

*We have all been here before...*

The word *karma* has made it into the mainstream. But not everyone knows what it really means or how to deal with it. This insightful book will help you come to grips with karmic connections from past lives that have helped create the circumstances of your life today.

You'll discover how your actions in past lives—good and bad—affect which family you're born into, who you're attracted to, and why some people put you on edge. You'll learn about group karma, what we do between lives, and what the great lights of East and West, including Jesus, have to say about karma and reincarnation. Most of all, you'll find out how to turn your karmic encounters into grand opportunities to shape the future you want.

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KARMA AND REINCARNATION

PROPHET



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*Transcending  
Your Past,  
Transforming  
Your Future*



ELIZABETH CLARE PROPHET  
and PATRICIA R. SPADARO

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# Contents

## KARMA AND REINCARNATION

*Transcending Your Past, Transforming Your Future*

by Elizabeth Clare Prophet and Patricia R. Spadaro

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Note: Because gender-neutral language can be cumbersome and at times confusing, we have often used *he* and *him* to refer to God or the individual. These terms are for readability only and are not intended to exclude women or the feminine aspect of the Godhead. Likewise, our use of *God* or *Spirit* does not exclude other expressions for the Divine.

## Karmic Conundrums

*Luck is a word devoid of sense.*

*Nothing can exist without a cause.*

—VOLTAIRE

The word *karma* has made it into the mainstream. Just look at bumper stickers like *My karma ran over your dogma* or *It's a thankless job, but I've got a lot of karma to burn off*. But not everyone understands what karma really means, why it matters and how to deal with it.

Think about the talents you were born with and the good things that have happened to you in life. Now think about the so-called limitations and challenges that have come your way. Both have to do with your karma. Karma simply tells us that what happens to us in the present is the result of causes we ourselves have set in motion in the past—whether ten minutes ago or ten lifetimes ago.

We've all grown up learning about karma. We just didn't call it that. Instead we heard: *What goes around comes around. Whatsoever a man soweth,*

*that shall he also reap. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. And in the end, the love you take is equal to the love you make.* In essence, karma tells us that whatever we do will come full circle to our doorstep—sometime, somewhere.

Karma and reincarnation go hand in hand. While karma means accountability and payback, reincarnation is simply another word for opportunity. Reincarnation gives us another chance to make good on the karmic debts we owe others and to reap the blessings we have sent forth.

Karma and reincarnation also help us make sense out of the question marks in life. *Why me? Why not me?* Why was my niece born with Down's syndrome when her brothers and sisters are healthy and robust? Why have I been blessed with promotion after promotion while my brother can't hold down a job—even though we had the same opportunities growing up? Why do all my relationships become a tug of war—how come I can't live with him and I can't live without him? Why, when I just landed the job I've been after for a year, do I have to leave town to care for my ailing parents? Why did I survive a car accident

when all of my friends in the car were killed?

Life is full of paradoxes and questions like these. Like a Zen koan, each paradox is designed to make us dig deeper, connect with our inner soul knowing and solve the karmic conundrum.

## Taking a Cue from Nature

*Come forth into the light of things,  
Let Nature be your teacher.*

—WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

At times it seems that the only thing we can count on are the cycles of the seasons. No matter what else happens, we know that the surge of new life at springtime will give way to the full-blown beauty of summer. The ripe autumn harvest welcomes winter as nature prepares once again for a fresh new start.

Many a sage has looked to the cycles of nature to understand the cycles of the soul. “Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood

#### 4 *Karma and Reincarnation*

and so it is in everything where power moves,” said the Sioux holy man Black Elk. French philosopher and author Voltaire put it this way, “It is not more surprising to be born twice than once; everything in nature is resurrection.”

Karma and reincarnation tell us that our soul, following the patterns of nature, journeys along a path of birth, maturation, death and then the renewed opportunity of rebirth. They tell us that we are a part of a moving stream of consciousness and that through many life experiences our soul is evolving. Karma and reincarnation explain that our soul, like the legendary phoenix, does indeed rise from the ashes of our former selves to be reborn and that our former lives contain the seeds of our new life. In other words, everything we are today we have been building for thousands of years.

The natural cycles of karma and reincarnation can help us understand how we got where we are today and what we can do about it. They can help us understand why we were born with a particular set of aptitudes and talents, crises and challenges, assignments and aspirations. They can help us deal with the questions that tease us in moments of

One of the most ancient symbols of rebirth, rejuvenation and immortality is the phoenix. The phoenix legend, in various forms, appears in ancient Egypt, Greece, China, Japan, Ireland, Turkey, Persia and also in Christian writings.



