

The Problem of Life and Death

BY

SWAMI PARAMANANDA

Author of "Path of Devotion"
"Vedanta in Practice", "The Way
of Peace and Blessedness", Etc.



THE VEDANTA CENTRE
1 Queensberry Street
Boston, Mass., U. S. A.

Reprinted from the
VEDANTA MONTHLY
‘THE MESSAGE OF THE EAST’

Issued by the Vedanta Centre of Boston.
\$1.00 a year, Single Copies, 15 cents

Copyrighted 1912, 1916 and 1917 by Swami Paramananda

THE BRATTLE PRESS
CAMBRIDGE. MASS.

CONTENTS

	Page
I. Life and Death	5
II. Can Destiny Be Overcome?	16
III. Reincarnation and Evolution	27
IV. Resurrection and Immortality	38

I.

LIFE AND DEATH.

There is nothing more vital to human hearts than the question of life and death. Does the Soul die? Do we cease to exist with the body? What happens after death to this life of which we are now conscious? This has always been the most absorbing and the most perplexing of problems to the human mind. Ages have gone by. Now and then some one has caught a glimpse of the truth regarding it and has declared it boldly before mankind, yet to every individual it comes afresh. Why? Because this question is only solved by one's own Self-realization. As our hunger cannot be satisfied if someone else eats for us; similarly the knowledge of the Self, which solves this problem, must be gained by each individual for himself. It never comes through others'

knowledge or experience. The Sages who have realized immortality, who know what death means, have answered this question; but we can only know that their answer is true by proving it through our own experience. Whoever tastes the nectar becomes immortal; but no one can become immortal by merely hearing about it.

What good, then, do these great men do us, if the solution of this problem is impossible without our own perception? They at least give us the hope that even in this life we can rise above death and gain immortality. We also get much help from them because they show us the way to acquire knowledge of the Soul. But after the path is shown, we must ourselves follow it. We must work with sincerity, faith and earnestness to reach the same state as these Great Ones have attained, that state which is the goal of every human being. The effort must be all our own, and this is the reason why this question rises afresh in every individual mind. Sometimes we may forget it through attachment to the transitory things of this world; but however we may cling to

our external surroundings, sooner or later the problem is bound to come up. Disease, death, misfortune will bring it to the surface of our minds.

Why should the question rise at all? Because man does not want to die. He wants to live, and his clinging to life makes him restless to solve this problem in order to overcome death. Man loves life. And what is this life to which he clings? It is the only thing that exists; the only thing that brings consciousness. Without it no one can move, or talk, or see, or do anything. Material forms have no value, no power independent of this life. It is indeed this life which we love when we say that we love our friends. It is not the material form of the friend that we love, but the life, the vital force, the Soul that dwells within. This is clear, because when the life goes out of the body we no more care for the bodies of those friends whom we loved. This shows that we love, not the material bodies, but the Soul, the Inner Spirit. That Self or Spirit is one without a second, deathless and indestructible.

The idea that the Soul does not die brings a great sense of responsibility. If there is a future life, then it rests with us to make it what we will. We can make it happy or miserable, a life of freedom or of bondage. No man wants to go on eternally through these changes of fortune and misfortune, pleasure and pain, these endless births and deaths. Yet he cannot help it so long as he has the least desire. Hence the Sages teach us to control all desire. The Soul is dragged down by these different desires for enjoyment, for wealth and power. But all these conditions are related to the body and we have just seen that the idea we had about ourselves as the body is a delusion. The body dies, but the Self is deathless; the body is limited, but the Self is infinite; the body has form, but the Self is formless. It has no form of its own. It is "greater than the greatest, and smaller than the smallest." As water has no form, yet it takes different forms in different vessels and again becomes one with the ocean when thrown back into it, so the Soul has no form of its own, but it assumes different forms as it dwells in differ-

ent bodies; and when it knows its own nature, it becomes one with the Universal Self.

The wise ones realize this through the process of "*Neti, Neti*" (not that, not this). They begin with the body and they see that that which has beginning must also have an end, so they know that this cannot be the Self. Then they turn to the mind. They see that the mind is constantly restless and changing, whereas the Self is changeless, therefore it cannot be the Self. So by this process of discrimination they go on until they come to the Self and then they rest satisfied. "The life to which you are clinging you have within yourself," they declare. "You are that. Atman or Soul exists in every living being, but so long as you dwell on the gross material plane, you cannot see it; you will have to go within. There you will find your True Self and you will realize that it is birthless, formless, infinite and eternal."

