *The Secret Doctrine*. In: *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THOUGHTS ON KARMA AND REINCARNATION) XI pp. 137-38 & *fn*.

# Reincarnation, paliggenesia, metensomatosis

## Reincarnation or re-infleshment

*One of successive descents of the same spiritual soul into a human body.*

**Μετενσάρκωσις** (Gr.) Metensarkōsis is a modern Greek term and evidence as to how, in the unrelenting march to materialism, even spiritual terms are being carnalised. A rare classic use of ἐνσάρκος (ensarkos), in-fleshed, in ἐνσάρκος βορὰ or flesh meat.<sup>52</sup> When a human soul continues to thirst for self-conscious existence, its Atma-Buddhi-Manas or “Reincarnating Ego” assumes a new physical body for the purpose of acting on the plane of objectivity. This is Reincarnation in its commonly understood sense.

### Examples of striking and instructive passages

The many striking and instructive passages referring to reincarnation from the writings and teachings of the Gnostic Heresiarchs have yet to be collected. As an example, we take one from Clemens Alexandrinus (*Strom.*, lib. iv, chap. xii), who quoted from Basilides in order to refute him as he imagined. Basilides, he says averred that the soul was punished in this life for sins that it had previously committed in another. The *elect soul* was honourably punished through martyrdom, but the *other* was purified by its proper chastisement. The key of Theosophy at once unlocks the mystery by its teachings as to the Higher and Lower Manas, the divine Individuality and the perishable Personality. For the Higher Ego is indeed the Sacrificial Victim, that suffers an honourable “martyrdom”; and “the other” is the Lower Manas that must be punished by its “proper chastisement.”

The late E.D. Walker, in the eighth chapter of his book on *Reincarnation*,<sup>53</sup> has given a brief sketch to show that it was the prevailing creed in the first centuries of Christianity, and those who are interested in the subject should certainly read this chapter, if they have not done so already. An authoritative volume, however, has yet to be written on the subject, supported by the citation of the innumerable passages that are to be found in the writings of the Gnostics, Neo-platonists and early Church Fathers.<sup>54</sup>

The doctrines of the *Pistis-Sophia* are in many essentials identical with Egyptian teachings, especially with regard to the mysteries of life and death and of reincarnation. What the learned of the Egyptians taught on these heads we do not as yet know, for such teaching formed part of the instruction of the Mysteries. And even exoterically we are dependent to a large extent on what Greek and Roman writers have to tell us of the Egyptians rather than on the Egyptians themselves. Moreover, such writers, if they were initiated, had their tongues tied by the oath of secrecy; and if uninitiated, could only re-echo the popular beliefs at best, and in general wove in their own glosses and misconceptions even of this distorted shadow of the truth.

<sup>52</sup> Porphyrius Turius, *de Abstinencia*, 1.1; cf. *ad Gaurum*, 3.2, “πὼς ἐμψυχούνηται τὰ ἐμβρῶα.”

<sup>53</sup> [*Reincarnation; A study of Forgotten Truth*, N.Y., University Books, 1965 reprint.]

<sup>54</sup> [Today’s students may consult Joseph Head and S.L. Cranston’s *Reincarnation, The Phoenix Fire Mystery*, N.Y., Crown, 1977; San Diego Publications, 1991.]

Consequently no subject remains in greater obscurity for our scholars. Wilkinson (*Ancient Egyptians*, Vol. V., p. 440, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) throws no light on the subject, although he is useful for the finding of a few references. Let us turn to the first of them, Herodotus, *Euterpe*, ch. 123.

“The Egyptians are the first who said that the *psyche* of man is immortal, and that when the body (*sōma*) is destroyed, it always enters into some *other* living one (*zōon*), and after having completed the cycle of all earthy, watery, and airy (bodies), it enters again into the body of a man, and this cycle takes it 3,000 years to accomplish.”

Again, in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, translated by Thomas Taylor, p. 325, we read:

“But no soul will return to its pristine condition till the expiration of 10,000 years, since it will not recover the use of its *wings* until that period, except it be the soul of *one who has philosophised sincerely*, or, together with philosophy, has loved beautiful forms. These, indeed, in the *third period* of 1,000 years, if they have *thrice* chosen this mode of life in succession . . . shall in the 3,000<sup>th</sup> year *fly away* to their pristine abode; but other souls being arrived at the end of their first life shall be judged. And of those who are judged, some, proceeding to a subterraneous place of judgment [*Kamaloka*], shall there sustain the punishments they have deserved; but others, in consequence of a favourable judgment, being elevated into a certain celestial place [*Devachan*], shall pass their time in a manner becoming the life they have lived in a human shape.<sup>55</sup> And in the 1,000<sup>th</sup> year, both the kinds of those who have been judged, returning to the lot and election of a second life, shall each of them receive a life agreeable to his desire. Here also the human soul shall pass into the life of a beast; and from that of a beast again into that of a man. For the soul that has never perceived the truth cannot pass into the human form.”