According to the legends, the phoenix is the only one of its kind. When its lifetime comes to a close—every five hundred years—it builds itself a nest of spices. The nest is ignited by the sun or by the phoenix itself as it fans its wings, and the bird is consumed by the conflagration. Out of its ashes a young and vibrant phoenix arises. One version of the legend explains that out of the ashes a single glowing spark remains, representing the immortal spirit, from which new life is kindled.

In spiritual terms, the rebirth of the phoenix out of the fiery flames portends both the testing and the reincarnation of the soul. Through the sometimes fiery trials and traumas of life, the soul is purified and refined, ascending to higher and higher levels of consciousness.

exasperation—*Why was I born to these parents? Why did I give birth to the children I have? Why am I afraid of the water or of heights? Why am I here?*

In this book we'll talk about the underlying principles as well as the practical aspects of karma and reincarnation: How the belief in reincarnation spans East and West, through many centuries and cultures. Why karma is the x factor in our relationships, our health, our career—every aspect of our life. Why karma *isn't* fate. How karma works. How we can trace the karmic threads we have woven from lifetime to lifetime.

We'll also talk about the traps that keep us from working through our karma and taking full advantage of our rites of passage. Finally, we'll share some tools and techniques that can help you transform karmic encounters into grand opportunities to shape the future you want. Whether or not you believe in reincarnation and karma, this book will offer new ways of thinking about life's most profound paradoxes—and promises.

PART 1

## Karmic Truths



*I had the feeling that I was a historical fragment, an excerpt for which the preceding and succeeding text was missing. . . . I could well imagine that I might have lived in former centuries and there encountered questions I was not yet able to answer; that I had to be born again because I had not fulfilled the task that was given to me.*

—CARL JUNG



## The Universal Law of Love

*Is there one maxim which ought be acted upon throughout one's whole life? Surely it is the maxim of loving-kindness: Do not unto others what you would not have them do unto you.*

—CONFUCIUS

**K**arma picks up where the golden rule leaves off. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you—*because someday it will be done unto you*. The Sanskrit word *karma* means “act,” “action,” “word” or “deed.” The law of karma as it is traditionally taught says that our thoughts, words and deeds—positive and negative—create a chain of cause and effect, and that we will personally experience the effect of every cause we have set in motion. Karma, therefore, is our greatest benefactor, returning to us the good we have sent to others. It is also our greatest teacher, allowing us to learn from our mistakes.

Because the law of karma gives back to us

whatever we have sent forth as thought, word or deed, some think of it as punishment. Not so. The law of karma is the law of love. There is no greater love than having the opportunity to understand the consequences of our action—or our inaction—so that our soul can grow. Karma teaches us to love and to love and to love as no other process can. It gives us hope.

Take, for example, the tragic case of Avianca flight 052. In 1990, after a long trip from Colombia, it was trying to land at John F. Kennedy International Airport. Controllers and bad weather had delayed its landing for an hour and seventeen minutes. The jet ran out of fuel and crashed into a hillside in Cove Neck, New York, killing seventy-three and injuring eighty-five.

The National Transportation Safety Board said that inadequate traffic flow management contributed to the accident as well as faulty communication. The crew did not communicate an emergency fuel situation, which would have enabled them to have a priority landing. The official transcript of the cockpit voice recorder shows that the first officer, who had the job of communicating with air-traffic controllers, told the control tower

that the plane was low on fuel, but he never used the word *emergency* even though the pilot directed him to.

In karmic terms, the first officer was at least partially accountable for the deaths and injuries of those on board. Having died in the crash himself, how would he be able to pay his debt to the people harmed by his negligence? Would God send him to hell?

According to the law of cause and effect, the law of karma, here's one possible scenario: he will mercifully be allowed to reincarnate and have the opportunity to work in a position where he can serve those who had suffered. The passengers whose destiny in this life may have been cut short through this accident will also be given another opportunity to live and complete their soul journey.

A single lifetime, whether lived to nine or ninety-nine, is just not enough time for the soul to pay off her karmic debts, develop her vast potential or fulfill her reason for being. How could we learn all our spiritual lessons or share all our unique talents on the stage of life in only one lifetime?



