

## **-REINCARNATION-**

# **THE ART OF TRANSMIGRATION**

HOW MANY OF YOU CAN BELIEVE IT .

**Really I don't know But there is some thing in it..Let see the facts supporting and objecting Reincarnation .**



According to Hinduism, every living being is an eternally existing spirit (the soul or the self). Upon physical death, this soul passes from one body to another in accordance with the laws of Karma and reincarnation.

**Reincarnation**, literally "to be made flesh again", as a doctrine or mystical belief, holds the notion that some essential part of a living being (or in some variations, only human beings) can survive death in some form, with its integrity partly or wholly retained, to be reborn in a new body. This part is often referred to as the Spirit or Soul, the 'Higher or True Self', 'Divine Spark', 'I' or the 'Ego' (not to be confused with the ego as defined by psychology).

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In such beliefs, a new personality is developed during each life in the physical world, based upon past integrated experience and new acquired experiences, but some part of the being remains constantly present throughout these successive lives as well. It is usually believed that there is interaction between predeterminism of certain experiences, or lessons intended to happen during the physical life, and the free-will action of the individual as they live that life. This doctrine is a central tenet within the majority of Hindu traditions such as Yoga, Vaishnavism, Jainism and Sikhism. Although the concept of Rebirth is also a major part of Buddhist philosophy, this often differs somewhat from the *Vedic* based viewpoints of the Hindu traditions in defining what it is that is actually born again. Most modern *Pagans* also believe in reincarnation as do some *new Age* movements, along with followers of Spiritism and certain *African* traditions

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## Overview

Belief in reincarnation is an ancient phenomenon; in various guises humans have believed in a [future life](#) since the [Ancient Egyptians](#), perhaps earlier, and ancient [graves](#) containing both people and possessions may testify to beliefs that a person would have need for their treasured possessions once again despite physical death.

In brief, there are several common concepts of a future life. In each of them either the person, or some essential component that defines that person (variously called the [soul](#) or [spirit](#)) persists in continuing existence:

- People live on this earth, and then live in some kind of afterlife for the rest of eternity - variously called [heaven](#) ([paradise](#)) or [hell](#), or the [Kingdom of the Dead](#), or some [higher plane](#), or similar. They do not return to earth as such.
- People die, but will return to the earth or are revived in some final [Judgement](#), or at some final battle (eg the [Norse Ragnarok](#)). They may go to heaven or hell at that time, or live again and repopulate the earth. This is often called an [apocalyptic](#) vision of the future.
- People die, and are returned to this or another existence continually, their form upon return being of a 'higher' or 'lower' kind depending upon the [virtue](#) ([moral](#) quality) of their present life. This is often called [Transmigration](#).
- People die, go through [inner planes](#) and return, rebirth, (usually or often) as new human beings. Strictly, it is this which is known as **reincarnation** (also called "rebirth"). In many versions, eventually there is the potential to escape the cycle, e.g. by joining [God](#), [enlightenment](#), some kind of [self-realization](#), a [spiritual rebirth](#), entering a spiritual realm, etc. (There is some confusion, in general society, between reincarnation and transmigration; see below for comparison)

Beliefs in reincarnation or transmigration are widespread amongst religions and beliefs, some seeing it as part of the religion, others seeing in it an answer to many common moral and existential dilemmas, such as "[why are we here](#)" and "why do bad things sometimes appear to happen to good people". Reincarnation is therefore a claim that a person has been or will be on this earth again in a different [body](#). It suggests that there is a connection between apparently disparate human lifetimes, and (in most cases) that there may even be covert evidence of continuity between different people's lifetimes, if looked for. Proponents claim this is indeed the case, whilst critics tend to reject the notion due to its [metaphysical](#) implications or non-acceptance by [science](#) due to other possible explanations of the phenomenon not yet eliminated from consideration. Such evidence tends to be of three kinds:

- Tradition commonly holds that certain people (such as the [Dalai](#) or [Panchen Lamas](#) in [Buddhism](#)) can be identified by looking for a child born at the time of their death, and by certain signs and knowledge that such a child has of their predecessor life beyond the norm. In the case of Buddhism there are well defined tests of such a child.
- In Western culture, [regression](#) or [near death experience](#) has at times provided what are claimed to be past life memories, some of which can in theory be verified, and some of which might be tested for fraudulent claims. Some aspects of these tend to be quite consistent in some ways

(beings of light, messages of love and peace, etc), a factor which to some people lends credence to the idea, and to others supports that "something" is going on but without certainty what that might be.

- Last, for many people, the evidence is internal and [empirical](#), personal belief or experience. This may not be proof as such, but to them, qualifies as sufficient evidence to believe it.

As the introduction suggests, there are large differences in philosophical beliefs regarding the nature of the [soul](#) (also known as the [jiva](#) or [atma](#)) amongst the [Dharmic Religions](#) such as Hinduism and Buddhism. Some schools deny the existence of a 'self', while others claim the existence of an eternal, personal self, and still others say there is neither self or no-self, as both are false. Each of these beliefs has a direct bearing on the possible nature of reincarnation, including such concepts of [samsara](#), [moksha](#), [nirvana](#), and [bhakti](#).

It may be asked how reincarnation fits into this picture. In a word, for Buddhism it doesn't fit at all, for if there is no personal self there can be no soul but since the Buddha himself referred to his past-lives it must be inferred that these existed only in the world of the mind and that this is furthermore exactly the same state as is perceived by the one experiencing (or immersed in) the cyclic manifestation of Samsara. For Hinduism this state both exists and does not exist so that it may be likened to a dream-state, unreal in every sense. Thus from both perspectives, reincarnation cannot be likened to the re-appearance of the spirit or person within a physical body which inhabits an objective physical world rather, the perception of the world alone exists as a manifestation, around the conscious being, and this is maintained as an act of mind only. To be trapped in Samsara then is to be held by ignorance of the true nature of being, in a self-created world of error. As such, this is really nothing other than a dream. The major point referenced by both Buddhism and Hinduism concerns the necessity of awakening from this repetitive dream-state by obtaining "Nirvana" for the former and by achieving "Enlightenment" for the latter. Both are words specifying the exact same state and all lives, past & present, are then to be seen as products of mind only.

