

**Man's Quest
for
Immortality**

From Ancient Times to the Present

Also by G. Cope Schellhorn

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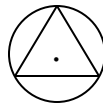
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Man's Quest for Immortality

From Ancient Times to the Present

G. Cope Schellhorn



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For Patricia,
who created the right
environment and offered so much
assistance in the preparation of this manuscript,
and Zecharia Sitchin,
in recognition of his
pioneering research in Near Eastern
Studies and his revolutionary analyses.

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Chapter One

The Yearning for Immortality

A famous old syllogism of logic states: All men are mortal. Socrates is a man. Therefore, Socrates is mortal. And Socrates did most assuredly die. Or did he? Every last bit of him?

Plato tells us Socrates wanted to believe in an afterlife. But so did most Greeks of his day as did many Romans, whose empire soon dominated the Mediterranean, and as do the majority of human beings living today, regardless of race, color or creed. Belief in or hope for some kind of afterlife is a universal constant and has been, in one form or another, since before the dawning of Eastern and Western civilization.

There is something in man, an intuition, a subconscious certainty, an overpowering urge for wish fulfillment or something more fine, more elusive and less definable that leads the great majority of humanity to predict the survival of what has been called variously the individual spirit, the soul, the ego, the personality or simply the consciousness after physical death. Not everyone agrees on terminology or definitions. Ideas of just what survives and how it survives are numerous to say the least. But that something survives, something essential, intelligent, sentient and lasting, is common to all theories of survival. The human inclination to believe in some kind of posthumous afterlife is as strong today as ever, even though modern science generally rejects such a notion.

Recent polls by several organizations confirm the idea that the

afterlife question is on people's minds probably more than they consciously realize. It is like a stew on the backburner of a stove, forgotten about for awhile, then cursorily checked and forgotten again. Over the years, when Americans are asked whether they personally believe in God, 85-90 percent can be counted upon to reply in the affirmative. In 2004, Gallup reported that 81 percent of the population believed in a heaven of some kind. A more recent poll published in *AARP The Magazine* (September/October 2007) found that 73 percent of people 50 and older agreed with the statement, "I believe in life after death." Needless to say, a belief in heaven is preceded by a belief in afterlife. No afterlife, no heaven. American Christians, to this researcher's surprise, were more generous and more ecumenical in their attitudes about the possibility of non-Christian religions' ability to lead the soul to eternal life. A 2006 Pew Research Center poll titled "Religion in America" found that "Three-quarters of the public say more religions (than Christianity alone) can lead to eternal life, while just 18 percent think their own religion the only way to achieve eternal life." The most contentious group among American persuasions was the evangelical Protestants who were "evenly divided (48%-48%) over whether their faith is the only route to eternal life" The Baylor Religion Survey (2006) which purports to be "the most extensive and sensitive study of religion ever conducted," offers this tantalizing bit of information that probably would surprise just about everyone. When the pollsters asked the participants to agree or not agree with the statement, "It is possible to communicate with the dead (Talk to the Dead)," 19.9 percent of the responders answered in the affirmative. That is an answer that would most likely have merited burning at the stake during the Salem witch trials and later in many parts of America.

Today in greater America, mechanistic rationalists are as certain as they were a century ago that the body is no more than a physiochemical machine and are as thoroughly convinced as always that afterlife speculations, and the evidence which has been collected to support them, have no place in science. Their attitude remains the traditional one: If the evidence cannot be replicated in the laboratory, it is not evidence. Japanese psychotherapist Seiyu Kiriyama (*You Have Been Here Before:*

Reincarnation) offers a contemporary example of this kind of limited scientific vision by quoting from anatomist Takeshi Yoro's work *Yuinoron* (Brain-Only Theory): 'In summary, I contend that the mind is ultimately nothing more than a function of the nervous system and that the brain is just one structural component of this system.' Obviously materialistic, Western, scientific attitudes are nothing new to Asian philosophy and practice even though such patterns of thought are not traditional or as yet typical.

Many scientists, especially psychologists and parapsychologists of the late nineteenth century, to the present day, do subscribe, however, to the idea that there is indeed evidence of posthumous survival. Most all of those agree, there is a need for more research and a more open-minded willingness among scientists in general to pursue it. Such eminent scientific figures of the nineteenth century as F.W.H. Myers, William Barrett, Oliver Lodge, Alfred Russel Wallace and William Crookes, and prominent researchers of the twentieth century, such as Karlis Osis, Ian Stevenson, Robert Crookall, Camille Flammarion, William James, Hornell Hart, Charles Tart, Celia Green, D.S. Rogo, Erlender Haraldsson, John Palmer, Carl Jung, Raymond Moody, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and Kenneth Ring, to name but a few, have not hesitated to embrace the subject and allied subjects, such as out-of-body experiences (OBEs) and near-death experiences (NDEs). They naturally do not all reach the same conclusions, but they all agree in principle that the experiential data available is extremely valuable and needs more study. Unfortunately, there is a tendency of academic researchers to avoid such topics in America because, it would appear, they are considered less scientifically acceptable by their scientific and academic colleagues. This researcher's long experience with academe has convinced him that it is not an environment that inspires, or rewards, strong steps forward that are not perceived as politically correct among the powers that be.

In the course of this investigation, we will explore some of the evidence supporting survival theory in succeeding chapters. It is, nevertheless, important to initiate our investigation as close to the beginning as we can get. This would be when humans, as we now know them, first began to leave evidence of afterlife beliefs.

It is virtually impossible to study humanity's quest for immortality without taking at least a partial chronological approach because, as we shall see, ideas of afterlife were, to a large extent, cumulative and often interrelating over time. They often changed within cultures or were refined as they passed from culture to culture. Sometimes they underwent extensive, internal modification, as in the ancient Hebrew world.

Two revealing accounts from ancient history, which bear witness to just how hot the desire for immortality can burn in the human heart and how greatly it can obsess the human mind, are the story of Alexander the Great's pilgrimage to the oracle at the Siwa oasis, Egypt, and the even more ancient tale of Gilgamesh, Sumerian king of Uruk, who attempted to visit heaven and secure the secrets of eternal life.

After accepting the crown of Macedonia, following the assassination of his father, Philip II, Alexander consulted the oracle at Delphi, Greece, and received a prophecy of great fame but a short life. This prophecy would subsequently prove all too accurate. But in the meantime, Alexander set his ambition to work conquering Egypt. It was not long after the success of this venture, and shortly after (some accounts say "before") founding the new city of Alexandria at the mouth of the Nile in 332 B.C., that he set off on his pilgrimage to the Temple of Zeus-Amun at Ammonium (Siwa oasis). Amun-Re, Egyptian god of the sun, was usually identified by Macedonians and Greeks with Zeus. Historically, the pharaohs were believed to be sons of Amun-Re and therefore immortal. There were rumors afloat at the time that Alexander had been sired, not by Philip II but by Zeus-Amun, who had visited the royal Macedonian court in the mortal disguise of pharaoh Nectanebus and secretly impregnated his mother, Olympia. Whatever the truth, and despite whoever started the story, the story appealed to Alexander for an obvious reason. If it were true, then he could lay claim to immortality through lineage, because it was generally acknowledged throughout the ancient world that the sons of the gods were unequivocally immortal and so also were pharaohs and their offspring. They were, after all, either true sons of the gods themselves (especially in very ancient times) or the chosen surrogates of these gods—which was good enough leverage to

make the grand presumption.

According to the historians (Callisthenes, Ptolemy, Aristobulus) who accompanied Alexander to the Siwa oasis, his hopes for immortality in afterlife and the prospect of becoming at least a glorious demigod during his mortal life were legitimized by the Ammonium prophecy. Or so Alexander said and so he did act. But, as fascinating as all this is, we have only Alexander's word that the oracle confirmed his immortality. And his vested interest in the outcome could hardly be called lukewarm. The historians tell us there were no witnesses to the prophetic moment—because Alexander went to his audience alone.

It would seem that Alexander's newfound semidivinity went to his head. He is described by his own men as sometimes favoring a two-horned, ram's-head helmet at parties and gatherings, thereby emphasizing (some suggested flaunting) his affiliation with Zeus-Amun. Furthermore, he attempted for awhile to enforce the Persian custom of *proskynesis*—a rather bootlicking form of obeisance which was resisted and resented by many of his men and considered by most Greeks (and Macedonians) to be a demonstration of reverence suitably offered to only the gods on high. (Heckel and Yardly) One thing is certain. Alexander was not the first man in human history, nor would he be the last, who yearned to escape the limitations of his fleshly being and, when he thought he had done so, let that notion partially unhinge his better judgment and create in his mind fantasies of superiority to those who served him.

Alexander was preceded in his concern about his prospects for immortality by another famous king, Gilgamesh of Uruk. Perhaps the oldest series of interrelated stories in history, predating Alexander's fortunes by more than 2000 years, is the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh. Variations of Gilgamesh's adventures appeared as well in later Akkadian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Hurrian and Hittite versions. The original Sumerian tales of this culture-hero may date to around 4000 B.C. By almost any estimate, some of the extant material is well over 1500 years older than the oldest sections of the Old Testament. The collection of tales which were found at Nineveh in the ruins of Assurbanipal's great library are the most complete account we have of this most extraordinary king. According to the ancient

King Lists, he was in fact a historical reality, as real as Alexander of Macedon.

Gilgamesh's fate carries a stern message for those who would mentally confuse immortality of the physical body with ideas of cosmic survival. He seems to have equated immortality with a body which would never wear out. The idea of immortal soul-stuff surviving that body and existing on attractive planes of existence beyond earth, or of the possibility of reincarnating again on earth, seems to either not have occurred to him or to have been discarded. These were ideas which had not yet appeared on cultural "radar screens" the world over. The gods he was familiar with had material bodies and appeared to live forever. According to the Sumerian tablets and their facsimiles, the gods never broached the idea of an immortal soul to the people of earth. It simply was not advantageous for them to raise the issue.

So who exactly was this king among men and what befell him?

Gilgamesh was king of Uruk, the biblical Erech, located in southern Babylonia. The King Lists places him fifth in line of the First Dynasty, which positions him historically at about the latter half of the third millennium B.C.E. One account states his mother was the minor goddess, Ninsun, wife of Lugalbanda, *a god who was not his father*. It is sometimes written that the high priest Kullab, a mortal, was his true father. Whatever the case, Gilgamesh was said to be two-thirds god but mortal nevertheless. The problem was the young king wished to be immortal in this life as well as forever. As strange as it may seem to us today, the King Lists tell us that, at least in the Mesopotamian part of the world, the pre-Noachian, pre-Gilgamesh kings were immortals—or at least they seemed to be in the eyes of Adamic man. But a great change was imminent. The "immortal" rulers of the past, who we are told had descended from the heavens, were gradually withdrawing, placing often in their stead as their surrogates demigods (such as Gilgamesh) and even thoroughly mortal kings to rule over men. This was called, "When the gods brought kingship down from heaven." Gilgamesh wished to claim the prerogatives of his more godly side, the complete immortality of godliness which, it became clear, was reserved for pure-blooded

gods and goddesses alone.

One of the accounts tells us that Gilgamesh sets out with his faithful friend, Enkidu, to reach the heavenly abode of the gods where he plans to state his case and make his plea. To reach their destination, they must first make their way to the land of Tilmun, wherein lies the launching site of the gods who travel back and forth between heaven and earth in their *mu(s)* and *shem(s)*. The launching site, it is plain to see, sounds suspiciously like a spaceport, which should give us today much food for thought. If there ever were ancient astronauts visiting earth, here we have excellent, detailed descriptions about what may have been transpiring at the dawn of “modern” civilizations. The Sumerians and the Semitic Akkadians who succeeded them had an elaborate vocabulary for space-age vehicles including allied paraphernalia. The Sumerian word *mu* and its Semitic derivatives *shu-mu*, *sham* or *shem* have an interesting etymology. Quite literally, *mu* and *shem* descend linguistically from the word *shamaim* (“heaven”) and are further derived from the root word *shamah* (“that which is highward”). Thanks to the studies of two Near Eastern scholars, G.M. Redflood and Zecharia Sitchin, we now have a wider appreciation for the possibilities inherent in such information.

We also have, now, the interesting prospect that our “gods” under consideration are extraterrestrials who have colonized earth and rule over their earthly children who, the tablets relate, they have genetically helped create or modify. If such is the case, it is quite possible that these extraterrestrial visitors and pure-bred kings are not really immortal after all but, because of their excessively-long lifespans, seemed so to their subjects who were in great awe of them and undoubtedly envious. All of this speculation gives a potentially interesting twist to Genesis 6:4 and 1 Enoch 15:4-9. But these are other stories for other days.

Gilgamesh finally reaches Tilmun after many dangerous travails. Enkidu loses his life in one adventure to the heartfelt chagrin of his royal friend. The guards of the spaceport finally allow Gilgamesh to proceed, after he has explained his partly divine origins. The local area is restricted and only gods and those in their service are allowed access.

At last Gilgamesh flies upward to the Abode of the Gods. There he has an audience with Ziusudra/Utnaphistim the

Sumerian/Akkadian Noah who was, up till then, the only mortal ever granted immortality. He appears to the king as a full-bodied, physical human being.

In answer to Gilgamesh's questions and his request for the secrets of immortality, Ziusudra (Sumerian version) or Utnaphistim (Akkadian version) replies:

'Do we build a home forever?
Do we seal agreements forever?
Do brothers divide their heritage
Forever?
Does the birth of children
Take place on earth forever?
Do the rivers forever rise
And bring flood waters?
Forever there has been
No forever . . .'

Gilgamesh's search for the secret of the Tree of Life ultimately goes unrewarded. In one episode, however, he does retrieve a water plant which is reputed to confer everlasting life, but he loses it. Later in human history, the motif that there is a magic elixir, a food, a special fountain of water or something else attainable but difficult to find and possess, which confers physical immortality on more literal-minded questers, runs with a strong undercurrent through the human psyche and pops to the surface every now and then. Attempts by early Chinese and medieval alchemists to create a chemical solution to the problem are examples of such quests as is the story of Ponce de Leon and his search for the Fountain of Youth. So is Luigi Galvani's quest for the life-force, which he believed he had discovered in electrical current. But until the developing religious impulse in man conceives of the idea that all men, or at least most men, can attain immortality beyond this world through good works, faith or certain beliefs and actions, the fate of mortal men like Gilgamesh seems settled. He is forced to accept his destiny and return to Uruk to live out his days and rule over his subjects until death removes him from this world to *Kurnugea*, the underworld of enfeebled shadows, which is no real, substantial immortality at

all.

At this point in civilized, human history, there is no desirable, everlasting life, neither on earth, in the underworld or in the heavens for mortal men—not even for kings whose genes are two-thirds godly:

‘The life which you look for,
You will not find.
When the gods created man,
They allotted to him death.
But everlasting life
They withheld for themselves.
So, Gilgamesh, fill your stomach,
Make merry day and night.
Keep each day a movable feast.’

There is an implied question running throughout the Epic of Gilgamesh in all its variations and fragments which might be stated as such, Why should the gods who created us in their own image deny us everlasting life? They in fact did not. What they denied us during their bioengineering experiments was an extra-long, physical existence, something vaguely approaching theirs. Quite possibly, given the environment of earth-biology with which to work, they could not create a viable entity *of the kind they wanted* that would exceed in longevity what they ultimately produced. We have already stated the opinion that they had their vested interests. They wanted a *lulu*, a worker who was really no better than a slave. This becomes clear from reading the Sumerian accounts detailing the bioengineering of modern humans. Could they have created a more intelligent specimen, one wired to take more advantage of all that gray matter which science tells us is not being utilized? It is an interesting question. You don’t want a *lulu* as intelligent as yourself. That is a potential recipe for revolution. What is most fascinating, but not surprising, is the fact that the *lulu* did not conceive of a bodiless immortality of the personality, consciousness or *soul* for several more thousand years. Metaphorically, in Torah and Bible terms, when Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they became thinking beings. Haltingly, at first.

Much time had to pass before the *Homo sapiens* mind began to conceive of an immortality more or less beyond body and not constrained by the bounds of the planet. This is not a question we find formulated in the much later Semitic Old Testament manuscripts. It is an idea, however, we do find early on in Osirian religious beliefs in Egypt. But it was not until Hellenistic awareness of other cultures' religious and philosophical concepts that seminal ideas which had been slowly budding in the Mediterranean world and elsewhere, including Judah, Persia and Asia, began to open and finally flower. Then everlasting life in one form or another became a primary issue in Western philosophy and religion.

Although few contemporary human beings have a direct, strong claim to a royal bloodline, and fewer still can maintain with any acceptable credulousness that they are descended directly from the gods, most people believe, as the polls have demonstrated, that they will experience an afterlife of some sort. It is usually conceived of as desirable and fulfilling, something like the kind of immortality envisioned by Alexander and Gilgamesh. There is considerable variation in how individuals today define their speculations on the subject. The polls indicate the average citizen is rather vague in his definition of the afterlife he expects to have. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that there are as many personal definitions of afterlife as there are heads on the Medusa. Nevertheless, most of these definitions, after careful sorting, can be subsumed under certain traditional philosophical and religious categories. And any abstraction so large as the idea of *immortality* needs careful defining.

Chapter Two

Immortality Beliefs and Hypotheses

As might be expected, concepts of immortality vary greatly from culture to culture, between various primitive and modern religions, between major religions and between schools, sects and denominations within those religions. What is more, and as we might well expect, there is tremendous variation from one individual to another within the same culture and/or religion. Because of this multiversity of beliefs, and the complexities they raise, it is necessary to define terminology with care.

The kind of immortality which Gilgamesh and Alexander quested after could best be called *Personal Immortality*. Here the primary interest is in the survival of personal beingness. It is the kind of immortality which is of most interest to Westerners today. In the case of Gilgamesh, considerations of an individualistic, everlasting soul or consciousness do not much apply. They were concepts yet to be born in the human mind. What Gilgamesh does have is a strong, literal yearning for a physical body held in perpetuity, 'I will eat of this plant and then I shall return to a youthful body.'

As we have already indicated, this yearning was not uncommon in the ancient world, and it still exists somewhat today in both the East and West. It is thoroughly literal-minded and earth-focused. Alexander is not the type of mortal to settle for an endless, insubstantial existence as one of the brighter shades amid the Elysian Fields. It is true that in the Greek world during his time, new ideas of everlasting soul-life were available to initiates in the Mystery Schools. These were public knowledge. One did not have to be a god, king or hero to qualify. But Alexander seems locked in old-school ideas. In his mind,

one needed the proper, royal bloodline for assurance of immortality. That was the conventional wisdom of the time. In his interpretation, there was no real need for absolute purity of the line. Hopefully, standards could be stretched as they had been for the Sumerian/Akkadian culture heroes Ziusudra (Utnapishtim) and Etana and the Hebrew patriarch, Enoch. But these cases were rare. His hopes were destined to be dashed. With the status of gods, both Gilgamesh and Alexander could have lived forever pretty much wherever and in whatever form they desired. And, of course, their accomplishments would burn even brighter in the minds of men, a consideration of no small attraction for men of large egos.

Just what exactly survives death has caused much contentious debate in the East and West among both philosophers and theologians. And this debate is far from over. It is active and ongoing with no end in sight. Christian immortality-theology is today more or less bifurcated. Some Christians (essentially the Pauline view) believe only a spiritual body or, at most, an insubstantial, personal consciousness, returns to the presence of God. Paul stated (1 Cor. 14:42-44), "So also is the resurrection of the dead . . . it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body." These were revolutionary words in the Jewish world of that day and to many of the new followers of the new religion. Others took a more traditional position, which is still the dominating Christian position today, arguing that not only the spirit or soul returns to the vicinity of its Creator, but that the physical body is in some form resurrected, or created anew, as well. Supporters of this line of reasoning feel some form of physical body is imperative because they cannot imagine, or find unacceptable, the idea of a spirit without a container or a body unlike their present one in a future existence. This could be called the *Body Imperative* hypothesis.

The *Body Imperative* hypothesis is a mental construct which appeals to most Evangelicals and Fundamentalists, although this is not its exclusive domain. The same idea was popular with early Christians and, before then, with the Jews. Is the idea that there can be no immortality without an accompanying body a throwback to an earlier, more primitive, idea of survival? Is it

mere literal-mindedness? Whatever the truth, both early Christians and Jews believed the spirit *and body* would be literally raised from the grave at the End Times and Last Judgment. Originally, ancient Jewry did not look beyond the final resurrection of the dead when the reborn would take possession of the restored nation and live out their lives. Other than prospects of an eventual Sheol or Gehenna, the story ended there.

Ideas of a preceding judgment, allowing the spirit to take up temporary abode in a heaven or Gan Eden before the Last Judgment, are later historical developments. The history of Jewish ideas on the subject reflects disagreement as to whether or not there is a transmigration of some form of body along with consciousness to Gan Eden. Even the concept of Gan Eden itself, as a heaven awaiting purified Jewish souls, after the complete reestablishment of the Jewish nation, and after the Last Judgment, is not accepted by all Jews. The idea of heaven and cosmic immortality has never been as compelling an issue with Jewry as it has been for Christians. The Baylor Religion Survey indicates that 7.2 percent of Jews today, “Don’t Believe in anything beyond the physical world.” Among mainline Protestants, the figure is 0.7 percent. In the religiously Unaffiliated category, 37.1 percent found belief in any existence beyond this life unlikely. The reasons for this disbelief are many and complicated and a discussion of them will not be undertaken here.

In much of the East, where Hinduism and Buddhism predominate, there is more emphasis on the transmigration of an essence of consciousness (the *Returning Essence of Consciousness* hypothesis) rather than a fixation or focus on reentering a physical body. The ideas of reincarnation (Hinduism) and rebirth (Buddhism) dominate. The soul is either reincarnated or reborn in a new body, usually an earth-body, and does so as many times as is needed to reach enlightenment. Finally, when sufficient enlightenment is achieved, which may take hundreds, even thousands of rebirths, the soul, in the Vendantic paradigm, either settles into existence on a heavenly plane until the present cosmic cycle ends or is absorbed into Brahman from whence it originally came. The Buddhist conception is somewhat different. As the self gradually sheds its

ego-ness over countless lives, it reaches an illumination which is also a state of being, *nibbana* (nirvana). By that time, all, or nearly all, dispositional tendencies—which would mark it as a distinguishable personality—have dissipated. The “grasping” nature of the egocentric entity is “cooled,” deadened. The selfless self has been liberated and what is left will gradually be absorbed willingly into the Creation from which it originated.

Comparatively speaking, Islam is much more similar to Christianity than Hinduism or Buddhism. It recognizes both an individualistic, migrating soul and a migrating body, free of earthly blemishes, to Paradise. The requirements to qualify for this afterlife are simple: A faithful life rich in good works. Most souls will be saved in due time, although they may spend time rehabbing in a purgatorial existence. Only the most reprehensible, un-rehabilitative souls are relegated to an eternal Hell.

There is within Christianity a notable disagreement over whether all human souls are theoretically immortal or whether the soul is simply “immortable,” that is, capable of being made immortal. The *Immortality of the Soul* hypothesis suggests immortality is not inherent but must be earned, a view in contradistinction to the present-day, popular belief among Evangelicals and Fundamentalists that if a professed Christian accepts Jesus as his personal savior, he automatically becomes a saved soul, good works or not. This is the *Jesus as Personal Savior* hypothesis which, it could be argued, is one possible adjunct of the *Immortality* hypothesis. There are alternate versions of immortality. One postulates that being a professed Christian alone is enough to insure immortality. Another, which can be applied to Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity, posits an immortality achieved through experience, enlightenment, faith and good works. It is encouraging in this distraught world where creeds often are seen to clash, where a tolerant ecumenism is often overshadowed by selfish personal and political agendas, that Americans genuinely “are open to the idea that many religions can provide a moral foundation and lead to eternal life.” Such is one of the conclusions of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life after their most recent in-depth survey (2006). “Three-quarters of the public say many religions

can lead to eternal life, while just 18 percent think their own religion the only way to achieve eternal life.” Among even the strongly-committed Evangelicals, almost half (48 percent) supported the more ecumenical possibilities of achieving immortality. However, both Christians and Muslims who are particularly attracted to the *Faith and Good Works* hypothesis, are adamant in their belief, which to them effectively reflects reality, that the requirements for immortality, however they are separately seen, must be met in this lifetime. The Hindu-Buddhist time-scale runs obviously much longer.

The Catholic Church has placed historically a high priority on the idea of good works. Next to faith, it was the *sine qua non* of the soul striving for salvation. Many Protestant denominations in the more recent past also stressed this idea. Whether a majority of Catholics and Protestants today place a premium on good works is debatable. They profess to do so. Whether profession is followed by action is an interesting question. The Baylor Religion Survey asked a series of questions on the topic, “What it means to be a good person.” A solid majority, 62.9 percent, thought taking care of “the sick and needy” is very important. Almost half that number, 36.8 percent, indicated that actively seeking “social and economic justice” is a priority with them, and 23.5 percent indicated teaching others “your morals” is highly significant. The respondents, it should be noted, could choose from six statements. Just how much these respondents believe such actions affect their chances of gaining immortality is not known nor can it be known from the way in which the questions in the survey were presented. One would assume they do believe such actions significantly affect their prospects. Regardless of the preceding responses, the answers can be seen as either positive or negative, depending on your point of view. Nevertheless, the Evangelical position that one’s soul is saved-in-Jesus and thus immortalized because one professes him as a personal savior, although supremely egalitarian from an objective point of view, seems far too intellectually soft and morally easy for many critics.

The *Inherent Immortality* hypothesis, however, is the orthodox view of most Catholics and Protestants. Whether one rises to its challenge or becomes a thistle among the harvest is

another matter altogether. What the New Testament has to say about Immortality is difficult to establish. It is clear, however, from Jesus' remarks in the Gospels that individual salvation does not come automatically with birth but must be earned. The devil, one might say, is as usual found in the details.

The Reverend Edward White's 1846 book, *Life in Christ*, awakened the sleeping question of earned immortality to public attention. The book initiated a modern theological debate which continues to this day. White's period in history was a time when the importance of good works held a more prominent position in Christian eschatology than it does today. One cannot help but wonder if Alexander the Great considered his "great works" to be "good works." Great works, like those of Hercules, merited an afterlife in the Elysian Fields. They didn't necessarily have to be particularly "good works," that is, works which demonstrate social responsibility and things such as kindness to strangers. In his mind, the right genes meant an immeasurably great destiny, the cosmic immortality and mobility of godliness. Mobility was no small matter in Alexander's day. Once consigned to the Elysian Fields, the "immortal" was limited to that venue. A god could go where he pleased. In this day and age, it would be a rare mortal who would dare expound the idea that the right genes could confer immortality. There have been, needless to say, a few infamous examples. It is clear that Hitler tried and failed to enforce a doctrine of genetic superiority which would lead an Aryan to an immortality of sorts. The Japanese during World War II also considered themselves genetically superior. Dying for the immortal emperor was seen as a way of insuring one's honor and status in the after-world. Adolph Hitler and the Japanese are grotesque, modern anomalies. Thankfully, the number of humans with similar ideas seems small in today's world. Small—but never nonexistent.

The *Energy-Matter Dispersion* hypothesis denies the possibility of posthumous consciousness. No personality, ego, soul or spirit survives the death of the psychophysical organism. This hypothesis is ancient, although it has received increasing attention in the more recent modern and contemporary world with the rise of scientific materialism. At best, one can expect his atoms to slowly disperse into the cosmos. Whatever pure energy

exists within the organism at the time of death quickly dissipates into the ether. In the West, this hypothesis may have its origins as far back as Genesis 3:19. Within the Garden of Eden, Jehovah reproves Adam with the words, ‘ . . . in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground: for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shall thou return.’ A more contemporary spokesman was Henry Ford who claimed, “Heaven is a lot of bunk.” Although such a remark does not completely rule out a belief in God, the attitude exposed would have made the late atheist, Madelyn Murray, nod with approval. And it is virtually impossible, as most people realize, to believe in a conscious afterlife if you don’t believe in a Creator. Not all scientists by any means subscribe completely to the *Energy-Matter Dispersion* hypothesis. Einstein, perceiving the mathematical order with which the cosmos seems to be embedded, stated, “God doesn’t play dice with the universe.” As for Henry Ford, it is safe to say he didn’t expect to take either his consciousness or his fortune with him.

Another perspective on the posthumous state is the *Works and Memories* hypothesis. This postulates that the only immortality one can achieve is in the minds of one’s peers, one’s contemporaries and, with luck, in the consciousness of future generations. What a person creates or achieves, be it substantial or intangible—whether literature, music, motion pictures, winning the Battle of Waterloo, architecture or “other things”—has great bearing on how they will be remembered. Idi Amin will be remembered for breaking thousands of skulls; Christian Barnard for repairing thousands of hearts; Robert Jarvik for building an artificial one et certera. Auguste Comte, the French positivist philosopher, defined for modernity this ancient idea as “subjective immortality,” a rather vague combination of words which is misleading. This is one of the few hypotheses in the survival field which is particularly acceptable to scientific rationalists, atheists, French existentialists and other nonbelievers. You are, then, as you are remembered. Nothing more, nothing less.

There is obviously a relativity involved here. Reality dictates a time limit to this kind of immortality. Sooner or later, even the most potent memories of the achievements and exploits of the

greatest cultural heroes dissipate into nothingness like so much vaporous gas. Names such as George Eliot, Sigmund Freud, Vladimir Lenin, Albert Camus, Jean Paul Sartre and Norman Cousins would seem to find a home in this hypothesis. Alexander the Great's compulsion to found cities (23) and name them after himself is an excellent, obsessive example of this *Works and Memories* hypothesis.

The next hypothesis is as old as any major religious hypothesis in existence except for the belief in immortality itself. This is the *Cosmic Monad*. It has its roots in the Indian Vedas, was a tacit part of Gautama Buddha's teachings, was philosophically recommended by the Greek Xenophanes and championed in the late Renaissance by the Dutch philosopher, Benedict Spinoza. Monadism, or monism as it is most commonly known, is essentially the mental construct that out of a primal, undifferentiated, single unit all creation was born. Modern cosmologists and physicists who now theorize a Big Bang event (which, with expansion over time, has created the cosmos we know) are in fact, supporting this ancient idea. The new scientific form of it postulates a tremendous explosion originating from the nuclear reaction of a possibly infinitesimally small mass (a monad or atom). Once the monad is personified into a god, we have the Hindu idea of Brahman as well as all the monotheistic, creative gods such as the Jewish and Christian Yahweh (Jehovah) and the Muslim Allah (which is the same God). If the religious devotee perceives everything as being the creation of this primary god, if everything is intimately related to everything else, then we have a *posteriori* pure Monadism or monism.