But you may say: "If my Soul is by its very nature immortal, it does not matter whether I know it or not. If my life is eternal, why should I bother about it?" There is a great

difference between having a thing and knowing that we have it. A man may be the possessor of a vast hidden treasure, but if he does not know it he feels poverty stricken and at every moment is in fear of starvation. Although our Soul may be the descendant of that Immortal, Infinite, Eternal Being, yet if we are not conscious of it, we are constantly afraid; our life is full of anxiety and suffering. Knowledge alone will eliminate this suffering. Until we know by our own experience what it means to go beyond death, it is useless to read about it in the Scriptures or to hear others talk of it. When death comes we are still fearful. Descriptions of immortality will not give us courage or conviction or strength. We must know. Each individual must cultivate the faculty of true discrimination and think for himself. Why should we accept any theory, whether it is set forth in the East or the West? No one can have firm faith in what other people say; each one of us must "prove all things" for himself before he can be convinced of the truth of any religion or philosophy. We may take suggestions from

outside; we may listen to those who inspire and stimulate our minds; but we must dispel the veil of darkness through our own effort. When we hear that the Soul is undying in the midst of the dying, unborn and endless, we must ask ourselves what it means. Certainly that is not the definition of this material organism, for like all combinations of matter it must be dissolved sooner or later. There must be something else therefore within us which is ever-living. Shall we then depend upon this perishable physical existence, or shall we seek for that Something which cannot be corrupted or destroyed or taken from us? That alone is the source of all real strength and inspiration. Through That only can we transcend our difficulties and limitations.

Also only as we realize our Higher Self are we able to help others. The mortal who believes in his physical nature alone, who is disturbed by heat and cold, pleasure and pain, who is running after name or fame or personal gratification, has no time to give to anyone else. He is like a hungry man; when food is brought, although someone beside him may

be starving, he thinks first of satisfying his own appetite. Nothing makes a man so strong or so self-denying as the knowledge of his Higher Self. It eliminates the impatience and unrest which are killing us, and which make us struggle madly to fulfill our ambitions here and now because we fear we may miss our only opportunity. It is lack of faith in the eternity of the Soul and the long habit of looking upon existence as a little circle of one life that lie at the root of all selfishness and wrong-doing. When a man awakens to the fact that the few years which he spends in this body represent only a very small fraction of an eternal existence, and that bodily death does not mean the end of a journey, but merely a change of form and environment offering him new opportunities, he will no longer regard death as an enemy; nor will he feel discontented with his present life.

In seeking to gain knowledge of our Soul, however, there is no need to denounce or neglect our body; we are merely to put the proper valuation upon both. We must cherish the Soul as the Soul should be cherished, and

we must also treat the body as the body should be treated—as an instrument in the hands of the Soul. Only the one who is able to do this accomplishes the purpose of life. Those who merely follow the whims and appetites of the body miss both the Here and the Hereafter. Do not think, when we are trying to make the most of this life by getting all we can of physical satisfaction and enjoyment, that we are gaining anything. We are the gainers only when we sacrifice the pleasures of this life in order to find That which connects us with the Unseen Realm; and when we do this, we actually gain more in our present life, because we learn how to live with understanding and how to face death fearlessly. That is the proof of the true Knower,—to be able to meet death as only a change of garment.

Why should we feel afraid of death? It may destroy the body, but not the Soul. And when we see someone we love dying, why should we suffer? The true man is not dead. It is only the fleshly covering which he has left behind. The real person is still living. It is because we have so little understanding that we suffer.

The Hereafter is nothing but darkness to one who has not studied this life and grasped its meaning; but he who understands this life, quickly finds his connection with the other life. He walks into that other realm and takes up his next duties naturally and easily.

Such a man becomes fearless and lives only to fulfill the commands of God. If he meets with misfortune, he sees God's will working through it; and he knows also that all happiness and success come through His Will. Thus seeing all life as nothing but a manifestation of Infinite Will, he gives himself up wholly to that Divine Will and the Infinite radiates through his every thought, word and action. His body may fall, hundred of bodies may fall; still, knowing the undying nature of the Soul, he stands up and boldly declares "Death cannot harm me." When one has that conviction it matters not where he lives, whether in the world or out of it, whether in the midst of activity or in the calm of solitude, everywhere he carries this mighty consciousness. This is what St. Paul meant when He said: "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." It is

not that we actually overcome death or save the body from dying, but we overcome the ignorance of what dies and what is undying; and we realize that there is no death for the Real; that the Soul within, which is part of God, cannot die.