These two passages throw considerable light on one another, and, with the help of Theosophical teachings, become understandable, in spite of the innumerable blinds which they contain. The figures refer to certain cycles, based on the root numbers, 3, 7, 10, and have to do with Rounds, Races, individual births, monadic evolution, etc., etc.

But the soul is of two kinds, the Manasic and Kāmic, and herein is the greatest blind. The former goes to “a certain celestial place,” and the latter to “a subterranean place.” It is the *latter only* that goes through the “cycle” which Herodotus speaks of. Wilkinson, therefore, is only useful for the two references, the first of which has been retranslated and the second retained verbatim, as it is Taylor’s translation. He, however, adds one further item of interest, viz:

“The doctrine of transmigration was also admitted by the Pharisees; their belief according to Josephus,<sup>56</sup> being ‘that all souls were incorruptible; but that those of good men were only removed into other bodies, and that those of the bad were subject to eternal punishment.’”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> [For estimates of the length of time, see “Death and post-mortem states” in our Constitution of Man Series.]

<sup>56</sup> Joseph. *Bell. Jud.* ii, 8, 14

<sup>57</sup> *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (COMMENTARY ON THE PISTIS SOPHIA) XIII pp. 79-81; [on PS 248.]

## Paliggenesia or re-generation

**Παλιγγενεσία** (Gr.) Paliggenesia or Palingenesia, *i.e.*, rebirth [of persons]; beginning a new life, *e.g.*, “εις παλιγγενεσίαν ορμάν”;<sup>58</sup> rebirth or regeneration [of the world];<sup>59</sup> renewal of a race;<sup>60</sup> transformation or new birth;<sup>61</sup> transmigration or reincarnation of souls;<sup>62</sup> and so much later, “η περιοδική παλιγγενεσία των όλων.”<sup>63</sup>

“The whole of nature subsists and is conserved only by the circulation, the transmigration, the exchange, and the perpetual displacing of insensible particles and atoms, or of the sensible combinations of matter. It is by this palingenesia, or regeneration, that the great whole subsists, who, like the Saturn of the ancients, is perpetually occupied with devouring his own children.”<sup>64</sup>

NB. Paliggenesia persisted up to the middle Platonic era (1<sup>st</sup> C BCE to 2<sup>nd</sup> C AD). Subsequently, it is often but incorrectly designated by the late and inaccurate term metempsychosis.<sup>65</sup> Cf. “Pythagoras vero non μετεμψύχωσι, sed παλιγγενεσίαν esse dicit, hoc est redire, sed post tempus.”<sup>66</sup>

## Metensomatosis or re-embodiment

*Descent of a soul in an unspecified physical body.*

**Μετεσώματόωμα** (Gr.) Metensōmatoomai (passive), *i.e.*, [of the soul] to be put in another body; to be transmigrated.<sup>67</sup>

**Μετεσώμάτωσις** (Gr.) Metensōmatosis, *i.e.*, transmigration of the soul.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Philo Judaeus, I.159

<sup>59</sup> Boethus Sidonius, *Stoic*, 3.265; Chrysippus, *Stoic*, 2.191: *pl. ib.* 187

<sup>60</sup> *Corpus Hermeticum*, 3.3

<sup>61</sup> *Theosophical Glossary*: Palingenesia

<sup>62</sup> Plutarchus, 2.998c; cf. μετεμψύχωσις (*fin.*)

<sup>63</sup> Marcus Antoninus, II.1; cf. Proclus, in *Platonis Timaeum commentarii*, 3.241d

<sup>64</sup> Baron d'Holbach Paul-Henri Thiry. *The System of Nature: or, Laws of the Moral and Physical World*. With Notes by Diderot. (2 vols.) First translation from the French by H.D. Robinson. New York: G.W. & A.J. Matsell, 1835; (Vol. II, ch. iv “Of Pantheism, or of the Natural Ideas of the Divinity,” p. 240)

<sup>65</sup> Cf. “. . . the main purpose of the religious observances practised by the Orphics and Pythagoreans alike was to secure by means of ‘purifications’ (καθαρμοί) the ransom (λύσις) of the soul, which was regarded as a fallen god, from the punishment of imprisonment in successive bodies. There is no reason to suppose that Pythagoras displayed any particular originality in this part of his teaching. It all depends on the doctrine of transmigration or rebirth (παλιγγενεσία), which is often incorrectly designated by the late and inaccurate term ‘metempsychosis.’ There is no doubt that Pythagoras taught this, and also the rule of abstinence from animal flesh which is its natural corollary, but such ideas had been well known in many parts of Greece before his time.” — See J. Burnet’s “Essay on Philosophy” in: Livingstone, R.W. (Ed.). *The Legacy of Greece*. Essays by G. Murray, *et al.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921. See “The Value of Greece to the Future of the World” in our Hellenic and Hellenistic Papers.]