Many paths are offered toward this state of liberation or "heaven" and most are generally initiated by proposing this life to be "real". This of course means that past-lives are also to be seen as real. However, significant progression on any such path soon causes this initial, every-day concept of "reality" to wither away. As unity with the god-head is approached, the essence of being is recalled with the result that the previously perceived "reality" vanishes as unity is achieved.

Whilst science is perhaps not as scathing of reincarnatory belief as it is of many other metaphysical concepts, and many claims have been documented in a scientific manner, it is important to be aware that formally, mainstream science does not accept yet that reincarnation is a proven phenomenon, or that it happens. Many apparently proven phenomena turn out to be illusional over time, and others are often deemed by many to simply be unknowable, and hence by definition outside its province.

## **Reincarnation in various religions, traditions and philosophies**

### **Eastern religions and traditions**

#### **Hinduism**

In [India](#) this doctrine was thoroughly established from ancient times. While [metempsychosis](#) was not established in the older sections of the [Vedas](#), it was explicated first in the [Upanishads](#) (c. 1000 BC - AD 4), which are philosophico-mystic texts held to be the essence of the [Vedas](#) and is spoken of in detail by [Krishna](#) in the [Bhagavad Gita](#).

The idea that the soul (of any living being - including animals, humans and plants) reincarnates is intricately linked to [karma](#), whose first explication was also seen in the Hindu books of the Upanishads. The idea is that individual souls, [jiva-atmas](#) pass from one plane of existence and carry with them [samskaras](#) (impressions) from former states of being. These karmic agglomerations on the soul are taken to the next life and result in a causally-determined state of being. In some schools of [Hinduism](#) liberation from [samsara](#), the cycle of death and rebirth, is considered the ultimate goal of earthly existence. This is known as [Moksha](#), mahasamadhi (or [nirvana](#), as also found in Buddhism) in Hinduism. Other [Bhakti](#) traditions assert that liberation from [samsara](#) is merely the beginning of real [spiritual](#) life and beyond [nirvana](#) activities still continue, but that they are no longer of a worldly nature. Both sides agree on the phenomenon of reincarnation itself.

The notion of [nirvana](#) was further promoted (see [Advaita Vedanta](#)) following the advent of the great Hindu sage [Adi Shankaracharya](#). In some schools of Hinduism, the idea that stilling one's *karmas* (actions) and becoming at one, harmonious, with all would free one, ultimately, from reincarnation, became a central tenet.

#### **Buddhism**

Since according to Buddhism there is no permanent and unchanging [soul](#) there is no metempsychosis in the strict sense. However, Buddhism never rejected [samsara](#), the process of rebirth or reincarnation; there is debate, however, over what is transmitted between lives.

*See also: [Rebirth \(Buddhist\)](#)*

In spite of the doctrinal beliefs against the idea of a soul, Tibetan Buddhists do believe that a new-born child may be the reincarnation of someone departed. In Tibetan Buddhism the soul of an important [lama](#) (like the [Dalai Lama](#)) is supposed to pass into an infant born nine months after his decease.

The Buddha has this to say on reincarnation. Kutadanta continued: "Thou believest, O Master, that beings are reborn; that they migrate in the evolution of life; and that subject to the law of karma we must reap what we sow. Yet thou teachest the non-existence of the soul! Thy disciples praise utter self-extinction as the highest bliss of Nirvana. If I am merely a combination of the sankharas, my existence will cease when I die. If I am merely a compound of sensations and ideas and desires, whither can I go at the dissolution of the body?" [7] Said the Blessed One: "O Brahman, thou art religious and earnest. Thou art seriously concerned about thy soul. Yet is thy work in vain because thou art lacking in the one thing that is needful. [8] "There is rebirth of character, but no

transmigration of a self. Thy thought-forms reappear, but there is no egoentity transferred. The stanza uttered by a teacher is reborn in the scholar who repeats the word. [9]

## **Jainism**

In [Jainism](#), particular reference is given to how [devas](#) (gods) also reincarnate after they die. A Jainist, who accumulates enough good karma, may become a deva; but, this is generally seen as undesirable since devas eventually die and one might then come back as a lesser being. This belief is also commonplace in a number of other schools of Hinduism.

[\[edit\]](#)

**Western religions and traditions**

[\[edit\]](#)

## **Classical Greek philosophy**

Some [ancient Greek](#) philosophers believed in reincarnation; see for example [Plato's](#) *Phaedo* and *The Republic*. [Pythagoras](#) was probably the first Greek philosopher to advance the idea.

We do not know exactly how the doctrine of metempsychosis arose in Greece; most scholars do not believe it was borrowed from [Egypt](#) or that it somehow was transmitted from ancient [Hindu](#) thinkers of India. It is easiest to assume that earlier ideas which had never been extinguished were utilized for religious and philosophic purposes. The Orphic religion, which held it, first appeared in Thrace upon the semi-barbarous north-eastern frontier. [Orpheus](#), its legendary founder, is said to have taught that soul and body are united by a compact unequally binding on either; the soul is divine, immortal and aspires to freedom, while the body holds it in fetters as a prisoner. Death dissolves this compact, but only to re-imprison the liberated soul after a short time: for the wheel of birth revolves inexorably. Thus the soul continues its journey, alternating between a separate unrestrained existence and fresh reincarnation, round the wide circle of necessity, as the companion of many bodies of men and animals." To these unfortunate prisoners Orpheus proclaims the message of liberation, that they stand in need of the grace of redeeming gods and of [Dionysus](#) in particular, and calls them to turn to God by ascetic piety of life and self-purification: the purer their lives the higher will be their next reincarnation, until the soul has completed the spiral ascent of destiny to live for ever as God from whom it comes. Such was the teaching of Orphism which appeared in Greece about the [6th century BC](#), organized itself into private and public mysteries at [Eleusis](#) and elsewhere, and produced a copious literature.