II.

CAN DESTINY BE OVERCOME?

Physical science explains the laws of nature, but it fails to explain the law of human life. It shows us how in the outer world certain causes produce certain effects, but it does not tell us why among men one is born to misery and misfortune while another enjoys every blessing and privilege. If it is the law that without a cause there can never be an effect, what then can be the cause of this difference? The usual answer of religion is that it is the Divine will, that God rewards and punishes according to His will. But why should He make such distinctions? He must have some reason, for an arbitrary Ruler who rewards or punishes His children according to His whim could not be an ideal God. There must be some more satisfactory explanation. The Indo-

Aryan Sages and Philosophers found it in the law of Karma, the law of cause and effect applied to human life. They did not blame the Supreme Deity for the inequalities existing everywhere, but they placed the cause in man himself. Man, they said, is responsible for his own destiny. His present life is nothing but the result of what he has done in the past; for whatever we sow, that we reap. We cannot gather a harvest contrary to the seed we have sown. We cannot bribe the Almighty. If we wish to reap a better harvest, we must enrich our own life. We must live in accordance with our highest instincts of right and wrong. If we do not, then we must expect to suffer, for evil actions inevitably produce suffering, however we may try to escape from it.

We cannot break the law and there is no one in the higher realms of consciousness who will help us break it. God has not put us under it; our own hand has bound on the fetters which drag us down and tie us to our present conditions. Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavad-Gita: "The Almighty Lord does not partake of the good or evil deed of any being. Wisdom is

covered by ignorance, thus mortals are deluded"; and they imagine that it is God who is blessing or punishing them. It is ignorance alone that causes their bondage and suffering. So long as we are under the sway of ignorance and imperfection, we carry within ourselves the seed of unhappiness, and all our efforts to avoid it will be vain. The only escape from suffering is in not trying to run away from outer conditions, but in striving to understand the law which governs them. Often when people are in great suffering and have not proper understanding, they think that the best way to end their misery is by committing suicide. But is the law so weak, so limited that man can escape from it by simply ending his life here? Impossible. What he has created will accompany him. The Soul is not an object which we can destroy by any act of ours. Neither can we destroy the cause of misery in that way. It will last as long as we remain in ignorance of the law.

Man must begin to study his own life; he must look into his own character; he must analyze his own thoughts and actions; and

very soon he will find that the effects in this life are caused by what he himself thinks and does. As Buddha says: "All that we are is the result of what we have thought; it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage. If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him." And the law which is working in this life also governs other realms of existence; therefore if a man observes the law carefully, he can easily avoid all complications and difficulties and make his destiny what he will. He must, however, set to work with earnestness. It is not the one who merely talks or quotes from the Scriptures, but the one who lives, who learns and applies the law, he alone overcomes all adverse conditions and reshapes the course of his life.

We cannot expect to get something we have not earned; and the thing we do not deserve we cannot retain, even when it is given to us. A story is told in the Indian Scriptures that

once the Great God Siva, one of the Hindu Trinity, was asked by Parvati to help a man in great misery.

"It is impossible," was Siva's answer.

"Impossible?" Parvati exclaimed. "Nothing is impossible to You."

"I will prove it to you," Siva replied.

The man was at the time walking through a forest, full of anxiety as to how he could get something for his bodily maintenance, and the God Siva placed a bag of gold directly in his path; but as he was passing the spot, the man chanced to close his eyes and missed the gold. This is what is happening all the time. We must have the right to everything that we desire. We must earn it.

All our thoughts and actions, even the smallest, combined together make up our destiny and determine our happiness or unhappiness. This is a fact, whether we recognize it or not. Through what we say and do each one of us is working out his own salvation or misery. Therefore we must guard our every thought and action, for sometimes even a little thought may be the seed from which will spring a great

tree of activity bearing good or evil fruit. But this does not mean that when suffering comes as the result of wrong doing, man is helpless. No. What he has himself created, he has also the power to counteract. He may not be able to undo wholly the results of a past mistake; but understanding what it is, he does not waste his energy in useless rebellion or repentance. He meets it cheerfully and tries to learn a lesson from it; for every experience, whatever its nature, comes as a blessing when one understands the law. This is especially marked in the lives of people in the East, even among the most ignorant. When they are suffering, they do not give way to despair; because they know that suffering is not a lasting thing; that misfortune is a cloud which rises and must have its setting; that it is nothing but an effect of their own actions and thoughts; and as the cause is finite, no infinite result can be produced from it.