In Eastern thought, the monad projects a marvelously complex, amazingly diverse creation filled with a multitude of seemingly individualistic parts, from the largest galactic formations to subatomic particles. This individualistic identity is an illusion. At the end of a cosmic great cycle of expansion (a breathing outward), everything finally returns, in its own time (the breathing inward), to the Source which gave it birth and life. Gautama Buddha avoided a definition of this Source. The indications he gave suggest that he believed it was futile, if not impossible, to define it with any accuracy. In the Hindu Vedantic conception, the process of understanding this rhythmic, cyclical

breathing in and out of creation, and of one's place within the scheme of things, requires great experience and self-knowledge. To gain enlightenment, the soul passes through a long succession of lives. This process itself is in its own right a very important and complex hypothesis—the *Reincarnation* hypothesis. A full discussion of it appears later in the text under its own chapter heading. When the soul has proven that it has reached a sufficiently enlightened understanding of self and non-self, it is ready to return to “That” from which it originated, “That” which gave it breath and being. It may, however, along the way home, spend time on other planes in a variety of heavens which it has earned by dissolving its karmic fetters (see also the *Karma* hypothesis, also discussed in the *Reincarnation* hypothesis chapter) which have held it enthralled to life on earth. There are significant differences, some quite subtle, some very evident, between Hindu conceptions of what exactly is reborn and Buddhist conceptions. Within Buddhism itself, there are considerable differences between the way Mahayanist schools define karma and the way Hinayanists interpret its meaning. Some of these differences will be addressed in the chapters on Vedanta and Reincarnation.

The pantheistic elements of Hindu theology are like the seed tufts atop a dandelion; they all spring forth from the prime center, Brahman, serving with some independence for awhile at Brahman's leisure. After many ages, the infolding of creation commences, which itself takes eons of time, just as did the original exfoliation. Then a new cycle begins, the Monad (in this case, Brahman) begets itself anew and begins unfolding itself in an illusion of separate parts.

There are many sects of Hinduism and Buddhism with various slants on this story, but none of them seem to support the transposition of the human body, or virtual facsimile, from this world to the afterlife as does so much, though not all, Christian theology. Logic has led a growing number of thoughtful Westerners to conclude that one, short life is probably not enough time to even approach the potential perfection of the human soul. Westerners, nevertheless, continue to find it difficult to warm to an idea like *nirvana*, a state where striving and grasping has been overcome and illusions, such as the value of a distinct

personality, have been expunged. For most Christians who have done much serious thinking about an afterlife, and attempted to carefully define their thoughts, the idea of forever relinquishing all personal beingness is difficult to comprehend, much less accept. The West is burdened, in the monistic view, by a materialism that runs deep and far beyond mere commercial capitalism. It seems increasingly wedded to a scientifically-based materialism which conceives of the ideal life as a physical body enjoying a mechanistic Utopia which eternally furnishes an unending stream of new gadgets and things.

Whatever artificial categories and hypotheses we create to facilitate our understanding of the many conceptions of afterlife, one cardinal reality stands out above all others over time, one salient fact. When early man buried his dead, he often did it in a manner which indicated a belief in some kind of posthumous survival. It soon became clear to some researchers that if they wished to understand contemporary impulses supporting survival theory, they needed to initiate their studies as close to the beginning of modern man as they could get. It was already abundantly clear to archeologists and anthropologists, even in the early days of survival research, that today's and yesterday's ideas of afterlife have not appeared miraculously all at once complete and seamless like a whole piece of carefully-stitched cloth into our present civilizations, like Athena instantly materializing full-grown out of Zeus' head. They exhibit instead an extended process of gradual, local accretion of practices and intercultural, syncretic tendencies.

Chapter Three

Primordial Burial: Paleolithic and Neolithic Man

No matter how far back we trace the graves of Neanderthal man (*Homo neandertalensis*), Cro-Magnon and modern man (*Homo sapiens*), we come face to face with a similar scenario: Some of these men were burying their relatives and friends in positions and with objects which suggest a belief in some kind of posthumous survival, a survival doctrine or creed which should not be confused necessarily with ideas of immortality, although, on the other hand, it could indicate it.

The distinction for the earliest sites showing evidence of this premeditated behavior belong to Mousterian man, a real caveman, a Neanderthal living between c. 150,000 B.C.E. to 30,000 B.C.E., with a few, small, straggler populations surviving even longer. Mousterian man takes his name from a young male (approximately eighteen years old) who was buried at Le Moustier, France, the country which has produced some of the best specimens of this kind of burial. The youth was buried in a fetal position with head placed on a pile of flints. The fetal position of the skeletal deposits of a considerable number of undisturbed Mousterian interments becomes a common theme, one which evokes speculation of the acceptance of a revolutionary fetal cycle: from the womb, to the womb. Were these particular Neanderthals exhibiting evidence of a wider belief in rebirth in this or some other world? The careful placement of these skeletons in undisturbed graves seems to rule out accident. The La Ferrassie shelter contained the graves of a male and female placed head to head in a hollow pit about fifty centimeters apart. The male was found in a fetal position, flat stones on head and shoulder, with flint flakes and bone splinters

scattered about the skeleton. The female also lay with her legs bent up against the body, her hands on her knees. Of special importance nearby was the conical grave of two young children, indicating the careful interment of the young as well as adults.

The classic Mousterian find, however, was made near the village of La Chapelle-aux-Saints in the Correze in 1908 by the *abbes* Amedee and Jean Bouyssonie and L. Bardon. The skeleton has been dated to c. 50,000 B.C.E. It is of extraordinary value because it opens a window on the Neanderthal mind and its conceptualizing capacity. The skeleton was buried alone in a single sepulchral cave covered by a single layer of fossiliferous material between 30 and 40 centimeters deep. It is of a male, presumed to be middle-aged, which was very old for the time. The body was placed in a shallow grave or trench beneath the floor of a cave which gave no indication of other habitation. It was placed on its back, legs flexed to the right in semifetal position, left arm extended but right arm bent. The head of the skeleton was facing East, the grave lying East and West. The skeleton was almost complete, and flesh still adhered to some bones. The height of the individual was estimated at five feet four inches; the cranium capacity was estimated at 1600 centimeters.

The head of the La Chapelle-aux-Saints find is surrounded and protected by arranged stones. Near the body were many implements of unmistakable Mousterian craftsmanship: side-scrapers, carefully flaked flint points along with pieces of quartz and ochre. A few feet inside the cave's entrance were the remnants of a hearth. Closer to the entrance was a small trench which contained bison bones and another flint point. Remains of rhinoceros, horse, wolf, hyena and possibly aurochs were also found.

All of this sets the mind to work. What we are looking at is possibly evidence of a cult of the dead; certainly evidence of respect and care and probably of ritual. It is impossible to tell how long such practices among early man had existed—theoretically as far back as *Homo erectus* and even *Homo habilis*. They are even among Mousterian Neanderthals the exception rather than the rule. But, as C.E. Vulliamy cogently observed, the importance of their existence from a metaphysical, philosophical, psychological and religious point of view is considerable and

should not be underestimated. The La Chappelle individual, and others like him, are surrounded by objects of great value, objects needed to sustain life here and in any hereafter of a like kind. They are objects of the present, the practical and probably the sacred (the protective head stones, the ochre). As we move closer to the present, we find the burials become more lavish in goods but not fundamentally different. The only conclusion that is fair to draw is that some Neanderthals who cared rather meticulously for their dead seemed to have a sense of the sacred about the process and appeared to prepare their dead for a possible future existence.

The more recently discovered Shanidar cave finds (1957-61) in northern Iraq support the idea that some of these troglodytes and semi-troglodytes took special care of the injured, the aged and the dead. The Shanidar 4 Neanderthal burial discovered by Ralph Solecki and his team reveal evidence of burial ritual, as do the Shanidar 1 interment. The Shanidar 4 skeleton is of an adult male estimated at between thirty to forty-five years of age. He was found lying on his left side in a semifetal position. Analysis of soil samples indicated clumps of pollen from an interesting assortment of medicinal plants and flowers. These included astringents, diuretics and stimulants such as yarrow, cornflower, ragwort, bachelor's button, grape hyacinth, hollyhock, joint pine, groundsel, Barnaby's thistle and woody horsetail. It has been argued that Persian jirds, a gerbil-like rodent, may have stored seeds and flowers within the cave. A better explanation, however, seems to be that the deceased was buried with the flowers either as a bouquet or, more likely still, because they were the tools of this individual's shamanic activities. In either case, we can see preparation for a special send-off, a tribute of one kind or another to the deceased and the memory of him. The age of the finds at Shanidar have been carbon-dated to c. 60,000-80,000 B.C.E.

The latest Neanderthal burial was discovered in 1979 at St. Cezaire, France, and is dated to c. 33,000 B.C.E. A male cranium exhibits a severe head wound probably caused by a blow or a fall. The individual receiving this deadly blow did not die, however, until the cranium had partially healed. This would suggest that the members of the community or family of the subject had

probably demonstrated a compassionate nursing of the injured victim. Neanderthals were not, as so recently portrayed by science and the public, totally crude, uncompassionate, shuffling dolts. Once considered incapable of speech, anatomical evidence to the contrary has now been established, and a new understanding of the complete structural anatomy of these beings points to the likelihood of a more or less upright mobility.

Neanderthal remains have been found from Asia Minor to Western Europe, including North Africa, Palestine, Iraq, The Czech Republic, Russia, Poland, the Crimea, Croatia, Germany, Italy, France, Spain and England. Additionally, excellent deposits, often including intact skeletal remains, have been found at La Quina (Charente), Placard (Charente), the Somme valley, Laussel, the Grotte du Prince (Mentone), France; at the Cave of Paviland (South Wales) and the Cambridge and Mildenhall districts in England; at LaGrotta (near Cassino) in Italy; at Castillo, Hornos de la Pena and Cobalejos (Cantabria) in Spain; at Spy and La Naulette in Belgium and Achenheim, Sirgenstein and Klause in Germany. In the Palestine area, there is evidence Neanderthal man and Cro-Magnon may have lived side by side for over 10,000 years.

Gradually, a new man began to appear and displace Neanderthal in the Upper Paleolithic era and during the Aurignacian, Solutrean and Magdalenian culture periods that immediately preceded the Neolithic (New Stone Age) era. In 1823, a skeleton was discovered by Buckland in the cave of Paviland, South Wales, which became known as the Cro-Magnon type. Although many early reports called it the "Red Lady of Paviland," it is actually the remains of a male heavily covered with red ochre at burial. At the rock shelter of Cro-Magnon, near Les Eyzies, France, Lartet discovered five skeletons. The implements and perforated seashells found with the interments—shells which were brought from afar—indicate an attempt at serious burial. As true a type-station as any other Cro-Magnon find, can be found at the Grotte au Cavillon in the Mentone district. Here in 1872 Emile Riviere discovered what became known as the *Homme du Mentone* (the Man of Mentone). The find created excitement among anthropologists and biologists and a sensation in the popular press.

The Man of Mentone lay on his left side, legs slightly flexed in a semifetal position. His head was crowned with a headdress containing over two hundred *Nassa* shells, the peak of which held perforated stag teeth. A stag-bone dagger lay across his forehead. Two flint knives were found at the rear of his neck. Twenty-two perforated reindeer teeth were found on either side of his head. A garter-like band was found around the left knee composed of forty-one *Nassa* shells. The head itself rested against two large, flaked, flint stones. Most startling of all was the fact that the skeletal remains and all the accompanying artifacts were colored with red ochre. Later the name Red Ochre People would be used by anthropologists and archeologists to describe the use of red coloring compounds found at burial sites in western and northern Europe, and especially along the coasts, as far west as the New World. The problem is red ochre does not delineate any special time period, people or race. As a descriptive tool, its use is of rather limited value. Red ochre as a funerary ritual was used by some Neanderthals, many Cro-Magnons and many more later, modern men throughout Neolithic times into the Bronze Age. The probability that it signified something like the life force, power or life seems larger. More specifically, it may have represented blood, either human or that of the menstruating moon during “her” red phases. What is surprising is that the practice was so ubiquitous over such a vast time scale, indicating a possible transference of some cultured practices among quite disparate peoples. Moon worship could possibly explain this phenomenon.

Other important Cro-Magnon burials are not uncommon. Of these, the burial complex at Dolni Vestonice, in what was formerly Moravia and is now part of the Czech Republic, is of special, unique interest. Radiocarbon dates indicate the area was occupied from c. 27,000 B.C.E. to c. 23,000 B.C.E. and is assigned to the Gravettian culture (sometimes called Grimaldian) which succeeded the Upper Auragnacian culture and preceded the Solutrean and Magdalenian cultures. The complex is a rich kitchen midden containing tools and weapons of bone and ivory in addition to the usual stone blades, scrapers, points and burins. Decorative objects such as perforated shells, tubular beads, bone tubes and assorted pendants are plentiful, including what may

have been panpipes. Interesting as all this is, it takes a backseat to what may be two highly-unusual finds.

In one dig, in 1948, among the remains of a hut, was found a small piece of ivory tablet with a carved human face. In 1936, a small, sculpted, human head had been previously found nearby. Then in 1949, a burial pit within the same settlement produced a body contracted into a fetal position which appeared to be that of the sculpted head recovered in 1936 as well as the image found carved on the ivory tablet in 1948. The reason for making these associations is simple: The female occupant of the gravesite was considered to have been suffering from advanced, peripheral paralysis of the cheek nerves which caused a severe, pathological degeneration of the left maxillary joint. If indeed the three are contemporary and represent the same individual, this skeleton and these artifacts have huge implications. Obviously, the individual was held in esteem in spite of her disfigurement, which is indicated by her careful burial. But more important is the question of memory and the dead. If the three are truly a match, then the memory of this person may have been perpetuated generations after her death.

Another important Cro-Magnon burial is found at Brno (Brunn) in today's Czech Republic. Here the legs of the skeleton can be seen drawn up toward the pelvis, the knees almost touching the teeth, a bit more exaggerated but reminiscent of the fetal position found in our previous example. This site had, in addition, a plethora of shells about the bones, similar to the Mentone site, and fourteen discs made of red sandstone, quartzite, ivory and rhinoceros bone. Some discs were carved and notched. What is more, an ivory statuette was found, and it, like the human bones themselves, was stained with ochre pigment.

Magdalenian sites (c. 20,000-11,000 B.C.E.) of Cro-Magnon offer many examples of flexed limbs and the use of ritual ochre. A tightly-flexed, early Magdalenian body was found at Saint-Andre-de-Cubzac (Gironde) covered with ochre. At Cap Blanc (Dordogne), a body was uncovered protected by stones on the head and feet. The feet themselves were elevated close to the pelvis, creating the classic fetal position. At Combe-Chapelle, among other indications of careful burial, the limbs of the skeleton were flexed.

The Chancelade site offers an exceptionally valuable example of Magdalenian burial. The body of an adult male, approximately five feet three inches in height, was tightly compressed into a small gravesite. He was tightly flexed into a fetal position, feet virtually on a parallel with the pelvis, knees abutting his nose. The body had been covered liberally with ochre. Although shorter than most Cro-Magnon types, he had a broad, long face, longer than type, and a broad, high forehead and narrow nose. Some anthropologists have argued for a race distinction because of this specimen, maintaining that Chancelade man and Cro-Magnon were different enough physiologically to warrant a division. It would seem more rational, however, to recognize that during Magdalenian times much diversification of *Homo sapiens* was occurring, and it would be more prudent to recognize the Chancelade find as a variation among the Cro-Magnon type rather than a new race, although a hybrid hypothesis is not completely out of order.

During Upper Paleolithic times, a number of small, female statuettes were discovered in diverse localities of western, central and eastern Europe among disparate cultures. The dates ascribed to these figurines range from c. 27,000 to 12,000 B.C.E. encompassing Auragnacian, Gravettian and Magdalenian times. These "Venuses" are, surprisingly, more common in the archeological record than representations of men or animals. Does this hint at not only fertility cultism but matriarchy and moon worship as well? The statuettes are plainly not intended as realistic depictions. They are of exceptionally full-bodied character, exhibiting extremely large, prominent, often pendulous, breasts, wide hips and exaggerated buttocks. The abdomen is enlarged, suggesting an advanced state of pregnancy. Little attention is given to arms and lower legs. In fact, hands and feet are often missing. The face is nondetailed and expressionless, although the head sometimes reflects a passing attempt at hairdressing.

Most famous of the lot is the Venus of Willendorf, Austria. She is approximately eleven centimeters in length and six centimeters in width. The Venus figurine found at Dolni Vestonice was retrieved from a fireplace in the central, communal complex. This one was modeled in clay and powdered bone and

had been fired. In contrast, all other Venuses extant are carved out of stone, particularly limestone, hematite, serpentine, sandstone, ivory or antler. She conforms to type except for two eye slits and the fact that the torso is grooved at the junction of body and legs. Similar grooves are found on her back separating torso from legs and arms as well as a vertical groove, like a spine, running up her back. Several unique, striated rods with pendulous breast-like appendages were also found at the site prompting speculation that these objects may be more abstract versions of the Venus figurine. Other Venuses have been uncovered from pits in the Ukraine at Kostenki and Avdeevo, at Pavlov, Czech Republic, at Unter Wisternitz, at La Mouthe, Lespugue and Monpazier, France, and at Catal Huyuk and Hacilar, Anatolia. Over sixty of the figurines have been recovered from different sites.

A sculpture in relief on a limestone block was retrieved from Laussel, France. The Venus figure depicted there is true to type except for the flexed right arm which is holding the image of a half-moon in her hand. The half-moon was hatched with thirteen lines. This representation in particular, as well as the other Venus figurines, raises more interesting questions. Are the Venuses fertility amulets? This seems more than a little probable. The Laussel sculpture hints at a recognition of the similarity between the moon phases and the female menstruation cycle. Are we witnessing an early indication of moon worship associated with the female form and fertility? Quite possibly. And a thirteen month calendar based on the moon cycle? This also seems quite possible. If so, we are not far removed from the concept of goddesses, if we are not already there. From the Aurignacian culture (c. 32,000-26,000 B.C.E.) onward, as D. Bruce Dickson has noted, "is the first time in prehistory that females were commonly buried with grave goods." They seem to be gathering respect and power in many cultures as we near and enter the Neolithic era. It would seem logical that some of these cultures were matriarchal, but the evidence for this from early prehistory, like so many other areas of interest, is scanty at best.

A review of Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon burial sites can lead to compelling, tentative conclusions. Some very early and somewhat later peoples were discernibly *burying their dead with*

care and ceremony. They left with them objects of the highest practical value to the living, objects that would be needed by the deceased in any new life. The living willingly sacrificed these objects to the dead. Vulliamy's studies of such interments led him to say, "This may be regarded as proof that their attitude towards the departed was based on a fully evolved conviction and on a clear and detailed belief in spiritual existence," a sentiment shared by many archeologists and anthropologists.

Not everyone, however, is convinced that the evidence that exists is strong enough to indicate a belief in a survival hypothesis among Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon man. Several decades ago, and several decades after some of these major discoveries, James H. Leuba wondered, "Must these funerary customs be taken to imply a belief in survival after death? Not necessarily." But a few words later, he cautions, ". . . if the presence of burial is not necessarily a proof of the presence of the continuation-idea, no more is the absence of burial a proof of the absence of that conception." But Leuba seems to miss the point. It isn't burial as such which is the main issue, but how the burials were arranged and the importance of the objects found with them.

What first inspired these ritual burials among Mousterian, Cro-Magnon and neolithic man? The question is huge. Why the special arrangement of objects such as shells, arrowheads, scrapers, diadems and anatomical limbs? What magic was associated in so many vastly separated places with ochre coloring of bones and associated paraphernalia? The use of ochre, as we have seen, in interments can be traced backward to some Neanderthal burials and forward to neolithic gravesites where its use is sometimes lavish. Was there a realization that weapons might be needed some place other than the here and now? And food? If so, we seem to be talking about survival and perhaps immortality issues. Whatever the truth, it seems to have been obscured by the blanketing fog of fading millennia. To see through that fog takes more than mortal eyes.

Further circumstantial evidence that prehistoric men may have held survival ideas is indicated from New Stone Age burial sites. Of these, the dolmen sites are most extraordinary. They can be found in many parts of Europe, especially France, northern Germany, Sweden, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Belgium, Holland,

Ireland, the British Isles, Corsica, Sardinia, Ethiopia, Malta, Turkey, Greece, the Caucasus, the Black Sea area, Russia, Syria, Korea, Japan, Madagascar, India and even in several places in the New World. The burial site evidence from these geographically diverse diggings is a study in the refinement of practices found in an earlier age.

There is no human construction extant on the planet older than the dolmens. Neolithic builders brought tomb construction to a fine art. There are two principal classes of chambered tombs, "gallery graves," in which the entrance opens at once into an open chamber, and "passage graves," in which there is an approach passage followed by the burial chamber(s). The simplest gallery grave would consist of a rectangular or circular enclosure consisting of four massive, stone slabs for walls and an additional slab for a roof. Large megalithic burial sites are often called "long barrows" and are extended tumuluses.

Quite a few skeletons have been found intact dating from the Neolithic era (c. 9,000-3,500 B.C.E.) within these megalithic sites. A typical dolmen burial might contain several skeletons; a really large barrow might hold dozens of remains. Although intact skeletons have been found, many burial sites are filled with scattered or broken remnants of two or more bodies. At some sites no complete skeletons seem to have existed, which has led to two primary speculations: Either the tomb was an ossuary or portions of the skeletal remains have been withheld from burial and possibly hoarded elsewhere for any number of reasons. These would include possible fetishism, talismanic worship and alternative disposal or preservation.

Some of the most striking examples of dolmen burial in Europe can be found at Ascott-under-Wychwood, Oxfordshire, England; West Kennet, Wiltshire, England; Arles-Fontvieille, Bouches-du-Rhone, France; La Chaussee-Tirancourt, Somme, France; Eteauville, Lutz-en-Dunois, Eure-et-Loire, France; Fontenay-Le-Marmian, Calvados, France, numerous sites in the French Department of Morbihan, bordering the Gulf of Morbihan and Lohne-Zuschen, Kr. Fritzlar-Homburg, Hesse, Germany. Vulliamy notes the widespread use of ritual ochre at a Ligurian site in northern Italy and observes that the grave was filled with it. He further notes it is also found at the Terranova

site in southern Italy as well as at Chamblandes, a middle-Neolithic site in Switzerland. Here a skeleton was recovered holding a piece of red ochre in his right hand. The bodies at this site were found in a semifetal, crouched-over position, as were the bodily remains found on the Isle of Thinic, Scotland.

There are perhaps no late Neolithic burial sites more revealing than those found in the Marne, France, area. It was here, starting in 1872, that Baron Joseph de Baye did extensive archeological investigations. He found dozens of tombs called hypogea dug out of the sides of limestone hills. The hypogeum is technically a rock-cut tomb with a main burial chamber preceded by a smaller antechamber which is often reached by a descending passageway. The Coizard complex of tombs in the Marne area are characteristic of the type, as are other hypogea located around the Targus estuary of Portugal and in Sardinia, Malta and Egypt.

Two of the hypogea at Coizard have impressive, carved motifs of twin axes, symbols of male power, flanking the entrance and one of them has the bas-relief of a female idol or goddess, a symbol of female power and fertility. According to Joseph Dechelette, the “goddess of the tomb” found in Razet represents a deity imported from Asia Minor, something on the order of an Astarte figure. This may well be true. And it may not. The obvious question is, Why should these neolithic peoples necessarily need an importation—of which there is no evidence—when in fact it would be logical to create one’s own *in situ* from local traditions? The argument remains open. What is certain is that by the late Neolithic era the gods (and goddesses) have been brought down from the sky and worship of them is in progress.

Over two thousand bodies were found in the Marne grottos. Many of them had been laid out carefully but only one in a semifetal position. The dead were surrounded with flint and jadeite implements—arrowheads, scrapers, axes—including a significant number of perforated *rondelles*. At least one rare, magnificent, well-preserved, wooden bow was found as well as a fine, polished flint axe carefully fitted into a horn sheath. The stone and sheath were pierced to accept a wooden haft.

Rondelles are pieces of skull bone with one or two holes in them. Sometimes amulets are made by stringing together a series of them. In Vulliamy’s opinion, “The strange proceeding is not

to be explained by reference to similar practice elsewhere . . . and we must therefore regard it as unaccountable.” This is, in fact, not exactly accurate. Pruniere discovered in Lozere, a department of southern France, no fewer than one hundred twenty-six perforated skulls and forty-one pieces taken from them. Leuba believed, “. . . trepanation on the dead was performed in preference upon the skulls that had already been trepanned in life, perhaps, as Broca suggested, because these persons were invested with a holy character.” What we have may be a cult of skulls. Many neolithic burial sites have an abundance of skeletons from which the heads have been severed. Dechelette suggested that the worked bones, perforated on each end, might well have been coveted as sacred objects, conferring powers and protections.

Trepanning may also have been performed simply to let out the spirit or life force. We cannot discount the idea offered by several authorities that neolithic tribesmen believed in a manna or life force residing in both animals and people as do some of the more animistic, primitive tribes surviving today. Trepanning could be seen at the time, then, as a quite natural and expedient way of facilitating the release of this force. It does not appear at this point in prehistory to have been performed for medical reasons, as was practiced by the later Egyptians and much later Incas. Once the life force or spirit had flitted away, the *rondelle* may well have been kept as a reminder of the deceased. This is all very speculative, of course, as is so much of our “knowledge” of paleolithic and neolithic man.

In contradistinction to the above explanations, another theory has been offered. The operation may have been performed to release an evil spirit blamed for death. It is a well-known fact that many primitive peoples, such as the Yanomami of northwestern Brazil and southwestern Venezuela, still believe death is usually an unnatural occurrence. It is caused by evil spirits or the magic of enemies, particularly enemy shaman. If the primitive of relatively contemporary times so commonly comes to this conclusion, why shouldn't we suspect that the idea was present among neolithic man?

Why dwell on paleolithic and neolithic people when we know almost nothing about what their thoughts were and very little

about their practices? The obvious answer is, this is when the ideas of posthumous survival must have begun. As we have seen, there is enough circumstantial evidence to draw that conclusion. It is really irrelevant *exactly where and when* these ideas germinated. Tribes were spread across a large part of the earth, developing at their own pace. No precise dates are possible. Nor should we expect any. What we do have is an *a priori* case backed by strong circumstantial indications that the idea of posthumous survival once spread over a wide area of Africa, the Near East and Europe.

We do know from late Bronze Age accounts (Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian, Egyptian, Hurrian, Hittite and Assyrian) is that every major culture by then had developed their own ideas on the subject, most of which are rather bleak though somewhat similar. The “cult of the dead” we see emerging in these prehistoric, earlier times, with bodies often carefully arranged, elaborately adorned with shells and stones and supplied with valuable weapons, tools and foodstuffs, is a strong indication of just how much attention was being given to the after-death state of the deceased. They were being well supplied and properly prepared for some kind of journey to somewhere of import to both family and tribe. That a slow but gradual transformation of thinking was happening between the Paleolithic era and the Bronze Age is undeniable. And yet it could be argued that neolithic burial sites suggest the possibility of a happier, postmortem destiny than we find several thousand years later in more “advanced” cultures. Not long after the beginning of the historical period, and before “modern” conceptions of survival had taken form, the hereafter was being described by the Sumerians, Hebrews and Greeks as an abode of unhappy, wraith-like, listless beings who had nothing to do and little to which to look eternally forward. The Egyptians during this period were most original in their eschatological ideas, way ahead of their contemporaries, and offered the most hope to the common man of an honorable death and an acceptable postmortem existence as early, perhaps, as the 12th dynasty. More will be said about this Egyptian eschatology presently. For the nations neighboring Egypt or within close proximity, survival ideology does not seem much improved over neolithic times.

If we wish to get an approximation of what may have passed as survival hypotheses in paleolithic and neolithic cultures, our most productive route is to refer to the anthropological studies and reports of primitive, contemporary cultures made during the 19th and early 20th century. This work was done before large-scale contact with the outside world had occurred, before massive pollution of the ideas of these indigenous peoples had taken place. Many of these cultures were, in their own right, thoroughly Stone Age.

Chapter Four

Contemporary Primitives and Their Ideas of Afterlife

Any large-scale study of primitive societies in existence within the last one hundred and fifty years will indicate the universality of the belief in spiritual survival. Sometimes survival is qualified, and time in the afterworld is limited. Sometimes not. There is tremendous diversity in the contemporary primitives' ideas of proper burial, appropriate ceremony and what kind of prospects the deceased has to look forward to in the afterlife.

The primitive is, above all, not a social skeptic. He accepts the ideas that his society or tribe has bequeathed him. He is, because of this indoctrination, often fearful of departed souls. Thoughts of the dead have a tendency to fill him with uneasiness, even dread. If he looks upon the dead with affection, it is probably because they were relatives or friends, but even former friends at times can return and cause trouble. Affection toward the deceased spirit seems to wax early and wane with time and memory. It is a version of the old story, out of sight, out of mind. There are exceptions to this general, mental pattern among individuals and cultures, depending often upon circumstance and tradition, but the general parameters are predictably consistent within a given culture. Overall, similarities of belief and behavior among contemporary, primitive cultures of the relatively recent past are greater than the dissimilarities might at first suggest.

Morality and ethics, with few exceptions, have little or nothing to do with the spirit's qualifications for an afterlife. This comes as a surprise to many members of contemporary "civilized" cultures. It is only in the Bronze Age cultures of Mesopotamia,

the Mediterranean, the Near East and perhaps India and China that moral caveats began to play an increasingly important role. Recent and contemporary stone-age-like cultures seem stuck and holding fast to what our logic tells us must be close approximations of paleolithic and neolithic conceptions of this life and afterlife. And this should not, if this assumption is true, surprise us because they are, after all, at the same level of development.

Sometimes only the powerful or well-bred seem eligible for the primitive's idea of heaven. Genetic lineage is extremely important to most of these people. Chiefs and heroes are special people, regardless, and are treated as such. This should not surprise us, either. Caste systems are still a formidable force in many underdeveloped parts of the world. It is hard to deny that even the developed West does not harbor remnants of former caste systems. And the lack of advanced education, either because of the personal inability to afford it, or because of personal lack of incentive, is creating in Western cultures a sharp divide between the undereducated, who find it increasingly difficult to find employment, and the highly educated (often in technically-oriented fields) who are much sought after by corporate-driven economies.

In some primitive societies, the afterlife of women seems to have been completely discounted. This also should not surprise us. Even during the Bronze Age, as ideas about afterlife began to freely evolve and spread, the position of women in most cultures was minimized. The early Hebrews were certainly not ready to enfranchise or empower their women. Early Greek and Roman women fared no better.