The earliest Greek thinker with whom metempsychosis is connected is [Pherecydes](#); but [Pythagoras](#), who is said to have been his pupil, is its first famous philosophic exponent. Pythagoras probably neither invented the doctrine nor imported it from Egypt, but made his reputation by bringing Orphic doctrine from North-Eastern Hellas to Magna Graecia and by instituting societies for its diffusion.

The real weight and importance of metempsychosis in Western tradition is due to its adoption by Plato. Had he not embodied it in some of his greatest works it would be merely a matter of curious investigation for the Western anthropologist and student of folk-lore. In the eschatological myth which closes the Republic he tells the story how Er, the son of Armenius, miraculously returned to life on the twelfth day after death and recounted the secrets of the other world. After death, he said, he went with

others to the place of Judgment and saw the souls returning from heaven and from purgatory, and proceeded with them to a place where they chose new lives, human and animal. He saw the soul of Orpheus changing into a swan, Thamyras becoming a nightingale, musical birds choosing to be men, the soul of Atalanta choosing the honours of an athlete. Men were seen passing into animals and wild and tame animals changing into each other. After their choice the souls drank of [Lethe](#) and then shot away like stars to their birth. There are myths and theories to the same effect in other dialogues, the *Phaedrus*, *Meno*, *Phaedo*, *Timaeus* and *Laws*. In Plato's view the number of souls was fixed; birth therefore is never the creation of a soul, but only a transmigration from one body to another. Plato's acceptance of the doctrine is characteristic of his sympathy with popular beliefs and desire to incorporate them in a purified form into his system. [Aristotle](#), a far less emotional and sympathetic mind, has a doctrine of immortality totally inconsistent with it.

In later Greek literature the doctrine appears from time to time; it is mentioned in a fragment of [Menander](#) (the Inspired Woman) and satirized by [Lucian](#) (*Gallus* 18 seq.). In *Roman* literature it is found as early as [Ennius](#), who in his Calabrian home must have been familiar with the Greek teachings which had descended to his times from the cities of Magna Graecia. In a lost passage of his *Annals*, a Roman history in verse, Ennius told how he had seen [Homer](#) in a dream, who had assured him that the same soul which had animated both the poets had once belonged to a peacock. [Persius](#) in one of his satires (vi. 9) laughs at Ennius for this: it is referred to also by [Lucretius](#) (i. 124) and by [Horace](#) (*Epist.* II. i. 52). [Virgil](#) works the idea into his account of the Underworld in the sixth book of the *Aeneid* (vv. 724 sqq.). It persists in antiquity down to the latest classic thinkers, [Plotinus](#) and the other [Neoplatonists](#).

## Judaism and Kabbalah

Classic works of the Kabbalah, *Shaar ha Gilgulim* ("Gate of Reincarnations") of Arizal or [Isaac Luria](#), describes complex laws of reincarnation *gilgul* and impregnation *ibbur* of 5 different parts of the soul. It shows many references of reincarnation in the Hebrew Bible (the [Tanach](#)).

The notion of **reincarnation** is not openly mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. The classical rabbinic works ([midrash](#), [Mishna](#) and [Talmud](#)) also are silent on this topic.

The concept was elucidated in an influential mystical work called the *Bahir* (Illumination) (one of the most ancient books of Jewish mysticism) which was composed by the first century mystic Nehunia ben haKana, and gained widespread recognition around 1150. After the publication of the *Zohar* in the late 13th century, the idea of reincarnation spread to most of the general Jewish community.

While ancient Greek philosophers like [Plato](#) and [Socrates](#) attempted to prove the existence of reincarnation through philosophical proofs, Jewish mystics who accepted this idea did not. Rather, they offered explanations of why reincarnation would solve otherwise intractable problems of [theodicy](#) (how to reconcile the existence of evil with the premise of a good God.)

Rabbis who accepted the idea of reincarnation include the founder of [Chassidism](#), the [Baal Shem Tov](#), Levi ibn Habib (the *Ralbah*), [Nahmanides](#) (the *Ramban*), Rabbenu [Bahya ben Asher](#), Rabbi Shelomoh Alkabez and Rabbi [Hayyim Vital](#). The argument made was that even the most righteous of Jews sometimes would suffer or be murdered unjustly. Further, children would sometimes suffer or be murdered, yet they were obviously too young for them to have committed sins that God would

presumably punish them for. Jewish supporters of reincarnation said that this idea would remove the theodicy: Good people were not suffering; rather, they were reincarnations of people who had sinned in previous lifetimes. Therefore any suffering which was observed could be assumed to be from a just God. Yitzchak Blua writes "Unlike some other areas of philosophy where the philosophic battleground revolves around the truth or falsehood of a given assertion, the *gilgul* debate at points focuses on the psychological needs of the people." (p.6)

[Martin Buber](#)'s collection of *Legend of the Baal-Shem (Die Chassidischen Bücher)* includes several of the Baal Shem Tov's stories that explicitly discuss concrete cases of reincarnating souls.

Rabbis who rejected the idea of reincarnation include [Saadia Gaon](#), [Hasdai Crescas](#), Yedayah Bedershi (early 14th century), [Joseph Albo](#), [Abraham ibn Daud](#) and [Leon de Modena](#). Sattia, in [Emunoth ve-Deoth](#), concludes Section vi with a refutation of the doctrine of metempsychosis. Crescas writes that if reincarnation was real, people should remember details of their previous lives. Bedershi offers three reasons why the entire concept is dangerous: (a) There is no reason for people to try and do good in this life, if they fear that they will nonetheless be punished for some unknown sin committed in a past life. (b) Some people may assume that they did not sin in their past life, and so can coast on their success; thus there is no need to try hard to live a good life. In Bedershi's view, the only psychologically tenable worldview for a healthy life is to deal with the here-and-now. (c) The idea presents a conundrum for those who believe that at the end of days, God will resurrect the souls and physical bodies of the dead. If a person has lived multiple lives, which body will God resurrect? Joseph Albo writes that in theory the idea of gilgulim is compatible with Jewish theology. However, Albo argues that there is a purpose for a soul to enter the body, creating a being with free will. However, a return of the soul to another body, again and again, has no point. Leon De Moden thinks that the idea of reincarnation make a mockery of God's plans for humans; why does God need to send the soul back over and over? If God requires an individual to achieve some perfection or atone for some sin, then God can just extend that person's life until they have time to do what is necessary. de Modena's second argument against reincarnation is that the entire concept is absent from the entire Bible and corpus of classical rabbinic literature.