When we understand the law, we become patient and strong-hearted and we are able to meet all the conditions of life bravely. Why should we grow impatient or down-hearted,

when we know that nothing can happen contrary to the law and that if something has come to us, it must have a deep meaning and purpose? Often we hear the complaint that good people always suffer, while evil-minded people seem to triumph here. What is meant by this? Because the selfish and worldly-minded have more sense pleasures and luxuries, are they for that reason more fortunate? Are these what we want to get out of life? They should not be the ideal of human existence. It should be to rise above bodily suffering and pleasure; to bear with equal-mindedness whatever comes, knowing that all kinds of experience are necessary to unfold our higher nature and increase our spiritual strength.

When we realize that this life is neither for pain nor for pleasure, that its value is not according to a man's bodily conditions, but that it is for the manifestation of the Soul, for the attainment of freedom, our ideas of good and evil fortune change. And when we awaken to the fact that the fetters which hold us down are not outside, but within, that we have bound

ourselves by our own desires and imperfections, then we cease to complain or blame others. Who can ever cause you suffering or disturbance if you have that serenity of heart which comes from knowledge that you are not the body, you are not a puny mortal, but that you are a mighty Soul, a child of God? That knowledge will at once place you on a rock which nothing can move or shake.

An understanding of the law of Karma helps us to avoid mistakes and follow the path which leads to the right goal. The effect of mistakes is inevitable. If a man out of mistake puts his hand into the fire, it burns. Whether he does it consciously or not, it must burn him. Similarly our actions produce their effects. And what are we to learn from these effects? That we should not repeat the same ignorant actions. Everything that we do—our talking, working, walking, thinking, every action indeed brings a reaction and we must meet this whether we have acted consciously or unconsciously. But how are we to avoid the results of unconscious actions? Sri Krishna tells Arjuna in the Gita: "Whatever thou doest,

whatever thou eatest, whatever thou offerest in oblation, whatever thou givest and the austerities thou performest, do that as an offering to the Lord. Thus thou shalt be freed from the bonds of action that bears good and evil fruit." In other words, if we can surrender ourselves wholly to God, then we shall become free from all the binding effects of life. We may live in the world but we shall not be touched by it, just as the lotus leaf floats on the water but is never wet by it. When we begin to realize what life is and what is its relation to God, to nature, and to all human beings, we begin to see everything in a different light. We do not have the attitude of condemning anything. If we find good people suffering, we do not feel that it is without a reason; we do not rise in opposition declaring that there is no justice in the universe. This impulsive rebellious spirit comes only through ignorance.

The Law of Karma must not be confounded with the morbid idea of Fate—that what is must be. It does not throw that weight on one's heart. On the contrary it declares that no condition is permanent, but that if man

wishes to escape from the present fruits of his actions, he has only to direct his energies steadily in another channel and he will counteract the results of past errors. It tells him: "Let the past go, let it not hang over you. Even if your life has been full of mistakes, it will not do any good to dwell on them. Take some Ideal which you can look up to and follow that with your whole heart and soul. Constantly hold your mind fixed on that and direct all your actions towards that. Very soon you will become free from your imperfections."

If we have formed a bad habit, or if a feeling of hatred or jealousy is burning in our heart, the surest and quickest way to conquer it is to keep our thought fixed on some higher object, for often by fighting our imperfections we make them stronger. Whenever we are full of despair because our life and strength and understanding seem so limited, it is best to forget as much as we can those little ideas and look at things which are bigger and nobler. No matter where we may be, on a high plane or a low plane, we are all going through the process of evolution and sooner or later we

must all come to perfection. We should always try to give people hope and encouragement when they are depressed. Sometimes when a man's heart is sinking into a state of hopelessness, just a word of hope and sympathy will bring him up. Everybody can find fault with us and remind us of our weaknesses, but he is a true friend who can come and plant the seed of faith in our heart by showing us that we have in us the same possibilities as a Christ or a Buddha.

Our destiny lies in our own hands and we can mould it as we will. Let us therefore diligently set to work and strive with patience, perseverance and determination to uproot all the imperfections which now seem to be a part of our nature and which cause all our suffering. By right thought and right action we can remove every fetter that binds us and make our lives a constant blessing both to ourselves and to our fellowmen.

