

**Various spiritual traditions suggest that this is not the first life we have lived on this earth, and that our individual lives form part of a greater cycle. We can relate to this idea because, on a minor scale, every day we have periods of activity followed by periods of rest and each new day can be seen as a fresh start.**

## Theories of Human Life

There are three main theories commonly suggested or believed in:

1. A new soul is created by God for each person at birth or at conception.
2. We are merely the highest level of the animal kingdom and are the result of combined electro-chemical components with no existence beyond the material world.
3. We are spiritual beings who have a long series of lives in a number of evolving forms.

In the first explanation we have no individual past but we seem to have an endless future. Our characters are specially created by God and imposed upon us without any choice on our part.

In the second heredity/environment and evolution becomes significant. However, there is difficulty in accounting for qualities such as saintliness or genius and the conditions experienced are determined by chance.

In the third explanation, reincarnation and evolution are essential aspects, but with added features not generally recognised by science. Reincarnation allows for intellectual and spiritual evolution, as well as our physical evolution which is greatly influenced by hereditary and environmental factors.

Reincarnation, along with Karma, the spiritual law of cause and effect, provides for choice and restores balance. Consider the idea that each of us is a spiritual soul that begins a pilgrimage by entering a cycle of incarnations. We learn from our experiences, pleasant and painful, and the results of these experiences help to develop our mental and moral faculties.

Thus the heredity and environment we encounter in each life are not accidental, but are the consequences of our thoughts, emotions

and actions in previous lives. Our total nature is therefore the outcome of the choices we have made during our many incarnations and those choices become more thoughtful and deliberate as we evolve.

## Memory Of Previous Lives

A question often asked is: "If I have been here before, why do I not remember my past lives?" Surely we would agree that we forget more of our present life than we remember. Many people cannot remember learning to speak, yet the fact that they can speak proves that they did. Incidents of childhood and youth may fade from memory, yet they leave traces on our character. This may include memories of past lives which some children do in fact have (see the work of Ian Stevenson and others).

Events in our present lives can be traumatic and an accumulation of such events could be excessive, however it is suggested that, although not remembered now, they leave a permanent trace which will eventually be remembered when we are developed sufficiently to deal with them.

When we feel we know a stranger on first meeting, we may be recognising a friend from the past. When we react negatively to a stranger, it could be recognition of an old enemy. These affinities, or warnings, come from deep within. We remember but, as the body and brain are new, it is the soul that truly remembers.

## What Reincarnates?

The theosophical view is that we have a number of aspects or "bodies". That we consist of temporary aspects - the physical body, emotions and the factual mind - which make up our personality; but also there is a deeper spiritual self, a more permanent part of ourselves which contains the accumulated result of experiences gained over many lives. These various aspects of

our makeup are not separate, but interpenetrate each other.

Our more permanent self, remaining with us throughout the whole cycle of reincarnations, is often called the higher self or soul. At death, the temporary aspects fall away and return to their elements. New mental, emotional and physical matter is moulded for the next incarnation or birth. An accountant closing a year's accounts and opening new ones does not enter in the new all the items of the old, but only its balances. Similarly, the soul hands on to the new bodies the qualities, tendencies and capacities which are the result of past life experiences. Our conscience and our "instinctive" responses to emotional and intellectual situations are the result of past experiences.

## Growth Of Capacity

Evolutionary development is a key aspect of reincarnation. The emphasis is on continual growth toward human perfection and is only achieved by personal effort. According to theosophical teachings we do not regress, i.e. reincarnate as an animal or plant. On the contrary, we take a human form again in order to gradually develop our full human potential in all areas. This process takes many lives, but may be hastened if we apply ourselves unselfishly. When a philosophy or a science is quickly grasped and applied, when an art is mastered easily, these could be the result of accomplishments gained in past lives, although the facts of the experience may have been forgotten.

## Spiritual Growth

Memory of past lives can be recovered, but this faculty is related to spiritual growth. Only when we are capable of hearing the quiet voice of the soul may the full story of the past be unrolled and the lessons it contains be fully learned.

Pain follows mistakes, but this can be constructive once we learn not to make the same mistakes again. Strength is developed by effort. We learn from every experience the inevitable consequences: happiness grows out of doing what is right, sorrow out of error.

In every case, the past explains the present and the present influences the future. If we accept the notion of spiritual growth through many lives, we can become more responsible for building our own future. Our lives will then become increasingly fulfilled, until we reach the goal of the human journey. Along the way we are able to make an increasingly effective contribution toward humanity's progress.

### *Books Suggested for Further Reading*

**The Key To Theosophy** by H.P. Blavatsky  
(Abridged Ed. J. Mills)

**Reincarnation Explored** by Dr. John Algeo  
**Reincarnation: Fact Or Fallacy?** by Geoffrey Hodson

**Experiencing Reincarnation** by James S. Perkins

**Reincarnation In Christianity** by Geddes MacGregor

**Reincarnation: The Phoenix Fire Mystery** by Joseph Head and S.L. Cranston

**Twenty Cases Suggestive Of Reincarnation**  
by Dr. Ian Stevenson

**Karma And Rebirth** by Christmas Humphreys

**Exploring Reincarnation** by Hans TenDam

## Vision and Mission of the Theosophical Society

### Vision

To inspire and serve the spiritual evolution of humanity.

### Mission

To encourage enquiry with open hearts and minds into world religions, philosophy, science, and the arts; and to support the individual's endeavour to understand and apply the ageless wisdom, respect and honour all life, and achieve spiritual self-transformation.



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# Reincarnation

Have we lived  
before?

THEOSOLOGY in NEW ZEALAND