The idea of reincarnation, called *gilgul*, became popular in folk belief, and is found in much [Yiddish](#) literature among [Ashkenazi](#) Jews. Among a few kabbalists, it was posited that some human souls could end up being reincarnated into non-human bodies. These ideas can be found in a number of Kabbalistic works from the 1200s, and also among many mystics in the late 1500s. A distinction was made, however, between actual Transmigration and this form of reincarnation; the non-human subject had its own soul already, the human soul simply 'rode along with' the rock, or tree, or giraffe waiting to be 'elevated,' that is, to be raised to a higher level and to gradually approach the level of human again. The cow eats the grass, elevating the soul within it, the soul rides with the cow a while until a person eats the cow, and the soul is elevated to the max. Rabbi Chaim Vidal, when asked how he came to be the foremost disciple and sole transmitter of the teachings of his teacher, the great Issac Luria, credits, not study or mitzvot, but his diligence in blessing his food: "For this way I elevate the souls therein. These souls then become my witnesses in the Heavenly Realm, and empower me to receive even greater revelations."

"Over time however, the philosophical teaching limiting reincarnation to human bodies emerged as the dominant view. Nonetheless, the idea that one can reborn as an animal was never completely



eliminated from Jewish thought, and appears centuries later in the Eastern European folk tradition".  
[Simcha Paull-Raphael, *Jewish Views of the Afterlife*, p.319]

While many Jews today do not believe in reincarnation, the belief is common amongst [Orthodox](#) Jews, particularly amongst [Hasidim](#); some Hasidic [siddurim](#) (prayerbooks) have a prayer asking for forgiveness for one's sins that one may have committed in this [gilgul](#) or a previous one.

## Gnosticism

Many [Gnostic](#) groups believed in reincarnation. For them, reincarnation was a negative concept: [Gnostics](#) believed that the material body was evil, and that they would be better off if they could eventually avoid having their 'good' souls reincarnated in 'evil' bodies.

The Gnostic [Gospel of the Nazirenes - Chapter 69](#):

- 1. As Yeshua sat by the west of the temple with his disciples, behold there passed some carrying one that was dead, to burial, and a certain one said to Him, "Master, if a man die, shall he live again?"*
- 2. He answered and said, "I am the resurrection and the life, I am the good, the beautiful, the true; if a man believe in me he shall not die, but live eternally. As in Adam all (1997 = are bound to cycles of rebirth) die, so in the Messiah shall all be made alive. Blessed are the dead who die in me, and are made perfect in my image and likeness, for they rest from their labors and their works do follow them. They have overcome evil, and are made pillars in the temple of my God, and they go out no more, for they rest in the eternal."*
- 3. "For them that persist in evil there is no rest, but they go out and in, and suffer correction for ages, till they are made perfect. But for them that have done good and attained to perfection, there is endless rest and they go into life everlasting. They rest in the eternal."*
- 4. "Over them the repeated death and birth have no power, for them the wheel of the eternal revolves no more, for they have attained to the center, where is eternal rest, and the center of all things is God."*

Note: The text above is not from the original Gospel of the Nazirenes, which now exists only in fragments. Rather, it is the product of "channeling" and of recent origin.

The texts contains several parallels to the Gospels, which are, though, traditionally interpreted differently in their context:

*"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. John 11:25f RSV*  
*Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. Revelation 3:12 (NIV)*

## Christianity

Almost all present official Christian denominations reject reincarnation: exceptions include the [Liberal Catholic Church](#) and the [Rosicrucian Fellowship](#). Doctrines of reincarnation were known to the early Church (before the 6th century A.D.), and believers in reincarnation claim that these doctrines were embraced or at least tolerated within the Church at that time. Two Church Fathers, [Origen](#) and [Clement of Alexandria](#) are frequently cited as supporting this. However, this cannot be confirmed

from the existent writings of Origen. He was cognizant of the concept of reincarnation (metempsychosis "re-embodiment" in his words) from Greek philosophy, but he repeatedly states that this concept is no part of the Christian teaching or scripture. He writes in his Comment on the Gospel of Matthew: "In this place [when Jesus said Elijah was come and referred to John the Baptist] it does not appear to me that by Elijah the soul is spoken of, lest I fall into the doctrine of transmigration, which is foreign to the Church of God, and not handed down by the apostles, nor anywhere set forth in the scriptures" (ibid., 13:1:46–53).

Some reincarnation followers state that Origen's writings have only come down to us heavily edited 'to conform to Church doctrine', and some Origen's writings were later declared heretical by the Church (though Origen himself was not). However, [Gregory of Nyssa](#) cites Origen: *By some inclination toward evil, certain souls ... come into bodies, first of men; then through their association with the irrational passions, after the allotted span of human life, they are changed into beasts, from which they sink to the level of plants. From this condition they rise again through the same stages and are restored to their heavenly place.* (B.W. Butterworth, *On First Principles*, Book I, Chapter VIII (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 73).

They also state that before the Church expurged what it considered his heretical ideas from editions of his works, other quotes of Origen were also recorded by early Church fathers that make it clear that he did indeed teach reincarnation. A discussion of Origen's relationship to reincarnation, including many more quotes, can be found at [Kevin Williams' Near Death Experiences website](#).