III.

REINCARNATION AND EVOLUTION.

The complex nature of our existence always demands explanation and in seeking to find it, ~~man~~ has been led to investigate both the physical and spiritual realms, for the study of life is the most interesting of all study. The very fact that we exist makes us want to understand the process of life:—how and whence we have come into existence and what happens after death. The discovery of the theory of evolution by modern science led many to believe that it would solve the whole problem of life. But the theory as presented in the West does not offer the explanation we require. Western scientists say that the natural struggle for existence must lead every germ of life to progress and that it cannot stop evolving until it has developed the power to resist all difficulties; that, by the law of the survival of the

fittest, wherever there is a necessity of escaping from greater forces, the lesser forces are striving to acquire greater power; hence, every living thing, from the minutest insect up, is constantly ~~compelled~~ impelled by its inherent nature to try to evolve its life-force. They also attempt to show how the body evolves through the lower stages and continues to evolve until it is perfected.

The explanation of modern physical evolution, however, can never fully satisfy us, for it does not account for the higher planes of manifestation. But this is not the case with the ancient evolutionists of India, like Kapila, who lived in the seventh century B. C. and who extended his conception beyond the physical to moral and spiritual evolution. These early Seers realized that there can be no evolution without involution. The fact that something cannot come out of nothing, as modern science also affirms, proves that involution must precede evolution. The relation, indeed, between evolution and involution is as inseparable as between cause and effect; and just as to understand the effect we must

know the cause so to understand our present state of evolution we must know all that has gone before; for what we call our mental and physical inheritances are not matters of chance, but the direct outcome of our past.

The wise ones who have been brave and strong enough to lift the veil, know that this life cannot be explained until we connect it with a previous existence and that the future existence will find its explanation in the present one; for the law of life is nothing but the process of evolution. When we grasp this, we are able to comprehend more clearly the diversity and inequality apparent everywhere. Why are not all men alike? Does an All-mighty, All-merciful Lord create one happy and another miserable? What brings the distinction? There must be some cause, for there can be no effect without a cause, and the inequalities in outer condition and mental power among human beings are effects of causes which lie imbedded in the character of each individual.

. The gross body is not all. There is another known as the subtle body, which is composed

of finer and less destructible material. This subtle body consists of mind, intellect and the sense of "I." In it are stored up all the impressions gathered through our different lives. Only by knowing this subtler part of man, wherein dwells the individuality, can we gain insight into the course of his evolution, and understand why his life varies from every other. We create for ourselves these differences either consciously or unconsciously. Our destiny is not governed, as we imagine, by a supernatural power. The happiness and misery which we experience here are not forced upon us by an arbitrary Providence, but are the inevitable result of our own thoughts and deeds. We must reap what we have sown. No one can give us what we do not deserve, nor can any one keep from us the blessing we have earned.

We ourselves have the power to make and unmake our destiny. Therefore if we are born with certain defects in our character, if we are placed in an unhappy environment, although these are due to our own past errors, such conditions are by no means unalterable,

but can be counteracted by our present mode of living. When, however, a person dies without completing his task in life, with his goal unattained, is everything ended for him? Has he no further chance? Sri Krishna answers in the Bhagavad-Gita: "There is no loss for him either here or hereafter; for he who doeth good never attaineth an evil condition. In his new birth he regaineth the knowledge acquired in his former incarnations and striveth again for his end. He is irresistibly led by his previous tendencies. Thus purified by many births and rebirths, he reacheth the Supreme Goal."

Now the question naturally arises: If we existed before, why is it that we do not remember? We do not recall many things that took place in our childhood, yet we cannot say that we did not exist then. Our memory is not in its pure state, our mind at present is not collected or focused enough to penetrate the past, therefore our knowledge is limited and our recollection vague. Also the power of memory varies. There are some people who can recall even the smallest detail of their

childhood; and there are others who do not remember what happened a year ago, or even yesterday. This shows how minds differ. The memory, however, can be purified, as we find in the lives of the Great Ones. Buddha, for instance, remembered his past; and many Yogis who lead lives of contemplation and absolute purity also are able to know their previous births, for the mind becomes like a crystal and reflects everything clearly.