The idea that the ghost of the departed might return at any moment is generally recognized by primitive societies. It is also recognized that this wraith might be seeking vengeance and wreck proverbial havoc by causing various kinds of mischief or by making a general nuisance of itself. Ghosts are recognized as unpredictable. They can be a positive or neutral presence, then change rapidly for the worse. The ghost's attitude may be appreciably affected by several variables; for instance, the way in which the corpse of the deceased was disposed and whether proper ceremony was carried out at the time of death and

afterward. Then again some ghosts seem to have been born to become, upon death, a spear in the side of potentially all those who were ever acquainted with it.

The primitive's conception of death covers a broad spectrum. Some of his concepts are likely to seem quite novel to the civilized, present-day mentality. One story found again and again in culture after culture attempts to explain why men die. There are several African versions, including Bantu and Ashanti.

James G. Frazer, the accomplished compiler of ethnic tales from the books of his contemporary ethnologists and anthropologists, offers one variant recorded among the Togas. It seems that at some time in the past men sent a dog to God on a special mission. It was to advise God that when a member of the species died, it would like to return to life again. The dog, being loyal, set off on its errand. But, as the day lengthened, it became hungry and stopped at a witch's hut. The witch was busy boiling magic herbs, but the hungry dog could only think of one thing—the witch was cooking food. About this time, a meddlesome frog happened along, and it so happened the frog knew what the dog was up to. The frog took off at a good, fast hop. “When I've eaten, I'll catch up to froggy,” the dog told himself.

As fate would have it, froggy got to God first and said, “When men die, they don't want to come to life again.” Well, the dog finally arrived and stated his purpose. Yes, men wanted to come back to life again after death. God, of course, was puzzled by these contradictions and said to the dog, “I don't understand these contradictory requests. Since the frog made his request first, I will grant it to him.” And so it was. And so it is. That is the real reason why men die and do not come to life again.

Sometimes the reasons for man's mortality seem to have been drawn from a real or imagined event projected into the dim past. Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen relate a short tale which describes a sequence of death and resurrection which has gone awry because of the ill deeds of one man. The Unmatjera and Kaitish tribes of central Australia maintain that long ago their dead were buried either in trees or underground. After three days, they would rise from the dead. This happy state of affairs, however, came to an abrupt end, the Kaitish say, because a man of the Curlew totem found some men of the Little Wallaby totem

burying a Little Wallaby man. This Curlew man went into a passionate rage and kicked the body of the corpse into the sea. That, of course, made it impossible for the dead man to come to life again and explains why no one rises from the dead after three days anymore like they used to do so long ago.

The Melanesians of the Banks Islands have their own special way of accounting for the origin of death. According to the account collected by R.A. Codrington, at one time death lived underground in a dark world called Panoi, and every living man existed above ground in our world in perpetuity. When a man needed to renew himself, he changed his skin like a snake. But at the same time, society had a great problem. The young had little chance for an equitable distribution of property because older members of the culture controlled it all. Thus Death was invited to make an appearance above ground to readjust the situation. As an inducement, he was promised no harm would come to him while he was on his mission. When Death arrived, the islanders laid him out on a board, covered him like a corpse and then began cheerfully to divide his property among themselves. There was a great funeral feast, and everyone enjoyed himself greatly.

On the fifth day of festivities, the islanders blew a conch shell to drive away the ghost, as was their custom, and then peeped under the pall to see what had become of the deceased. Unfortunately, Death was nowhere to be found. He had slipped away leaving only a skeleton behind. Fearing that he intended to return to Panoi, they sent a fool to check the road to the underworld. If Death got away, how could men die and how would others then be able to inherit their property? Well, the fool being what he was, busied himself watching the wrong road, and Death slipped by and made his way back home. Since then, however, all men looking for him have followed Death down the road to his kingdom.

As every anthropologist and sociologist knows, every culture must explain to its satisfaction certain essential, vital questions. And without a doubt, the question of death, and the reason(s) for it, loom large and high on any scale of interest, as does a close counterpart, the question of, What happens to us after we die? Lest we are tempted to consider these primitive explanations as overly simplistic, and discount the primitives prevailing beliefs

that all men are naturally immortal, and that death is due to the effects of sorcery or accidents, it would do us well to recall the “plasmic,” scientific idea of immortality. August Weismann offered one of the first descriptions of it: “An immense number of low organisms do not die . . . As long, however, as those conditions which are necessary for their life are fulfilled, they continue to live, and they thus carry the potentiality of unending life in themselves.” Weismann, in another of his essays, quoted his contemporary, Alfred Russel Wallace, ‘If individuals did not die, they would soon multiply inordinately and would interfere with each other’s healthy existence.’

We today cannot help but wonder where our present world population of over six billion is headed. Perhaps we should thank our biology or our stars (or God) for not giving our immediate ancestors plasmic longevity or we might already have crowded ourselves toward extinction as a species.

Once a culture has explained the origin of death to its satisfaction and verified that, one way or another, its members will prove mortal in this world, it must offer an acceptable explanation for the important question of what happens to us when we die. There are almost as many answers to that question as there are primitive cultures. It would probably be wise of us to keep that fact in mind when we are tempted to speculate on what may have passed for survival hypotheses in the paleolithic and neolithic mind.

Certain commonalties of belief among contemporary primitive cultures do, however, become evident once a large enough sampling has been gathered. The first impression, nevertheless, is of the extraordinary diversification of survival ideas. If ever the devil was in the details, it is here. Central to these survival ideas are the varying conceptions of soul, spirit, personality, ego and residual ghost. There are ideas of “long” souls, “short” souls, round souls, featureless souls, souls as small as a dust mite and giant souls, souls thought to reside in the eye, in the heart, in the liver, in the blood, in the breath, souls believed to house themselves in the human shadow or lurk in reflected water. There is just about any humanly conceivable shape whatever. Many primitive cultures are paligenetic or metempsychotic and are convinced souls transmigrate to animal forms upon death of

the human body.

The connection of the soul to the body leads to some interesting conjectures. The primitive tends to imagine the soul as a material substance much as today's rationalistic science tends to believe the mind is nothing but a material brain in its operation. The primitive is not inclined toward abstract thought such as the notion of a spirit totally independent of a body. (And recall, the same could be said for the early Egyptians, early Christians and the Jews at the time of the founding of Christianity. Many Christians still maintain such a position.) Nevertheless, ghost-spirits are often invisible, capable of being seen only by special people such as shaman, chiefs or old men or women. There is an exception to this general rule when psychedelic drugs are ingested by large numbers of the males of a particular community as is common among the Yanomami of Venezuela and Brazil today. The visions of the spirit-world are then accessible to all participants and, in fact, such ceremonies often accompany coming-of-age rituals undergone by young, male initiates.

Interestingly enough, the souls of old men and women are often considered as being old themselves—which is a literal projection of the present state of the body. It is not, generally, an indication that the entity has experienced many lives or reincarnations in this world or another.

Souls of the deceased can travel—and usually do. Many are clinging and demanding; many are troublesome gadabouts. They hover, they meddle, they play tricks, they even give advice (many modern, alpine Quechua of Peru still seek this advice at annual ceremonies). It is not unusual for friendly spirits to offer aid and moral support to the living. At their most fearsome, they run amok, cause trouble and sometimes illness and death.

Many primitive cultures believe the souls of the living can temporarily leave the body with or without the use of drugs. (An extended discussion of primitive and modern out-of-body experiences appears in a later chapter.) This happens, for instance, during sleep, during fainting spells, during delirium caused by sickness and in trance states often induced by psychedelic, botanical toxins. Use of such drugs is still common among the tribes of the Amazon Basin.

Because of the belief in the binding relationship of soul and body, many primitive cultures have insisted that the soul will cling to the body until total decomposition has taken place. This means in practice that the deceased must either have all remaining flesh stripped from his/her torso or a protracted period is waited out until nature herself thoroughly scavenges the skeleton. Once the bones are clean, the soul is free to depart. Some tribes would prefer never to see it again. Other peoples, such as some of the present-day Quechuas, keep the parched, mummified skeletons of former family members close at hand, including within the family hut, and bring out the remains on special occasions, often seat them at the table, lay out food before them and frequently ask them for support and advice. With attention such as this, the living-dead are obviously granted an active role in day-to-day affairs. The conviction that the spirit still resides in the remains, or hovers about them, is strong.

It is best to remember that the primitive mind is not locked into many of the learned mindsets we today pass off as logical thinking. This does not mean that the primitive mind is not self-limited by its own habitual practices and customs. Quite the contrary. Much about the practices and ideas of these cultures may seem to us today to be contradictory or illogical. But it is best to remember that once practices and ideas become thoroughly established, they become communal thought-property, develop their own internal *raison d' etre*, their own special rationalizations, their own self-sustaining momentum and become quite resistant to change. Old practices can sometimes be found running a parallel life with contradictory, new practices. Free-thinking individuals would be rare and dangerous to the community's sense of well-being, whereas what has been in the past considered acceptable, effective practices are considered sound practices for the present moment.

Christian, Muslim and Asian ideas of the soul and afterlife often seem very strange to contemporary, primitive cultures. As an example, here is an account related to the author by a young Brazilian graduate student in anthropology whose name, unfortunately, has been lost in the files. His story, however, stayed firmly embedded in the author's memory. The native tribe under consideration was located in the state of Rondonia and, until

recently, had limited contact with the outside world. As was predictable, one day some eager missionaries appeared before the tribal members. They spent several days zealously explaining to the chiefs and aggregated tribesmen the finer points of their denomination's interpretation of the Christian religion, then packed up and left. After their departure, one of the chiefs approached the graduate student, who was studying the tribe's history, giving the student the opportunity to ask, "What do you think of their religion?" "It's kind of simpleminded," the chief replied. "It doesn't explain nearly as much as our beliefs do." And in the context of his jungle-world, with old practices and hallowed beliefs carefully crafted over centuries to explain it and control it, who is to say he was wrong? To maintain such a position is highly presumptive and carries all the hallmarks of all those living souls who are so willing to sink rapidly into the black, slippery muds of ethnocentrism.

For the primitive, as for members of today's major religions, the most salient questions are the same. Once the soul-spirit is free of the body, what becomes of it? What does it have to look forward to? And for how long? Anthropological field studies made in Australia in the early 20th century and the Pacific islands give us probably the closest approximation to the Stone Age mind as we will ever get. The following examples were, in fact, collected from peoples still living stone-age lives. And they are, simply in their own right, fascinating glimpses of the diversity of survival ideas recently still in existence.

Until the arrival of white settlers, the aborigines of Australia were, by present anthropological standards, as primitive as any people on earth. Even well into the 20th century, ways of doing and thinking had changed little over the millennia for most clans. They remained basically hunters and gatherers. The ideas of reincarnation and rebirth held by the clans inhabiting a large area, extending from the center of the country north to the Gulf of Carpentaria, seem to us today, in an age which seems to have overindulged itself with a fancy for the weird and exotic and is surprised by very little, still remarkable. If we are inclined today to discount the likelihood of similar ideas existing in the paleolithic or neolithic brain because of a lack of hard evidence, these aboriginal beliefs might give us second thoughts.

According to Spencer and Gillen, these tribes and clans believe that every living person is a reincarnation of a person who has lived previously on earth, possibly in recent memory, perhaps long ago, an idea approximating Hindu and Buddhist thought. For them, the human personality survives in spirit form which later *may be* reborn into this world—again an approximation of current Hindu/Buddhist thought and quite possibly as ancient in its origins as well. In addition, these Central Australian tribesmen are convinced that the Milky Way is a great river along the banks of which the souls of the dead have encamped. The light of the accumulated stars is the light of their campfires. When the deceased has been properly laid to rest after prolonged totemic rituals, the soul of the deceased, described as about the size of a grain of sand, is believed to return to a place where it had camped long ago in a previous existence, a place where it remains among its totemic relatives until it is reborn into a human body. It is not unusual, according to these two anthropologists, for the living to provide the “dead” with food, water, shelter, fire, weapons and other items out of either devotion or respect or even fear. These are some of the same types of accouterments we have noted in paleolithic and neolithic burial sites which are reflective of the burial practices of peoples as diverse in time and place as the ancient Egyptians, the Etruscans, the Vikings, the Maya and even some present-day Peruvian Quechuas.

According to studies reported by A.C. Haddon, the Torres Straits Islanders claim that there is an island in the far West, or rather Northwest called either Kibu or Biogu where the spirit-ghosts go after their death. Kibu means “sundown.” Skulls of the dead are preserved, kept in-house and, as with the previously mentioned Quechuas, consulted from time to time for advice and predictions. This suggests, of course, that the living have confidence that the dead possess, if not supernatural precognition, at least valuable knowledge that can be passed on. These people also practice a form of mummification expedited by smoking the corpse after removing the bowels.

Much anthropological research still continues in New Guinea, although all tribes now have been influenced to one degree or another by contact with the outside world. In what was once British New Guinea, C.G. Seligmann studied the Massim, a

branch of the Papuo-Melanesian race. The Massim called the spirit of the dead person an *arugo*, which means a man's shadow or reflection in water. The souls of the dead were said to depart for the land of Hiyoyoa, which was thought to be relatively close-by but in the ocean under water. This land resembled the earth of the living with a few unique twists: Day was night for the living and vice versa; also, the dead did not speak exactly the tribal language but a related dialect. A god called Tumudurere met the transplanted spirits and advised them where to plant their new gardens. These folk, like many primitives, believed it is possible to visit the dead and return. Whereas dream and trance are the most common states used for such visitations among aboriginal peoples, individuals of this tribe had a variation on the procedure. They smeared themselves with magical ingredients before falling asleep, and their chances of awakening in Hiyoyoa were believed to be much improved.

The Kai people of New Guinea ascribe two souls to a human being, says R. Neuhauss. One is like the sap of a tree and dissipates after death. The second, however, endures and resembles the formerly living man *sans* body. The body that remains has a marginal corporeality but to a very diminished degree. While alive, the Kai imagines that his shadow or reflection is his soul. To step on either is to crush his soul. But the true home of his soul is his heart. No logical contradiction in the two ostensibly irreconcilable positions is perceived. The Kai knows his soul is in his heart because he can feel it beating. In fact, it also resides in his lips, his fingers, his feet, even his spit. This is the second soul, the one like tree sap, which pervades his whole material being. And like so many primitive peoples of the past, and many extant today, the Kai believe most deaths are not a natural phenomenon but caused by sorcery.

After a Kai spirit-ghost has haunted his old neighborhood for awhile, he returns to his new home in the underworld. This home-world is ruled by Tulumeng who is known to beat refractory souls. It is comparatively very much like the upper world. People farm, give birth, squabble and sometimes kill one another just like they always have. And sorcerers do a brisk business going about their never-ending mischief-making. But there is a time limit to dwelling in this other world. When a spirit-ghost

dies the second death, it turns into an animal. This is basic metempsychosis, not unlike the belief system of today's basic Hinduism. When once again in the upper world, the reincarnated spirit, now in animal form, runs the risk of being killed by a hunter. Should this happen, its spirit turns into an insect or an anthill. When the insect dies, the series comes to an end, unlike the Hindu/Buddhist belief that incarnate lives continue until soul-enlightenment and the ego dissipation of the Buddhists. Thus we have survival and reincarnation but not immortality.

The Kirvi tribe in New Guinea call the land of the dead Adiri or Wiobu. This world is said to exist somewhere to the west, according to G. Landtman, although the tribal members seem rather uncertain as to its exact whereabouts. Many stories are told about a hero named Sido who first discovered the land, found it initially sterile and unappealing but turned it into a veritable Garden of Eden where things good to eat grow profusely.

After death, ghosts often loiter around and can be dangerous adversaries, luring others to die deaths similar to their own. Some dead often appear to people in dreams, warning them or offering other helpful advice. To obtain advice from dead parents, a man will sometimes dig up a skull and sleep beside it.

The research of Stefan Lenner reveals that in other parts of New Guinea, there is less certainty as to exactly where the souls of the dead repair. Contradictory ideas are common. Some, for instance, say the ghosts depart to Bukaua on Huron Gulf; others believe, as we have already seen, that they transmigrate into living animals. Some are convinced that the ghosts of the deceased linger near their native villages. The Bukaua think that a person's spirit can take temporary leave of the body during sleep or swoons. (See the discussion of out-of-body travel in later chapters.) They also believe the living can project their spirits or consciousness and sometimes astral travel to people some distance away.

If we are tempted to consider ideas such as astral projection as far-fetched and undocumented, it is perhaps well to remember the contemporary research of the phenomenon by the English and American divisions of the Society for Psychical Research, the published experiences of Sylvan Muldoon and Robert A. Monroe and the even more recent studies of Raymond A. Moody and

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross. Some of this research offers compelling evidence to support the idea of astral travel and thought-transference over distances both short and long.

James G. Frazer, that tireless Victorian compiler of anthropological data, notes that the Tami Islanders practice the worship of ancestors. In their belief system, each human has two souls, a long one and a short one. Both of these souls are thought to survive earthly death, but they do not repair after funeral rites to the same destination. The long soul heads for the lower world while the short one was “last sighted off the coast of New Britain.” The lower world is called Lamboam, and here everything is “fairer and more perfect than on earth,” which sounds like a capsulized description of heaven we might expect to be offered by most present-day Christians and Muslims. And yet, almost paradoxically, everything is in many ways just like it was on earth. People are born, get sick or are killed and die as do their earthly relatives and tribesmen. There is some disagreement as to souls which die the second death. Some say they become vermin; others are convinced they morph into mischievous wood-spirits.

The southern Melanesians of New Caledonia hold the same, almost universal, belief among primitives that peoples’ souls continue to survive for a time after death, if in fact they are not immortal. According to Father Lamber, a Catholic missionary, all the ghost-spirits of the Belep tribesmen have much to look forward to in the afterlife world of Tsiabiloum. Tsiabiloum is a paradise, rich and beautiful. There is no sickness, infirmity, sorrow, want or death—all those unfortunate states of being we Christians and Muslims have stricken from the register of our projected heavenly paradise. Boredom, by the way, is not an option. Neither is narcolepsy. No one sleeps in Tsiabiloum because sleep is not necessary. Night is unknown. One must assume life here is a busy affair, although what exactly everyone is doing all the time in this restless world is not completely clear. At any rate, the ghost-spirits often return to their former homes on earth during daylight hours and reside for that day in the cemeteries where they are honored. At night, they skedaddle back to their undersea paradise.

Among the New Caledonians, there seems to be a heartfelt worship of the dead tinged by an active belief in magical

ceremonies. George Turnes has asserted that some of the New Caledonians ascribe sickness to the artifices of white men, whom they have identified with ghost-spirits of the dead. This being the case, it is ample reason to kill white strangers. Luckily, since the days of his account, such attitudes have ameliorated or disappeared.

The Tongans recently believed in superior and inferior gods. They made a distinction between those who had always been gods and the souls of dead chiefs and nobles, who had become gods either in life or after death. These lower or inferior gods seem a close parallel to some of the ideas of the Maoris of New Zealand, who believed chiefs and priests were descended from the good life in one of ten heavens, presumably a high one, as most commoners seem to have been expected to settle in a lower one. Such are the field gleanings of W. Mariner who, in *Tonga Islands*, gives an extended explanation of the pecking order to be found among the native people. The *toos*, or lowest ranking members of society, were acknowledged to have souls but little chance of a future existence. The *moas*, recognized as a class above the *toos*, had an outside chance at soul-survival, although it appears to have been a slim one. Only the chiefs and their ministers (*matabooles*) were guaranteed immortality. Here, as in many primitive cultures, gaining Bolotoo or heaven had much more to do with rank and lineage than with morals, deeds or character. The lot of the soul in Bolotoo was completely unaffected by either the good or evil which could be ascribed to it while it was on earth. This state of affairs would certainly be attractive to our contemporary politicians.

The souls of these chiefs and ministers, now possessing god-powers, albeit in an inferior degree to the original deities, were able to communicate with the living by causing visions, appearing in dreams or inspiring the words of priests. We see here once again the possibility of communication between the dead and the living, and the living and the dead, which is such a powerful, central, even dominating idea in so many primitive cultures.

Some Samoans, unlike the Tongans, had more democratic ideas of survival and immortality. G. Brown concluded that generally the Samoans graciously offered the prospect of

immortality to commoners as well as chiefs and noblemen and “. . . so far as I know they had no idea of their dying a second death or being destroyed.” The American ethnologist Horatio Hale suggested that there were several alternative views extant among the Samoans in regard to the fate of the soul. Things were not so simple. “Some suppose that while the souls of the common people perish with their bodies, those of the chiefs are received into this island [Pulotu], which is described as a terrestrial Elysium, and become there inferior divinities.” This, we must agree, sounds like a Tongan description, but Hale’s additional remarks help clarify and expand the possibilities. “Others hold (according to Mr. Heath) that the spirits of the departed live and work in a dark, subterraneous abode, and are eaten by the gods.” The “dark, subterraneous abode” has an obvious affinity with the Sumerian *Kurnugea*, the Babylonian *Aralu* or *Bit-edie*, the Hebrew Sheol and the Greek Hades and Tartarus that we find developing during the Bronze Age. Hale notes that there is one more possible explanation for the fate of the soul found among many Samoans. “A third, and very common opinion is, that the souls of all who die on an island, make their way to the western extremity, where they plunge into the sea; but what then becomes of them is not stated.”

What seems likely from evidence collated from a variety of sources and pieced together, is that the soul, having quit its body, began its journey to Fafa, the nether, undersea abode of the dead, by walking and swimming to the western cape of Savaii, where it dove into the ocean and plunged downward until it reached its objective.

The great majority of Samoans seemed to believe that whether one achieved the blissful paradise of Pulotu or the forbidding, woeful hell called Sa-le-fe`e (Fafa) had nothing to do with moral worth; social rank was the deciding factor. Chiefs and nobles went to Pulotu. Commoners shared their destiny in Fafa or Sa-le-Fe`e. Pulotu was conceived as an idealized earth. There one could bathe in the “Water of Life” and regain one’s youth and vigor. This theme, the Waters of Life, is reminiscent of the Biblical reference to The Tree of Life, of the Sumerian king Gilgamesh’s search for an aquatic plant guaranteeing immortality to whoever ingested it, of the medieval alchemists’ attempts to

discover an immortalizing elixir of life and of Juan Ponce de Leon's search for the Fountain of Youth. It also recalls to mind the Greek tradition of a tree growing in Paradise which bore golden apples of immortality; the Chinese tradition of a magic garden where grew a similar tree bearing apples of immortality, and the Hindu myth of the celestial fruit found in Indra's Paradise which also conferred immortality to anyone lucky enough to ingest it. In Puluotu one found majestic heavens, abundant sea life, an idyllic landscape, good fishing, rich gardens, pleasing work, courting and marriage and everything one was used to in the good, old days on earth. Except everything was now brighter, fuller, better.

The Samoans believed these rejuvenated souls could return for brief periods to visit relatives, friends and enemies. On the one hand, they could run wildly amok and cause death and disease. They could even torment their enemies by entering their bodies. On the more positive side, they could counsel and instruct their friends in dreams and foretell the future.

The abilities of these dead souls caused fear and loathing among the living, as we might expect. And because of this fear, the Samoans worked hard at propitiating the dying with attention and presents, both friends and enemies. They dreaded the later powerful anger of the ghost-spirits. Prayers were found useful. They were commonly offered to a deceased relative, acquaintance or chief in an attempt to curry favors for the benefit of one's self or a friend or as a supplication for aid against an actual or perceived enemy. Thus we see how a habitual worship of the dead may be inspired by fear and hope and need. It is not unreasonable to believe that similar thoughts coursed through the paleolithic and neolithic mind long before man reached the Samoan Islands. Once the human mind proposed to itself the idea of the soul's survival after death and accepted it, it had created the fearful possibility that it might return. Prayer and acts of propitiation were attempts to control the attitude of these returnees and direct them to acts which would benefit the experiencer.

According to Hale and others, although there is much evidence that the Samoans believed in the ability of ghost-spirits to appear for good or ill, there is no evidence that they believed

these spirits transmigrated to men, animals, plants or inanimate objects. Samoan totemism did not seem to have been based on transmigration ideas. If totemism was ever a large factor in the metaphysical beliefs of the Polynesians, Samoan and Tongan practices indicate it most probably did not have its roots in the worship of the dead.

The Society Islanders, while believing in an afterlife for the soul, were typical among Pacific Islanders in the respect that their religion exerted no discernible influence on their everyday morality. Their lot in the hereafter was decided by social rank, not by any actions deemed good or bad by the living. As Captain John Cook noted in his *Voyages*, the Society Islanders believed no soul perished at death but began a journey to the afterworld as a *tee* or *teehee* by lingering near its former habitation. These islanders, however, were not very consistent in their views regarding the fate of the posthumous soul. Some seemed to favor the assumption that the soul lingered perpetually but invisibly about the old neighborhood. Others, perhaps the majority, embraced the idea that the ghost-spirits, after a period of loitering about, departed for a distant land. This land was called Po, which means night. It is the abode of gods and departed spirits. Unhappily, upon their arrival, these new denizen-spirits became literal foodstuff for their gods. W. Ellis has described the process as tripartite: After the soul was eaten and digested three separate times, it became an imperishable entity and was now able to visit the world of the living. The process of being cannibalized by a god was not considered a negative event; precisely the opposite was the case. Cook tells us the people saw this act “as a kind of purification necessary to be undergone before they enter a state of bliss.”

There was another version of this purification ritual which was recorded by early missionaries to Tahiti. In that version, the newly released ghost-spirit was swallowed by the *atua* bird, which frequents burial places, passed through the animal’s alimentary tract to be purified and was then united to a deity. “And such are afterwards employed by him,” says J. Wilson, “to attend other human beings and to inflict punishment, or remove sickness, as shall be deemed requisite.”

The exact coordinates of Po seemed to be indefinite in the

minds of many Society Islanders. Locations varied. The natives of Raiatea, however, had a precise location for it—in a mysterious cave on the top of the highest mountain on their island. After the natives were Christianized, missionaries were shown the location of the cavern. One informant, according to D. Tyerman and G. Bennet, assured them that he had often seen souls of the dead climbing the precipitous sides of the mountain as they made their way slowly to their new home.

As with so many primitive cultures of the South Seas (and elsewhere), there was discrimination in the world of the Society Islanders' afterlife. Souls were assigned to abodes of greater or lesser happiness, not because of their conduct in this world, as we find in Hinduism generally, but because of the rank and status they held on earth. The deities were not at all interested in the history of their moral conduct. Ellis says, "The only crimes that were visited by the displeasure of their deities were the neglect of some rite or ceremony, or the failure to furnish required offerings." If we feel today that these kind of strictures are quaint and inherently unjust, we had best take a look at some of our own Christian rituals. Many Christians, for example, feel that an unbaptized child or adult is not heaven-worthy or heaven-acceptable.

One version of paradise was offered by the Leeward Islanders. Their name for it was Rohutu Noanoa or "sweet-scented Rohutu." Ellis tells us every delight imaginable was to be found here. It was a kind of perfumed Muslim paradise but its clientele was strictly chiefs and the wealthy—because only they could afford to pay the large fees demanded by the priests for a passport. The other heaven, for the less fortunate and less well-healed, was called "foul-scented Rohutu." The name seems self-explanatory and implies the prospects to be expected.

The Yap Islanders of Micronesia, similar to many of their primitive brethren, believed that the body must be thoroughly decayed before the soul was light enough and fit to travel. When the soul was ready, it ascended to heaven, which was conceived of as a big house called Falraman. Falraman was ruled by Yalafath, creator of the world. There were no moral distinctions made between souls eligible for paradise; everyone was admitted except the souls of stillborn children.

The studies of Father Sixtus Walleser, Frazer tells us, reveal that the Yap Islanders had a rather unique conception of ascension to heaven. It was not absolutely necessary to be dead. In the old days, before the secret of ascending was lost, many men traveled there, it was said, some on the wings of a great bird, others on clouds, and later returned bearing rich gifts.

Heaven to these islanders was more than the big house. It was like a large, idealized island rich in fruit trees and the better things in life. The waters surrounding land were chock-full of fish. The skies were ever fair. It is, after all, a mental projection of an idealized Yap, the kind of projection human beings are want to make relative to their circumstances and experiences of what is desirable and possible.

The national religion of Yap, according to Father Walleser, was basically the worship of ancestors. The ones everyone respected and feared most were the spirits of one's dead parents and other family members. The Yap Islander was not bothered much by the thought of other human spirits. He was, however, very concerned with a host of nonhuman spirits called "kan." All sickness, misfortune and plain bad luck was ascribed to the influence of these powerful beings. He had to be continually guarding himself from attack from a multitude of spirits residing in trees, bushes, the sky, the ocean, even the stones of the earth. In other words, animism played a large part here, as it did elsewhere in many primitive societies and can still be found as a shaping factor in some societies today.

Studies of the South Seas' peoples offer a cornucopia of examples of belief in posthumous survival. The preceding cases but scratch the surface of roots that go very deep. Some of these cases involve metempsychosis, some human reincarnation as we understand it in the West. As impressive as they are, they are by no means unique among primitive societies found worldwide. In fact, belief in reincarnation or rebirth is and was surprisingly common. Nowhere is this more true than in the Americas, from Tierra del Fuego to the proximity of the North Pole.

Most Americans today, including many ethnologists and anthropologists, are relatively unaware of the ubiquitousness of profound afterlife considerations in New World Amerindian cultures of the past and present and the common belief, in a great

many of these cultures, in the idea of reincarnation or rebirth. There is no question the great diversity of beliefs and practices among these cultures has caused confusion among the great majority of investigators in the past, although more recent collations of these beliefs and practices have confirmed large areas of commonality and similarity. Some early observers were quick to pick up on these similarities. Pierre de Charlevoix commented in the 1740s that, "The belief the best established among our Americans [Amerindians] is that of the immortality of the soul."

Daniel Brinton, after long study of Amerindian practices, was moved to observe in the late 19th century that, of all the cultures he had studied, "I know of only one well authenticated instance where the notion of a future state appears to have been entirely wanting, and this in quite a small clan, the Lower Pend d'Oreilles, of Oregon." The idea of a posthumous "future state," either in this world or somewhere above or below it, is intimately related to the various conceptions of the soul itself. The soul is understood variously, but the end result of its sojourns no matter its definition, is either to remain in the happy world of the hereafter or, quite likely, to return to earth in a new body to either the same culture, clan or family. The appearance of this new body is most often recognized by family and culture as the reincarnation, a return, of a former family or totem-related member, especially among tribes of the Pacific Northwest and Alaska. The Matlock-Mills Trait Index of Amerindian and Inuit Reincarnation codifies the variations found in one hundred thirty cultures or subgroups found to date which believe, in some form, that the human soul reincarnates.