## A Belief without Boundaries

*The most striking fact at first sight about the doctrine of the repeated incarnations of the soul . . . is the constant reappearance of the faith in all parts of the world. . . . No other doctrine has exerted so extensive, controlling, and permanent an influence upon mankind.*

—REV. WILLIAM R. ALGER

The belief in karma and reincarnation crisscrosses time and space, finding a home in many cultures, both ancient and modern. The most elaborately developed concepts of karma and reincarnation are found in the religious traditions of India, especially Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism.

These traditions explain that the soul reaps both the good and the bad that she has sown in previous lifetimes. “Just as a farmer plants a certain kind of seed and gets a certain crop, so it is with good and bad deeds,” explains the Mahabharata, the great Hindu epic. The Dhammapada, a collection of sayings of the Buddha, tells us: “What we are today

comes from our thoughts of yesterday. . . . If a man speaks or acts with an impure mind, suffering follows him as the wheel of the cart follows the beast that draws the cart. . . . If a man speaks or acts with a pure mind, joy follows him as his own shadow.”

Although this fact is unknown to many Westerners, before the advent of Christianity reincarnation was also a part of the spiritual beliefs of many of the peoples of Europe, including the early Teutonic tribes, the Finns, Icelanders, Lapps, Norwegians, Swedes, Danes, early Saxons and the Celts of Ireland, Scotland, England, Brittany, Gaul and Wales. The Welsh have even claimed that it was the Celts who originally carried the belief in reincarnation to India.

In ancient Greece, both Pythagoras and Plato believed in reincarnation. Pythagoras taught that the soul’s many incarnations were opportunities for her to purify and perfect herself. Some Native Americans as well as many tribes in Central and South America have believed in reincarnation. Today the belief also exists among over one hundred tribes in Africa as well as among the Eskimos and Central Australian tribes and many peoples of the Pacific, including the Tahitians,

Melanesians and Okinawans.

What about the Judeo-Christian tradition? The law of karma, as the law of cause and effect, is firmly rooted in that tradition. According to some scholars, statements made by the first-century Jewish historian Josephus may indicate that the Pharisees and the Essenes believed in reincarnation. We know that Philo, the great Jewish philosopher and contemporary of Jesus, taught reincarnation. The third-century Church Father Origen of Alexandria noted that reincarnation was part of the mystical teachings of the Jews.

In addition, reincarnation was and is taught by students of Kabbalah, a system of Jewish mysticism that flowered in the thirteenth century and is enjoying a resurgence today. Reincarnation is also part of the religious beliefs of the Jewish Hasidic movement, founded in the eighteenth century.

Last but not least, history itself as well as ancient manuscripts unearthed in this century reveal that reincarnation was alive and well in early Christianity. As we will show, even through the thirteenth century, certain groups of Christians openly espoused reincarnation alongside traditional Christian beliefs.



## Karma in the Bible

*As thou hast done, it shall be done  
unto thee.*

—BOOK OF OBADIAH

*Blessed are the merciful: for they  
shall obtain mercy.*

—JESUS

Although the Old Testament does not explicitly refer to reincarnation, it is filled with stories of karmic law exacting penalties for harmful or devious actions and rewards for good actions. One graphic example comes from the life of King David. David falls in love with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, and she conceives a child by him. David secretly assigns Uriah to the front lines of battle, knowing that he will be killed, and then marries Bathsheba.

The Lord then sends the prophet Nathan to tell David that because he has slain Uriah and married his wife, he will in turn be punished. Because God has forgiven David, Nathan says he will not take David's life, but the price of his sin will be the life

of the child born to Bathsheba. No different from any of us, David had to learn the consequences for taking another's life.

The testings and trials of the Israelites during forty years of wandering in the wilderness colorfully depict the boomerang of returning karma. When Moses walks down Mount Sinai with the two tablets of stone containing the law and the ten commandments written by God, he discovers that the Israelites are worshipping a golden calf they have fashioned after the gods of Egypt. Three thousand of the people are punished with death.

On another occasion, Moses' sister, Miriam, challenges her brother's authority. As a result, she is afflicted with leprosy until she is healed by Moses' intercessory prayer. When a group of Israelites rebel under the leadership of Korah, the earth splits open beneath them and swallows up them and their families.

One of the most poignant lessons of karma is experienced by Moses himself. The Israelites once again test their leader's patience as they set up camp at a place where there is no water. Why bother to bring us out of Egypt, they complain, if we are going to die here of thirst? The Lord commands

Moses to take his rod in hand and order a rock to give forth water. Moses, however, is so angry that instead of speaking to the rock, he strikes it twice with his rod. The water flows abundantly to quench the people's thirst, but Moses has disobeyed God. The karmic consequences? Tragically, he is forbidden to enter the promised land.