Mind is the cause of our bondage and mind is the cause of our freedom. It is the unfulfilled desires of the mind which impel us to seek embodiment in order to satisfy them. Desires are like the seeds of new births and the character of those desires shapes our future. We read in the Gita: "Whatever state or being a man dwelleth upon at the time of leaving the body, that verily he attaineth." In other words he attains the condition he has most constantly held in his thought through his life-time. This means that a man cannot gain anything other than what he has created for himself by his habits of mind. He may wish to have something else, but his own nature,

formed by his voluntary or involuntary thoughts or deeds, will impel him to move in a certain direction. If we wish to change our present course, we must cultivate such habits of thought as will counteract the past and carry us in a new direction.

What do we really want? Do we want that which is temporary or that which is lasting? Can we be satisfied to go on through this round of birth and death, finding little gratifications for this one span of life, identifying ourselves with mere bodily existence, seeking nothing beyond? If we long for something else, we must work for it. We must unfold all our latent powers. We must learn to know our true nature. Through moral evolution alone man can attain his freedom. We can gain material blessings by striving for material things; for whatever a man constantly thinks of and works for, he gains. But until he can unfold his moral and spiritual nature, that nature within him which is mighty and imperishable, he cannot be free.

. Life is indestructible. All the great philosophers and sages recognize that life has not its

rising and setting in this one small existence. It has been and will be. The fullness of evolution could not be reached during one embodiment, for the time is not long enough. The Soul has not finished its experience; it has not gathered all the knowledge it requires and therefore it must return to gather more. "Why should I not come back as often as I am capable of acquiring fresh knowledge, fresh experience? Do I bring away so much from once that there is nothing to repay the trouble of coming back?" the great German writer Lessing exclaims. And Huxley says: "Like the doctrine of evolution itself, that of transmigration has its roots in the realm of reality. None but hasty thinkers will reject it on the ground of inherent absurdity."

The doctrine of evolution and reincarnation explains the law of life; and when we understand it, we have no feeling of bitterness towards our present conditions. A rebellious spirit will never help us escape from suffering and ignorance; only work, work with understanding can free us. When we learn to mould this life of ours wisely, then we regard it as a

privilege and a blessing to possess it, because through it we can manifest the glory of Godhood. This is the purpose of evolution. Every germ of life is descended from the Almighty and every germ must ultimately attain union with its Source. Most people are at present making the journey unconsciously, fettered by many desires which can never be satisfied. To try to fulfill them is like adding fuel to fire. At every step we must use discrimination. We must question what we want and what can give us what we want. We must also bear in mind that this life of ours is not a matter of accident; that it is not so temporary or so limited as we imagine; but that it is everlasting.

Faith in the eternity of our existence will lift us above the plane of physical consciousness to a plane where we shall gain the power to live our lives nobly and fulfill all our duties wisely. Man does not fear to live when he understands what life is. He does not wish to run away then, for who runs away from life? Do you suppose that people who commit suicide do so because they do not love life? No.

It is the bondage, the ignorance, the miseries of life from which they wish to escape; but they take the wrong road. They destroy the instrument with which they might unfold their nature and gain that which would bring them what their soul is really craving. No living being hates life or wishes to escape from it. It is from death we want to escape; and this last enemy, death, can never be overcome until we have evolved our spiritual nature, the nature which is undying, free and complete. Infinity has no lack; and when limited man finds his unlimited nature — that which is part of God, then he casts off all bondage and transcends the realm of death.

The idea of reincarnation takes from us all sense of impatience and injustice, because it shows that we are not put here arbitrarily, with only a few years in which to do all that we have to do; but that we shall be given other opportunities to work out our desires and find fullness of life; that what we have left unfinished we shall have another chance to finish. The majority of people, who live under slavery to their lower desires, have no choice as to the environment and conditions of their new birth.

They have created a chain, a weight which holds them down; but it is a self-created fetter, which they themselves can break by purifying their desires and elevating their thoughts.

Every mortal must be awakened some day or other to his spiritual nature. It may come gradually through the natural process of evolution, or suddenly through disappointment and suffering. Therefore we must not imagine that all the suffering we see in human life is a curse. Great blessings sometimes come through pain or grief, and a man who understands the law does not cry out against his fate. He lives here with serenity. He knows that nothing happens without a definite purpose; that the experiences of pleasure and pain, of success or failure, which a man undergoes, all help him to evolve his higher nature and lead him to ultimate perfection. Therefore let each one of us live his life consciously and cheerfully. Let us never give way to despair or look upon this life as a burden. Let us work with perseverance and undepressed heart until we realize that for our True Self there is no death, but that this life of ours is a part of the Infinite, Indestructible and All-pervading Life.