<sup>66</sup> Servius, in *Vergilii carmina commentarii*, A.3.68, 14-15

<sup>67</sup> Hierocles Platonius, *de Providentia*, 461b; Plotinus, 1.1.12, 4.4.9

<sup>68</sup> Olympiodorus, in *Platonis Phaedonem commentaria*, 54n; [of the soul] Hermes Trismegistus, in *Platonis Phaedonem commentaria*, 61a; Hierocles Platonius, *de Providentia*, 172b; Hippolytus, *Reputatio Omnium Haeresium*, 1.3.2; Plotinus, 2.9.6. (*pl.*) 4.3.9

## Gilgulim, permutation, revolution

*They differ from transmigration and metempsychosis.*

**Gilgūlim** (*Heb.*) represents the process of perpetual deaths and births as revolutions or whirlings of the soul.

Until the present day uninitiated Kabalists and Masons believe permutation<sup>69</sup> to be synonymous with transmigration and metempsychosis. But they are as much mistaken in regard to the doctrine of the true Kabalists as to that of the Buddhists.<sup>70</sup>

For, they have taken the allegory literally, *i.e.*, that “the bodies of Jews deposited in foreign tombs contain within them a principle of soul which cannot rest, until by a process, called by them the ‘Whirling of the Soul’ the immortal particle reaches once more the sacred soil of the Promised Land.”<sup>71</sup> In Occultism, Palestine is neither land nor locus. It is Nirvāna of the Buddhist.

The Allegory relates *to the atoms of the body*, which have each to pass through every form before all reach the *final state*,<sup>72</sup> which is the first starting point of the departure of every atom — its primitive *laya* state. But the primitive meaning of *Gilgūlim* or “Revolution of Souls,” was the idea of the re-incarnating Souls or *Egos*. “All the Souls go into the *gilgūlah*” into a cyclic or revolving process; *i.e.*, they all proceed on the cyclic path of rebirths. Some Kabalists interpret this doctrine to mean only a kind of purgatory for the souls of the wicked. But this is not so.<sup>73</sup>

But this doctrine of permutation, or *revolutio*, must not be understood as a belief in reincarnation. That Moses was considered the transmigration of Abel and Seth, does not imply that the kabalists — those who were *initiated* at least — believed that the identical spirit of either of Adam’s sons reappeared under the corporeal form of Moses. It only shows what was the mode of expression they used when hinting at one of the profoundest mysteries of the Oriental Gnosis, one of the most majestic articles of faith of the Secret Wisdom.<sup>74</sup>

The selections above suggest that life-atoms or skandhas are inexorably linked with the doctrine of Planetary Rounds.<sup>75</sup>

“The *Breath* becomes a stone; the stone, a plant; the plant, an animal; the animal, a man; the man, a spirit; and the spirit, a god.”

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<sup>69</sup> Cf. “But the author of this *restitutio* was Mosah, our master, upon whom be peace! Who was the *revolutio* [transmigration] of Seth and Hebel, that he might cover the nudity of his Father Adam, to wit, *Primus*,” says the *Kabala*. [*Kabbala denudata*, II, p. 155; also *Vallis Regia*, Paris edition.] Thus, Jesus hinting that John was the *revolutio*, or transmigration of Elias, seems to prove beyond any doubt the school to which he belonged.” *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Isis Unveiled*, II p. 152

<sup>71</sup> *Secret Doctrine*, I p. 568 *fn.* [quoting MacKenzie’s *Royal Masonic Cyclopaedia*.]

<sup>72</sup> [*I.e.*, Parinirvāna. See *Secret Doctrine*, I p. 135 — ED. PHIL.]

<sup>73</sup> *Secret Doctrine*, I p. 568 *fn.*

<sup>74</sup> *Isis Unveiled*, II pp. 152-53

<sup>75</sup> See drawings and study notes in our Planetary Rounds and Globes Series.

**Uncommon Greek terms**

**Ενδεσμέω** (*Gr.*) Endesmeō, *i.e.*, to bind to, or in. “Ενδεσμέεται η ψυχή”; *i.e.*, the soul is bound [in a body], the Orphic idea of the soul’s imprisonment in lower worlds.<sup>76</sup>

**Μεταμείβω** (*Gr.*) Metameivō, *i.e.*, change to another form. “Εκ βοός . . . μετὰμειβε γυναίκα”; *i.e.*, From bull . . . transformed woman. *Cf.* “A bull unlike the rest, as if a human heart were in his breast.”<sup>77</sup>



The Rape of Europa (c 1640) Simon Vouet, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

<sup>76</sup> Proclus, in *Platonis Alcibiadem* 108c

<sup>77</sup> Moschus 2.52; *cf.* “Moschus’ hymn to Europa - *tr.* Chapman” in our Mystic Verse and Insights Series.