The same law of cause and effect taught in the Old Testament is affirmed by Jesus. The Sermon on the Mount is one of the greatest lessons on karma that you will find anywhere. In it, Jesus states the mathematical precision of the law of personal accountability: "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. . . . Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. . . . Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets."

On another occasion, Jesus teaches that we are karmically responsible for what we say: "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words

thou shalt be condemned.”

At the scene of his arrest, Jesus reiterates the law of karmic retribution. One of his disciples cuts off the ear of the high priest’s servant. Jesus tells his disciple to put his sword away, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.” Jesus then compassionately heals the man’s ear, blessing the servant and saving his disciple from reaping the karma of having harmed another.

The apostle Paul also sets forth the law of karma when he says, “Every man shall bear his own burden. . . . Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. . . . Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor.”



## Did Jesus Teach Reincarnation?

*“Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but they did to him whatever they pleased.” . . . Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them about John the Baptist.*

—THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Jesus certainly taught the concept of karma, as we have seen, but did he teach reincarnation? Both the Bible and other early Christian texts provide compelling evidence that both he and some of his followers did.

The first piece of evidence is the episode involving the man who was born blind. As Jesus and his disciples passed by the blind man, the disciples asked, “Master, who did sin, this man or his parents that he was born blind?” They were offering two possible causes for his blindness. They asked whether the blindness was a result of the parents’ sin because they knew the Old Testament law that says, “The sins of the father shall be visited upon the sons to the third and fourth generation.” But

they also asked if the blindness was a result of the man's own sin. Since the man was *born* blind, the only way he could have sinned before his birth was to have done it in a previous lifetime.

Jesus astounded them all when he replied, "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him."<sup>1</sup> The man hadn't sinned and his parents hadn't sinned. By free will, he had incarnated with this condition so that Jesus could heal him—so that the works of God could be revealed in him.

If Jesus had not believed in karma or reincarnation, this was the moment when he could have denied these doctrines, but he did not. As a matter of fact, there is no record whatsoever—either in the Gospels, the writings of the apostles, the Book of Revelation or other Christian texts—that Jesus ever denied karma or reincarnation.

In fact, this account indicates that Jesus and his disciples had ongoing talks about karma and reincarnation. Jesus didn't invalidate his disciples' question nor did he elaborate on the options they offered. It wasn't necessary for Jesus to rehearse the ABCs of what the disciples already knew. Instead, Jesus used this as an opportunity to

demonstrate that there are exceptions to universal law, and this was one of them.

A second example of Jesus teaching reincarnation takes place as the disciples are walking down the Mount of Transfiguration with him. On the mountain they had seen Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. The disciples asked Jesus, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" In other words, if Elijah is supposed to come before you, what is he doing in heaven and why haven't we seen him yet on earth?

Jesus answered, "Elijah is indeed coming and will restore all things; but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but they did to him whatever they pleased." The Book of Matthew follows that with the statement "Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them about John the Baptist."<sup>2</sup> Jesus was revealing that Elijah had reincarnated as John the Baptist, who tragically had been imprisoned and then beheaded by Herod.

It was a popular belief among the Jews of Jesus' day that the prophet Elijah would come again as the forerunner of the Messiah, as Malachi had prophesied: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the

prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.”

The idea that this passage implies a belief in reincarnation is not something new to this century. The fact that the fourth-century Church Father Jerome specifically argues that the passage from Matthew should *not* be interpreted as supporting reincarnation tells us that some Christians of his day believed that Jesus and the disciples accepted, or were at least aware of, the concept of reincarnation.

Some Christians say that because the Bible doesn't include comprehensive teaching on reincarnation, Christians should not believe in the idea. If one followed that rationale, Christians wouldn't believe in the doctrines of the Trinity or original sin—neither of which appear in the Bible.

We also know that not all of Jesus' original teachings have survived. The Book of Acts says that following the resurrection, Jesus taught his disciples for forty days of “things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” There is no record of what he said. John closes his gospel by explicitly telling us, “There are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one,

I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.”

In addition, it is quite plausible that Jesus would have been exposed to the idea of reincarnation. In his day, Greek ideas penetrated Jewish thought and many scholars believe that Jesus, like many first-century Jews, spoke Greek and would have easily come into contact with Greek ideas. One of the currents running through the broad stream of Greek religion was a belief in reincarnation.