The soul is understood by many as a subtle, material form, by others as a more ethereal essence of the personality. One Inuit culture calls it *tarnak*, the Kutchins' *natli*, the Dene *Tha mdaadlinha*, the Dakotas *nagi*, some New England cultures *chemung*. Many of these definitions suggest shadow and breath. The Mohawk designation is *atonritz*, from *atonrion*, to breathe. As Brinton said, these definitions are not far removed from Plato's three divisions: *thumos*, *epithumia* and *nous*. Nor are they so different from the traditional Jewish divisions of *neshamah*, the divine soul, *ruah*, the human soul or *mephesh*, the

animal soul. And it is not an exaggeration to say that they are not that far removed from our present-day Christian definitions.

The Amerindians recognize a number of possible souls varying from one to four or more. Multiple souls can create unusual states of rebirth. A living individual may be the repository of several ancestral souls at once. An individual soul, it is said, may sometimes embody in more than one living person at the same time. The Iroquois and Algonquin, for example, have long held the belief that human beings have two souls, one which supplies the body with life and remains with the corpse posthumously until it undergoes rebirth and one of a more aerial nature which in life can willingly or unwillingly leave the body in trance states or while dreaming. This soul can move about the world in true out-of-body fashion and have experiences (OBEs). At death, if all goes well, it proceeds directly to the land of spirits. Some Dakotas believe man has four souls, each with its own properties and destinies. One wanders the earth; another lingers about the village; a third watches over the body and a fourth repairs to the spirit realm. These are but a few instances of numerous possibilities. It is generally agreed that a soul can inadvertently get lost or be stolen from the living. This requires the work of shamans and specialists to hunt down the wayward or stolen soul and return it to its rightful owner. Any discussion of souls must also include the flora and fauna, especially the animals. The notion that all animals have souls is universally accepted by the Amerindians just as it is by East Indian Jainists. Care must be taken with them and their harvested carcasses that they may be reborn and replenish the earth.

The location of the soul is as variously interpreted as we find among the Pacific Islanders. One Pacific Northwest culture believes the soul resides in a particular neck bone. An old Tlingit legend suggests that the seat of life must be in the liver, because the first men appeared “when the liver came out from below.” It is not surprising to find the heart and the head also often recognized as the soul’s seat. Roger Williams long ago wrote in *Key into the Language of America* that certain New England Indians believed the soul could be found “In the braine” And it should be noted that the soul in almost all these cultures is intimately related to the naming of the individual at birth, the

newborn often perceived as a familial soul returning to earth life. This soul is adjudged a personality and that personality is recognized as having remained more or less intact during its sojourn in the spirit realm. It will often be recognized as its former self by exhibiting behavior suitable or reminiscent of the deceased family or clan member, by birthmarks, by speech, by its own memories and by the investigation of shamans into its former identity.

The bones of the deceased play a special, sacred, eschatological role in many Amerindian cultures, especially those cultures east of the Mississippi. Nations were (and are) accustomed at periodic intervals—usually one every eight to ten years—to gather, clean and inter them in communal sepulchers, often mounds or tumuli. Thus was formed the large mound systems found throughout the Middle West, in Peru and elsewhere. No act is considered more sacrilegious and guaranteed to incite the anger of Native Americans more than the desecration of these tombs, no matter the reason. The thinking behind these ossuary practices was probably in many cases the belief that one of the souls resided in the bones. These, like seed corn planted in Mother Earth, would over time grow new flesh and create a new man. If this thinking is at all close to the mark, it may explain earlier paleolithic and neolithic man's often exceptional care with the skeletons of the dead, including the existence of large ossuaries in the late Neolithic era filled with an abundance of skulls and skeletons. And there is little doubt today that the grave goods, which became increasingly plentiful in neolithic graves and later ones, were intended to supplement the life of the deceased in the spirit world. Logic compels us to believe this was also what motivated the similar, earlier paleolithic and early neolithic practices. In the Athapaskan dialect today we find, for instance, the word for bone is *yani*; the word for soul *i-yune*. These cognates tell their own story.

The sun holds a predominant position with most Amerindian cultures, and this is reflected especially in their ideas of it as a posthumous soul-destination. It is for many cultures the final Spirit Land, the ultimate, blessed hunting and gathering grounds, a happy and fertile land much like earth has to offer on her best days. The Milky Way is often conceived as the sure road of

spirits, the ultimate path of all souls. Along its spanning arch can be seen the large and small campfire lights of those in transit and those abiding in the neighborhood. Some believe the stars to be the souls of the deceased. When the sun rises, however, they scurry swiftly to its blinding light, not to be seen again until its light disappears from view.

The concept of hell did not exist until the inroads of Christianity. Ethics and morals were not used as yardsticks to separate those qualified for Spirit Land from those who were not. There were other, more pertinent, overriding considerations such as manner of death, the faithfulness with which relatives practiced the sepulchral rites and, in some cultures, the tribal status of the individual. In many societies, all souls repaired at death to the Spirit Land heaven; with others only a selected few, such as shamans and chiefs. Father Jean de Brebeuf (*Relations de la Nouvelle France*, 1636), for example, pointed out that among the Hurons, it was believed suicides and those killed in war lived apart in the spirit world, “but as to the souls of reprobates, as to being denied entry, they are welcome guests”

The various realms to which the spirit took flight were not always its final destination. A spirit could get lost on its way to “heaven.” And, with the concept of multiple souls differing in their functions, one soul might stay with the bones while a related soul(s) of the deceased might be elsewhere. According to Baron de la Hontan, writing in the 17th century, Algonquin women gathered around the deathbed of those dying with the hope that the passing vital spirit would enter their barren wombs. Among Florida Seminoles, the newborn, living issue of a mother who died during childbirth was held over her face so that it might receive her departing spirit and acquire by such means the strength and knowledge of her spirit for its future life. Ideas such as these bring us back to themes of transmigration, metempsychosis and reincarnation.

The recent Matlock-Mills Trait Index of Amerindian and Inuit Reincarnation distinguishes three main categories of rebirth. Reincarnation defines human-to-human rebirth. Transmigration is defined as human-to-animal rebirth. Metempsychosis is defined as a human-to-animal-to-human cycle. The Index lists,

as has been noted, one hundred thirty cultures or subgroups where belief in some form of human reincarnation has been noted. The category under which the greatest number of cultures is subsumed is the first, Reincarnation. Reincarnation beliefs are very common among Inuit people, the Pacific Northwest cultures and cultures in the American East, with further, scattered representation throughout Middle America. Transmigration, as Matlock-Mills defines it, is most common in California cultures with scattered representation elsewhere. Metempsychosis is found primarily among certain tribes of the Inuit, Eskimo and Aleut, the Kutchin of the Canadian Mackenzie Drainage Area and the Northwest Coast Kwakiutls.

Rebirth, we can justifiably conclude, is a common idea, and internally a very important idea, to a very large percentage of Amerindian cultures. With wide cultural variance, there are particular social dynamics within each society which determine whose soul is worthy of what—also when, where, in what form and to whom a spirit will reincarnate or be reborn. These ideas differ significantly, however, from Eastern Hindu and Buddhist ideology in one important, defining aspect. They are not related to an ethical or moral base. Karma, the idea that one remains responsible for his own negative actions life after life until they have been balanced, resolved and overcome, is not an operational imperative in original Native American religious thought.

And whereas the goal of the Hindu or Buddhist devotee is to reach a state of *moksha* or *nirvana* and escape the injustices, pain and suffering of this world, the goal of the Native American is to live as harmoniously as possible with the natural world, which he believes is possible. He knows if he does so, it will bring happiness to himself and those around him. He is not trying to escape this world. At death, he often indicates a yearning to return to it. This raises a question which haunts modern life. By modern life, we mean life in nonprimitive societies since approximately the middle of the Bronze Age. Why is it relatively small, “primitive” societies most often seem to achieve a level of contentment which far exceeds that of larger, more “civilized” societies? Does size of culture have something to do with this problem, or is it more likely that the further one withdraws from close contact with Mother Nature, the more one

loses his sense of internal, spiritual, balance, which affects his self-image and his happiness? If this is, indeed, the case, then small hunting, foraging, agrarian and semiagrarian cultures may hold the answer to the larger problem. Unfortunately, modern man, because of his numbers, and by his philosophy, probably has passed the point of no return. He cannot return to a pastoral life, which quite possibly was his true Eden, because of the scale of the monstrous, industrial golem he has created around himself.

North American cultures are not the only native cultures in the New World where reincarnation or rebirth in its several forms was (and often still is) an important constituent of the belief-systems. Rebirth ideas are (or were) found among the Caribs of the Caribbean and North coast of South America, the Chilean Patagonians, the South American Chiriquanes, many Amazonian cultures, the Quechuas of Peru and the Mayas and Quiches of Central America. Among North American peoples, a partial listing would include Iroquois, Huron, Oneida, Algonquin, Potawatomi, Delaware, Powhatan, Creek, Yuchi, Chitimacha, Natchez, Maidu, Eastern Ojibwa, Chippewa, Winnebago, Fox, Chiricahua Apache, Navaho, Hopi, Keresan Pueblo, Cochiti, Santa Ana, Maricopa, River Yuman, Cocopa, Karankawa, Cheyenne, Shoshone, Arapaho, Dakota, Oglala, Teton, Iowa, Ponca, Mandan, Assiniboin, Thompson, Lillooet, Puget Sound, Twana, Upper Skagit, Pentlach, Bella Coola, Kwakiutl, Gitskan, Tsimshian, Haida, Tlingit, Eyak, Micmac, Naskapi, Dene Tha, Chipewyan, Beaver, Hare, Kutchin, Carrier, Tagish, Han, Tanana, Tanaina, Netsilik, Caribou Inuit, Copper Inuit and Aleut. Impressive as this list is, it is by no means comprehensive.

Many of the early peoples of European descent also claimed reincarnation and/or rebirth as doctrinal ideas. Such a belief has been found among the early Teutonics and later Prussians as well as among the Lombards, the early Latvians (Letts), the Lapps, the Finns, the Danes, the Norse generally, the early Icelanders, the early Saxons and the Celts of England, Wales, Ireland and old Gaul.

The ancient Celts in Roman times occupied Ireland, Great Britain, France, Belgium, parts of Switzerland, northern Italy and western Germany. Julius Caesar, in his *Gallic War*, said of them, "They desire to impart one of their leading ideas, that souls are

not extinguished but pass on after death from body to body. They think men are very much aroused to bravery by this belief, the fear of death being ignored." The Roman poet, Lucan, speaking directly to the Druids in his *Pharsalia*, remarked, ". . . we learn that the destination of man's spirit is not the grave, nor is it the Underworld of Shades. In another world, the same spirit quickens another body and, if your teaching is accurate, death is the midpoint, not the end, of a long series of lives." And Diodorus of Sicily added, "Among them [the Druids] the doctrine of Pythagoras held weight, that is, that men's souls are undying, and after a fixed number of years men come to life again, the soul transmigrating into another body."

According to Ignatius Donnelly's *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World*, "metempsychosis or transmigration of souls was one of the articles of their [Celts] belief long before the time of Pythagoras; it had probably been drawn from the storehouse of Atlantis." A good example of this belief can be found in the saga *The Voyage of Bran*: "He will be found in the form of every beast in both the blue sea and on land. He will be a dragon facing multitudes in the beginning, a wolf of the great forest, a silver horned stag on lands where chariots course. He will be spotted salmon in the great pool, a seal, a fair white swan." Douglas Hyde, in the *Literary History of Ireland*, comments that "the idea of rebirth, which forms part of a half-a-dozen existing sagas was perfectly familiar to the Irish Gael." From fragments of the ancient Irish tale of the *Birth of Cuchulin*, preserved in the 11th century *The Book of the Dun Cow*, we have, "It was he who had carried her off with her companions. He had led them in the shape of birds. He was the child she had reared. Now he was about to enter her womb and take the name of Setanta. He was Lug, son of Ethne."

No one knows where the Gaels got their ideas of rebirth. It is true that ancient Ireland was reputed to be a relatively highly civilized land from an early day. It is also true, as Donnelly states, that Sanskrit sources refer to it as *Hiranya*, "Island of the Sun," and that the Greeks called it the "Sacred Isle" and "Ogygia." And the term *Ogygia* for them was reserved for something extremely ancient. It is also demonstrable, as Donnelly observed, that the Irish annals state that the island was

settled prior to the biblical flood. Donnelly also believed the annals supported an early, pre-flood immigration from the direction of Atlantis. He found it “probable” that Druidic ideas had been passed from Ireland to England to France.

Our own opinion about the validity of Atlantean influence on the early Gaels remains open. If Atlantis, especially a mid-Atlantic Atlantis, is ever proved to have been a prehistorical reality, it will serve to explain many a mystery which has been troubling our understanding for a very long time.

Tropical Africa is especially rich in beliefs in reincarnation, rebirth and metempsychosis, although these ideas can be found abundantly throughout the extent of the continent. Theodore Besterman, in his *Collected Papers on the Paranormal*, discovered over one hundred tribes within Africa and Madagascar with a variety of ideas on various kinds of rebirth. Thirty-six tribes supported the position that human beings returned to new human lives; four hundred seventy-six believed humans returned as animals; twelve were open to the possibility that a returnee’s body could be either human or animal in form.

Geoffrey Parrinder, summing up the African tribal attitude to death and the idea of posthumous survival, had this to say, “This is the best of all possible worlds; the African’s attitude is world-affirming not world-renouncing . . . It is therefore punishment to be detained in Hades . . . All the dead return to earth, except perhaps certain ghosts that have been captured by sorcerers. Rarely does one find any limit set to the number of reincarnations, speculation does not go so far.” In *African Traditional Religion*, he addresses the ideas of transmigration or metempsychosis, which is a fairly common concept among the tribes, as Besterman’s survey indicates. As an illustration, he chooses the Nankanse, who reside along the Gold Coast. The Nankanse are convinced that “certain clans are related to animals.” Totemic practices are not particularly common in Africa, which makes the Nankanse convictions a little unusual.

The males of one clan are called “leopard-rising fellows.” Their belief is that at death, these former men will appear to their sons in the guise of a leopard. The members of the clan have a taboo against killing leopards, as one might expect. If they happen to find a dead one, they wrap it carefully in white fabric

and bury it with the same respectful interment ceremonies reserved for humans. Parrinder reaffirms the validity of the existence of the often-repeated notion that a sorcerer can assume the shape of an animal. It isn't clear, however, whether these are real animals or thought-form projections. If they are real animals, he wonders what happens to these animal souls, in the interim, because in Africa animals and plants are commonly believed to have souls, albeit ones less developed than humans.

In *Religion in Africa*, Parrinder offers the Ila of Zambia as an example of a tribe which believes that all humans are reborn with the possible exception of evil souls who have been in the employ of sorcerers. As with most African tribes which subscribe to the idea of reincarnation, succession is seen as a family affair. At the birth of a child, the normal practice is for the parents to visit a diviner who indicates to them the name of the returning ancestor, much like the practice of Amerindians on this continent. This is the doctrine some have called "the extended self." It is commonly believed a newborn child will cry until it is given its rightful name, which is the name of the correct forebear. Ila believe males may return as females; also that the same spirit may inhabit two or more bodies—a belief accepted by several other African tribes. Again, the similarities to some Amerindian beliefs are striking. Disputes over important issues such as chieftaincy are often settled when one of the contending disputants is able to prove he is the reborn issue of an ancestor more powerful than his opponent's forebear.

A further word on returning spirits might clarify many possible misunderstandings of just who is returning and who exactly is being born. As Emefie Ikenga-Metuh explains, "Africans believe that the deceased who reincarnates in the newly born is present in him and guides him in his actions without displacing his personality. Multiple location is one of the qualities of the spirit. So it is not impossible for an ancestral spirit guardian to be in the spirit-land, the ancestral shrine, and in the reincarnated at the same time."

Alexander Lopasic, who has studied the Bini of southwestern Nigeria and the Ekpo cult of the tribe, maintains that many of "the Ekpo masks portray Ihe, the deities who are believed to have once been human beings . . ." They have been transformed, or

transformed themselves, “into rivers, ponds, or hills.” Among several examples, he cites the Igbagon deity, “a woman who became the Igbagon river (also know as Jameison river),” a mask of Okhuan, who also “transformed himself into a river,” and Ovia, “who used to be a woman, a wife of the king Oyo,” who also turned herself into a river.

Another Ekpo mask is of Ebomisi, reputed to have been “a famous magician at Ugo,” who “transformed himself into a hill.” This is a kind of survival and immortality which does not seem strange to the African mind, especially tribes with strong animistic roots in their religious tradition. For most Westerners, beliefs such as these seem almost incomprehensible and patently unacceptable. But as Edward Taylor observed, these “are topics on which the lower races for the most part hold explicit doctrines. When these fall under the inspection of a modern ethnographer, he treats them as myths” Unfortunately, Taylor’s comment, like so many of James Frazer’s remarks and those of their contemporaneous colleagues, reflects the smug, Victorian ethnocentrism of a century or more ago, and his pejorative reference to the “lower races” aside, it is still not unusual today to find barely concealed ethnocentric feelings of superiority lurking, coiled and ready to release their venom, when comparative religious practices are discussed.

As a final example of a relatively recent primitive view of survival, and the lack of it, we turn to the Warao Indians of Venezuela. The Waroa have an anthropocentric world view and a complex cosmographical schema of the relationship between earth and the near heavens of the gods. This schema comes complete with a dark underworld ruled by flesh-eating, soul-devouring, nether gods. Rather startling is the fact that the Waroa have no word in their vocabulary for being alive, only for dying or being dead. Johannes Wilbert has described the “different places of ultimate destiny of the human soul” in Waroa society. Reaching one of the tribe’s heavens and attaining the semblance of a happy, posthumous existence is neither assured nor easy.

Wilbert’s studies of the Waroa reveal that the prospects for afterlife of the common man are tentative at best. “Fortunately, not all people end up as sacrifices for the underworld, with only a

select group of religious practitioners able to look forward to an afterlife.” The situation might be called an example of *conditional immortality* with a vengeance. It takes “wit and luck” to live a good, full life in Waroa society and, when death comes, to join finally one’s own respective patron deity in that particular deity’s respective heaven. The unlucky victims of “the magic arrow of a dark-shaman,” are sacrificed as food for the deities and inhabitants of the underworld. In this culture, where infant mortality approaches fifty percent, there is no particular protection for the souls of infants, no heaven for children. The final destiny of many deceased children and infants, probably the great majority, is the underworld and certain death. Some, it is thought, may continue as invisible souls on earth. And some Waroa believe a number of them may return to the womb of their mothers to be reborn. Still others believe that some of these souls can be directed to a place in the heavens where a relative can offer foster care.

In contrast, Waroa shamans die with almost complete assurance of an afterlife in the company of their patron gods. This category includes priest-shamans, light-shamans and dark-shamans. In a culture where certain crafts are highly valued, weavers of baskets and hammocks may qualify for one of the heavens when and if they become certified masters of their craft. The same prospect is open to accomplished boat-makers who pass from successful initiates to master craftsmen. In short, the cosmography of the tribe is a daunting one and probably reflects the ultrarealistic perspective Waroa tribesmen have of a expected hard life on earth with no easy prospects in sight for a happy hereafter.

An overview of primitive, tribal beliefs and practices from ancient times to the recent past indicates more similarities, potential and proven, than great differences. There is undeniably a great diversity of beliefs and practices. The differences become more evident if one focuses on specific details or, metaphorically speaking, the “small print.” The “headline,” the one perennial certainty in almost all of these cultures, is a belief in some kind of posthumous survival for at least a portion of the culture’s members. Often it is only the gods on earth, kings, chiefs, priests, heroes or the wealthy who qualify. The future destiny of

the common man is often uncertain. If he is not disqualified initially from any hope of continuance, his prospects are, nevertheless, uncertain and tenuous. If there is a way, it is often a very hard way upon which a limited number of mortals find success.

If there is any one reason why major, present-day, world-religions have succeeded in organizing themselves and growing with time, it is because each one has been inclusive and, more or less, egalitarian in offering posthumous survival. Usually a certain kind of life is prescribed. If the prescriptions are met, survival is offered as a reward. The first inclusive, great religion of historical times was the Egyptian cult of Osiris. Until then there was no religion we know of in the Near East which offered afterlife to the common man; in fact, no religion which proposed a desirable heaven in which to enjoy such a life—unless, as the Sumerians, Babylonians and Assyrians taught, the petitioner was of one hundred percent godly blood. The Sumerian king, Gilgamesh, as we have seen, found this out to his chagrin. The story may well have been partially propounded to educate the nonqualifiers as to their status, in case they were tempted to let their yearning for survival mentally and emotionally overwhelm their sense of reality.

As time passed, the standards were lowered. Alexander the Great could hope for heaven if only he could prove his bloodline descended directly, *if only partially*, from a pharaoh, a position which he did maintain. Royal blood became confused with godly blood. If the first great rulers of the Near East had been gods, and therefore immortal, and if later pharaohs and kings were their hybridized children or, at any rate, their chosen emissaries on earth (the Divine Right of Kings)—then royal blood would do. It became a belated passport to a happy eternity, but the change in thinking was too late for Gilgamesh. The perception had changed after some rationalization, thus changing perceived reality. But not until the later Egyptians did the common man, by living a good life, being faithful and conscientiously studying the proper rituals, have a chance to exit this world for one at least as desirable.

Today, Islam teaches that almost all souls will eventually be saved and enjoy Paradise. This is achieved by loving God,

honoring Mohammed's teachings and living a good life filled with good works. The erring soul may find itself in a purgatory until it is purified, but sooner or later it will join its brothers and sisters in heaven. Only the very worst, unrehabilitative reprobates run the risk of eternal damnation—and hell.

Hinduism and Buddhism are demonstrably egalitarian and compassionate. All souls will reach enlightenment or nirvana in time—although this may require hundreds, even thousands, of lifetimes. There is no angry God thrusting sinners into everlasting hellfire, although there is a possibility of spending time in hellish “heavens” before reincarnating once again on earth where, it is thought, the majority of real soul-growth occurs.

Orthodox Christianity might be called the cruelest of major religions, a designation which might surprise most practicing members of the faith—but not those observing from a distance. The problem is not the teachings of Jesus, which are, for the most part, patently compassionate. It is centuries of papal and denominational manipulation of texts, and zealous, individual interpretations and exegeses of texts, which have reworked the original scriptures into dogma they were never intended to convey. The Christian God, as preached today, is an angry deity who is not hesitant to sentence erring souls to eternal damnation. The compassionate teachings of Jesus seem to have been lost, according to many critics, overwhelmed by narrow, doctrinal disputes and competing definitions of what constitutes a good Christian and who exactly qualifies for salvation. In the not to distant past, the conventional definition of a good Christian was one who loved God, honored the words of Jesus, generally had faith, treated others as he would treat himself and lived a good life filled with good works. This was commonly thought to qualify one for salvation and immortality. Now the Evangelical approach has become the easiest, most egalitarian formula for posthumous survival that any major religion, or branch of such, has ever proposed. All that is necessary is for an individual to proclaim that Jesus Christ is his/her personal savior. This assures the individual that his/her soul is saved and constitutes a passport for entry into eternal life in heaven. Some critics find this doctrine overly simplistic, too easy and specious at its center.

Good works and a faithful, good life have been accorded secondary status. Faith has been reduced to a formulaic pronouncement. A net cast so broad is likely to yield a catch which contains unsavory things beyond the “fish” of the more traditional Church.

At the moment, Christianity seems confused as to what exactly it is and where it wants to go. In terms of growth, Islam is expanding rapidly worldwide. Hinduism and Buddhism seem to have reached a stasis which could turn out to be momentary or permanent.

Chapter Five

Bronze Age Transformations: Sumer, Babylonia, Egypt

Sumerologists like to remind us that modern culture, as we conceive of it today, had its beginnings in the Mesopotamian land of Sumer. Here is found the first written language, one like no other on earth, which has no affinities, no roots to any other known language in the world (which should give the extraterrestrial-intervention hypothesis a large boost). And, significantly it is from Sumerian accounts and later Chaldean records that we learn the history of mortal man's creation and the physical and mental limitations imposed on that creation. Man mistakenly came to believe that a seemingly limitless physical longevity was tantamount to immortality—a misconception that his bioengineers made no attempt to clarify because, for reasons that will become obvious, it was not in their interest to do so.

These early, Near-Eastern, Bronze-Age cultures did not dote much on ideas of soul and everlasting continuance of personality or spirit. Cosmic immortality, confused in the popular mind with physical longevity, was a prerogative of the gods. For most humans, the best one could hope for was to live well an exceedingly long time in a body on this earth and die a peaceful death with the lingering respect of one's surviving contemporaries.

Sumerian accounts, such as the epic “When the Gods as Men”, and similar Babylonian texts, such as the “Creation of Man by the Mother Goddess,” make it clear that earth man, *Homo sapiens*, was created by their major gods, with the help of the Anunnaki, the minor gods, which in later Hebrew translates to Nephilim. Before the bioengineering of *Homo erectus* into *Homo sapiens* by these “gods,” the records indicate that the

Anunnaki (literally “Those of Heaven Come Down to Earth”) had landed in the Persian Gulf area around 450,000 years ago. Their first settlement, called E.RI.DU. (“Home in the Far Distant”) is, almost without a doubt, the biblical Eden. These extraterrestrials had come to mine for metals, gold in particular, which, the records also tell us, was desperately needed to treat the deteriorating atmosphere of their home planet, Nibiru. To work the mines more effectively, the Anunnaki, led by one of their two chief leaders and his half-sister, Ea (Lord of Earth) and Ninhursag, (the Mother Goddess) set about to alter the wild hominid *Homo erectus* into a more tractable specimen, one that could be employed as a *lulu* (“primitive worker”) in the mines. These bioengineering experiments began, the records suggest, about 300,000 years ago and went on for quite some time.

The early experiments did not always go well. According to Sumerian texts, some of Ninhursag's early attempts were a disaster—people without genitalia, a woman who could not reproduce. Ea (also called Enki) had no better luck initially, producing prototypes with bad livers, defective eyes, malfunctioning hearts and other infirmities. There was a general problem with fertility among these creations. The minotaurs, satyrs, sphinxes and such crossbred monstrosities mentioned in ancient “mythology” may not have all been poetic imagination or flights of fancy. Gradually, however, through borrowing genetic material from other Anunnaki astronauts and even using his own, Ea (Enki), along with Ninhursag, created an acceptable model, named Adapa. Most probably Adapa is the earlier Mesopotamian designation for what later Hebrew writers would call the Adam. Once these new specimens had achieved self-reproductivity, an unlimited supply of labor had been achieved. It appears this pool of workers was subjected to involuntary servitude, in effect slavery.

That these new specimens looked like the extraterrestrial technicians who had fashioned them, both male and female, should come as no surprise. The Sumerian and Babylonian texts make quite plain that genetic material taken from Anunnaki blood samples was mixed with *Homo erectus* genes. ‘I will collect blood . . . Out of his blood they bioengineered Man/ burdened him with service/freed the gods . . .’ And so we have

in later Hebrew transmutations of the story, borrowed from the Mesopotamians, verses such as, “And God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness . . .’” (Gen. 1:26) and, “. . . Jehovah God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” (Gen. 2:7) Compare these remarks with several of the much earlier Mesopotamian statements: “Mix well the clay . . . I will provide good, intelligent young gods who will work that clay in the right way,” and, “Let a god be bred . . . Let Ninti blend the clay with his flesh and blood,” and finally, “You can proclaim the newborn’s destiny/Ninki will etch upon it the image of the gods/And it will be ‘Man.’”

What is particularly significant is that nowhere in the Sumerian texts (or other early Mesopotamian texts) is there any mention of hope for a happy, meaningful, posthumous survival for these new specimens. They looked like the “gods” which had formed them but they did not live nearly as long. To those new men, the Anunnaki extraterrestrials were gods and seemed immortal, although in fact they were not. The Anunnaki made no attempt to disabuse them of their false conclusions. The *lulus* must have been greatly awed by these seemingly divine beings of high intelligence and great, almost unfathomably complex technology who could accomplish superhuman feats such as flying through the air. And they seemed to live on interminably. That reality would suggest today that because of an alien genetic structure adapted to a different planetary orbit and ecosystem, an ability to somehow regulate and slow metabolism, an ability to somehow physically rejuvenate the physical organism, an ability to repeatedly clone one’s self and transfer consciousness, or some other principle we do not yet understand, these beings lived an extraordinary long time, tens of thousands of years in some cases, according to the Sumerian King Lists. Skeptics argue there are other possible explanations for such claims of tremendous longevity. There could have been mistakes in translation and transliterations. And yet the tablets from which the figures are taken still exists. If these numbers are askew, a great many mistakes had to be made with the original imprinting of the clay tablets; and this is not likely. Some of the dates are found to be collaborated by other sources. Could it be the

numerology in the King Lists is just an anomaly, a fanciful act or perhaps a purposeful exaggeration intended to impress common minds with royal prowess? These possibilities also seem unlikely. We must remember that claims of extreme longevity appear in biblical accounts of the patriarchs' lives. It has been suggested that these patriarchs carried some of the genes of their Anunnaki bioengineers. If this is so, early men, as well as the patriarchs, carried some of these genes as well and tended to live longer lives than later men, including men of today. Old Testament statements confirm this fact. As time passed, the gene pool became more diluted. And this inevitable reality would help explain why the pharaohs and kings of antiquity, many of whom like Gilgamesh claimed to be gods or demigods, guarded their gene pool obsessively and were not above marrying their sisters and near-blood relatives.

What mortal man of that time would have doubted the divinity of these beings? It could be demonstrated to any skeptical human, if he were so bold to broach the subject, that he was indeed the product of the Anunnaki laboratories.

One thing we do know. The Anunnaki did not, and probably could not, even if they had desired to do so, pass on to men genes which would allow for life spans approaching those of their modellers. Not, anyway, without creating absolute clones of themselves, a product which may well have been within their technological expertise. They were not interested in copies of themselves with all the attendant problems that would raise. They wanted a hybrid worker made partially from what was already at hand—local stock—*Homo erectus*. And they made one.

For the common Babylonian mortal of the 2nd and 3rd millennia B.C.E., and for his Sumerian predecessors and Assyrian successors, death was a gloomy affair. The Babylonian dead descended to *Aralu* or *Bit-edie*, a vast area conceived of as subterranean, cave-like, seven-walled and heavily guarded. No living person was allowed admittance and no mortal, should he somehow breach security and enter, could ever depart. Even the living gods risked their lives if they made unauthorized intrusions.