Kurt Eggenstein claims that "Jerome wrote in a letter to Demetrius that among the early Christians, the doctrine of reincarnation had been passed on to the elect, as an occult tradition." He also gives a quote from Gregory of Nyssa, saying "It is a necessity of nature that the soul becomes purified in repeated lives", though the source and the translation are uncited. His [book](#) claims many more Christian authorities supported a belief in reincarnation.

In the New Testament, there are several passages that some people demonstrate that a belief in reincarnation was prevalent amongst those of Jesus' inner circle. He is asked if he is Elias, for example, in John 1:21; in Matthew 16:13-14 Jesus asks his disciples, 'Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?' And they said, 'Some say that you are John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the other prophets.' Such statements are only comprehensible if Jesus' disciples believed in reincarnation. Finally, in Matthew 11:13-14, Jesus says: *For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.* This can be understood in the light of the traditional Jewish prophecy that Elijah (Elias) would return one day, bringing on the Messianic age. However, Elijah was transfigured and taken up into heaven (2 Kings 2:11). Since he did not die, he would have no need of reincarnation to return again as prophesied by Malachi.

Matthew 19:28 states: "Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me, in the regeneration (Greek -- pale-genesis literally, rebirth) when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." A more well-known passage from John 3:3 reads, "...Except a man be born again (Greek -- ano-then), he cannot see the Kingdom of God." The quote from John is sometimes translated as "born from above", and is the inspiration for the modern evangelical movement. Some readers interpret these passages to indicate reincarnation; however, Christian churches read them to refer to [baptism](#) or [conversion](#).

In John 9:1, the disciples put the question to Jesus, regarding a man who was blind from birth, "Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" The disciples appear to be citing two of the most plausible theories of the time: reincarnation, and sins of the parents (or, effects of parenting). This suggests that reincarnation was known to the disciples. Jesus's answer, "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him" is open to interpretation, but it is apparent that he did not rebuke the disciples for suggesting the idea of reincarnation itself. In fact, one could interpret that he tacitly affirmed both hypotheses, while pointing to a third explanation in this particular case.

The Gnostic gospels include clear references to reincarnation, and it is clear that this early Christian (heretical) sect believed in this (see above). In the Gospel of Thomas, Nag Hammadi documents, passage #109 (Thomas O. Lambdin translation), we read: "The kingdom is like a man who had a hidden treasure in his field without knowing it. And after he died, he left it to his son. The son did not know (about the treasure). He inherited the field and sold it. And the one who bought it went plowing and found the treasure. He began to lend money at interest to whomever he wished." The "field" can be interpreted as our phenomenal world of sense experience; the "treasure" the essential Self; "inheriting" as reincarnating; and "plowing" as spiritual search and spiritual discipline.

A number of Evangelical and (in the USA) Fundamentalist Christian groups denounce any belief in reincarnation as heretical, and explain any phenomena suggestive of it as deceptions of the devil.

There are various contemporary attempts to reconcile Christianity and reincarnation. See:

- Geddes Macgregor, *Reincarnation in Christianity : A New Vision of Rebirth in Christian Thought*
- Rudolf Steiner, *Christianity and Mystical Fact*.

## Islam

Mainstream Islam rejects the concept of reincarnation. Believing in reincarnation into this world, in such a way that it could be interpreted as a denial of resurrection may constitute apostasy in Islam.

A very few [sufi](#) groups believe in reincarnation [\[1\]](#) claiming that this concept is mentioned in [Quran 2:28](#):

"How can you deny God, when you were dead and God gave you life? Then God will cause you to die, and then revive you, and then you will be returned to God." (Quran 2:28)

The mainstream Islam rejects this understanding of the verse, claiming that it refers to the worldly human life and the consequent resurrection in the hereafter.

It is claimed by some [sufi](#) groups that the mystics and poets in the Islam tradition have celebrated this belief:

"I died as mineral and became a plant,  
I died as plant and rose to animal,  
I died as animal and I was man.  
Why should I fear?"

When was I less by dying?  
Yet once more I shall die as man,  
To soar with angels blest;  
But even from angelhood I must pass on ..."  
(excerpt from *Masnawi*, by Hazrat)

In his *Masnawi*, [Rumi](#) speaks about the "*seventy-two forms I have worn*".

Modern Sufis who embrace the idea of reincarnation include Bawa Muhaiyadeen (see his *To Die Before Death: The Sufi Way of Life*) and Hazrat Inayat Khan (see *The Sufi Message*, vol. V, part 3).

Some verse of Quran that seem to discount repeated lives:

- "From the (earth) did We Create you, and into it Shall We return you, And from it shall We Bring you out once again. (The Quran, 20:55)"
- " 'And Allah has produced you from the earth, Growing (gradually), And in the End He will return you Into the (earth), And raise you forth (Again at the Resurrection).' (The Quran, 71:17-18)"
- "Nor will they there Taste Death, except the first Death; and He will preserve Them from the Penalty Of the Blazing Fire. (The Quran, 44:56)"
- " 'Is it (the case) that We shall not die, except our first death, And that we Shall not be punished?' Verily this is The supreme achievement! For the like of this Let all strive, Who wish to strive. (The Quran, 37:58-61)"

## **Native American Nations**

Reincarnation is an intrinsic part of many [Native American](#) and [Inuit](#) traditions. Regardless of the actual religious beliefs and practices of today's Native Americans, with varying religious beliefs, the idea has survived for centuries. In the now heavily [Christian Polar North](#) (now mainly parts of [Greenland](#) and [Nunavut](#)), the concept of reincarnation is enshrined in the [Inuit language](#). The survival of the concept of reincarnation applies across the Nations in varying degrees of integrity. The Nations are, of course, now sandwiched between Eastern [Native] and Western traditions.

## **Norse mythology**

Reincarnation also appears in [Norse mythology](#), in the *Poetic Edda*. The editor of the *Poetic Edda* informs the reader that [Helgi Hjörvarðsson](#) and his mistress, the valkyrie [Sváva](#), whose love story is told in the *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar*, were reborn as [Helgi Hundingsbane](#) and the valkyrie [Sigrún](#). Helgi and Sigrún's love story is the matter of a part of the *Völsunga saga* and the lays *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I and II*. They were reborn a second time as Helgi Haddingjaskati and the valkyrie Kára, but unfortunately their story, *Káru ljóð*, only survives in a probably modified form in the *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar*.