The Roman statesman Cicero and the great Roman poet Virgil, both of whom lived around the time of Jesus, also espoused reincarnation. Given the multicultural climate of Palestine and the trade routes stretching to the East, Jesus could also have come into contact with Indian ideas on reincarnation.<sup>3</sup> In addition, there is substantial evidence, which I review in my book *The Lost Years of Jesus*, that between the ages of twelve and thirty Jesus himself visited India.<sup>4</sup>



## Reincarnation in Early Christianity

*Every soul . . . comes into this world  
strengthened by the victories or weakened  
by the defeats of its previous life.*

—CHURCH FATHER ORIGEN OF ALEXANDRIA

Can you be a Christian and still believe in reincarnation? Today the majority of Christian denominations would answer no to that question. But not in the second century.

Early Christianity was extremely diverse. During the first three centuries of this new religion, the Christian community was composed of numerous sects, including several groups now known collectively as Gnostics. The Gnostics claimed to possess an advanced teaching that had been secretly handed down to them from Jesus through his closest disciples. Even among the Gnostics, there were differences in beliefs and practices. Some were strictly ascetic; others were accused of being morally licentious. Some were celibate; others were not. But they did share some common beliefs.

They believed that the means to salvation was not simply through faith, as the emerging orthodox contingent claimed, but through *gnosis*—a Greek word meaning “knowledge” or “acquaintance.” The Gnostics emphasized a personal knowledge and experience of the Divine. They believed that the quest for self-knowledge would lead to reintegration with the divine Self that is the essence of our identity. To the Gnostics, karma and reincarnation created the context for that mystical union.

In the Gnostic *Book of Thomas*, probably written toward the end of the second century, Jesus teaches that after death some will remain consumed “in their concern about life” and “will be brought back to the visible realm.” Toward the end of this work, Jesus says, “Watch and pray that you may not be born in the flesh, but that you may leave the bitter bondage of this life.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, pray that you are not reborn on earth but that you return to higher realms.

In another Gnostic text, *Pistis Sophia*, probably written in the third century, Jesus describes various karmic consequences for actions taken in previous lives. He says that a person will be “cast

back into the world again according to the type of the sins which he hath committed.” A person who is a “curser,” for example, will be “continually troubled” in his heart. The soul of one who is “arrogant and overweening” will be cast “into a lame and deformed body, so that all despise it persistently.” Someone who has not sinned but who has not yet received the mysteries of the spiritual world will be placed in a body that will enable him to “find the signs of the mysteries of the Light and inherit the Light-kingdom forever.”<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the Gnostics, in the second and third centuries many prominent Christians accepted reincarnation. Clement of Alexandria, a Christian teacher who headed the Church’s catechetical school in Alexandria, is said to have been one of them. His successor, Origen of Alexandria—a Church Father and the most influential theologian of the Greek Church—believed in the preexistence of the soul, if not reincarnation.

Origen’s *On First Principles* explains that souls are assigned to their “place or region or condition” based on their actions “before the present life.” God has “arranged the universe on the principle of a most impartial retribution,” he tells us.<sup>7</sup>

God didn’t create “from any favoritism” but gave souls bodies “according to the sin of each.”<sup>8</sup>

“If souls did not pre-exist,” asks Origen, “why is it that we find some blind from their birth, having done no sin, while others are born having nothing wrong with them?”<sup>9</sup> He answers his own question: “It is clear that certain sins existed [i.e., were committed] before the souls [came into bodies], and as a result of these sins each soul receives a recompense in proportion to its deserts.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, people’s fates are based on their past actions.

Origen’s belief in the preexistence of the soul implies reincarnation. For this, his followers and his teachings were later attacked in the controversial crossfire of ecclesiastical canon. Three centuries after Origen’s death, the Byzantine emperor Justinian declared Origen a heretic. At the emperor’s instigation, a Church council anathematized (“cursed”) Origen’s teaching on the preexistence of the soul. Origenist monks were expelled and Origen’s writings destroyed.

Since there are no records documenting papal approval of these anathemas, scholars today question their legitimacy. But the council’s action,

accepted in practice by the Church, made reincarnation incompatible with Christianity. Between the third and sixth centuries, the authorities of Church and State gradually rejected Christians who believed in reincarnation, banning and finally destroying their manuscripts.