Aralu or *Bit-edie* is a place of shades and inactivity. In these respects, it and its earlier predecessor, the Sumerian *Kurnugea*,

foreshadow the later Hebrew notion of Sheol and the early Greek conception of Hades. There is no doubt these disparate cultures, as different as they were in so many ways, cross-fertilized over time some of each other's theological concepts. Within each of these underworlds, the dead suffer from physical weakness, and their strength in the Babylonian and Egyptian mind was somewhat dependent on attendance by the living, who had to supply them with nourishment. For the Sumerians, Babylonians and early Hebrews, death was the great leveler. As Morris Jastrow has suggested, kings, priests and commoners all found themselves in a dusty hellhole where earth was food, drinking water was polluted and inactivity was the *modus operandi*.

From the Renaissance onward, the West has looked to ancient Greece and Rome for its political inspiration and to Greece and Israel for the roots of its philosophico-religious ideas. As with most oversimplifications, the danger is a preconceived myopia which is more fascinated with individual trees than the forest in which they dwell. Nowhere is this more evident than when we inquire into the origins of the idea of immortality. The greater truth is the ideas of personal immortality came to Greece and Israel rather late. In Greece, the first stirrings of such an idea occurred between the 6th and 5th centuries B.C.E. The idea was probably already a part of the Zoroastrian canon. The idea did not receive much attention in Israel until not long before the Christian era.

The best evidence for the gradual shifting away in historic times from the ghost-spirit worship of the Stone Age cultures to more complex ideas of survival and personal immortality can be found in Egypt in the great civilization that developed along the Nile river beginning sometime in the 4th millennium B.C.E. Just how much influence the Sumerian-Babylonian-Assyrian empires to the north in the Mesopotamian region and its environs had on the cultural ideas in early Egypt is debatable, but it was undoubtedly a substantial contribution. The same could probably be said of the later Persian empire. The Egyptian priesthood was always adept at keeping informed of intellectual ideas being passed along the trade routes of the Near East. In matters of posthumous survival, however, there is much evidence that the Egyptians were not only greatly interested early on but

industriously set about to develop over time a schema in theory and practice that guaranteed the survival of everyone's body and soul if they lived virtuous lives and followed the rules (of which there were many). This is revolutionary thinking, and it was inspired by the legend of Osiris and culminated in the "cult" of Osiris. It is the first time in history that a dominating culture trumpeted ethics and morality (plus a good dose of piety and not a little magic) as the basic qualifications for a desirable afterlife. An afterlife which had originally been the sole province of pharaohs and noblemen had been gradually transformed into a more or less egalitarian state, available to all petitioners who could fulfill the required conditions. Of course, fulfilling these conditions generally cost money. The acquiring of the complicated knowledge needed to pass successfully through the underworld examination was neither inexpensive nor intellectually easy.

For Egyptians, the god Osiris was "King of eternity, the prince of gods and men, god of gods, king of kings, governor of the world, whose life is everlasting." He was in the Egyptian mind, above all else, an immortal who had been mortal and was resurrected. In that resurrection was great hope for others. He was, among other things, the god of the Tuat, the Nether World, the West Land, and there he passed judgment on the dead.

If the ultimate value of a god is that he guarantees in the psyche of men the hope of immortality, of which he himself (or herself) is the symbol and living proof, then the popularity of the cult of Osiris in ancient Egypt is most logical and understandable. That all gods, like Osiris, were at one time living men was once a popular view held by such illustrious men of history as Eusebius, Cicero, Hesiod, Alexander the Great (who partially staked his posthumous future on it) and the namesake of the theory, the Greek Euhemerus. We have come with this line of thinking a long way from earlier Sumerian-Babylonian ideology that only those with one hundred percent godly blood qualify for immortality. Euhemeristic theory embodies several ideas which could not have escaped the attention of later Bronze Age man. For Greeks and Romans who held this view, it was a superabundance of outstanding qualities that purchased for these heroes the immortality of their souls and bodies. Fearlessness,

bravery, faithfulness, piety, honesty, integrity . . . and so forth, values depending to a great degree on cultural bias. At some point, so the thinking went, this superabundance of special qualities, exhibited before the reigning gods, draws attention and creates for the hero a passport to admittance among the company of the gods.

Long before Euhemerus, the cult of Osiris in Egypt held out the hope of immortality for everyone. Blood line and heroic stature became issues, at least theoretically, of secondary importance. By the 2nd millennium, it seems likely that Osirian egalitarianism had largely penetrated doctrine and ritual. The earliest known copies of the Book of the Dead are from the 11th and 12th dynasties. Passages from the Book of the Dead, such as the following, found in the Papyrus of Ani (c. 1450 B.C.E.) make it clear that by this date the ideas of rebirth and reincarnation are indisputably major themes of Osirian theology: “[Great King] ‘How long . . . have I to live?’ [Thoth] ‘It is decreed that you will live for millions and millions of years.’ [Great King] ‘May it be granted to me that I pass on to the holy princes, because I am, indeed, overcoming all the wrong which I have done from the earliest days of this earth’s existence.’” Another states, “all due reverence to you, Oh Governor of those who are in Amenti [the underworld], who causes mortals to be reborn again, who renews our youth.” The Book of the Dead is essentially a study in the soul’s journey and trials through the precincts of the underworld after the body’s death. When the higher levels of the Tuat are finally gained, the deceased is “Osirified” and proclaims, “I am Osiris, Lord of Eternity.” The correlation has been completed. The deceased has become an immortal being, an Osiris, probably destined to a continuing cycle of many lives on earth and elsewhere. The Hindu-Buddhist similarities are striking but have been seldom noted or discussed by many Egyptologists or other commentators.

One of the very earliest Osirian views of the nether world, before the religion had transformed itself, comes from the Pyramid Texts c. 3500 B.C.E. This view does not appear any more appealing than what we find in the Sumerian *Kurnugea* or the Babylonian *Bit-edie*. At best it is an unhappy existence as a shade under the earth and devoid of all hope. According to

James Henry Breasted, it offered “a forbidding hereafter which was dreaded” not only by commoners but many of the nobility. There soon arose, however, a competing theology which continued to run concurrently, sometimes intertwined with the Osirian rites, for well over three millennia. This was the religion of the Sun-god, Ra. Whether the fate of the dead was much improved in the early schema of the Ra cult is questionable.

The religion of the Sun-god, the God of the Sky, was the religion of the nobles at the time of the writing of the Pyramid Texts. And there was a reason for this which will shortly become apparent. As the Sun-god journeyed in his solar boat from the western horizon, he dropped off along the way various souls in different parts of the underworld. There the better among them were given fields to till and, in good feudal tradition, were told to resist any attacks on Ra during his passage. The god came and went in his diurnal course, and for twenty-three hours of every twenty-four his subjects labored in the feeble light which came from fire-breathing serpents or from the flaming sea in which the acknowledged enemies of the Sun-god were basting. This conception of the hellish section of the underworld most likely influenced the Zoroastrian conception of Drujo Demana, the Greek idea of Tartarus and the Judeo-Christian idea of Gehenna and hell. How much or how little the influence was in each case is impossible to tell.

Very few devotees of the Sun-god escaped this fate. But a few did. Not the good and the righteous, to which the later, modified Osirian theology offered some hope. But the wealthy, who could pay to remain aboard the solar boat, thus escaping the labor and suffering below. By not having to disembark, they also avoided, in the Osirian sense, a final judgment. There were other preferred customers. Those who had acquired great knowledge in magic, and those who were able to convince the godhead that they would never become his enemies, were sometime allowed to remain aboard the craft to course endlessly through the heavens. (A. Wiedemann)

In no other major culture on earth has the idea of survival after death played a more important role than in ancient Egypt. Egyptian religion has been called “the religion of eternal life.” Every subject of the realm was incessantly reminded of the

importance of preparing the way for himself and others at all important official functions and often during his daily life. And yet in its full development, worship of the Sun-god and the doctrine of the Osirian cult is exceedingly complex, so much so that one begins to wonder just how much the untutored lower classes really understood, even if they had the desire and the pocketbook to insure their immortality. But then we might as well ask how knowledgeable today's average Christian or Buddhist is about the finer points of the religious doctrine he professes to hold close to his heart. Reality would suggest his knowledge of the faith is rather scanty and his attachment to it is more a learned, habitual, emotional attachment than a carefully studied and thought out position.

The Egyptian priesthood's ideas of the hereafter and the immortal parts of their human subjects can be summarized as follows:

Of the various elements of the body, real or imagined, there are several which are considered immortal and can be reunited in afterlife—if all goes well. First is the *Ka*, the spiritual, divine counterpart of the body. It is a kind of “memory-image,” personal and recognizable. It is capable of living without the body, but the obverse is not true. This *Ka* requires no feeding, unlike the “lesser” *ka* which visits the mummy, often residing in a statuette placed near the sepulchre, but does not reunite with the whole person again till the last judgment.

Second is the *Ba*, a rather mysterious soul-like entity that flies to the gods after death, although it periodically returns to the mummy from time to time just like the *ka*. The *Ba* was contained at one time within the *Ka*, but always had the ability to move independently. The *Ba* is more delicate than the *Ka*. It is a perishable element, although it is also capable of entering or taking up residence in living bodies and, therefore, it is theoretically possible for a human being to play host to more than one *Ba*.

The *Khu* is an essence of the spirit. It retains imperishable, immortal status no matter what. The *Kahib* (or *Khaibit*) is shadow-like and also maintains a separate existence. When death arrives, this shadow-like element goes forth alone to be among the gods; it does not flit back and forth to the presence of

the mummy as does the *Ka*. The *Ab* represents the human heart and all its passions and emotions. It is also, however, considered immortal. At death, it is removed from the body for special keeping in canopic jars. An extra replacement heart, usually in the form of a scarab beetle—the symbol of resurrection—is inserted into the mummy. Finally, the deceased is reunited with his heart in the Hall of Judgment.

The *Sahu* is the mummy of the deceased, what is left, the vacated hull. It has, however, a double which is fleet and free and indestructible. This element can travel anywhere it wishes, including the land of the dead, the West Land, the Tuat. (Wiedemann, Breasted, Budge)

The Egyptian questing for immortality, if he were literate (which is not likely), could read about the land of the dead in such accounts as the ritual book of Am-Tuat or the Papyrus of Nu. He could also avail himself of a guidebook especially prepared for such purposes, the Book of the Dead. A more appropriate name for this document would be the Book of Eternal Life. It is likely the average petitioner was either illiterate or only partially literate and received most of his knowledge about the hereafter from his schooling, the priesthood or hearsay. If he were a bit confused about the elaborate parsing of the human soul or spirit that was an integral part of the Osirian doctrine, and about what to expect and how to act in the other world, it would not be surprising. Even today many scholars are uncomfortable with their definitions of the Osirian corpus and their incomplete or uncertain understanding of the metaphysical Osirian process.

We have yet to consider in detail the most important immortal element of the deceased, which is the *Osiris*; that is, the *Sahu* and other elements as they associate and recombine in the nether world to supplicate and make their petition for immortality before the great god Osiris himself and the god Thoth. Here the designation *Osiris* is used to describe the entity successfully passing through the underworld and achieving immortal status. In this underworld, the god Osiris rules supreme. The souls of petitioners who come before him to be judged and who are found righteous become *Osiris*. They are identified with him but go on into the future to live an individualized, idealized life much like

the ones they have so recently passed through. A new life, similar to the old one but better, more desirable, of a higher quality, without the previous hardships. The average ancient Egyptian appears to have relished the act of living, and it should not be surprising to find that the perceived afterlife of the righteous and faithful was vibrant and sensual. Many Christians today conceive of the afterlife as similar to their present lives, without the problems, worries and hardships. It is difficult for the mind to conceptualize that with which it is not familiar. Psychologists and psychiatrist know this well. And, not surprisingly, it is predictable that the mind will project forward images it finds reassuring and pleasing in the present circumstances.

The Tuat (Amenti) had, according to the Papyrus of Nu, fourteen or fifteen divisions. (Some scholars say twelve.) Seker, the formidable, ancient god of the dead, ruled the fifth division. It was a domain both sterile and terrible, filled with monsters and hellfire to roast the damned. The eighth division was inhabited by unusual, unique gods answering Afu-Ra with cat-like noises. Here can be heard the noises “of those terrified.” Other divisions were: *Otamer-xer*, the “silence-loving fields”; *Neter-xer*, the burial place”; one spot walled by iron; another serving petitioners beer and cakes; still another where the serpent Rerek dwells on a bed of fire. Some divisions seem surreal and phantasmagoric; others are just plain dull. One special division seems like a prototype of the Hindu Devachan or Greek Olympus inhabited only by the gods. Another, unknown even to the gods, is a place where dwells “the god who lives in his egg.” Here we have an allusion to the cosmic, primordial egg, an idea which has echoes in later Hindu and Buddhist philosophy, perhaps in the Ain Soph figure of the Hebrew Sephiroth and metaphysics generally. Obviously, the Tuat or Amenti was not a place to lose one’s way. Unless one had guidance and knew the proper formulas and power-words, that was precisely what would happen. If the petitioner were so fortunate as to wind his way through this maze, and pass judgmental muster, he would find stretched before him endlessly peaceful fields yielding abundant crops beside still waters. If he were found acceptable, a part of all this could be his. You might say it was a great, agrarian dream-

image in a society that was basically agrarian.

Every Egyptian was taught, if he were so lucky, the required drill. Toward morning the would-be *Osiris* waited at the entrance of the other world for the approach of the sun-god, Ra, riding his solar boat. It was possible to enter the Tuat in other ways but hitchhiking a ride on the bark was the most common means, and it offered one advantage to the traveler that other methods did not. If, for instance, the passenger lost his nerve and felt his petition for admittance to the good, eternal life would be rejected, he could ride forever in the bark as Ra made his eternal, diurnal circumnavigation of the heavens. Once disembarked, however, if he misjudged his chances, lost his way or failed his examination, he could only look forward to either a feeble existence as a shade wandering in darkness until he was devoured by monsters or, in a slightly more positive interpretation of the Osirian lore, his soul and body simply never rejoined, and the lingering soul, what was left of it, could look forward to a colorless, impersonal existence among the gods. Neither of these possibilities was understandably very much appreciated or desired.

Ra's bark sweeps through the ghostly regions of the Tuat, lighting briefly each division before darkness claims its own once again. As the abbreviated moment of light wanes, the dead hail the bark and its master with shouts of praise. These are immediately followed by frustrated cries of anguish as the solar boat passes on. It is the responsibility of the respective gods and goddesses of the hours of the night to successfully pilot Ra's bark through their particular domains.

The Book of the Dead tells us that once the petitioner makes it safely to the sixth division of the Tuat, he finds himself in *Aanroo*, the Hall of Double Truth. Here his life is adjudged either worthy of immortality, in which case the heart is restored along with all other immortal elements, and he is made whole again and becomes an *Osiris* or, if the hopeful soul is rejected and wholeness withheld, an impersonal, colorless, shade-like existence is decreed. This judicial process is accomplished, in part, by weighing the heart (*ab*) of the petitioner. The gods Thoth and Anubis assist in supervising the weighing ordeal, and the standard counterweight is a feather symbolizing

righteousness. Woe be it to him whose good deeds, attitudes and general actions do not at least counterbalance.

It is clear to us today that the ancient Egyptian was held to a very high standard of ethics and moral rectitude. He was obliged to make before the judges of the Hall of Double Truth a declaration of his innocence. It was expected of him to have carried out his obligations to his fellow men and to have shown piety to his gods. He had to demonstrate a life which had been useful to society at large. There were as many as forty-two offenses which could abnegate his petition. Chief among these were murder and adultery, greed, profanity, slander, lying, rashness, vociferousness . . . Here is a gauntlet more demanding than the Ten Commandments brought down the mountain by Moses. One cannot help but wonder if anyone today would qualify for Egyptian “heaven”—or if anyone then could have passed such a stringent examination.

If the petitioner were found worthy, he was granted a plot of land in the heavenly fields the size of which was proportionate not to his former societal rank but to the level of his moral rectitude. This land grant was dutifully marked off for him by the heavenly surveyors. We have already referred to the democratic strain in Osirian theology. Pharaohs, nevertheless, held a unique position in the Egyptian mind; they were either gods on earth or the approved representatives of the gods and thereby appeared before the judges of the Tuat with a certain presumption of innocence. It was assumed that the character of a pharaoh was innately moral and his actions inherently justified. His chances of passing his examination were excellent. (Budge, Breasted)

The Egyptian pantheon is filled with gods and goddesses—old gods, newer gods, local gods, national gods . . . All of these deities had special rites prescribed for their observance. It becomes obvious from ancient texts that it was common for a man or woman to be a devotee of several deities at once and to practice multiple homages and rituals that sometimes seem to us today to be contradictory. The mindset of the ancient Egyptian does not, however, seem to have found contradictions in variety but rather solace in multiplicity. Of all theologies practiced in Egypt for over three thousand years, several aspects of the

Osirian rites seem especially salient to our observations today. It is by far the most morally demanding of all the theologies of the ancient world until Judaism had fully ripened and the Christian era had begun. It was, doubtlessly, notoriously convoluted and therefore difficult for the masses to comprehend. These are not attributes which will assure it a worldwide appeal or a longevity that could much survive dynastic Egypt. Because of this, the prospects for its own immortality were severely compromised. It did, despite these shortcomings, proffer a great gift—the idea that the righteous soul could achieve immortality through its righteousness. And it would be a great mistake to underestimate the influence of this gift-idea on later Judaism, early Christianity and Islam.

A few special words on Egyptian mummification seem appropriate. It was no doubt deemed practical to make a great effort at preserving the material remains of the physical body if the substance of that body was to be reunited with the various but separate elements of the soul in the Egyptian *Tuat*. The almost fanatical diligence with which the mummification procedures were carried out raises an interesting question which has not been previously addressed. Did the Egyptian priesthood—which was undoubtedly familiar with Sumerian-Babylonian accounts of the bioengineering involved in creating the *lulu*, the primitive worker and the first *Homo sapiens*, out of the raw stuff of evolution, *Homo erectus*, who already existed—have the thought-hope of cloning a new man out of his remaining DNA? What would have sounded like farfetched science fiction a few years ago is today's reality. If we read the creation tablets carefully, it becomes clear that manipulating man's (and their own extraterrestrial) DNA is exactly what these Sumerians had set about doing. And they finally succeeded, they tell us, after repeated failures. Their description of *Homo sapiens*' sudden appearance on the world's stage explains an evolutionary mystery which has haunted biological science. The question has been: How could *Homo sapiens* have evolved so suddenly out of its uncouth relatives and predecessors, *Homo habilis*, *Homo erectus* and Neanderthal man? The answer has been in the tablets all along, waiting for a pioneer in Near Eastern studies like Zecharia Sitchin to finally make sense of it and draw the

seemingly inevitable conclusions from formerly misunderstood data.

Chapter Six

The Hebrews

When studying Judaism and its origins, one of the first things that impresses the mind is the fact that Abram (Abraham), the first patriarch of the Hebrews, was born in the city of Ur, later moved to Haran, and finally led his growing family to the wilds of Canaan in Palestine. Ur and Haran were Babylonian cities, with Sumerian-Babylonian gods, and these same gods, with name changes, were also the gods of the Canaanites.

What is the significance of this itinerary? We are told that Abraham was encouraged by God to leave Haran and that his descendants would some day be as numerous as “the sand which is upon the seashore.” This prophecy, as we all know, came in time to fruition. It is significant to realize that even as early as Abraham, some of the Hebrews (lit. those who pass from place to place) lived in Egypt and had close contact with its religion and institutions. Abraham and his people were in fact expelled from Egypt because he ostensibly lied to pharaoh about Sarah, claiming she was his sister. Up to the time of Moses, another patriarch who was raised among the Egyptians, we can safely assume that the idol worship so vehemently condemned by him after his experience on the mount, was the worship of the Sumerian-Babylonian pantheon by way of, with the proper name changes, Canaanite influence. The influences of Sumerian-Babylonian religious practices and Egyptian theology should be kept alive in our consciousness as possibly strong catalytic agents of early, Hebrew, religious thought.

Certainly any survivors, who were able to return after the Assyrian conquest of the House of Israel (721 to 718 B.C.E.), and the subsequent scattering of the Ten Lost Tribes, would have

returned with some Assyrian ideas. It is perhaps foolish to believe no survivors at all ever returned to the Palestine area. The Assyrian gods, following the earlier Semitic prototypes, were essentially the same gods as the Sumerian-Babylonian pantheon with, of course, a wholesale change of names. But it is the later Babylonian Captivity in c. 585 B.C.E. of the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levi which most likely influenced to the greatest extent the development of Judaism. Daniel and his captive countrymen returned to Palestine after extensive contact with Babylonian culture and religion, most of which seems to have been relatively positive.

The impact of Zoroastrianism also should not be discounted as an additional influence during the reign of the Persian satrapy. Cyrus the Great, king of the Persian Empire, sent a colony of captive Jews back to Jerusalem to build a second Temple. The climate was one of burgeoning religious thinking which only increased with Alexander's conquest of Egypt and its environs, bringing a florescence of Hellenistic ideas to the somewhat fractured social and intellectual infrastructure of Judea and what was left of Israel. All of this change and social turmoil carried with it a concomitant fertilization and hybridization of Hebrew ideas about individual immortality of the soul, Paradise and Gehenna. Many of these ideas would later be transmuted into a Christian religion.

Karl Jaspers called the period between 800 B.C.E. and 200 B.C.E. the "axial period." It was a time of flux in which great changes were slowly taking shape, changes which were to lead Jewish thinking to a reevaluation of past ideas and a gradual adoption in many quarters of the concept of a democratically administered Paradise earned by righteous living and complete subservience to the will of Yahweh who brooked no disobedience and suffered no competitors.

Whether Yahweh was who the Jews believed him to be is debatable. He is demonstrably not the Elohim of Genesis, which is a plural reference and harkens back to a time of multiple gods similar to what is found in the Sumerian-Babylonian pantheon. We need to keep in mind that Abraham (Abram) was originally a Babylonian born in Ur who later migrated to Haran and then to Canaan. The primary Babylonian pantheon was made up of fifty

gods, twelve primary and thirty-eight others of lesser rank. Foremost among these was Enlil (Lord of the Air) and Enki (the Sumerian Ea) who were competitive brothers. In biblical times, there was a fierce rivalry between the Enlil faction and the Enki supporters, although Enlil, because he was first born and because of blood lineage on his mother's side, theoretically outranked his brother. He was in fact considered Commander and Chief of the Anunnaki.

The Near East, including what became known as the Palestine area, had been divided up among the major gods, who served as city-gods and administrators over specific land areas. Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to say these "gods" had divided up the whole known world into fiefdoms. It would appear the Hebrews had early on given their allegiance to the Enlil factions. Ultimately, wars erupted between these competing factions (e.g. the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah). Each city had sworn allegiance to a particular god and, although a man or woman might worship several gods, there was one primary god or goddess who expected obeisance regionally with Enlil recognized as the overall Commander and Chief. The fifty gods of the old pantheon were, however, increasingly divided in their loyalties as time passed. These loyalties almost invariably followed bloodline differences between Enlil and Enki. Egypt, for instance, underwent a long period of sympathy for the Enki faction, which included Osiris, Marduk and Thoth. The Hebrews accepted Enlil (and possibly his succeeding sons) as the monotheistic Creator of All That Is and called him Yahweh. Thus, according to this line of thinking, a tribal god with dubious credentials as Creator of All That Is was elevated to supreme, cosmic status and later accepted as such by Christianity and Islam.

The vengeful and angry aspects of Yahweh make more sense once this misidentification is understood. He is a god who has favorites (a chosen people) and tolerates no human frailties. Loyalty and obedience are paramount with him—a stern father not above bloodletting. These are characteristics which do not recommend themselves for a deity who aspires to be the father and protector of all men everywhere and creation in general. They are, nevertheless, the exact characteristics of Enlil which

can be gleaned from the Sumerian-Babylonian tablets. They are the attributes we might expect to find in a territorial chief involved in a struggle with rebellious city-states. The case of Sodom and Gomorrah is an instructive example. Why such a calamity? The causes for their destruction which can be deduced from the Old Testament are neither convincing nor satisfying. They appear possibly to have been destroyed by a nuclear attack. Certain radiation traces, the burn and collapse evidence of structures in the area which may have been one of the cities, and present geologic features of the region tentatively support such a theory. If these cities were in fact consumed by such a holocaust, we have a lot more to learn about all of these ancient civilizations than we think we do. (Indian literature referring to approximately the same time period is filled with the mention of gods flying in machines and nuclear-like warfare.) The most logical motives for the destruction of these cities seem to lie in competitive political and economic rivalries of the time. Yahweh (or Enlil) destroys all the people, we are told, except Lot and his family. Stern “justice” to say the least. Lot’s wife dies, turned to a “pillar of salt”—or a shadow of salt a la Hiroshima style. Once the Hebrews are contacted by Yahweh-Enlil (which was early with Abraham), they offer almost unswerving devotion to him who promises them ultimately their own sovereignty and hegemony over their rivals. It is in essence a political and economic deal which hinges over time on continual Hebrew loyalty and support. Nowhere, however, in the Old Testament does Yahweh offer immortality of the soul or eternal resurrection to his supporters. In fact, at the time, they can be found in no Near Eastern culture except in the Egyptian Osirian “cult.” They do not yet exist elsewhere and will only develop later.

The early Biblical period of Judaism begins with Abraham (c.1800 B.C.E.) and extends to the Exodus from Egypt (c.1250 B.C.E.). It is wise to remember that ideas then as now were in a constant state of agitation and flux. There was then extant a panoply of older customs and traditions and newer ideas all mingling and vying for attention. In the early Old Testament period, remnants of polydemonism (i.e. a belief in multiple spirits) were not uncommon, no more uncommon than the practice of praying to multiple deities. We have ample evidence

of ancestor worship—including the feeding of and attempted communication with the dead. These are remnants of the old, primary belief system dating back to prehistoric times. There is, for example, the ritual confession given by those offering tithes of foodstuffs to the Temple priests found in Deut. 26:14: “I have not eaten of it [the consecrated foodstuffs] while in mourning; I have not eaten any of it while I was unclean, and I have not deposited any of it with the dead.” Other references to feeding the dead can be found in Jer. 16:6-7 and Hos. 9:4. Each of these are evidence of the attempts of the priesthood in later times to stamp out the older customs.

We also find references in early Biblical times to *bamot* (high places), *asherim* (sacred poles dedicated to Asherah or Anath) and *massebot* (plural of *massebah*: upright stones that symbolize the male deity and his potency). 1 Kings 14:23 recalls all three at once: “For they built high places for themselves and pillars and Asherim, on every high hill, under every leafy tree.” We have as well the sacred stone of Bethel (Gen. 28:22) and the oracular tree at Sichem (Gen. 12:6; Deut. 11:3).

There is other evidence of the survival of the primary belief in survival after death among the ancient Hebrews—the references to *teraphim*, usually translated as ‘household gods.’ But what exactly were they? R.H. Charles may well have been speculating in the right direction when he offered the opinion that they were modeled images of dead ancestors and were used as oracular agents to consult the dead. This is an explanation which satisfies the majority of today’s biblical scholars. It would seem they could come in sizes both large and small.

There is little question that the *teraphim* were connected with ancestor worship. (Budde, Leuba, Raphael) We see Rachel hiding them in a camel saddle from her father, Laban (Gen. 31:35). These must have been doll-sized statuettes. In 1 Sam. 19, however, they are much larger. Here David’s wife, Michal, helps him escape King Saul’s men by pulling the bed covers over one and placing “a net of goats’ hair” over its head. When the pursuers arrive, she tells them he’s sick. The medieval, biblical commentator Nahmanides states that the *teraphim* were used to foretell the future. As S.P. Raphael indicates, this is inferred in Judges 17:5 and Hos. 3:4 which mentions *teraphim* in the same

breath with the *ephod*, another ancient divinatory source. And then there is the condemnation of such devices found in Zech. 10:2, “The teraphim speak deceit, diviners see visions that lie” As late as the 8th century B.C.E., *teraphim* were in use and possibly even later. Old habits do die hard. We find the prophets continually condemning and railing against ancient practices which were associated with the dead and the world beyond. “Moreover the workers with familiar spirits, and the wizards, and the idols, and all the abomination that were spread in the land of Judah and Jerusalem, did Josiah put away” (2 Kings 23:24).

The Hebrew word *ob* is usually translated as “ghost” or “familiar spirit.” The most famous biblical account of an individual seeking out the divinatory wisdom of an *ob* is the story of Saul and the witch of En-Dor. Saul does this secretly after having publicly outlawed such solicitations. The term is used variously in different texts but hardly ever favorably. We see it used in Lev. 20:27, Deut. 18:11, and we hear Isaiah (Is. 8:19) pleading for the people to disavow the old practices and turn to the one God, Yahweh, for advice, “And when they say to you consult the mediums and the wizards, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?” It should be noted at this time in Hebrew history that the land of the dead, Sheol, was not considered part of Yahweh’s jurisdiction. He ruled over the living, not the dead. This distinction would disappear by Hellenistic times. By then, Yahweh’s sovereignty was supreme among both the quick and the shades of Sheol.

Before the prophets, however, Hebrew Sheol was a carbon copy of the Sumerian *Kurnugea*, the Babylonian *Aralu* or *Bit-edie* and the Assyrian underworld. It was also similar in its major attributes to the Greek Hades. Conceived as a great, subterranean pit or catacomb, its denizens were de-energized shadow-forms living an amoral existence in perpetuity. There was no hope of a change in their destiny. And Yahweh’s potential mercy did not extend to these dismal precincts. Once having reached Sheol, the ghost-spirit lived with customs and relationships similar to his former life, but it was an extremely enfeebled existence. No one desired this kind of future. As early as Gen. 42:38, Jacob mentions to Reuben the prospect of

descending to Sheol if harm should come to his son, Benjamin. In other words, such a misfortune might cause the old man to die of grief. What awaits him there seems to have little appeal for him. Job is much more graphic and recoils at the thought of what awaits him:

Are not the days of my life few?
Let me alone, that I may find a little comfort
before I go whence I shall not return
to the land of gloom and deep darkness,
the land of gloom and chaos,
where light is as darkness. (Job 10:20-22)

In the early biblical period, though Sheol is by no means a desirable destination, it is never a place of diabolical punishment or physical or mental torture, which is not always the case by the time of the prophets and the later, post-exilic, biblical period. There is precedent for this kind of underworld in certain precincts of the Egyptian *Tuat* such as *Karr* and in Zoroastrian ideas of *Drujo Demana*.

From as early as Job, Sheol had its near synonyms. Job himself speaks of Abbadon or the realm of ruin (Job 26:6; 28:22). Isaiah uses both Sheol and *Bor* or “the pit” (Is. 14:15, 24:22) almost interchangeably. Ezekiel refers to *Bor* as a nether world (Ezek. 26:20). Isaiah also uses the term *Shakhat* or “corruption” (Is. 38:17) as does Psalms (55:24) and Ezekiel (28:8). All these terms, although referring to a specific place, form a nexus of definition which spells Sheol.