## Contemporary movements and thinkers

### Modern thinkers

In the Renaissance we find the doctrine in [Giordano Bruno](#), and in the 17th century in the theosophist [van Helmont](#). During the classical period of German literature metempsychosis attracted much attention: [Goethe](#) played with the idea, and it was taken up more seriously by [Lessing](#), who borrowed it from [Charles Bonnet](#), and by [Herder](#). It has been mentioned with respect by [Hume](#) and by [Schopenhauer](#).

### Spiritism

Reincarnation is the core of the doctrine of Spiritism, a tolerant new religious movement started in France in 1857. According to Spiritists the souls will reincarnate to perfect themselves toward communion with God.

### Anthroposophy

Reincarnation plays an important role in the ideas of [Anthroposophy](#), a spiritual movement founded by [Rudolf Steiner](#). Steiner described the human soul gaining new experiences in every epoch and in a variety of races or nations. The unique personality and abilities, but also weaknesses, that every human being is born with are not simply a reflection of the genetic heritage -- though Steiner described the incarnating soul as searching for and even preparing a familial lineage supportive of its future life; a person's character is also determined by his or her past lives.

[Anthroposophy](#) describes the present as being formed by a tension between the past and the future. Both influence our present [destiny](#); there are events that occur due to our past, but there are also events that occur to prepare us rightly for the future. Between these two, there is space for human [free will](#); we create our [destiny](#), not only live it out, just as we build a house in which we then choose to live.

Books by Steiner and others on the subject include *Reincarnation and Karma*, *Reincarnation and Immortality*, *A Western Approach to Reincarnation and Karma*, and *The Principle of Spiritual Economy in Connection With Questions of Reincarnation*. Aside from these more general discussions, six volumes of Steiner's published lectures are devoted to investigating the karmic relationships of many historical individuals, from Karl Marx to Julian the Apostate.

### Theosophy

Modern theosophy, which draws its inspiration from India, has taken metempsychosis (or rather reincarnation) as a cardinal tenet; it is, says a recent theosophical writer, "the master-key to modern problems," and among them to the problem of heredity. The idea of reincarnation is also part of the New Age culture.

Today, among newer movements, belief in reincarnation is widespread in [New Age](#) and [Neopagan](#) circles. It is an important tenet of [Theosophy](#), and central to [Spiritism](#), founded by [Allan Kardec](#).

[Toward the Light](#) is an example of a contemporary work originating in the western world, which very detailed accounts for reincarnation.

## Scientology

The [Church of Scientology](#), founded by [L. Ron Hubbard](#), is another new religion that accepts past lives and holds that all beings are truly immortal, although in a variety of levels of awareness. The motto of their fraternal religious order [Sea Organization](#) is "We Come Back". Scientology does not use the word "reincarnation" to describe its beliefs, noting that "The common definition of reincarnation has been altered from its original meaning. The word has come to mean 'to be born again in different life forms' whereas its actual definition is 'to be born again into the flesh of another body.' Scientology ascribes to this latter, original definition of reincarnation."

The first writings in Scientology regarding past lives date from around 1951 and slightly earlier. The controversy brought the subject to public awareness, and was followed by such cases (not related to Scientology) as [Bridey Murphy](#) in 1952. In 1960, Hubbard wrote a book on past lives entitled [Have You Lived Before This Life](#) and started a second called *Where Were You Buried?* that was never completed.

Much of the controversy involving Scientology arises from the logical extension of the concept of past lives to what is effectively eternity. In this context, past lives not only take place prior to Earth, but also in non-Earth civilizations, and even in universes prior to this one, where conditions and rules of existence can be different. One could even have past lives in civilizations where advanced technology was common and/or routine. Thus a person who once lived in a world destroyed by nuclear war could become upset living in a world where nuclear power has been re-discovered. Such events can also act as a template for future actions and reactions on a knowing and as well as an unknowing basis. Persons and cultures can act out unknowingly, as if in a script, the circumstances that led to unfortunate events in the past.

Scientology looks only to the writings of L. Ron Hubbard, its founder, for explanations on the system of past lives. Scientology does not assume that beings in the between life area necessarily have the best interests of the individual at heart (it varies), and that the path to increased awareness is not a guaranteed thing.

Scientology also holds that people are composite beings, and that the physical body can have a sense of awareness of its own (called the "genetic entity"), separate from the [mind](#) and the [spirit](#), which memories from its own genetic line can be recalled by an individual, although this is not usually done. In Scientology the term that roughly corresponds to the concepts for spirit or soul is [thetan](#).

Scientology does not consider the lack of awareness of past lives to be a good thing. It attributes the general amnesia of past lives to a variety of causes, including, but not limited to, pain, unconsciousness, lack of personal responsibility, and even the decision to forget what had just transpired.

Persons can unknowingly assume the personality characteristics of another person. Carried to an extreme, this results in people identifying themselves with famous and/or powerful individuals, even when the circumstances were different. Scientology Counseling addresses this problem as part of a larger body of procedures.

In Scientology counselling, knowledge of previous lives is not pursued for its own sake. Rather, awareness and knowledge of previous lives might occur while resolving a specific matter, such as an injury, etc., arising during counselling. Importance is placed upon resolving those issues which affect the individual currently, not when or where the past life took place. However, those particular details may become part of one's understanding as awareness improves in addressing these issues. General recall of past lives is addressed later, after one has attained the state of Clear, and is progressing through the Advanced Levels.

## **Edgar Cayce**

American mystic [Edgar Cayce](#) taught reality of reincarnation and karma, but as instruments of a loving God rather than blind natural laws. Its purpose is to teach us certain spiritual lessons. Animals have undifferentiated, "group" souls rather than individuality and consciousness. Once the soul evolves through a succession of animal incarnations and achieves human status, it is not then reborn in animal form. Cayce's view arguably incorporates Theosophical teachings on spiritual evolution.

