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Reincarnation-or life in Spirit?

By Elise L. Moore

More than a billion people include reincarnation as part of their religious belief. Faith in reincarnation or transmigration (a soul reborn in another form or body after death) seems as ancient as humankind. From the Upanishads, the ancient writings of India, to the Popul Vuh, or creation story, of the Maya in Central America, peoples have conceived the possibility of returning to earth in another form after death. Even some Christians view Jesus' resurrection as evidence of reincarnation.

For many followers of Christ Jesus, his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension give proof of eternal life as something more profound-and far different-than a return to earth in another physical form. They see his experience as demonstrating the spiritual, indestructible nature of true existence; also the supremacy of the one God-of Love over hate, Life over death.

Jesus had the same body when he returned to his disciples after the crucifixion. But one of the disciples, Thomas, didn't believe that the Master had overcome death. To reassure Thomas that he was not dead or merely a ghost, Jesus told him, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing." Jesus' victory over death was confirmed not by appearing in a reincarnated form but by raising up the very same body he had before the crucifixion. He then continued illustrating the real nature of life by ascending, by demonstrating the existence of life unfettered by physicality.

Several instances of life restored are recorded in the Bible. (See, for example, I Kings 17:17-23; II Kings 4:32-37; Luke 7:11-15; Luke 8:49-55; Acts 9:36-41.) Even after four days, Lazarus walked out of the grave, not in a new form but still wrapped in burial clothing.

To interpret the revitalization of life as an indication of transmigration would contradict a profound revelation. Might not restoration demonstrate life as having existence apart from matter, as being independent of matter rather than in or of it? Instead of defining life as a soul embodied in matter, what would be the

consequence of starting from the entirely different basis of Life as God, Spirit, expressing Himself in spiritual forms? Wouldn't we see that man is actually spiritual, the image and likeness of divine Spirit? And wouldn't this open up new possibilities for healing and salvation?

When Jesus' disciples informed him that the people thought he might be John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the other deceased prophets, Jesus swiftly dismissed such speculation, asking them, "But whom say ye that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus was the Son of God, immortal from the beginning. His life was the demonstration of divine Life. His purpose was to prove God's nature as all-powerful Love, all-embracing Spirit, and to show us our spiritual origin and identity as God's beloved offspring.

Mrs. Eddy came to realize through her deep study of the Bible, through revelation and healing proof, that Jesus' teachings and works pointed to man's life permanently at one with God. Jesus fully embodied Christ, demonstrating the divine power that dissolves the illusion of life in matter. Christ regenerates us, causes us to be born again, to put off progressively the materialistic thinking that constitutes the flesh. In her book *Science and Health* Mrs. Eddy explains Christ as "the divine manifestation of God, which comes to the flesh to destroy incarnate error."

Matter is never immortal. So eternal life is not gained by progressing from a sinning, material starting point. Immortality is gained by dropping the material for the spiritual through prayer, through purification of thought, through living more and more in accord with Jesus' precepts.

St. Paul clearly indicated our need to have the mind that was in Christ. In his letter to the Ephesians he urged us to "put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and...put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Isn't this new man the spiritual image of God? Putting off the old man is not denying man's individuality but rejecting whatever would obscure it. It is exchanging a material, sinful, destructive basis of existence for the spiritual.

Right thinking and acting, sound morals, are certainly important. They form the foundation for spiritual demonstration. Yet moral goodness needs to be accompanied by a growing understanding of what God and man really are if we're

not to fall short in the working out of eternal salvation. Each demonstration of spiritual healing, of turning, with understanding to the power of God alone for health and wholeness, illustrates the presence of Christ and leads us toward eternal life, independent of matter.

Referring to her recovery from a serious injury, Mrs. Eddy observes in her *Miscellaneous Writings*, “That short experience included a glimpse of the great fact that I have since tried to make plain to others, namely, Life in and of Spirit; this Life being the sole reality of existence.”

The hope of eternal life is not a false promise. Through the revelation of Christ, we can begin to shed the burden of materialistic thinking and find our original, spiritual individuality. The spiritual is the immortal. And each one can turn from the belief of life in matter, whether incarnate or reincarnate, to demonstrate life as the likeness of divine Spirit, God.