As S.P. Raphael observes, “between the tenth and eighth centuries B.C.E.—there is still no conception of a postmortem judgment associated with Sheol, nor any philosophy of an individual soul.” And even as late as the 7th century B.C.E., many Hebrews are still worshipping the gods of the Canaanites, Baal and Asherah and other diverse deities. But as we approach the time of the Babylonian exile, it is increasingly evident that monotheism is becoming more firmly rooted, and from post-exilic time onward belief in, and obeisance to, Yahweh only grows more apace and becomes predominant and commonplace. As this occurs, the priesthood’s conception of Sheol begins a

gradual transformation. Yahweh's superintendence is recognized to extend over the realm of the dead. Once this idea is accepted, moral imperatives begin to apply. Sheol becomes a place of punishment not only for wayward Hebrews but also for the enemies of Israel and Judah.

It was now imagined that Yahweh's power could save faithful, righteous believers from the drab existence of Sheol. This is clearly indicated in Hebrew literature as early as the Psalms of David. Psalm 116:3-4 proclaims, "The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me: I suffered distress and anguish. Then I called on the name of the Lord: 'O Lord, I beseech thee, save my life!'" And again in Psalm 18:4-46, "The cords of death encompassed me, the torrents of perdition assailed me; the cords of Sheol entangled me, the snares of death confronted me . . . The Lord lives and blessed be my rock, and exalted be the God of my salvation . . ." Psalm 9:17 warns, "The wicked shall depart to Sheol, all the nations that forget god." Additional Psalms reflect similar visions with the notion that the faithful in Yahweh might be saved and spared the perdition of the nether world.

While this transformation in the attitude toward Sheol was taking place, another revolutionary stage was slowly beginning in the Hebrew mind: the idea of an individual, posthumous future through direct communion with Yahweh. Hebrews in general, Israelites and Jews, would remain strong supporters of the corporate destiny of the nation, its resurrection and final, national triumph—and that belief remains a solid fixture of the faith today. But now another parallel theme, not in contradistinction to the above but as a corollary, begins to sprout and bud and grow. Over the span of centuries, the idea of a desirable, fruitful life after death, preceding the mass resurrection of the dead at End Time and succeeding the new, triumphal millennium, begins ever so gradually to gain attention and some acceptance among the faithful. Where exactly the seed for this idea came from is hard to say. Perhaps Persia. Possibly Greece or India. Maybe all three. Or it could have been self-generated. By the 2nd century B.C.E., the actual religious leadership was in the hands of the Pharisees. For the Sadducees, the Torah was the only binding law. The Pharisees, however, accepted the oral,

traditional law in addition to the Torah, *and they believed in the immortality of the soul as well as divine providence and future retribution for evil acts*. None of these latter doctrinal ideas can be found in the Torah. They became central, doctrinal points of focus a couple of centuries later when Christianity transmuted so many ideas from neighboring religions.

In a far earlier time, immediately before and in the time of the prophets, the immediate effect of Yahweh's newfound superintendence over Sheol served to diminish what feeble life-force and capabilities the inhabitants of the lower world possessed. Formerly, it was believed that those in Sheol maintained not only a somewhat active life-force but knowledge and an ability to react, even advise, the living. Thus we had Saul seeking the counsel of the shade of Samuel (1 Sam. 28:12-20) through the witch of En-Dor. But by the time of Job, one accepted conception of Sheol was of a place where the ghost-spirits "shall not awake nor be raised out of sleep" (Job 14:12). In short, they were now considered beyond correspondence—comatose. In the words of Ecclesiastes, "the dead know nothing" (Eccles. 9:5). As the Psalmist said, the dead dwelt "in the land of silence" (Ps. 94:17).

By the time of the prophets, the realm of Sheol had also become a place of retribution first for the enemies of Israel (Is. 14:14, Ezek. 32:18) and later, in Jeremiah, for the wayward, wicked individual. With Jeremiah, personal responsibility enters Jewish thinking with a thunderous impact. He holds every individual accountable to Yahweh, "But every one shall die for his own sins . . ." (Jer. 31:30) What will become central to Jewish conceptions of life after death, personal immortality and resurrection, surface now in the 6th century B.C.E., and their importance to Jewish theology can hardly be overestimated.

Now there is a growing conviction that Sheol is proper punishment for the wicked but that the righteous and faithful can escape assignment to these unprepossessing quarters through intercession by Yahweh: "The person who sins, he alone shall die . . . the righteousness of the righteous shall be accounted to him alone, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be accounted to him alone." (Ezek. 18:20)

This kind of thinking posed a dilemma, one that remains to a

degree with Judaism today. If the righteous are not cast into Sheol with the lot of the wicked, then how are they regarded? What specific reward do they have to which to look forward? The answer we find in Proverbs is equivocal. The reward of the righteous is a divinely-conferred, better life here on earth (Proverbs 11:31). It is a “delivery from” (Proverbs 10:2) in a kind of unspecified way but not a guarantee of a desirable immortality in the hereafter. This Catch 22 has been with Judaism since the time of Job, who exemplified the pious, righteous man who found his faithful life on earth anything but a reward. And yet Job, from the depth of his despair and suffering, was able to utter words of hope that foreshadowed later Jewish ideas of a possible, posthumous survival for the soul of the righteous, individual believer: “For I know that my redeemer lives, And at last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then from my flesh shall I see God. (Job 19:25-26).

The intellectual seed for a theory of survival in a positive hereafter is planted by Job and further nurtured by the ideas of Ezekiel and Jeremiah on the value of the individual, righteous soul. Where Job got his ideas, or the scribe who produced the original text, is, as we have indicated earlier, a mystery. Whether these were homegrown or imported ideas is beyond the capabilities of present-day scholarship. What is of paramount importance, is the recognition that these are ideas which will be expropriated and developed at length by future Jewish and Christian theologians. But it is also important to realize that the idea of an individual winning a posthumous immortality in an appealing realm or plane of existence, to which all worthy souls could look forward, never became a predominant thought in Jewish tradition. And yet the idea lingered with a minority and never really went away. The primary focus of the majority, nevertheless, remained firmly on the future fate of the Israelite nation.

It is during Jasper’s “axial period” (800 B.C.E. to 200 B.C.E.) that a coalition of ideas formed which would forever shape historical and practical Judaism and give it the face and body of a creed which we recognize today. Most important for a future Christianity, and to a lesser extent for Judaism, is the emergence

of a doctrine of *everlasting* resurrection. Sheol now became only a stopping place, a temporary resting realm for the sleeping souls of the righteous and pious who awaited the final resurrection of the dead during the messianic kingdom that would create a paradise on earth. The truly evil, it was decided, were cast down to Gehenna for eternal punishment. Gehenna was a much more proactive idea of the realm of the dead, particularly the impious and the truly unrehabilitative reprobate, and gradually replaced the nebulous, other world of Sheol.

The groundwork for this gradual coalescence of ideology had been laid by Job, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel and the other prophets and the experiences of other faithful servants of Yahweh such as Elisha (2 Kings 4:35) and Elijah (1 Kings 17:22). As we have indicated, Judaism was substantially affected by the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities and the later Persian suzerainty.

The influence of Persian Zoroastrianism on developing Judaic theology is too often ignored or misunderstood. This is a serious oversight. Although no particular events, individuals or texts can be cited as incontrovertible evidence of direct influence, the similarity of particular ideas found in this neighboring religion with ideas found in later Judaic thought deserves more attention. Zoroastrianism is also monotheistic. The holy book of the faith, the Zend Avesta, declares that there will be life after death complete with a heaven and hell and a kind of purgatory. The first few chapters of the Torah (Genesis) read as if they were borrowed conceptually, even in some of their phrasing, from the Zend Avesta. According to Zoroastrianism, it is the task of the faithful to recognize the dualistic nature of life and to choose truth and goodness (*asha*) over evil, disharmony and disorder (*druj*). There is liberation for the soul which overcomes temptation, a reunion with God (Ahura Mazda) and a rising from the dead. The truly wicked will finally perish in *Drujo Demana*, but the good soul, who has chosen good by his own free will, will be resurrected after death—the body being reunited with the soul. Each individual will have to stand before his judges (the angels Mithra, Sraosha and Rashnu) and Ahura Mazda and be judged by the quality of his past deeds, which is today a hallmark of Judaism and traditional Islam and unlike much of contemporary Christianity's preference for faith over performance. In the end,

the fact that the righteous soul is reunited with its body is reflected by both modern Judaic and Christian eschatology, although many Christians would say, in Pauline fashion, that this body might better be called a “glorified” body. Even such a brief summary as this scarcely does justice to some of the important similarities between ancient Zoroastrianism, its Mazdean predecessor and a Judaism susceptible at the time to emendation by philosophico-religious systems which were, in many ways, compatible.

The Judaism of the 2nd century B.C.E. is essentially the Judaism that existed at the time of Jesus of Nazareth. It was, and was not, ready for the arrival of a messiah. But the credentials of the claimant to this title were anything but awe-inspiring to those safely entrenched in power. How could a simple carpenter whose unspectacular life could be traced to a small Judean town possibly be the King of Kings the faithful awaited? If he were who he said he was, how come things in general remained virtually the same under the Roman occupation? No new kingdom of Yahweh on earth could be seen forming before their eyes. Instead, an upstart village magician with a carpenter’s background was threatening to disrupt the priestly bureaucracy, with its vested interest in keeping things the way they were, and the general civil order. The easiest way to maintain the status quo was to get rid of the interloper. He was, after all, calling into question the sincerity and authority of the civil and religious hierarchies. The situation would be analogous today to a blue collar country boy, whose roots seemed less than divine, showing up in Washington D.C. and proclaiming a new religious and civil order. What would be the city fathers’, the clergy’s and the overall national reaction? He would be deemed a threat to civil order, dangerous, possibly a terrorist and most probably a kook and quickly incarcerated at a mental institution, if he were not assassinated first. Anyone today who hopes to achieve creditable messiah-status had better arrive spectacularly from the sky with a powerful and dazzling sound and light show to accompany him (what the military now calls a ‘Shock and Awe’ display) if he wants serious attention. And he had best be bullet-proof, laser-proof and generally assassination-proof if he expects to survive because there would be many who would want to test his

mortality.

In the later part of the 4th century B.C.E., the Palestinian area was conquered by Alexander the Great. Samaria was destroyed and rebuilt as a Macedonian city. What was formerly Israel and Judah remained under control of Alexander's successors until the Persian conquest of 197 B.C.E. This conquest placed the whole area under the satrapy of Syria. By the time of the Book of Daniel, dating from the 2nd century B.C.E., the doctrine of resurrection was familiar to Hebrews who had been living within the bounds of Hellenistic culture. The Greeks, as we shall see, had developed their own ideas about posthumous survival and resurrection as had, as we have demonstrated, the invading Persians. Daniel's most important legacies are in reaffirming the Judaic postmortem resurrection and, most centrally, positing the idea of a postmortem judgment *for both the righteous and the wicked*.

Many rabbinic and gentile writers have given short shrift to developments in Jewish thought after 200 B.C.E. It would be accurate to say that orthodox Jewish thought on fundamental theological issues such as the final resurrection of the dead have changed little since then. It is, however, an egregious error to be ignorant of, to forget or to dismiss because of preconceived biases, the significant body of literature since then which expands Jewish ideas of resurrection, immortality and reincarnation. The Apocryphal Period, dating from c. 200 B.C.E. to c. 200 C.E., is a rich vein to mine. There one finds a pluralism of views on afterlife survival, resurrection of the body and soul and diverse descriptions of what the posthumous abodes of the dead might be like to experience.

In the Jewish theological view, Apocrypha designates all those texts excluded from the Hebrew canon. Many of these texts, however, are found in the Greek translation of the Bible known as the Septuagint. St. Jerome included many of these same texts in the Latin, or Vulgate, translation of the Bible which the Council of Trent accepted as sacred, canonical texts in 1546. As a group, the Pseudepigrapha never were accorded canonical status either by Judaism or Christianity. The most complete compilation of the Pseudepigrapha to date is the collection edited by James H. Charles and published in 1983.

There is probably no text among the Apocrypha that is more central to the transformations underway in Judaism than the Book of Enoch, of which there are three versions. 1 Enoch is the oldest and most complete manuscript, usually referred to as the Ethiopic Book of Enoch. There is reason to believe it was once widely circulated and read and had a correspondingly large influence in its day. Unfortunately today, it is practically forgotten and almost totally ignored by the few who are aware of its existence. It is the most ancient, Jewish, religious document outside the Bible. Some parts may date to earlier than the 3rd century B.C.E. The earliest section appears to antedate parts of the Book of Daniel by almost a half century. (J.T. Milik) 2 Enoch is called the Slavonic Book of Enoch. 3 Enoch is usually referred to as the Hebrew Book of Enoch, but all have Hebrew origins that probably derive from an original source. The popular nomenclature is somewhat misleading.

There are several relatively new ideas that surface and coalesce in 1 Enoch. First is the notion of Gehenna as a place of eternal damnation. In the future, the wicked who have not been judged in their lifetime, and who have spent the interim time before the Final Judgment in Sheol, will be transferred to the Valley of Hinnom, Gehinnom or Gehenna. The accursed valley, geographically located south of Jerusalem, was historically a place of idolatry and infant sacrifice and had come in the Hebrew mind to be associated with a realm of punishment for the hopelessly wicked dead. Gehenna and Sheol at this time are virtually synonymous. For sometime afterward in Apocryphal texts of the period, the two terms run parallel and are interchangeable. And yet, almost paradoxically, Sheol retains for many an image of an interim stop for even the most faithful and righteous before the Final Judgment.

What is particularly fascinating is that 1 Enoch is the initial progeny that spawns a whole school of lurid depictions of hell that have come, in time, to be called "Tours of Hell." Christianity would later adopt this conception of a realm of torture, darkness and fire as a fitting, eternal abode for the incurably wicked with some relish. A literary tour de force like Dante's *Inferno* comes to the tradition very late with a plethora of precursors, although the luridness of such mental projections has

never ceased to intrigue the Christian imagination. And, as a matter of fact, Dante's description of hell accurately reflects the Catholic Church's vision of the infernal regions in his day.

Another relatively new development in Jewish thought is found in 1 Enoch and reflected in other Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. The conception of heaven or Paradise (Heb. *Pardes*), heretofore only inhabited by two mortal men, Elijah and Enoch, is broadened to include the faithful, righteous and elect. The situation is somewhat analogous to the democratizing of the prospects for a happy afterlife that took place in Egypt within Osirian theology at an earlier date. Paradise becomes in 1 Enoch a "garden of righteousness." (1 Enoch 61-90)

1 Enoch is a treasure-trove for the scholar interested in researching the afterlife tradition in Jewish (and Christian) thought. It is an amalgam, an alloy, of elements which had been stirring and mixing in the collective consciousness. The text offers a visible dualism of body and soul, a distinction between immortal spirit and mortal body. This is a major theme which will come to occupy apocryphal writing for some time into the future. We also find a kindred dualism in the ideas of, on the one hand, Heaven/Paradise and, on the other, Sheol/Gehenna. Now there is a distinct place for the righteous and a specific abode for the depraved.

And lastly, 1 Enoch describes a multitiered afterlife realm. This four-tiered other world will later be enlarged to a seven-tiered heaven and hell by religious speculators. (Raphael) The heavens, indeed all of creation, will be recognized by succeeding Jewish philosophers and theologians as a much more complicated and intriguing reality with immense, untapped possibilities for mental and spiritual exploration.

The Fourth Book of Ezra has been dated to the late 1st century C.E., probably several decades after the Roman destruction of the Jerusalem temple. It offers the most complete description of the afterlife state to be found in apocryphal literature and answers in a detailed presentation the most burning question of the mortal man facing his imminent demise. That question is: What happens to the soul immediately after it departs from its physical body? The Fourth Book of Ezra answers, positing an interim state of being between death and final judgment. After death the

soul has seven days, “so that during those seven days they may see the thing of which you have been told.” (4 Ezra 7:100-1) What Salathiel has been told by an angel of God is that the soul has seven days to view the seven tiers of heaven and the seven tiers of hell before being assigned to one of the tiers to serve out its interim state before the Final Judgment. Thus we see the partial genesis here of the popular, contemporary, descriptive designation “seventh heaven” to show approval or delight, a heaven which was considered the very highest, the abode and presence of God. The number seven had long been a holy number in Semitic religions and is much in evidence in Christian texts such as the Book of Revelation.

In the Fourth Book of Ezra we see more indications of a growing interest in the idea of individual immortality. This theme, owing much to Hellenistic influences on Jewish thought, and popular with some Alexandrian writers such as Philo Judaeus, never replaced among Palestinian-based authors the primary focus on national resurrection. In fact, the theme is not found in their writings. And in the subsequent Rabbinic period (200 C.E. to 800 C.E.) up to the present moment, it never becomes the primary belief regarding afterlife either among the intellectual elite or the general populace, as it did with the Christians.

The axis around which various views of resurrection spins is always the idea that a resurrection will occur at the End of Days, above and beyond questions of individual immortality or disagreements as to whether this end-time resurrection is of both body and spirit or spirit alone. For a majority of Jews, then and now, the physical resurrection remained paramount—this despite the vast intellectual ferment occurring during the Hellenistic period.

We have seen that resurrection became a theme as early as Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. That theme is elaborated in later apocryphal works such as the Testament of Benjamin, the Testament of Judah, the Sibylline Oracles, the Second Book of Maccabees and the previously mentioned 1 Enoch and Fourth Book of Ezra. In 2 Maccabees, the resurrection is limited to the Israelites. The Sibylline Oracles is more generous: those who “are pious shall live on the earth again.” (Sibylline Oracles

4:181-83) 1 Enoch offers an assortment of possibilities, everything from the earlier idea that the dead remain enfeebled forever in the shadows of Sheol (1 Enoch 102:6-8) to a contradictory vision which is the exact opposite, “You will shine as the lights of heaven . . . You will become companions of the host of heaven.” (1 Enoch 104:2-6) Such diversity suggests just how much 1 Enoch is a study in transformations. And such divergent views bear witness to the roiling pot of disparate ideas which now simmered, now boiled at this time in history and make it impossible, even to this day, to say definitively and finally that this or that is (or was) *the* Jewish position on the subject of resurrection. The author(s) of 4 Ezra were by far the most generous. Resurrection is to be had by all the “nations that have raised from the dead,” a universal resurrection for the righteous whether Jew or non-Jew.

The passionate, visionary ideas found in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha reappear later in the medieval *Midrashim* and in the various texts which comprise the Kabala. Several good examples of these ideas is given to us by the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus in his 1st century C.E. work *The Jewish War*, a war in which he served as a general. In a speech to some of his soldiers who had decided to commit suicide, under hopeless conditions, rather than be captured by the Romans, he stated, “The bodies of all men are, indeed, mortal . . . but the soul is ever immortal, and is a portion of the divinity that inhabits our bodies” He proceeds to warn the men that those who die a natural death “enjoy eternal fame . . . and obtain a most holy place in heaven, from where, in the passage of the ages, they are again returned to pure bodies” whereas the souls who have committed suicide “are received in the darkest precincts of Gehenna.” In *The Antiquities of the Jews*, he tells us the Pharisees are of the opinion that “souls have an immortal vigor” and that virtuous souls “will have power to revivify and live again” on this earth. In *The Jewish War*, speaking of the Essenes, we hear, “For their doctrine is as follows: bodies are corruptible . . . but souls are immortal and continue on forever” The Sadducees had a bleaker view, believing the soul died along with the body until, presumably, brought back to life during the millennium.

The Rabbinic period, which immediately succeeded the end of the Apocrypha period and endured till the Medieval period, was a time of less radical ferment, a consolidation of previous ideology and much theoretical speculation on the meaning of biblical ideas in general. The consensus of opinion of the rabbinical majority was to accept the idea that the individual's destiny was to experience Gehenna immediately after death for a period of twelve months. This purgation was followed almost at once by an interim period of bliss in Paradise (Gan Eden) until the End of Days, at which point would occur a national, collective resurrection of bodies and souls. This resurrection might include, in some rabbis' opinion, all people everywhere.

There is an abundance of descriptions of the posthumous realms of Gan Eden and Gehenna. Gehenna in the Rabbinic period is most definitely a place of punishment. Gan Eden begins more and more to resemble the idealized paradise we find in Christianity and later in Islam. There is mention of ongoing contact with the dead in many folk tales, which is a return to a prebiblical belief as well as a popular belief in both official circles and among the common people that the soul of the deceased maintained at least a modicum of conscious awareness. One prominent idea of the period—the “World to come” (Heb. *Olam Ha-Ba*)—was given an extraordinary amount of attention but, as Raphael notes, it is “unclear whether this refers to a postmortem realm or to a messianic era at the end-of-days.”

The most important medieval Jewish theologians such as Abraham ibn Ezra, Saadia Gaon, Yehuda Ha Levi, Gersonides, Nahmanides and Maimonides were theologians first as well as philosophers and early humanists. Many of them made substantial contributions to natural science, medicine, astronomy, mathematics and other fledgling sciences, often borrowing and elaborating on ideas of their Arab neighbors. The rich, Jewish tradition of comment on such topics as afterlife and immortality continued and is noteworthy for its diversity of opinions. Previous fanciful, mythic descriptions and interpretations of heaven and hell tended to be replaced by philosophical speculation. Such topics as what did or did not constitute an immortal soul, what contributed to its formation and its prospects after death received much attention.

Maimonides' conception of *Olam Ha-Ba*, the World to Come, stands out as an anomaly when compared to traditional rabbinic ideas of the resurrection of the complete man, body and soul. He believed the afterlife to be inhabited by spirits, not bodies, who have earned their immortality not so much by good deeds as by acquiring knowledge, divine knowledge in particular. Sometimes contradictory and often bordering on the opaque and indiscernible, he seems to favor an interpretation which places the World to Come sometime after the national resurrection of the dead.

Nahmanides, in contrast to Maimonides, presents his ideas of the World to Come clearly enough but suffers from an excess of verbosity. It is he who introduces a new eschatological term, *olam ha-neshamot*, the World of Souls. In *Torat Ha-Adam*, he differentiates carefully between God's judgment prior to national resurrection and the earlier judgment of individual souls immediately following death. At death one reaps what one has sowed. The quality of the purgatorial time spent in Gehenna is directly proportionate to the quality of life lived. Good deeds and good attitudes ameliorate punishment. This remains a consensus view among world Jewry today and is, in fact, very close to the present-day Islamic consensus. Interestingly enough, Nahmanides has more than a little psychology in his philosophico-religious speculations. One's fate in Gehenna has much to do with one's attitudes in general, one's state of mind, as well as one's actual behavior. Intentions count.

For Gersonides, the mastery of intellect is supreme. The level of one's intellectual development during his life span greatly influences his immortality. The individual soul, or in Gersonides' rather Platonic phrase, the immortal Agent Intellect, reaps the rewards of past learning. But there is no further intellectual growth once past these mortal bounds. It is, however, Nahmanides who best reflects the kabalistic influences of the age and whose psychological inclinations presage an increasing willingness among medieval Kabalists to equate the quality of posthumous afterlife with the quality of the conscious mind during life.

Around the latter part of the 12th century the term "Kabala" came into general usage. In *A Talmudic Miscellany*, Paul Isaac

Hershon defines the word as “a thing received,” that is, traditional law. Moses, he says, received both the written law and the traditional law on Mount Sinai. He quotes two passages from the Talmud. One claims the words of the Kabala are “*the same* as the words of the law.” The other proclaims, “we find the Rabbis declare the Kabbalah [or Kabala] to be *above* the law.” What is for certain is that the kabalistic writings rely on ancient texts and some knowledge originally orally transmitted until it was transcribed. The Tanaiim living in Jerusalem at the beginning of the 3rd century were the first Jews to call themselves Kabalists. Isaac Myer, in his work *Qabbalah*, speculated that, “The Qabbalah most likely, originally came from Aryan sources, through Central Asia, Persia, India and Mesopotamia . . . We know that the Hebrew Genesis and many parts of the Old Testament, are tintured with Aryan, Akkadian, Chaldean and Babylonian thought, and that Isaiah, Daniel, Ezra, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and other learned Israelites were under the influence of Persian and Chaldean learning.”

Kabala is also a term used to describe the medieval Jewish mysticism which developed from a study of those ancient sources. In the Jewish Talmud generally and Kabalism in particular, reincarnation as well as metempsychosis are significant themes. Hershon’s *A Talmudic Miscellany* offers a considerable number of examples: “for after Adam sinned his soul passed into David, and the latter having also sinned, it passed into the Messiah”, “Most souls being at present in a state of transmigration, God requites a man now for what his soul merited in a past time in another body.” We also get colorful examples of possible metempsychosis. The soul of a slanderer may be transmigrated into a silent stone; the soul of a righteous man may sometimes be found inhabiting a fowl; a murderer may be transmigrated into water; uncleanness of the soul can cause one to be transmigrated variously into such animals as mules, bats, rabbits, camels and so on.

The most famous kabalistic work is the *Sefer Ha-Zohar* or “Book of Splendor,” usually referred to simply as the *Zohar*. The Rabbi Simeon ben Jochai is usually given credit as the author of the earliest, original *Zohar* c. 90 C.E. In 1280 C.E., after remaining inaccessible to the masses for centuries, a new

Zohar appeared compiled and edited by Rabbi Moses de Leon. Emendations and additions were made between the composition of the original and the 1280 version. The reappearance of the work sparked interest among some Christians, many of whom would pay dearly over time for such heretical ideas as a belief in reincarnation. It is, by far, the richest source of Jewish ideas on the afterlife and, unfortunately, practically unread and unknown today among modern Jewry. Even those who have heard of it, know little about it, and this would include many modern rabbis. Those somewhat familiar with it too often discount it as fanciful, medieval mysticism which crosses the grain of present, sober, rationalistic currents within the faith. A lack of familiarity with it denies the student of the faith and the generally curious a rich experience in alternative views of what succeeds the moment of death.

No one who has read the *Zohar* has been so bold as to say it is straightforward, easy reading. It is not. And it certainly is not organized in a fashion we find acceptable today. Ideas about the soul, notions about afterlife, musings about reincarnation and a host of other esoteric topics are woven together in an intriguing patchwork. One never quite knows what is coming next. The author(s) organizing *modus operandi* seems to have been the conviction that predictability is the hobgoblin of small minds, consistency the stepmother of boredom and occasional contradictions a salubrious tonic to minds too much impressed with self-congratulatory assumptions about probability and logical continuity.

The *Zohar* teaches that the individual soul has a three-part (some Kabalists say five-part) nature: (1) *nefesh*, the vegetative soul, (2) *ruah*, the animal soul, (3) *neshamah*, the intellectual soul. Some would add (4) the *hayyah*, the divine life force and (5) the *yehidah*, uniqueness. The Kabalists were often not hesitant to add a decidedly mystical bent to the previously more philosophic interpretation of those terms by more rationalistic rabbis while at the same time upholding the more traditional view that the soul is, after all, a unity. The lower levels of the soul after death are perceived to undergo a journey of purification and purgation. On the other hand, the higher levels experience a transcendent awakening and its concomitant bliss.

Gan Eden, heaven, has a dual nature: Lower Gan Eden is a level at which the bliss of the higher emotions is experienced while Upper Gan Eden is a realm wherein one receives credit for the more meritorious, spiritual thoughts of the previous existence. In this higher realm, direct communion with God is possible.

Gehenna, or hell, is defined as a purification realm. Here the psychic dross of the previous existence is purged during a period which lasts approximately a year. The level of torment is deemed proportionate to each soul's life experience; in other words, really bad boys suffer more dearly.

The most surprising aspect of kabalistic thought is the emphasis given by many teachers to the idea of *gilgul*, the doctrine of reincarnation. It is a part of Jewish holy tradition that has been almost completely ignored by modern Jewry today, as we have already noted, and yet the *Zohar* has many passages which describe it or refer to it. "Every soul is subject to the trials of transmigration . . . all souls do not know how many transmigrations and unknown trials they must experience . . . and if they have not learned the necessary lessons and fulfilled the necessary requirements during a single life, they must undergo another, a third, and so on until they have perfected their souls and are ready for reunion with Yahweh." These lines could easily have been written by a Vedantist or Buddhist. The next quote is more definitively kabalistic and Jewish, with the thought of punishment weighing heavily on the philosophy: ". . . to be saved from punishment the soul transmigrates from body to body"—to finally perfect itself, it should be noted, not as an escape mechanism.

The Kabbalist Rabbi Manasseh ben Israel underscored the powerful influence of the *gilgul* idea on some medieval Jewish communities when he wrote in *Nishmat Hayyim* (The Soul of Life): "The belief in the doctrine of transmigration of souls is a dependable, error-free doctrine accepted by the whole community . . . What is more, there is a large contingent of learned men in Israel who firmly believe in it and make it a doctrinal, basic creed of our religion."

Scholars are uncertain how the idea of *gilgul* entered medieval Judaism and from where exactly it came. We do know that many Gnostic, Orphic and Manichean sects of the 2nd and 3rd century

C.E. onward were familiar with the concept which has its deeper roots in ancient Egyptian and East Indian ideology and later Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy. It is more than likely that the influences were eclectic and traveled pervasively over extended time as large, seminal ideas tend to do.

There is no doubt the doctrine of *gilgul* had a large influence on formal Judaism beginning in the 12th century and lasting for some time to come. The idea of a physical return to life made it possible to fulfill the *mitzvot* or commandments. *All* of them. One could theoretically return as many times as necessary until he got it right. And getting it right assured one of a place in Gan Eden and ruled out the potential misery of Gehenna.

It should come as no surprise that the more or less uneducated common folk developed their own ideas about what could happen with *gilgul*. Stories about *Dybbukim*, often malevolent, possessive spirits became common as did tales of *ibburim*, which were benevolently-possessive souls. A rich folklore soon developed and has been maintained for centuries.

Today Hasidism is the only branch of Judaism which supports the reincarnation hypothesis. Hasidism as a modern practice of Judaism began about 1750 in Poland, but its roots can be traced to an earlier 2nd century B.C.E. sect opposed to Hellenism and devoted to a strict observance of the ritual law. Its great champion of the 20th century was Martin Buber, who drew attention in his works to its philosophy and colorful yet traditional way of life. The most famous, modern Hasidic work is S. Ansky's (a.k.a. Solomon Judah Rapoport) play *The Dybbuk* which he based on genuine Hasidic life: "If one of us dies before his time, his soul returns to earth to complete its span, to do the things left undone and experience the happiness and griefs he would have known . . . You can't say for a certainty, who any man might have been in his last existence, nor what he is doing on earth . . ." (Trans. H. Alsberg and W. Katzin)

Modern Judaism, with the exception of Hasidism, has relegated tales of *dybbukim* and *ibburim* to the status of quaint curiosities. Formal discussions of the reincarnation hypothesis are scarce, but traditional rabbis still affirm, as their kabalistic predecessors, a belief in one kind or another resurrection of the dead.