## **Seth Jane Roberts**

In the Seth series of books [Jane Roberts](#) talks about reincarnation and life after death. Seth believed that time and space are basically illusions. Consistent with this view, Seth argues that only parts of each person incarnate (appear in physical reality). This last argument is part of Seth's view that man is a multi-dimensional entity simultaneously alive in many contexts.

## **The New Age movement**

There are many people nowadays who allegedly "remember" their past lives and use that knowledge to help them with their current lives; this kind of occurrence is fairly central to the New Age faith. Some of the people who remember claim simply to remember without any effort on their part. They simply "see" previous times and see themselves interacting with others.

## **Common variations on the belief**

In recalling past lives, there are a number of variations that need to be examined, which are important to its adherents.

In the [Urantia Book](#), personality survival after death does not always happen. Personality survival takes place among those souls who have divined the divine meaning and purpose and signification of

their life, basically having evolved sufficiently to awaken some form of immortal awareness. Otherwise, death is a permanent affair. The cosmology of the Urantia Book is very complex, but is similar in some regards to the system seen in [Theosophy](#). See the section of the Urantia Book regarding Personality Survival for much more detail[3]

Theosophical texts maintain that people are constantly evolving, gradually becoming one of the [Ascended Masters](#). In this system, one may be incarnated anyplace in the chain of life, and this is often in connection with life lessons that need to be learned. One often meets with ones spirit guides, one of the Ascended masters, etc. in order to plan the major events for the next life. The element of karma in reincarnation is often seen as a system of devine justice. See also [Elizabeth Clare Prophet](#) for a modern exponent of [Theosophy](#).

In many common new age beliefs, past life recalls involving lifetimes within the historical record (real or supposed, including legendary places such as Atlantis) are commonly accepted. It is sometimes believed that prior to that there was a succession of lifetimes in other lifeforms where one was working to become Human. This seems to borrow ideas from the Darwinian theory of evolution. Lifetimes outside the context of earth are rarely acknowledged.

Often, the doctrine of karma as commonly believed is seen to be a mechanism of divine justice, imposed or enforced by rules of the universe. One variation is what one does, comes back to you multiplied three fold.

In Tibetan Buddhism one finds the concept of the Six Worlds, where dependant on the quality of one merit or karma, one is re-incarnated as a citizen of one of the six Worlds, these being the world of Gods, World of DemiGods, World of Men, World of Animals, world of Demons, and the world of Hell. The advantage of the Human realm is that this is the only place where it is possible to achieve enlightenment, and so pass beyond the cycle of suffering. Incarnations in other realms and worlds are acknowledged, but usually this is considered so long ago that it is not very relevant.

Theosophical and other related beliefs systems explain the common inability to not remember past lives as a part of the divine plan, and that this is a good thing for a variety of reasons. Souls often appear before a group of beings who sit in judgement, to one degree or another, and who decide where the soul is going to go in their future incarnation. This group of beings is always presumed to be members of the Ascended Masters. Some more recent groups have taken a more sceptical view of this.

An interesting variation can be seen in the work of Author Peter Novak[4], who proposes that reincarnation is part of a larger scheme, where soul and spirit are two different entities, united as one during one's lifetime, and which separate at death, in a process he calls consciousness division or [Division Theory](#). The division of consciousness is not considered to be a good thing.

One other variation, borrowing from the ancient Egyptian, can be seen in the essay The Western Lands[5] by [William S. Burroughs](#), where the doctrine of seven souls is discussed. In this context, the idea is propounded that souls can die a permanent death under unusual circumstances, such as in a nuclear explosion.

Yet another view can be gleaned from [The Nevers](#), where some "members" believe that their nomadic lifestyle is a result of their soul seeking out experiences to enrich it's journey.



One item of note is that with the vast increase in population in recent centuries, the number of beings who have experienced the historic cultures of Earth would actually be in a minority of the beings currently incarnating on Earth. This means that they must be coming from some other set of circumstances. Different beliefs explain this in a variety of ways, although some are not aware of the issue

## **Research and debate**

### **Scientific and other research into reincarnation**

The most detailed collections of personal reports in favor of reincarnation have been published by Dr. [Ian Stevenson](#) in works such as *Reincarnation and Biology: A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birth Defects*, which documents thousands of detailed cases where claims of injuries received in past lives sometimes correlate with typical physical birthmarks or birth defects.

Stevenson has spent over 40 years devoted to the study of children who have spoken about concepts seemingly unknown to them. Dr Stevenson maintains a thorough [scientific method](#) of interview and [observation](#). In each case, Dr. Stevenson methodically documents the child's statements. Then he identifies the [deceased](#) person the child allegedly identifies with, and verifies the facts of the deceased person's life that match the child's memory. He also matches [birthmarks](#) and [birth defects](#) to wounds and scars on the deceased, verified by [medical records](#) such as [autopsy](#) photographs. These sometimes reveal that the deceased individuals have fatal injuries that correspond to the unusual marks or birth defects of the child; for example, marks on the chest and back of a child line up precisely with the bullet entry and exit wounds on the body of an individual who has been shot.

Stevenson believes that his strict methods rule out all possible "normal" explanations for the child's memories. However, it should be noted that a significant majority of Dr. Stevenson's reported cases of **reincarnation** originate in Eastern societies, where dominant [religions](#) often permit the concept of reincarnation.

Perhaps the most significant anecdotal evidence in this regard is the phenomenon of young children spontaneously sharing what appear to be memories of past lives, a phenomenon which has been reported even in cultures that do not hold to a belief in reincarnation. Upon investigating these claims, Stevenson and others have identified individuals who had died a few years before the child was born who seem to meet the descriptions the children provided.

However, Stevenson cautions that such evidence is *suggestive* of reincarnation, but that more research must be conducted.