IV.

RESURRECTION AND IMMORTALITY.

(Easter Address.)

Know That to be imperishable by which all this is pervaded. None can ever cause the destruction of the Soul who abides within, the Immutable. This body has beginning and end, but the Dweller within this body is deathless. Therefore he who regards the indwelling Soul as perishable does not know its true nature. It is not born nor does it ever die, nor after existing for a time does it go into non-existence. It is unborn and eternal. Though the body may change and perish, the Soul is undying and unchanging. He who knows such to be the nature of the Soul, how can he grieve about anything! Why should he lament over passing conditions, since they do not touch the Soul? As one casts off worn-out garments and puts on new ones, similarly the

Soul, casting off worn-out bodies, takes fresher ones for its use. It is not to be pierced by the sword, it cannot be burned by fire, it cannot be wet by water, nor can air dry it. It is impenetrable and indestructible. Knowing this, why should one fear death? All bodies are perishable, but the Dweller within is imperishable; therefore the wise man never grieves or fears.

Thus have the Indo-Aryan Sages and Seers sung regarding the true nature of the Soul. But no amount of mere hearing can convince us, not until we have had a practical proof that the Soul survives bodily death shall we truly believe. And that is why a Christ must come and rise from the dead to show us that death cannot destroy the True, the Real. Unless man can see this face to face, unless he can have it actually demonstrated, he doubts again and again; and even after he sees, he often forgets. For that reason we have, in all countries and among all religions, certain figures who stand out as having survived death and thus given tangible proof of their immortal nature. The idea of rising from the dead does not ap-

pear for the first time in the Christ life. Indian history contains many instances of Saints and Sages who were often seen after they had departed from this body. It is a very old conception and it goes hand in hand with the conception of the immortality of the Soul.

Although, however, there may have been rare instances of Incarnate Teachers actually rising and reassuming the use of their physical bodies, this was possible only because the body had been so spiritualized and brought into such perfect harmony with the Soul that it was no longer subject to the laws governing gross matter. But this cannot apply to the ordinary human being, whose spiritual nature is unawakened and whose body is dense and under the laws of the physical plane. Those, therefore, who interpret the "resurrection of the body" to mean that man will rise as a man of flesh are destined to disappointment; for that idea cannot stand the test of science, logic, or true religion. The body is a composition of material particles and all things that are composed must sooner or later be dissolved; but within this gross body there is another, known

as the spiritual body, which physical death cannot destroy. When the Soul departs from the physical body, it takes with it this subtle body, which according to Indian psychology consists of *Manas* (mind), *Buddhi* (intellect or reason) and *Ahamkara* (ego). It is this body which rises from the dead, hence man should strive to know this subtle principle of his being and learn to identify himself with this rather than with his outer form.

In the early stages of our Soul evolution, it is difficult for us to separate our spiritual life from our physical life. Even when we seek spiritual consciousness, it is in order to demonstrate something through the body and for the benefit of the body. But this body is only the dwelling-place of Something more vital, and until we gain knowledge of That, we cannot know the true use and purpose of life. We must not let our consciousness be buried in the grave of matter. It should rather rest in that Higher Principle within man which is indestructible. We are told this again and again, yet when death comes we shudder before it. What is the cause of all such fear? False

perception, ignorance. Our life is centered in the body, and our bodily consciousness so overpowers our spiritual nature that we cannot imagine the existence of anything apart from our physical being.

True resurrection means rising out of this grave of ignorance before we are separated from this body. When we have had even a glimpse of our True Self, then death can never again touch us. Christ manifested this. He was so convinced of the immortality of His Soul that He had no fear when death confronted Him. Death, from which every created being instinctively shrinks, He embraced easily, because He knew that for the real man dying was no more than a change of garment. The outer garment might fall, but the inner garment of the Soul could not be destroyed on the cross. Knowing this, He did not try to escape from what we call death. We find the same thing in the lives of other great Teachers, — Socrates, for example. Having absolute faith in his immortal nature and in that subtle body which does not perish with physical death, he was most willing to give up this

coarser garment of flesh.