The present direction of modern Judaism is difficult to chart. A half century ago, intermarriage between Protestants and Jews was rare; today it is very common. Some observers believe this is a sign of the traditional faith having lost its direction. Many contemporary Jews seem doubtful that an afterlife, *any* afterlife, truly awaits them, whether it be in Gan Eden, Gehenna or elsewhere. Most are not aware of the rich kabalistic tradition and its ideas of reincarnation. Nevertheless, most Jews today do seem to believe that they will be ultimately judged by their Maker. There is a paradox here. Judgment usually implies placement somewhere. Whatever the case, most present-day Jews affirm a belief that love of God and respect for life is best expressed by deeds rather than a mere profession of faith.

At the time of the birth of Christianity, the rich diversity and ferment of ideas within Judaism, including the idea of a messiah whose appearance seemed imminent, made the time ripe for a schism. That schism occurred with the rise of a competing ideology, which used the old as a bedrock but insisted on building a new, radical top structure. At any given moment in the world, there are many individuals offering “new” philosophies to anyone who will listen, anyone who will follow along. Most fail to draw a lasting following for any number of reasons. Once in a great while, a charismatic figure comes along with a message that catches the imagination, resounds internally as the sound of truth, and finally rivets the allegiance of vast numbers of people. One of those rare moments in history had arrived.

Chapter Seven

The Greeks and Romans

At the beginning of the historical period, neither the Mesopotamians nor the Hebrews nor the Greeks and Romans believed in human immortality. That distinction is reserved for the Egyptians and, a little later, the Vedantists of India. The Judaic concern for an everlasting immortality scarcely precedes the Christian era. The real concern of the Jews was, first and foremost, the nation, its survival and nurturing and, finally, during the millennium, its final triumph. Yahweh's covenant with the Hebrews did not include any references to an everlasting future existence of the individual or his spirit. God's advice to Job makes this patently clear.

The belief in a generic immortality more or less available to all men begins to appear in Greek literature in the 6th and 5th centuries B.C.E., although the conviction that this was possible may well have preceded these writings by a century or more. What or who inspired this belief is a contentious issue. The likely candidates are ideas percolating westward from India and Persia and northward from Egypt. (The Greek historian Herodotus claimed the Orphics obtained their wisdom from Egypt.) The traditional, cultural explanation was that Orpheus had brought this wisdom with him. But, if he ever really existed, where exactly did he come from in the East? And when? Nobody knows.

The Greek idea of the immortality of the soul is embodied in the Mystery Schools. It was there that the aspirant learned the arcane knowledge of life's mysteries, including soul-immortality, and was taught the kind of living that could assure his soul's happy survival and allow him to escape the need for continual

reincarnation on earth. The similarity in thinking to Vedanta and Buddhism is probably not by accident. The Mystery Schools were inspired and supported by the cults of Orpheus and Dionysus. What we know about them, and their philosophico-religious doctrines, has come to us mainly through the works of several illustrious Greek philosophers and writers including Pherecydes, Pythagoras, Hierocles, Heraclitus of Ephesus, Pindar, Empedocles, Herodotus; and, later, Plato, Proclus, Aristotle; and, later still, the Neoplatonists. One thing all the Schools finally seemed to have in common was the idea of the soul's immortality, despite their differences in practice and ritual. The rather circumscribed and undeniably elitist Elysian afterlife of Homer's time had been hero-specific. Commoners, unless they could boast of extraordinary exploits, need not apply.

That the Greeks had developed several survival hypotheses within their earlier nature-god, corn-god cults is evident from extant sources. There was, however, within this mix no simple, continuous thread to follow, no dominating theme, no clear chronology. The process going on seems to have been aggregative and syncretistic and a long play of cross-pollinations and fusions with many actors.

By the 5th century B.C.E., it is obvious that a transformation in religious thought is well underway. Jane Harrison's *Prolegomena to the Study of the Greek Religion* indicates the dimensions of the bifurcation in Greek religious practices of the time: "two different classes of rites, one of the nature of 'service' addressed to the Olympians, the other of the nature of 'riddance' or 'aversion' addressed to an order of beings wholly alien." By "wholly alien" read Ghosts of the Dead. And it is well to consider the reality that Harrison's "two different classes" are often operative at the same moment of time within the psyche of a devotee or worshiper.

Gradually, the newer religion displaced the cults addressed to the worship and propitiation of ghosts—ghosts which had played such a large part in the ritual religious practices as far back as the early Bronze Age in Sumer, Babylon, Egypt, Rome and among the early Hebrews. Quite possibly these practices extend back to paleolithic times; what burial evidence we have does not rule out such speculation. These ghosts were personal and often familial,

pampered with sacrifices, offerings and invocations, not unlike the behavior we still find today in primitive societies such as the Yanomami of northern Brazil or the present-day mountain Quechuas of Peru. Even the Anthesteria, celebrated nominally in honor of Dionysus, was, in Harrison's words, "a festival of ghosts" aimed at deflection and eradication. Keres, which played such a major part in this festival, were in the 5th century B.C.E., Greek mind nothing more than small, winged, potentially-troublesome ghosts, similar in many ways to the Hebrew terraphim. Orphic ideas, Dionysian rites and the Eleusian Mysteries brought the new idea of the soul's immortality to the masses while, at the same time, acknowledging the older tradition of ghosts. There is more than a hint of the soul's transmigration in these new practices. Did some of them come from Dionysus' purported experiences in Phrygia and India? The time-frame does not support any direct Buddhist influence, but we cannot discount the possibility of Vedic influence or Herodotus' statement about Egyptian influences. Demeter's search through the underworld for her daughter, Persephone, which was quite likely reenacted as part of the Eleusian initiation rites, was related to the quest for immortality and bliss in a future life/world, which was the presumed purpose of the Eleusian ceremonies.

It is well to remember that in an earlier age, Homer's time, there was no cult of the dead to speak of. The Greeks paid homage to the dead rather than feared them. Gold, food and personal items were interred with the remains of the deceased with the belief that the dead would or could make use of them—just as the earlier Egyptians had done and as we find even earlier in so many late Neolithic era and early Bronze Age burial sites scattered throughout the Western World. There seems to have been little fear in Homer's time that the shades, locked incommunicado in Hades, would rise up to cause problems to the living. They were considered too effete, too insubstantial to be of much concern, even if they could escape their confines, which they could not. Homer's dead were not considered either threatening or strange. Harrison's "an order of being wholly alien" is from a later period and a different mindset. There is a great difference, after all, between homage and propitiation. The

two can potentially be bedfellows, but it seems clear that in the ancient world, and particularly the prehistoric period, homage preceded propitiation and, as belief in personal immortality grew, the fear of ghostly mischief waned and the need for propitiation weakened.

An idea of how the fusion of religious ideas was proceeding in Greece in the 6th and 5th centuries B.C.E. can be had by following the progression of recorded history. The Orphic rites were extremely popular in 6th century Athens where they were combined with the worship of Demeter and Persephone at Eleusis. Peisistratus, the rather mild-mannered tyrant of Athens, decreed that Dionysus should be added to the count of Eleusian deities and that his statue should be carried respectfully during festival time from Athens to Eleusis.

Over time, the Orphic religion cast a wide net. In early Christian Apocrypha, references to Orpheus are numerous. Allusions to Orphism can be found in the Roman writings of Virgil, Plutarch, Horace, Apuleius and Lucretius. Greek references to the Orphic religion can be found as early as the Homeric hymns. Then later in the 6th and 5th centuries, the immortality of the soul theme appears in works of Pherecydes, Pythagoras, Hierocles, Heraclitus of Ephesus, Pindar, Herodotus, Empedocles, Plato and finally Aristotle. Beginning in the 3rd century C.E., led by Plotinus, the Neoplatonists take up the same theme.

From the 6th century B.C.E. onward, Greek philosophers had an inordinate influence on subsequent Greek religious ideas, the expression of them and the popularizing of them. Of all the bright lights which preceded Plato, Pythagoras shines most brilliantly and yet, unfortunately, he left no writings to posterity, and we have to refer to his students, such as Lysis, and contemporaries and others who wrote of his ideas.

The Orphic idea that the body was a prison was not alien to Pythagoras. A similar conception was later adopted by the Pharisees, Gnostics, Essenes and Maccabees. The soul, he thought, had a divine birth, had in fact been a god and would be a god again someday, but before that could happen, it must undergo a thousand-year period of rehabilitation. Life on earth was punishment for sins. Once the soul had been rehabilitated to

its original pure state, it could reclaim its divine state and rightful place among the gods. At the end of its sentence, it would drink of the waters of Lethe and forget the horrible ordeal it had undergone. There is a hint of the original sin idea here. More accurately, we should say sins plural because the causes of man's "fall" seem to be multiple and various though unspecified.

Pythagoras' world was not conceived of as a happy place. Unlike the Egyptians, who so savored the earthly pleasures, material existence and the comforts of good living, Pythagoras' worldview was a dark one. Life was hard, often brutal, and evil was plentiful. Rehabilitation and death were an escape to a more ideal existence. The Orphics maintained that souls resided in Hades between incarnations whereas Pythagoras imagined them as dust-like, free-floating, airborne motes always on the lookout for a new human body to enter and continue the rehabilitative campaign. Although the Orphic mysteries contained references to metempsychosis—an idea which can be found in some Egyptian, Hindu and Buddhist theories—there is no evidence that Pythagoras held such views despite some later writers to the contrary. Those who knew him well (such as Lysis) and those who had studied his philosophy assiduously (such as Hierocles), either never mentioned such an idea or steadfastly refuted these claims. Hierocles writes in the *Commentary of the Golden Verses of Pythagoras*, "He who expects that after his death he shall incarnate into the body of a beast, and become a beast without reason, because of his vices, or a plant because of his dullness or stupidity; this man . . . is infinitely deceived, and totally ignorant of the essential form of our soul, which can never change"

Pythagoras' gift to Greek philosophy and religion was not the idea of reincarnation. That thought already had commerce among the people. It is, rather, why humans must experience a long round of lives to reeducate and rehabilitate their souls and make them more acceptable to a heavenly existence. Diogenes Laertius, in his *Life of Pythagoras*, summed it up well when he wrote, "Pythagoras was reported to have been the first of the Greeks to teach the doctrine that the soul, passing through the 'circle of necessity,' was bound at various times to various living bodies" It is true, as Porphyry noted, that he liked to remind

his associates “of the lives lived by their soul before it was fastened to the body,” and by incontrovertible arguments demonstrate that he had been Euphorbus “during the Trojan war” and, one might add, Aethalides, a son of Mercury. But these statements were all preludes which, in Iamblichus’ words, “assisted him in providing providential attention to others . . .” What better way to do so than to “remind them of their former existences”?

Another influential philosopher with a dark vision of the world, a disciple of Pythagoras and Parmenides, was Empedocles of Agrigentum. Although not as influential as either Pythagoras or Plato, his impact on Greek philosophy and religious thought was considerable. The fragments of his work which survive, *The Purifications* in particular, offer a curious parallel construction in many ways to the ideas of his major influences, especially Pythagoras. Like Pythagoras, he regarded human incarnation in a physical body of any kind as punishment for sin. Man had fallen from heaven. Those who had “sinfully debased their limbs with offensive slaughter, or had sworn and reneged their oaths, shall wander the earth for 30 thousand seasons from heaven’s home” Unlike Pythagoras, Empedocles foresees these forlorn, wandering, incarnating spirits as having to trace or retrace the whole evolutionary ontogenic progression from the lowest life forms upward. All this is necessary if the spirit or soul is going to win its way back to heaven and the “blessed.” This is metempsychosis with a vengeance. Those today who consider this world as a kind of cosmic prison have an ally in Empedocles. For both Pythagoras and Empedocles, life on earth is distasteful because of the nature of its human inhabitants. In Empedocles’ mind, man is an exile inhabiting a dark, dangerous, violent world, surrounded by murderers and other miscreants, burdened by a never-ending continuum of loathsome tasks, filled with sickness and decay, and always under assault by swarms of demons and fiends.

Needless to say, Empedocles’ vision is not shared by many of his contemporaries. The average Greek citizen of his day seems to have had a more positive acceptance of his lot as a living mortal. Pythagoras and some of the later Roman Stoics came closest to his disdain for life on earth, but none of these

philosophers rise to the same level of contempt for the perceived miserable life of humans. Born later, he could have been a Essene or Gnostic. Born today, he would most probably be an Evangelical. As with Pythagoras, his ideas have some consanguinity with Buddhist attitudes toward life and death. The way back to heavenly bliss is to learn and practice virtue. The intermediate states before the final, heavenly epiphany are best served by transforming one's self by virtuous, socially-productive work such as becoming a poet, physician, prophet or philosopher-prince. In his almost frenetic longing to cast off the "garbs of flesh" which burden the divine potential of man, he brings to mind the ferocious abnegation of human physicality we see periodically among men such as with the American Puritan clerics Jonathan Edwards and Cotton Mather.

The great Greek champion of immortality is Plato. It is almost inconceivable that a careful reading of his works would lead any intelligent human being to question his personal feelings about the survival hypothesis—but some critics have done so. Tone and context reveal his state of mind: first-person-pronoun proclamation is not his style.

Although he studied the ideas of Pythagoras and Parmenides, his own Doctrine of Ideas and his attitude toward immortality are essentially original. They can be found in the *Phaedo*, the *Phaedrus*, *Meno*, the *Laws*, *The Republic* and the *Apology*.

The *Phaedo* is a dialogue in which ideas of immortality and the soul's nature are forcefully and effectively presented at length. Plato argues, borrowing perhaps from cosmological ideas of Empedocles and Parmenides, that souls cannot appear out of nothingness and, therefore, must have preexisted eternally. If they preexisted eternally, they will continue to exist eternally. the Christian concept that each soul is created originally and uniquely by God at the moment of human physical conception is completely at odds with such notions. Plato was convinced the philosopher or wise man need not fear death. But there is a caveat. The philosopher had best abstain from strong impressions of "pleasures and desires, griefs and fears" because they deeply imprint the soul and, "it can never pass into Hades in a pure state, but must ever depart polluted by the body, and so quickly falls again into another body, and grows up as if it were

sown, and consequently is deprived of all association with that which is divine, and pure, and uniform” (Trans. Henry Cary)

The *Phaedo* suggests that at the time of death, as the soul separates from the body, it need not fear total reabsorption into the Universal, but will survive into the future as a distinct, conscious entity. Whether this survival is eternal or whether there is a point in time when absorption does occur is impossible to tell from Plato's own words. As a point of fact, a final absorption of the individual soul-stuff is conceived of in most Hindu and Buddhist eschatology as an inevitable and desirable event. Plato seems to have been strongly influenced by ideas traveling from East to West, although there is no outstanding proof possible for this kind of assertion.

Although all souls achieve some kind of afterlife, only those morally pure souls succeed in achieving immortal bliss. Socrates sums up this idea well in *Phaedo*, ‘But since, as things are, she appears to be immortal, there could be no escape from evil for her and no salvation, except that she should become as good and wise as possible. For when the soul comes to Hades she brings with her nothing but her education and training’ (Trans. W.H.D. Rouse)

In the Dialogues, the soul (psyche) which survives death is not a material thing which needs a body to convey it; it is rather, similar to earlier Orphic ideas, a spark of divinity manifesting as human mind, individual consciousness and the nonphysical abode of morally responsible choice. “Know that if you became worse, you shall go to the worse souls, or if better to the better, and in every succession of life and death you will do and suffer what like may fitly suffer at the hands of like,” warns Plato in *Laws*. (Trans. B. Jowett) The karmic overtones ring loud and clear. As stated in the *Apology*, the most important work in life is ‘the perfection of the soul.’ Though this heavenly spark is inherently immortal and theoretically indestructible by the grace of the gods, it needs unstinting moral cultivation and careful stewardship. It is necessary to attempt, with unwavering diligence, an understanding of the universe and seek to meld one’s individual soul with the Greater Soul of Absolute Goodness. In *Meno*, Socrates proposes that the soul has at least a subconscious memory of all its lives, whether heavenly or

earthbound, and has incipient knowledge of ‘everything’ from its birth, ‘for all inquiry and learning is but remembering’

It is with measured care that Plato scribed the ending to *The Republic*, *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus* and *Gorgias*. All conclude with clear, directional signals—transposed Orphic myths of judgment, rebirth and ascent of the morally purified soul to the eternal realms of bliss. In the tenth and last book of *The Republic*, toward the very end, a prophet speaking in the name of Lachesis, daughter of Necessity, addresses the souls about to reenter earth life: ‘. . . a new generation of men shall here begin the cycle of its mortal existence. Your destiny shall not be allotted to you, but you shall choose it for yourselves Virtue owns no master. He who honors her shall have more of her, and he who slights her less. The responsibility lies with the chooser. Heaven is guiltless’ (Trans. J. Wright) In this present, irresponsible, puling age, the skeptic might well wonder where all these self-responsibility-assuming souls have gone.

If we add the ideas of Pythagoras, Empedocles and Plato to the progression of thought put in motion by Orphism, the Eleusian mysteries, Dionysianism and the Mystery Schools generally, it becomes evident that the older, simpler, ghost-spirit theology could no longer prevail, although remnants of it would persist for some time. The possibility of a happy immortality in a pleasing realm will almost always trump the prospects of a mentally-benumbed, physically-effete, shadow-like existence in a dark underworld. An immortal existence now beckoned with a peace and bliss not to be found in this world. Like the Vedic Indians and Buddhists, and in contrast to the Egyptians and Hebrews, the Greeks did not prioritize a physical body as a necessary handmaiden to enjoy the afterlife they had earned.

Although the Greeks of the 6th through the 4th centuries B.C.E. were gradually forming new, unique ideas of afterlife, which far surpassed the basic and base concepts of a shadow-like continuance which preceded them, the Romans lagged conceptually far behind. Roman inventiveness in technology and the mechanics of war did not extend to the finer arts nor to religion. As J.B. Carter noted in *The Religious Life of Ancient Rome*, “If one had spoken to a Roman in the fourth century before Christ, concerning his soul, its sinfulness, and its needs of

salvation, there would have been no discussion possible, for the person addressed would not have understood what it was all about . . . The origin of this idea of the personal soul is obscured in great mystery . . . We see only scanty traces of it in the literature of the Ciceronian age.”

The Ciceronian age dates to the 1st century B.C.E. Thus, Carter is referring to a three- to five-century period after Pythagoras when the Italian peninsula was more involved in empire and nation-building than philosophical pursuits or religious speculation. When the Romans did turn their attention to such matters, they did it in the most predictable way. They borrowed heavily from the Greeks and, to a lesser extent, other cultures which they came to dominate in the Age of Caesars. By the time of the Caesars, the new Christian eschatology was spreading throughout the Mediterranean world and would become like thorns and thistles to the hands of Roman administrators until the Roman emperor Constantine (280-337 C.E.) legally sanctioned Christian worship. Whether he was a true convert or took an expedient opportunity to relieve pressures building within the empire is an issue historians have not fully resolved.

Aristotelian rationalism profoundly affected Roman thought for several centuries. The Roman poet Ennius’ (239-169 B.C.E.) assertion in his *Annals* that Homer had appeared to him in a dream and assured him that their bodies had been animated by the very same soul was looked upon by some later Roman authors as a curiosity. By the time of Julius Caesar’s assassination, Roman confidence in the idea of a future life had faltered. Epicureanism was much in vogue. Epicurus taught that the annihilation of death removed men from their sufferings. They did not remember past lives because there were no past lives to remember. The poet Lucretius, an ardent supporter of the new philosophy, wrote sarcastically in *De Rerum Natura* (On the Nature of Things), “If soul is immortal, and winds its way/into man’s body at birth/Why, then, don’t we remember something/of prior lives’ appearances?/where the footprints of paths once trod?/Were the mind/Immortal, and changed its bodies periodically/How capriciously would earth’s creatures strut!” (Trans. W.E. Leonard) As historian Franz Cumont

observed (*After Life in Roman Paganism*), one epitaph which became popular at the time read, 'I was not; I was; I am not: I do not care.'

The primary competing philosophy of life at the time was Stoicism, introduced from Greece to Rome by Aemilianus, but promulgated most effectively by Posidonius of Apamea. Posidonius was one of Cicero's teachers but, more importantly, he revitalized Stoicism's emphasis on ethics, "living according to reason" and following the divine order of the universe by reaffirming many of the teachings of Pythagoras and Plato. Of these, the central beliefs in immortality and transmigration found a strong and influential supporter in him. This Neo-Stoicism couldn't have come at a more opportune time. Rome of the 1st century was spiritually stumbling. In Cumont's estimation, Posidonius' impact on Roman society was large and lasting. "It made man king of creation." His eclectic "momentous ideas" derived from Pythagoras, Plato and the ancient Greek Mystery Schools and Eastern cults helped shape the thinking of contemporary and future philosophers, thinkers and poets such as Seneca, Varro, Virgil, Manilius, Philo the Jew and his friend Cicero. Cicero, beginning an agnostic, ended his life a Platonist. Anchises, in the *Aeneid*, in response to a question from Aeneas, answers, "They are souls to which bodies are to be given in the due course of time. For now, they live on Lethe's bank and drink forgetfulness of their former lives." In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* we get a metempsychotic version, "The soul wanders here and there and comes from this place to that, and vice versa, and assumes different forms; it moves from animals to humans and from humans to animals. And soon, it is gone again."

The revitalization of the Roman spirit had come full circle by the 3rd century C.E. with the introduction of Neoplatonic optimism about the soul's potential immortality and a further assist from two lesser, though influential, religions—Mithraism and Manicheism. The Christians at this point were a small cult which had potential as a socially disruptive force but, as an intellectual challenge, was discounted if not ignored by the great majority.

Aristotle, although Plato's student and the most influential philosopher after him, was ambivalent in his attitude toward

Plato's immortal soul complete with memory. Young Aristotle in *Eudemus* (On the Soul) endorses Plato. In later years, he wrote little of the "problem" and, when he did, he seemed to write very cautiously. His conclusion was that pure thought and, specifically, memory was a psycho-physical phenomenon; when the body died, so did memory. *Nus* (spirit) was incapable of recollection. He was left with a theoretical support for preexistence, for the concept of an intellectual soul *sans* memory that must enter a corporeal body from without and take up its residence.

The Hellenistic Mediterranean world was philosophically cosmopolitan. There was much movement of both human bodies and intellectual ideas. Platonism never really died but underwent a powerful renaissance when Ammonius Saccas founded the Alexandrian school of Neoplatonism sometime between 193 C.E. and the early 3rd century C.E. Previous to that event, several earlier Greek philosophers wrote works which foreshadowed that renaissance. One was Philo Judaeus (c.20 B.C.E.-c.50 C.E.) also called Philo of Alexandria. Another was Apollonius of Tyana (1st century C.E.). A third was Plutarch (c.46 C.E.-c.120 C.E.). All three advocated in their own fashion the idea of the soul's immortality.

Philo Judaeus was born in Alexandria and specialized in the study of the divinity of Jewish law. He also had a great interest in Greek philosophy and an especial attraction to the ideas of Pythagoras, Plato and the Stoics. It is man's heavenly nature, he believed, which guaranteed his soul's immortality. But there are degrees of divine nature and, therefore, degrees of immortality, "The lot of disembodied souls is distributed variously. The law prescribes that some of them enter mortal bodies and after certain appointed times are set free. But those who are of a more divine nature are free of all obligations that bind them to earth . . . Some of these souls choose to be bound by mortal bodies because they are earth-oriented and corporeally disposed. Others take leave, having been released once more according to divinely appointed times . . ." (Trans. G.C. Schellhorn)

Apollonius of Tyana is arguably the most renowned philosopher of the 1st century C.E. He was a true peripatetic quester, traveling, teaching and studying in India, Kashmir,

Persia, Asia Minor generally, Ethiopia, Spain, Italy and Greece. His contemporaries believed him to be a miracle-worker, but he deflected such adulation by observing that he had insight into the future, not godly powers. Philostratus transcribed parts of his biography written earlier by Damis, Apollonius' longtime companion. For thirteen years Apollonius taught and studied in Kashmir. During a discussion with the Kashmiri sage Iarchas, Iarchas inquired about Apollonius' former incarnations: "Will you tell me . . . who you were before this present life?" He replied, 'Since it was not a distinguished life, I don't recall much about it.' Iarchas then challenged him, 'You think then it was beneath you to have been the captain of an Egyptian ship, because I sense that this is what you were?' 'It's true what you sense, Iarchas,' replied Apollonius, 'because that is precisely what I was . . .'" (Trans. Schellhorn)

Plutarch was both essayist, *Moralia* (Morals), and biographer. His *Parallel Lives*, a series of forty-six biographies, has presented modern scholarship far more factual information about many outstanding figures of antiquity than any other source. The eighty essays which comprise *Moralia* are lively, didactic pieces, many dialogues, filled with interesting anecdotes and pertinent quotations. He writes souls "without mind or with mind, after departing from the body, are obliged to wander the space between the moon and the earth for awhile before their next incarnation." In the higher heavens, however, are more advanced spirits. "They are present at, and offer assistance during, the higher levels of initiation rites." These angelic-like, advanced beings, who often involve themselves with earthly matters, are held to high account. Should they overstep themselves, "they are punished, because they are forced down again to earth where they must embody themselves as humans." (Trans. Schellhorn)

Among Ammonius Saccas' first major disciples were Plotinus (205-270 C.E.) and Origen (c.185-c.254 C.E.). Among later Neoplatonists of exceptional merit are Porphyry (233-c.304 C.E.), Iamblichus (c.250-c.330 C.E.) and Proclus (410-485 C.E.). Neoplatonism attracted many notable Christian figures over the centuries; some like Origen, who became one of the Church Fathers; some like Synesius, Bishop of Cyrene, and some like Saint Augustine, who admired the contribution Neoplatonism

had made to Christianity and his own religious ideology. In no sense of the word, however, could Augustine be called a disciple of the philosophy, whereas both Origen (in his early writing) and Synesius both indicate a belief in transmigration of the soul. In Origen's case, this position was to cause him much grief later within the Church. Other early Church Fathers, like Clement of Alexandria and Athenagoras, although not officially connected with the movement, offered sympathetic cooperation to the early Neoplatonists and their synergistic efforts.

Neoplatonism is essentially a great attempt at synthesis—and a fairly successful one at that. The idea was to meld the best of ancient Greek thought (especially the original Platonic doctrines) with Hellenistic Judaism and other Eastern religious ideas and philosophies. Neoplatonism has been called an idealistic monism wherein the ultimate reality of creation is posited to be an infinite, unknowable, perfect One. There is a consubstantial hierarchy of command: the One, the *Nous* (pure intelligence or spirit) and the World-Soul. It is the World-Soul which generates the lesser souls of men. These souls have the choice of maintaining their purity and integrity or allowing themselves to yield to the senses, thereby ultimately corrupting their state of being. This most commonly occurs through ignorance although it can happen by choice. There is endemic in this philosophy a strong dualism, a categorical opposition between the spiritual and the carnal. The solution to the soul's dilemma when faced with worldly choices is to avoid as much as possible the world of sense and to seek liberation through rigorous, ascetic discipline.

At the age of forty, after much traveling and a failed attempt to reach India with the expedition of the Roman emperor Gordianus III, Plotinus settled in Rome and opened a very successful school of philosophy. He authored fifty-four treatises arranged later by his student, Porphyry, into six *Enneads* comprised of nine books each. Therein lies the philosophy that man is an entity of two worlds, the world of sense and the world of pure intelligence. Matter begets negativity, and, therefore, the objective of the soul is to escape it by foregoing interest in the world of sense and concentrating on intellectual meditation. Thus it may purify itself and raise itself to communion with the *Nous* and ultimately an epiphanic reunion with the One. The

influence of Eastern philosophical and religious ideas is obvious, and it is no surprise that he inspired the likes of Augustine and, much later, Meister Johannes Eckhart, Hugh of St. Victor and, finally, nearer our day, the group known as the Cambridge Platonists. In the *Enneads*, we find many statements related to the soul's immortality and to transmigration, “. . . they [the gods] allot to each individual his appropriate destiny, one that is in harmony with his past conduct, in conformity with his successive existences.” And, “It is a dogma recognized throughout antiquity that the soul expiates its sins in the darkness of the infernal regions, and that afterwards it passes into new bodies, there to undergo new trials.” Also, “When we have gone astray in multiplicity, we are first punished by our wandering away from the path, and afterwards by less favorable conditions, when we take on new bodies.” In *The Descent of the Soul*, he says, “For the experience of evil produces a clearer knowledge of good . . . This is accomplished in our souls according to the circulations of time, in which a conversion takes place from subordinate to more exalted natures . . .” (Trans. Thomas Taylor)

Porphyry, the Hellenized Jew, had the great misfortune of having his works publicly incinerated by both Constantine and Theodosius. Little remains extant of the originals. We learn of his ideas mainly through his contemporaries. Some of *De Abstinencia*, however, did survive. In this fragment, we see Porphyry argue that descent of the soul into matter ultimately has its reward, which is experience, understanding and an appreciation which the uninitiated soul to worldly existence does not have, “Hence, he who lives according to intellect, will more accurately define what is eligible and what is not, than he who lives under the dominion of irrationality. For the former has passed through the irrational life . . . but the latter having had no experience of an intellectual life [acts] like a child among children.” Elsewhere we get, “The souls that are not destined for the tortures of hell, and those that have passed through this expiation, are born again, and divine Justice gives them a new body, in accordance with their merits and demerits.” (Trans. Taylor)

Iamblichus, the Syrian-born Greek philosopher, was a student

of Pythagoras' and Plato's teaching and profoundly interested in the Egyptian Mysteries which he assayed to make public knowledge. A dialogue between Iamblichus and Porphyry comprises the former's work known as *The Egyptian Mysteries*. Speaking of the justice of the acts of the gods, Iamblichus observes, "but the powers that are superior to us know the whole life of the Soul, and all its former lives; and in consequence of this, if they inflict a certain punishment in obedience to the entreaties of those that invoke them, they do not inflict it without justice, but looking at the offenses committed by souls in former lives: which men, not perceiving, think that they unjustly fall into the calamities which they suffer." (Trans. Taylor)

There never was unanimous agreement among the Neoplatonists as to whether the soul was absolutely obliged by the gods or "the One" to incarnate, how many incarnations were necessary or whether the incarnating soul could ever really escape the "circle of birth" and return forever to a totally disembodied state. It was Proclus' opinion that "The ordering of souls, which originates from one primary Soul, includes a descent of a multitude of souls earthward and an ascent of this multitude back to the One . . . It is understood, then, that each soul periodically descends as is given and ascends as is given and that this periodicity is endless because of the infinitude of time. Therefore, each soul is able to descend and ascend an infinite number of times, and this condition shall apply forever to every soul." (Trans. Taylor)

There is no other philosophical system in the history of the Western World which has been nearly as influential as Platonism and its sister system, Neoplatonism, in affecting ethics, morals, and idealism generally as well as formal philosophy itself and much religious ideology. The asceticism and unworldliness of Neoplatonism was found attractive by the early Church Fathers who, nevertheless, with few exceptions, fulminated against the idea of reincarnation. Saint Augustine acknowledges as much in his *Confessions*. The ecclesiastics of the Medieval Church condemned both Platonism and Neoplatonism as pagan, heretical and ungodly. If God had sent His only Son to earth to forgive the sins of man, then there was absolutely no need of a series of lives to perfect the human soul. That was to be done in

the time allotted through faith, penance and good works. The idea of reincarnation did not serve doctrine or ritual and was inconvenient, even dangerous to both the theoretical and practical structure of the Church. Later, during the early Renaissance, the Church flirted cautiously with the Neoplatonic idea that the ecstatic soul has the ability to transcend all earthly, finite limitations as it explores further the theory of man's ability to directly intuit God. The Renaissance humanist philosophers, however, generally embraced Platonism and Neoplatonism. Marsilio Ficino translated the works of Plotinus, Porphyry and Iamblichus into Italian. Soon Platonist and Neoplatonist works were available throughout Europe.