From time to time, belief in reincarnation did stubbornly resurface. It traveled to the areas of present-day Bosnia and Bulgaria, appearing in the seventh century with the Paulicians and in the tenth century with the Bogomils. Reincarnation beliefs showed up in medieval France and Italy, where they formed a central part of the Cathar sect.

The dread Inquisition was originally established in the thirteenth century to combat the Cathars, also known as the Albigenses. The Church finally won the battle by waging a crusade followed by a brutal campaign of inquisition, torture and burnings.

At that point, belief in reincarnation went underground. It was kept alive through the nineteenth century in the secret traditions of the alchemists, Rosicrucians, Kabbalists, Hermeticists and Freemasons. Reincarnation continued to crop up inside the Church as well. In nineteenth-century

Poland, for instance, a Catholic archbishop, Monsignor Passavalli (1820–97), grafted reincarnation onto his faith and openly embraced it. He influenced other Polish and Italian priests, who also took up reincarnation.<sup>11</sup>



## West Meets East

*I believe I shall, in some shape or other, always exist, and, with all the inconveniences human life is liable to, I shall not object to a new edition of mine, hoping, however, that the errata of the last may be corrected.*

—BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

Even though early Christians and perhaps even Jesus himself had espoused reincarnation, Church councils effectively inoculated Christians against the idea. As the decades and centuries rolled by, however, some Western thinkers began thinking outside the box and had to admit that reincarnation made at least as much sense as a doctrine of a one-shot chance before heaven or hell.

A man with no less stature and genius than the twentieth-century philosopher, physician and missionary Albert Schweitzer once said that “reincarnation contains a most comforting explanation of reality by means of which Indian thought surmounts difficulties which baffle the thinkers of Europe.”<sup>12</sup> As nineteenth-century German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer put it, “Were an Asiatic to ask me for a definition of Europe, I should be forced to answer him: It is that part of the world which is haunted by the incredible delusion that man was created out of nothing, and that his present birth is his first entrance into life.”<sup>13</sup>

The contrast between East and West was described quite bluntly, and humorously, by a nine-year-old Hindu boy who wrote in a school essay about the cat, his favorite animal: “The cat has four legs, one in each corner. He also has nine lives, which he does not use in Europe because of Christianity.”<sup>14</sup>

What many Westerners don’t realize is that some of the greatest thinkers in the West, past and present, have embraced reincarnation. The concept made a lot of sense to American founding father Benjamin Franklin, for example. At the age of twenty-two, he wrote an epitaph for himself, al-

though it wasn’t used when he died. It read in part, “The body of B. Franklin, printer, like the cover of an old book, its contents torn out . . . lies here food for worms, but the work shall not be lost, for it will as he believed appear once more in a new and more elegant edition revised and corrected by the author.”

Years later, at the age of seventy-nine, Franklin wrote in a letter, “When I see nothing annihilated (in the works of God) and not a drop of water wasted, I cannot suspect the annihilation of souls, or believe that He will suffer the daily waste of millions of minds ready-made that now exist, and put himself to the continual trouble of making new ones.”<sup>15</sup>

The list of other prominent Westerners who have accepted or thought seriously about reincarnation in recent centuries is long and impressive. In addition to those we have already cited, it includes such eighteenth- and nineteenth-century greats as French philosopher Voltaire, German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, French novelist Honoré de Balzac, American transcendentalist and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson, American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and American industrialist

Henry Ford. From the twentieth century, the list includes British novelist Aldous Huxley, Irish poet W. B. Yeats, British author Rudyard Kipling, Finnish composer Jean Sibelius, Spanish painter Salvador Dali and American general George S. Patton.

Among those who have written about reincarnation or had their characters express reincarnationist ideas are British poets William Wordsworth and Percy Bysshe Shelley, German poet Friedrich Schiller, French novelist Victor Hugo, Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung and American authors J. D. Salinger and Jack London.<sup>16</sup>

Today, belief in reincarnation is on the rise. Millions of Americans, Europeans and Canadians believe in reincarnation. By conservative estimates, over one-fifth of American adults believe in reincarnation—including a fifth of all Christians. The figures are similar for Europe and Canada. Another 22 percent of Americans say they are “not sure” about reincarnation, indicating that they are at least open to the idea. The rise in accounts of near-death experiences and past-life recollections has contributed to the acceptance of reincarnation.



## Compelling Evidence

*The evidence for reincarnation, although mostly circumstantial, is now so compelling that intellectual assent is natural. . . . We've lived before in past lives and will likely live again in future lives.*

—DR. JOEL L. WHITTON

A part from the religious and philosophical reflections

about reincarnation, there is a growing body of research on the subject. For some of the most prominent voices in the field, the evidence surfaced unexpectedly, forcing them to change their perspective about life and death.