Until we are in the same way conscious of a spiritual body within us, we cannot transcend the grave. Do not think that all people will rise from the tomb at the Day of Judgment, as it is generally believed. Only those who have a clear conception of their spiritual Self will rise, but others who cling to matter will not. They will remain bound by their self-created chains until the beginning of a new cycle, when they will take up again the thread of life and continue their evolution. You have heard also of earth-bound spirits. No supernatural power holds them to this plane; it is their own ignorance. The physical body seems the only real thing to them; and even after they are forced by death to leave it, they still cling to it. But nothing they can do will change its perishable nature, and when the Soul cannot detach itself, it suffers untold miseries. That which is unreal will always remain unreal; that which is fleeting can never become everlasting; merely because man takes one thing for another and gives a wrong name to it cannot alter the truth.

This Easter feast teaches us a wonderful lesson. It is celebrated in almost every country. Others may not call it by the same name, but everywhere it is a feast signifying resurrection or the coming of new life. As nature bursts forth into blossom after the long dead winter, similarly man must rise with fresh vigor and strive to manifest new life. All such festivals are symbolic. If we do not understand their real significance and merely observe them by dressing the body in fresh garments and attending a religious service, we miss their purpose. It is true that this body is the temple of God, and because it is the temple of the Infinite, Indestructible, Immortal Self, we must cherish and care for it. Fresh outer garments and freshness in external environment no doubt help in giving us a fresh impetus to spiritual growth, and so far they are good. But we should not forget the deeper meaning of these feast days.

What is the real lesson that Christ by his rising sought to teach? That man, the true man, is the son of God; hence he is immortal, indestructible, and he must prove it by trans-

cending death. Our consciousness is now buried in our material interests; we must dig down beneath this physical life until we touch our spiritual nature and let that blossom forth. Such is the true lesson of Easter. It comes anew each year to remind us that we must not cling to this life which is so perishable, but we must gain a consciousness of that within us which survives all bodily dissolution. The Aryan Sages deny death. They declare to all men: "Children of Immortal Bliss, why have you forgotten your Divine nature? Do not remain buried in ignorance. Follow the path, realize your True Self, and you will find Everlasting Life."

No one can give us immortality; we must attain it for ourselves. If we always worship Mammon and cherish the body, forsaking the Soul, what have we? We may gain the wealth of this entire universe, but it will dwindle into nothingness unless we have possession of the God-part in us. It is the Infinite that we must try to inherit. We are by birth-right heirs to that Infinite, but we do not know

it. Why? Because our mind has become so enshrouded in matter that Soul-consciousness is for us an alien consciousness. Yet only when we are sincerely striving for spiritual consciousness do we truly live the spiritual life. It does not matter how many times we fall, God knows our heart and He rewards us according to the spirit within us. If our spirit is earnest and full of yearning, He will give us all that we need for our highest growth. The spiritual life must be lived side by side with our material life. We should never set aside our Soul, for our condition here and hereafter is wholly according to our spiritual unfoldment. All people do not meet the same end. There are some who rise above death here in this body, and there are others who cannot sever themselves from their bodily consciousness even after they have entered the grave. It is most important for us to detach ourselves from this clinging to matter before we die. If there is any spiritual freedom or real happiness to come after death, we should try to make it ours here and now.

It is not true that after this life we shall find

eternal life. Life is eternal now. Immortality does not begin after the grave. Then you may say, "What is the need of struggling for it?" Because, unless we free our mind while we are living here and make it a true instrument with which to gain God-Vision, it will prove a drawback to us after death. We must realize the existence of our subtle body in this life. The ordinary body must die, because it is a combination of earth, water, ether, air and fire; and these elements, now held together by the Soul, fall apart when it is gone. But that other subtle body is less destructible, because it is nearer the effulgent Spirit of man and the effulgent Spirit of man is part of God. Man does not need to go outside to find Godhood; on the contrary, he can never perceive the Divine in the external until he has seen It within himself.

There are many ways by which we can purify our hearts and thus revive the Spirit of God within us. Service, self-abnegation, meditation, one-pointed devotion to an Ideal all help. Actually we are struggling every minute to manifest this Divine Spirit, but we

go in the wrong direction. We cling to mere shadows; for this phenomenal world is full of shadows; and the result is painful, because the shadows must vanish. Let us find the Real! This is the mission of Christ and of all great Saviours or Seers—to show us the Real, to help us believe in a world which is invisible to us in our days of ignorance, and to make that world real to us, that we may enjoy the bliss of God-consciousness while still in the body. May the spirit of Christ, of Buddha, of all the Great Ones inspire us to realize our immortal birthright here and now. Such is the earnest prayer of my heart.