Another researcher is Dr. [Brian Weiss](#), whose books *Many lives, many masters*, *Through time into healing* and *Only love is real* document cases he came across in his 11 year practice as Chairman of the [Psychiatry](#) department at [Mount Sinai Medical Center Miami FL](#). (prior to this the author was a professor at the [University of Pittsburgh](#) medical facility). The latter book traces the histories of two patients of his, who independently during their separate treatments turned out to have past lives which dovetailed with matching descriptions. Dr Weiss now also runs past life workshops for interested parties.

One hypothesis that comes from the [channeller Diandra](#) is past life injuries are stored in the cellular memory of a person's body that can show as birth marks. These cellular memories can also be triggered this lifetime at the same age it occurred in a past lifetime. Diandra cites one example where she was doing a channelled personal session for a doctor that did not believe in channelling or past lives but came to the personal session because his wife wanted him to. The doctor started crying when Diandra moved into a past life where he died of a heart attack at age forty. The doctor revealed he was a heart doctor who had a heart attack at forty this lifetime. Diandra goes on to say that past life cellular memory can be healed and does not have to be repeated. In another personal channelled session Diandra moved into a past lifetime of a woman that was in the 1930's dust bowl. The woman stopped Diandra and told her she has a fetish of coming home from work everyday and dusting. [\[citation needed\]](#).

## Objections to reincarnation

Objections to metempsychosis include: that personal identity depends on [memory](#), and we do not remember our previous incarnations. An answer given by [Hindu](#) philosophers (like [Swami Vivekananda](#)) is that though we do not remember our infancy, we cannot deny its reality. Another common answer is that this perforce requires the limiting of memory to the known life, thus creating a [circular argument](#); the past life cannot be real because they are not remembered, because whatever it is that is claimed to be a memory does not meet the definition of memory as belonging to this life only, and therefore cannot be considered a memory.

Another philosophical answer is that the [soul](#), or whatever it is that lives these hypothetical multiple lives, is influenced throughout all its qualities by the qualities of the [body](#), and as bodies vary, whatever travels between them would not be the same consciousness. If the soul of a [dog](#) were to pass into a man's body, the argument goes, it would have to be so changed as to be no longer the same soul; and so, in a less degree, of change from one human's body to another.

[René Guénon](#) and others maintain that Reincarnation is both a recent concept (created in the 1800 by Spiritists and Theosophists) and distinct from both [metempsychosis](#) (which he describes as an influence from psychic residue that does not involve any true soul or personal essence) and [transmigration](#) (which for him, while often mistaken with reincarnation, actually describes the change of a once-corporeal being into some other non-corporeal state). That viewpoint is detailed in his 1923 book "The Spiritist Fallacy".

Some scientists and skeptics, such as [Paul Edwards](#), have analyzed many of these [anecdotal](#) accounts. In every case they found that further research into the individuals involved provides sufficient background to weaken the conclusion that these cases are credible examples of reincarnation. Others, such as philosopher [Robert Almeder](#), having analyzed the criticisms of Edwards and others, say that the gist of these arguments can be summarized as "we all know it can't possibly be real, so therefore it isn't real", a well known logical [fallacy](#) traditionally called an [Argument from Lack of Imagination](#).

Critics who claim that reincarnation is impossible often espouse the alternate theory that a large number of mental phenomena such as memory and ability are already accounted for by physiological processes; and may point to moral and practical inconsistencies in the various theories of reincarnation. To the [materialistic mind](#), [Occam's Razor](#) would then seem to dictate that the critical view is to be preferred, as it demands no extraordinary new evidence beyond what is already known to science.

A more [skeptical](#) view is that without conclusive evidence showing that reincarnation exists (regardless of the current state of science), the theory of reincarnation cannot be considered to be a valid [theory](#) worthy of formal scientific recognition and acceptance.

Some skeptics explain the abundance of claims of evidence for reincarnation to originate from [selective thinking](#) and the psychological phenomena of [false memories](#) that often result from one's own belief system and basic fears, and thus cannot be accounted as [empirical evidence](#).

Another argument often made is that claims of reincarnation by casual adherents are usually of having been some famous historical figure instead of being another animal or an insignificant person. This argument, however, is seldom substantiated with a quantitative count of famous and non-famous reincarnation claims, and many accounts are of peasant or other little known people.

### Reactions to Skepticism

Because of such [skepticism](#), many people who feel they may have lived a past life tend to be quite circumspect which whom they discuss this.

An example of the frustration that can be experienced can be found in the exercise of trying to prove that one had once lived in a city in another part of the country. A skeptical view can cynically explain away all such memories, etc. as based on fraud, research, memories from movies and theater productions, and many other alternate explanations; in fact, any other explanation, rather than admitting that someone now living in City Two had once lived in City One, regardless of the actual truth of the matter.

Thus they are more likely to seek out and associate with groups known to have a belief in past lives, and may investigate several before choosing one in particular.

### Other theories put forward to explain the phenomenon

A belief in reincarnation does not discount the existence of heaven, hell, or a final judgment. There are a number of small children who have reported having memories of past lives prior to their present life, and some also report being able to recall a time between lives (see books by Dr. [Ian Stevenson](#), [Carol Bowman](#), Dr. Jim B. Tucker, and Elisabeth Hallett). In some cases these children have also reported being in a place like heaven between lives, and sometimes that they were given some degree of choice as to whether and when to be reborn, and even in selecting their future parents.

Some of these children claim that being reborn is not necessarily a punishment for past bad "[karma](#)", but rather an opportunity for a soul to grow spiritually. Additional lifetimes could give individual souls a greater opportunity to accomplish more for God, if that is a person's goal, and to develop better character traits. Eastern views of reincarnation vary and several parallels with this idea are to be found in certain branches of [Hinduism](#) and [Buddhism](#).

A more dramatic idea is espoused in at least one account, of a woman who was raped at age 37, and was treated amongst other ways, with regression therapy. It seems she was attempted to be regressed prior to her birth, and reported that she had decided that a traumatic incident would be needed at around that time, to change her life from its previous path. If such accounts were true, they would have profound implications for human life.

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[God is a myth]

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