Twentieth-century American clairvoyant Edgar Cayce, known as the Sleeping Prophet, was shocked the first time one of his “readings” talked about reincarnation. For twenty years, Cayce had been giving medical readings, which he dictated to a secretary while in a trancelike sleep. Through his unique gift, he dispensed medical diagnoses and described natural remedies that healed many who

came to him for help. He could even successfully diagnose patients long-distance with only a name and address in hand.

As a devout and orthodox Christian, Cayce never entertained the idea of reincarnation—until, to his utter surprise, one of the readings talked about the past life of his subject. Eventually, after much soul searching, Cayce came to accept the idea of reincarnation as compatible with Jesus’ teachings. More than twenty-five hundred people learned about their past lives through Cayce’s work. He revealed how their interactions in past incarnations had determined the course of their present life. In many cases, he told them how karmic patterns woven through lifetimes had resulted in their emotional or physical afflictions.

Rabbi Yonassan Gershom in his book *Beyond the Ashes* describes how evidence for reincarnation came to him unexpectedly. Over a period of ten years 250 people, both Jews and non-Jews, came to him for counseling because they had flashbacks, spontaneous memories, dreams and visions of having died in the Holocaust in a past life.

Some of the evidence for reincarnation comes from those who have recalled past lives under

hypnosis. Although I do not recommend hypnosis as a tool in therapy or for delving into past lives,\* the findings from past-life regressions are interesting and they often confirm the teachings on reincarnation and the afterlife that have come down to us through various spiritual traditions. Dr. Alexander Cannon says he did his best to disprove reincarnation and even told his trance subjects that their memories were nonsense. “Yet as the years went by one subject after another told me the same story in spite of different and varied conscious beliefs,” he wrote in 1950. “Now well over a thousand cases have been so investigated and I have to admit that there is such a thing as reincarnation.”<sup>17</sup>

Dr. Helen Wambach, the clinical psychologist and regression therapy expert who pioneered past-life and prenatal research, regressed hundreds of people in the course of her career. She once said, “Ninety percent of the people who come to me definitely flash on images from a past life.”

Dr. Morris Netherton, a regression therapist

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\*Hypnosis, even when done with the best of intentions, can make us spiritually vulnerable. It can open us to elements of the subconscious and unconscious of the practitioner. Through hypnosis we may also prematurely uncover records of events from past lives that we are not ready to deal with (see pages 111–14).

since the 1960s, had a healing experience that changed his beliefs about reincarnation. Raised a fundamental southern Methodist, he hadn't thought much about past lives. At the time he was undergoing conventional therapy to ease a number of problems including a chronic ulcer. "In the third session I talked about the pain I was feeling," he writes, "and the next thing I knew I was in a different place."<sup>18</sup> He saw himself in an institution for the criminally insane in the early 1800s, where a sentry kicked him in the stomach, in the exact place of the ulcer. The pain, he says, immediately subsided and never returned.

Whether this past-life incident had really happened or was metaphorical, it dramatically changed Netherton's direction—he went on to found an institute that teaches regression therapy.

Most reincarnation accounts have not been able to provide details that can be checked against historical sources. A recent and intriguing testimony by an unlikely candidate does just that. In 1999, Captain Robert L. Snow, commander of the homicide branch of the Indianapolis Police Department, published the story of his search for a past life in a book called *Looking for Carroll Beckwith*.

Raised in a strict Methodist family and working in the no-nonsense police profession, Snow never toyed with the idea of reincarnation. He thought it only was for "kooks and weirdos." Then one day at a party, he told a child-abuse detective who used hypnotic regression therapy that past-life regression was probably based on a lot of imagination. "Besides," he said, "if it was true, then how come no one's ever proved they've lived a past life?"<sup>19</sup>

That's when the detective, a woman, politely challenged him to test his beliefs. She wrote down the name of a colleague who used hypnotic regression. Snow reluctantly took on her dare and under hypnosis he recalled, among other things, a past life as an artist. He saw his studio and some of the paintings he had created in that lifetime. At first Snow dismissed the session as a product of his subconscious mind. In true detective style, he decided to prove to himself that he had simply patched together memories of paintings he had seen before in a history or art book.

His search, however, proved just the opposite. First he couldn't find a picture of the paintings anywhere in a book. Then, in a small art gallery in New Orleans, he stumbled across the *exact* por-

trait he had seen himself painting under hypnosis. It was a rare work by a not-so-famous artist that had been in a private collection, so there was no chance he had ever seen it on display or in a book. Once he found out the name of the artist, J. Carroll Beckwith, he was off and running.

Rummaging through diaries, scrapbooks and biographies, he went on to prove twenty-eight details that he remembered in regression—including that he had been upset about poor lighting for one of his paintings, he had painted a portrait of a woman with a hunchback, he didn't like painting portraits but needed the money, his paintings were full of sun and bright colors, and he had died in the fall of the year in a big city.

"I have uncovered evidence that proves beyond a doubt the existence of a past life," writes Snow in his fascinating account. "The evidence I uncovered in this two-year investigation is so overwhelming that if it had been a criminal case, there would be no plea bargaining. A conviction would be assured. . . . What this all means, however, in the bigger picture of the other billions of inhabitants of Earth, I will leave to the philosophers and theologians."<sup>20</sup>



## Out of the Mouth of Babes

*Mere children . . . grasp innumerable facts with such speed as to show that they are not then taking them in for the first time, but remembering and recalling them.*

—CICERO

Some of the most compelling evidence for reincarnation comes from children. Dr. Ian Stevenson, the world's foremost investigator of children's past-life memories, prefers not to deal with hypnosis. Instead he interviews children who have had spontaneous past-life memories and then tries to independently verify the details of their previous existence. Stevenson, a psychiatrist, has meticulously documented twenty-five hundred of these cases, chiefly from India, Sri Lanka and Burma.

One of the most remarkable and best-documented cases of reincarnation is that of Shanti Devi from India. Mohandas Gandhi appointed a committee of fifteen people to study her unusual case. At three years of age, Shanti began speaking about her husband and children from her past life. Eventually she told her new family her husband's

## Notes

## KARMIC TRUTHS

1. See John 9:1–3 King James Version.
2. Matt. 17:11–13 New Revised Standard Version.
3. For an in-depth treatment of the role reincarnation played in the roots of Christianity and in the early Christian community, see *Reincarnation: The Missing Link in Christianity* by Elizabeth Clare Prophet with Erin L. Prophet (Corwin Springs, Mont.: Summit University Press, 1997).
4. See Elizabeth Clare Prophet, *The Lost Years of Jesus: Documentary Evidence of Jesus' 17-Year Journey to the East* (Corwin Springs, Mont.: Summit University Press, 1987).
5. Marvin W. Meyer, *The Secret Teachings of Jesus: Four Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), p. 50.
6. G. R. S. Mead, trans., *Pistis Sophia: A Gnostic Gospel* (Blauvelt, N.Y.: Spiritual Science Library, 1984), pp. 220, 315, 320, 220.
7. G. W. Butterworth, trans., *Origen: On First Principles* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1973), pp. 137, 136.
8. Origen, quoted in Jean Daniélou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*, trans. John Austin Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), p. 418.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 418–19.
10. Butterworth, *Origen: On First Principles*, p. 67.
11. W. Lutoslawski, *Pre-Existence and Reincarnation* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1928), p. 29.
12. Albert Schweitzer, quoted in Joseph Head and S. L. Cranston, comps. and eds., *Reincarnation in World Thought* (New York: Julian Press, 1967), p. 130.
13. Arthur Schopenhauer, quoted in Joseph Head and S. L. Cranston, comps. and eds., *Reincarnation: The Phoenix Fire Mystery* (New York: Julian Press, 1977), p. 296.
14. Gina Cerminara, *The World Within* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1957), pp. 3–4.
15. Head and Cranston, *Reincarnation: The Phoenix Fire Mystery*, pp. 270, 271.
16. For an excellent anthology of writings on reincarnation from around the world, see Head and Cranston, *Reincarnation: The Phoenix Fire Mystery*.
17. Dr. Alexander Cannon, quoted in Joe Fisher, *The Case for Reincarnation* (New York: Carol Publishing Group, Citadel Press, 1992), p. 47.
18. Dr. Morris Netherton, quoted in Fisher, *The Case for Reincarnation*, pp. 41–42.
19. Robert L. Snow, *Looking for Carroll Beckwith: The True Story of a Detective's Search for His Past Life* (Emmaus, Penn.: Rodale Books, Daybreak Books, 1999), p. 7.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 186.
21. Helen Wambach, *Reliving Past Lives: The Evidence*