As early Christianity struggled to assert itself, it had powerful, well-entrenched rivals in the Egyptian Mystery Schools, Mithraism, Manicheism and Neoplatonism—all philosophico-religious systems supporting the idea of the soul's immortality. And at least one of them, Mithraism, almost prevailed against it.

The reasons for Mithraism's popularity, particularly with the Romans and in the wild, Roman, Western provinces, is not particularly difficult to understand. It had many of the same beliefs, practices and symbols as Christianity. Many of these had great popular appeal. In addition to a belief in the immortality of the soul, the doctrine supported an idea of a last judgment as well as a resurrection. It preached the virtue of humility and the necessity for brotherly love. In its practices, it upheld the rite of communion and the use of holy water. It shared many of the same symbols as Christianity, such as the cross and the dove. Sundays were holy days, and the 25th of December was venerated. One might ask, Which came first here, the chicken or the egg? The answer probably lies somewhere in the history of Zoroastrian theology of which Mithraism is a metamorphosis, an offspring. Christianity itself is a transmuted theology, which means it is composed of elements borrowed freely from its theological predecessors.

Brought to Rome in 68 B.C.E. by Cilician pirates, Mithraism was the most important religious competition to Christianity by the 3rd century C.E. If it had not been for Emperor Constantine's intervention in support of Christianity, it may well have become the state religion of the Roman world. History tells

us it was greatly popular with legionnaires, slaves, merchants and many members of the intelligentsia. Its ideological consanguinity with Christian precepts did, however, allow for successful Christian proselytizing and conversion of its followers.

Manicheism, which also borrowed from Persian, Zoroasterian sources as well as Babylonian, Gnostic, Hindu, Buddhist and Christian, became widely popular within the Roman Empire of the 4th century C.E. and qualifies as a major religion of that time period. Founded by a Babylonian-Persian named Manes (or Mani) in the 3rd century, it spread rapidly throughout the Mediterranean world. Manes claimed to be, like Mohammed after him, the last and greatest prophet of God, the Messiah and Christ, the great “Comforter” of humanity. His theology is notably dualistic. Man’s spirit, created by God, is good. His body, created by Satan, is evil. These simple ideas are exceptionally close to Gnostic dogma. According to Manes, light and dark and good and evil are closely intermingled during life. The body must learn through discipline to purge the body and let the soul subjugate it. This is most effectively achieved by certain ascetic restraints: avoiding sexual indulgence, refraining from the intake of meat . . . It is not terribly surprising that his chief Christian critic was Saint Augustine. After the guilt-trip of his sensual youth, Augustine had been a Manichean for nine years before seeing a different light and converting to Christianity.

Manicheism did not die a swift death despite Roman attempts in the late 4th century to stomp it out. Both Roman and Byzantine emperors concocted harsh statutes prohibiting its practice, and, finally, Emperor Justinian decreed that Manichean devotees, if apprehended, would be put to death. Manicheism continued for some time an underground existence. It was ultimately one of the primary inspirations for several new (soon to be declared heretical) Christian sects: Bogomils, Beghards, Waldensians, Paulicians, Albigenses and Catharists. Young Mother Church brooked no rivals.

Chapter Eight

Hinduism and Buddhism

At least several centuries before ideas of human immortality began to capture the imagination of the Greeks, and possibly contemporaneous, if not a little later, than concern for such matters among the Egyptians, the Indians of the subcontinent were creating a body of orally transmitted knowledge rich in the possibilities of successive rebirths (*samsara*) and ultimate reunion with the Supreme Reality (Brahman). This oral wisdom, later transcribed into written documents, include the four Vedas (Rig, Sama, Yajur and Atharva), the Brahmanas (8), Aranyakas (also called Forest Texts) and the Upanisads (14).

The Brahmanas focus primarily on priestly ritual. The Aranyakas are the works of forest hermits reacting to the extreme ritualism and sacerdotalism of the Brahmanas; the Upanisads the more secret teachings of the Aranyakas. It is in the Brahmanas and Upanisads in particular, which date during and after the 7th century B.C.E., that are found the seeds of much later Hindu philosophy and, because they appeared at the end of the Vedic period (c.600 B.C.E.), they are known as Vedanta (lit. the end of the Vedas). The most popular religious texts today are the Puranas (18 major, 18 minor), but they date almost without exception from far more recent times, c.300-1200 C.E. They focus on narratives whose subject matter is the gods, ancient kings, sages and heroes of old.

The Vedas, which are a product of Dravidian (pre-Aryan) and Aryan philosophical and religious ideas, are a collection of hymns, magic formulas and charms which date from c.1700-1200 B.C.E. They are the most ancient underpinning of the Hindu doctrine of the future destiny of man. The references to

the subject of immortality of the soul are obscure and scarce. In brief, the dead appeared before the gods Yama and Varuna. Varuna was the judge of all souls. The wicked were cast into darkness either to be annihilated or to live as demons without light or hope. The good souls went heavenward and received a glorified spiritual body similar to the gods, “Where there is freedom unrestrain’d, where the triple vault of heaven’s in sight/ Where worlds of brightest glory are,—oh, make me immortal there!/Where pleasures and enjoyments are, where bliss and raptures ne’er take flight,/Where all desires are satisfied,—oh, make me but immortal there!” (Rig-Veda, trans. W.D. Whitney) It is, nevertheless, in the Upanisads and the later Puranas, in particular, that we find special attention to the topics of *samsara* (the Cycle or Wheel of Life), *jiva* (the soul), the soul’s immortality, the nature of the “deva-lokas” (heavens), *karma* (past actions which produce future good or evil results) and *moksha* (liberation from the Cycle and from the chains of *karma*). Some literary works such as the puranic Ramayana (c.800-400 B.C.E.) and the Mahabharata (c.200 B.C.E.), especially the Bhagavad-Gita section, have had an extraordinary influence on Hindu religion. The Bhagavad-Gita, in fact, is the most popular, epic, religious text in Indian literature.

Today the Puranas stand as a kind of bible for the religious practices of the average Hindu worshipper, albeit the number of sects is large and disagreements over dogma, doctrine and ritual are common. What is most striking is the fact that from the age of the Upanisads to the present, the interwoven ideas of karma and rebirth have been a hallmark of all major religions other than Christianity and Islam, including all forms of Vedantic, Shaivite and Vaishnavite Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Orphism, Jainism and Sikhism.

Basic Vedantic doctrine as taught today can be divided into two main categories. The first is monistic and nontheistic (*advaita*: nondualistic). The second is “qualified nondualist” (*vishishtadvaita*) theism. Think of the first as closer to the monistic, old Vedic, Brahmanic theology; under the second category, we can subsume those sects which elevate and tend to worship one of the gods, especially one of the *Trimurti*, the triad of the major gods, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Additionally, the

first category owes much to the definitive codifications of Shankara (c.4th century B.C.E.), the second to the philosophical orchestrations of Ramanuja in the 11th century C.E. Both divisions are essentially reflecting the same theory of karma and reincarnation or metempsychosis.

The ultimate reality for monists is final liberation of the soul (*jiva*) from all attachments and *karma* and final unification with Brahman, the Supreme Reality. The Katha Upanisad has this to say of him, “There is one Supreme Director who is the inner self of all beings. He projects His beingness outward, creating the infinite from his One-ness. Eternal joy is for those wise souls who perceive His great Being within themselves.” Somewhat ironically, Brahman is often defined as being undefinable or, as the sage Yajnavalkya has said, “Without cause and without effect, without anything inside or outside.” The Taittiriya Upanisad defines what is Brahman more succinctly, “Brahman is he whom speech cannot express, and from whom the mind, unable to reach him, comes away baffled.” These descriptions closely parallel the Chinese philosopher Lao Tsu’s conception of what is the Tao. One final definition of the Supreme Reality might be to say that Brahman is everything and nothing, neither this nor that, ineluctable and ineffable.

The finite consciousnesses or souls (*jivas*) that we as humans believe we are is really an illusion. We are, the monists tell us, trapped by the conceits of our minds and the senses of our bodies, which create the great illusion of separateness from Atman/Brahman. The goal of the *jiva*, whether consciously or otherwise, is to merge with Brahman, and this can be accomplished only by the overcoming of ignorance (*avidya*) and the attainment of enlightenment and release from the Cycle (*moksha*).

Theistic Hinduism (*vishishtadvaita*) has a quite unique vision of Ultimate Reality. Here Brahman does not reign as a supreme object of devotion but any number of competing *Bhagavans* vie for the devotee’s attention. Chief among these are Vishnu (Krishna) and Shiva, interest in the god Brahma (the Creator) having faded or been deflected by shifting religious allegiances. Theistic Hinduism, focusing on deities other than the monistic conception of Brahman, is a movement in time away from

ancient, pure Vedanta.

The term *Bhagavan* (God) is not necessarily synonymous with any one god or any one avatar. It designates one's personal supreme deity and can be applied to any one of many deities the individual has chosen to worship. For example, in the *bhakti* cults—where a path of devotion is chosen instead of the path of knowledge—Rama (the 7th avatar of Vishnu) and Krishna (the 8th avatar of Vishnu) are often addressed as *Bhagavan* by their followers. Vishnu as *Bhagavan* is given credit for creating the multitude of *jivas* or souls. In other cults, the *Bhagavan* Shiva, whose roots as a god of creation trace backward in Indian history to perhaps pre-Vedic times, is credited with similar creative acts.

In the *vishishtadvaita* view, Ishwara (God, the Lord, the Supreme) or Vishnu or Krishna has created an unlimited number of living souls. This is an expression of his *lila* or divine play. This play, taking the form of *samsara*, is endless just as it is beginningless. There is no final moment of complete, comprehensive revelation, no divine moment when God's purpose will be finally revealed and fulfilled as exists in Christianity. Each soul (*jiva*) may in time achieve liberation after settling his/her karmic affairs. Then they may go on to other heavens. But the process of souls in transit seeking liberation will continue indefinitely. There is an endless number of souls working through endless time.

In the West, we are used to thinking of the soul as having a definite beginning, usually defined as occurring around the moment of conception but enjoying the future prospects of an unending existence in the bosom of God. For the Hindu, the soul is eternal, identical with the eternal Atman/Brahman. As *jivas*, we have the illusion of separate identities which confuses us as to our true nature. We can escape this illusion through enlightenment gained through experience and education. A soul is said to be involved in *maya*, that is, the illusions produced by the creative power of the godhead working in a material context. Another way of saying the same thing, is to say the soul has become encapsulated in a set of three veneers or sheaths and, to be free, it must succeed in peeling away these veneers like successive skins of an onion. An extended discussion of these skins or veneers is complicated. Suffice it to say that one of

these veneers is called the *linga sharira*, and this special, subtle “body” is made up of our spiritual, moral, intellectual, emotional and aesthetic sensibilities—everything which seems to make us unique—which are continually undergoing various modifications in this life and from life to life. It is this veneer-like subtle body, this bundle of *samskaras* (psychic imprints, impressions) which is passed on and reincarnates.

The Hindu assertion that the soul is eternal, with or without its veneers or “bodies,” offers an explanation for several problems which have beleaguered Christian thinkers, namely the problems of evil in this world, the blatant inequalities of birth, economic status, social position and, especially, the deaths of the seemingly innocent, such as young children. If the soul is eternal into the past, and if it has had many lives, and presumably many more than one on this earth, it is the Hindu position that it is receiving karmically at any one moment in time its just rewards or punishments for the kinds of existences it has previously lived. This explanation makes logical sense out of a moral dilemma which has haunted Western theology—a dilemma for which it has had no answer except the rather lame excuse that “God’s will prevails.”

In the Hindu view, as the soul is reborn from life to life, it carries with it the moral (or immoral) baggage it has accumulated. A past relatively free of negative, hurtful activity, and abundantly filled with acts of piety, purity, kindness, generosity, selflessness and other positive actions or thoughts, is rewarded in the present moment with a better life. In other words, you earn where you are at. You and you alone are personally responsible for your present condition. It cannot be blamed on an angry or absent god or the devil making things difficult on planet earth. Neither can it be blamed on one’s parents, siblings, friends, enemies or the boss at work. The evils of the human condition such as they are can be blamed solely on the way humans have treated one another since humans have inhabited the earth. The root of the causes of negative conditions lies with man, not God. We are individually responsible for ourselves and our destiny. Escaping personal responsibility is impossible but the desire to do so seems to be coming increasingly common on the governmental, corporate and

individual levels.

A logical question might be, Where does the *linga sharira* go after the earthly death of the physical body? What is its state at that time? Vedantic theory posits many higher and lower realms or planes of existence. Some are heavenly, some hellish and some purgatorial in nature. The *jiva* or soul will find itself allocated to one of these worlds for a life in a body befitting that particular place because of the good or bad deeds committed in this world. However, these other-worldly experiences, though theoretically many in number, are not an end to future earth lives, not until all karmic accounts have been settled, not until all desire for material existence has been rung out of the *jiva*. It is generally believed that it is only, or primarily, through earth lives in a physical body that the soul is able to use its freedom (though somewhat circumscribed) and sense of responsibility and thereby develop within itself the necessary self-awareness to gain liberation (*moksha*).

One of the aspects of Hindu theology which upsets Westerners is the prevalence of the belief in metempsychosis (as well as reincarnation in general). It is difficult for a Christian to accept the idea he might have once been a stone or frog or pig—or that he could become incarnated as one of them once again. And yet the same Westerners give at least a passing credence to the Darwinian theory of evolution, which certainly doesn't rule out such a progression. Any student of medicine is quite familiar with the ontogenetic fact that the developing human fetus in the womb retraces the evolutionary history of the species. That history brings the few cells involved in conception through a spectrum of changes from lower animal forms to present-day *Homo-sapiens*. The *jiva*, after all, is not the physiological organism; it is the soul which enters that organism sometime around birth. The Hindu position is that the *jiva*, or part of the *jiva*, is sometimes assigned an animal body rather than a human one for particular reasons of soul growth (or for punishment). Christians believe the human soul was created by God for human bodies alone. God created man, each soul separately at the time of conception. For them, the soul comes more or less complete. It is not, in the Hindu sense, involved in a protracted period of growth which may span thousands of lives. The Christian soul is

here for a one-life stand. That soul inhabits a body especially made for it by God. Its plight, whether happy and healthy, poor and downtrodden, or some other intermediate variation, is God's will with a little free will to boot. If the Christian is good and accepts Jesus as his savior (the Evangelical-Fundamentalist position), he goes to heaven. If he has too much evil in him or refuses Jesus as his savior (possibly both), he is likely to be eternally damned in a very hellish place. To the Hindu, these positions seem simplistic, illogical and more than a bit arbitrary and unfair to the developing soul.

The Hindu position is that all lower-life forms are gradually moving upward, a position which is in agreement with modern science. Sometimes, although it is not the norm, a *jiva* may enter for a given life one of bodies of these lower-life forms. For any number of reasons, the central contention, which we should not lose sight of, is that one human life rarely offers enough earth-experience to create adequate enlightenment to understand one's self, the cosmos and the Godhead well enough for liberation. As the *jiva* moves upward, and in its humans lives as it is reborn, it gains in its powers and its ability to assimilate and understand. Its growing tolerance for all life forms is a recognition that That is Me—everything is intimately related to everything else. And Brahman comprehends All of What Is. The Hindu respect for all life forms, and the vegetarianism practiced by most devotees, mirrors the theological idea that all animals, plants and inorganic matter—birds, bears, insects, trees, grass, soil and the stones at our feet—are evolving, psychic life-forms (*linga shariras*) within the planetary and cosmic matrix. And, most devotees do not rule out an interesting subplot to the unfolding *linga sharira's* development—the possibility that while the majority of the *linga sharira* remains outside of an earth body in another realm of being, a regressive or underactive attribute of it which needs extraordinary attention, may be sent back to an earth-form for special experience. In other words, a soul with violent tendencies might find that tendency reincarnated in a violent animal. A soul which is extremely inactive, might find the languorous part of its *linga sharira* reincarnated in a sloth. The remainder of the *linga sharira* remains theoretically absent and quite possibly inactive. Westerners generally consider such

conceits strange and incredible.

Both the theistic and nontheistic systems posit an unlimited number of cosmic souls undergoing development. The cycle is endless and automatic, following its own physical, psychic and moral laws without, according to the majority of Hindu thinkers, being planned or directed by anyone. A minority of Vedantists ascribe a more important role to Ishwara (God) as director of cosmic mechanisms such as reincarnation and individual paths to liberation. That so many souls are now inhabiting earth bodies is beside the point when it is realized that the reserve is limitless, the process endless. Finite existences are created by Brahman (Ishwara) and return in time to Brahman. All is Brahman and always has been and always will be. Brahman's signature is the great, divine breathing out and breathing in of creation, a phenomenal cycle of vast time that creates this world (or *kalpa*) and its cycles of karma, and then brings this world back unto Itself.

The idea of final, total absorption is not an attractive alternative to most Christians and Muslims. Both groups like to imagine the singular, unique consciousness as remaining intact through eternity. The vision of sharing the life of the one and only heavenly realm and being next to the bosom of God is appealing to them. Being absorbed by that God and losing their individuality is not. Sooner or later the *jiva* theoretically reaches liberation. It may endure in heavenly worlds as a separate consciousness for some relative time, but finally, before the end of a *kalpa* or at its end, the *jiva* is reabsorbed into Brahman. As we are told in the Vishnu Purana, "Emancipation from all existence is the fullness of felicity."

Although references to reincarnation in the Vedas are scarce, they do exist. The consensus among Western orientalis has been to conclude the contrary. Several Eastern Hindu scholars are not at all in agreement with this analytic position. V. Raghavan, formerly head of the department of Sanskrit at the University of Madras and translator of the Rig-Veda, offered this translation of prayers being offered the dead upon cremation: "Let your eye go to the Sun; your life to the wind; by the meritorious acts that you have done, go to heaven, and then (for rebirth) to the earth again" (X.16.3) S. E. Gopala Charlu

was in agreement with Max Muller's translation of the 32nd Rik of the Rig Veda, I, 164, "Taking many births he has entered upon misery." And Sanskrit scholar and former president of India S. Radhakrishnan found several incontrovertibly-convincing references to reincarnation in the Rig-Veda which he mentions in his introduction to his translation of *The Principal Upanisads*. "Mitra is born again." (X.85.19) "The Dawn (Usas) is born again and again." (I.92.10) Also, "I seek neither release nor return." (V.46.1) And finally, "The immortal self will be reborn in a new body due to its meritorious deeds." (I.64.30) These references are possibly contemporaneous with or a little later than similar Egyptian ideas found in the cult of Osiris if, as some scholars believe, the Rig-Veda dates to c.2000 B.C.E. or earlier.

Once we direct our attention to the Brahmanas, the Upanisads and especially the Puranas, the references to reincarnation become more common.* The Shvetashvatar Upanisad states, ". . . in the revolving wheel of Brahman, he is made to turn, who comes and who goes; but if he concentrated on the Self and Godhead, as something apart from the wheel, he is honored by Him and proceeds forward free of death." In the Mundaka Upanisad, we see vocalized an idea which recurs often in Hindu texts, "He who creates desires in his mind is born again hither and thither because of those desires." The Brhadaranyaka Upanisad observes, ". . . the Self, having shed this body and cast off ignorance, makes for itself a newer, more beautiful form . . . Having ended this work, whatever it might be, he returns again from that world to this

*The following translations from Hindu texts in this chapter are my own.

active world." The *Manu Smrti* (Laws of Manu) gives an idea of the number of lives a soul may endure before it earns liberation, "Let him consider the many transmigrations of men . . . On the departure of the individual's soul from his body and its new birth in a new womb, and on its sojourns through thousands of millions of lives."

The Bhagavad-Gita, which is an interpolated section of the Mahabharata, has become an Indian national treasure and accounts in part for the immense popularity of Vishnu among his

devotees. Krishna, the eighth incarnation of the avatar Vishnu, explains to young Arjuna, 'As the incarnated man experiences childhood, youth, old age, in time he passes on to another body . . . He is not born, nor does he die. Having lived, he does not cease to exist. He is not slain when the body is slain but is unborn, eternal and ancient. As a man casts off old, worn clothing, so the embodied casts off his worn-out body and enters others which are new.' The hope of many Vishnu devotees for a more immediate liberation from the suffering of this world is encouraged by the periodic reappearance of this messianic figure, 'We have both left behind us many births, O Arjuna. I know them all, but you do not recall yours I am born from age to age to protect the good, to destroy evil, to firmly establish righteousness. He who essentially knows my divine birth and my actions, having relinquished his body, will not be born again but comes to me forever, O Arjuna.'

Among the themes of the Vishnu Purana, transmigration of the soul is a central theme as is final release and liberation from the sufferings of this world. "As long as man is alive, he is caught up in afflictions like the cotton seed amidst the cotton bol Where could man, burned by the fires of this world's sun, look for happiness, if it were not for the shade the tree of liberation affords? . . . As he travels the paths of the world for many thousands of births, man gleans only a harvest of confusion and is smothered by the dust of his imagination. When that dust is washed away with the soothing water of real knowledge, then the weariness and confusion is removed. Then the internal man is at peace with himself and obtains supreme happiness." And what is "supreme happiness"? Prahlada, on being offered by Vishnu any favor he might desire, answered, 'Wealth, virtue, love are as nothing, because liberation is obtainable for those who have faith in you.' And Vishnu then offered the supreme gift to one of his devotees, 'You shall, therefore, obtain freedom from existence.' Fervent bhakti-devotion to Vishnu or any other personal god may result finally in liberation, but there really is no better, surer path than the accumulation of true knowledge. Bharata, speaking to the king of Sauriva in the Vishnu Purana, indicates certain wisdom, beyond pure, emotional attachment to a god-figure, is almost a necessity for liberation, 'The great end to

be sought is not union of self with the Supreme Soul, because one thing cannot become another. The truer wisdom, the greater aim of all, is to know that Soul is one, uniform, perfected, not subject to birth, existing everywhere at once, undecaying, stable, eternally unspoiled, of true knowledge, and dissociated with illusions and false realities.' That 'Soul is one' is affirmed by the Vedas. It is held collectively, although paradoxically it is at the same time dispersed in many places like the moon's reflection upon the waters. Ignorance, misapprehension and capricious willfulness create the delusion of multiplicity. The Hindu sects, and most members of those sects, are generally united in thinking that liberation from the snares and sufferings of this world is almost always achieved through the attainment of knowledge, true wisdom, which cannot be obtained at once simply by wishing or human willfulness. Enlightenment takes many, many lives—true desire, true concentration, true patience.

Buddhism

When Gautama Buddha announced his doctrine of the Middle Way in 6th century India, it was a double-edged attempt to both redefine doctrine (*dhamma*) and to reform the exclusive nature and formalism of the caste system which had come to completely dominate Hinduism (Brahmanism). It was soon declared that all followers of the Buddha who accepted the new doctrine were released from caste restrictions. Women were also willingly accepted as participants. Here was suddenly a new "equal opportunity" way to liberation. A revolution in thought and action. To many Hindus, it was simply a heresy. Not surprisingly, Buddhism spread through Asia in succeeding centuries like a dry grass fire being driven by a stiff breeze.

The Middle Way is a road map for a human being desirous of escaping the inevitable cycle of almost endless lives humans are heir to unless they become sufficiently enlightened. Much of the background of Buddha's philosophy is Vedanta-related, including the concepts of *samsara*, reincarnation (which in Buddhism becomes rebirth) and *karma*, but to these he added the

unique Four Noble Truths: (1) the fact that sorrow (*duhkha*) is pervasive; (2) the fact that every person experiences it; (3) the recognition that everyone would like to be freed from it; (4) the reality that the only escape from it is by that pure knowledge which destroys all desire to clutch to material existence. That knowledge can be gained by adhering to the Noble Eightfold Path: Right Understanding, Right Thoughts, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.

Over the next few centuries two main divisions of doctrinal interpretation developed, the Hinayana (including its Theravada form) and the Mahayana. Hinayana Buddhism is sometimes called The Lesser Way; Mahayana Buddhism The Greater Way. The epithets are not value judgments but refer to philosophical differences. Soon there were many variations of the philosophy: Chinese Buddhism with the Pure Land school, the Ch'an school and T'ien-Tai; Japanese Buddhism with the Zen (Ch'an) school, the Shin school and the Tendai school; Tibetan Buddhism It is not an exaggeration to say that Buddhism has an extraordinary ability to metamorphose itself as it has been transplanted in Asia and elsewhere, assimilating cultural predispositions gracefully and developing nuances peculiar to the setting in which it is disseminated, whether that be Japan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia or some other country. And yet the core ideology of Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism has remained intact and firm, holding to the center of the original teachings, with some individual differences in canon and emphasis. Each has its own collection of transcriptions of Buddha's sayings and other exegetical works explaining Buddha's positions on any number of subjects. Our discussion focuses on the classical elements of these two major divisions and their positions on the questions of the Cycle of Lives (*samsara*), the immortality of the soul, and the Buddha's concept of soul or "no-soul," which has caused so much discussion outside of Buddhism and discussion within Buddhism itself.

The Buddha's doctrine is essentially different from Brahmanism and later Vedanta in several major respects. Whereas Hinduism supports the idea of an individuated self or soul (*jiva*) and the permanence and prominence of Brahman (the

Supreme Reality or Absolute Being), Buddha is said, particularly by the Theravada school, to have advocated *anatta*, the doctrine that there is no individual, permanent soul that survives death and is later reborn in another body. This is the popular notion Westerners have of Buddha's doctrine. It is also, to be frank, the idea many Hinayanists, Theravadists and Mahayanist practitioners carry around in their head believing it to be an adequate reflection of Gautama's teaching. But is it an accurate reflection? *The Dhammapada*, the most famous part of the Tripitaka, the Buddhist canon, says, "Self is the lord of self. What other lord could there possibly be?" and, "Self is the lord of self, and self's bourn." Also, "The Self in the you knows what is true and what is false."

The noted Buddhist scholar Christmas Humphreys refers to the above quotations in his article, "Buddhism Teaches Rebirth." His conclusion is revealing, "If the Buddha, then, taught Atta . . . what did he say was Not self, *an-atta*? He is quite specific. It is the five *skandhas*, the constituents of personality in which there is no permanent Self to be found . . . But the monks would not leave this statement alone . . . they swung too far. 'No self, no self' they cried . . ." Humphreys was not the first scholar to reach the conclusion that the Buddha had in mind two selves active within the living human body, an enduring greater Self and a lesser self, consisting of the *Skandhas*, which are perishable and disappear at death with the elements of the body. Mrs. Rhys Davids, translator and the leading Pali scholar in the West a few generations ago, was an expert on Theravada Buddhism. And despite popular Theravadaism's support of the no-soul hypothesis, she was convinced that Buddha "began his mission by advising men to seek thoroughly for the Atma [the true Self, Supreme Reality], and ended by bidding men live as having Atma for their lamp and refuge." Mrs. Rhys Davids once made up a list of ten things which Gautama did not teach. At the top of the list was the idea that the "soul, *purusa* is not real."

A little further on in the *Dhammapada*, there is more evidence that Buddha recognized a higher, controlling Self in man above and beyond his *shandhas*, his lesser self, 'Wake your self by your Self, examine self with Self. You will live a happy life if you are self-protected, O monk [Bikkhu]. Therefore learn to rein

in yourself, as a shopkeeper might curb a fine horse.” Buddha in his *dhamma* never attempted to define God or Supreme Reality. Some analysts, however, continue to wonder if certain roots of his philosophy, which are silent and unseen and hover, don’t spiral even further backward ever closer to Vedic originals than has been heretofore believed. Could the greater “Self” be, after all, a stand-in for the Hindu concept of Brahman, the Supreme Reality encompassing everything and yet above all definitions? What Gautama neglected, what he refused to speak of or define has left all kinds of open windows in the canon which allow all manner of speculation and interpretation. Most Buddhist texts were not produced until approximately four hundred years after Gautama’s death; just as most Christian texts of the New Testament were written one hundred or more years after Jesus’ death. Anyone who has played the parlor game of “Telephone,” with a half-dozen or so participants, knows that any message passed orally from one recipient to another becomes garbled after several transfers, sometimes hopelessly so. And yet there are those who accept claims of the authentic authorship of many religious texts without question, without proof. Unfortunately, many, if not most, of the major religious texts of the world’s major religions fall into this category. Some believe these texts, no matter who wrote them, are the word of their god. Some compromise a bit and settle for the idea that they are at least god-inspired. Exegetes like to believe their interpretations are also god-inspired, if not directly from the godhead itself, and a few have believed they were interpreting a god’s words at his behest. In other words, they were taking dictation, or, in modern parlance, channeling their god. This brings us in a circuitous way to the problem of Gautama’s reticence when it came to defining Supreme Reality, the Godhead. All kinds of reasons have been offered. One suggests he was being very practical and was more concerned with offering the truly interested a way to escape sorrow and the pain of repeated earth-lives. That is logical and a more persuasive explanation than most that have been offered. Perhaps he was just an honest man, though a very wise one, who realized the futility of such an intellectual exercise. If this is true, it rates as a Fifth Noble Truth. After all, the Vedantists had already defined Brahman as everything and

nothing, the One out of which all the Other has come. It is difficult to be more comprehensive or inclusive than that.

What really distinguishes Buddhism from Vedanta is the issue of self and what ultimately that self has to look forward to after enlightenment. If there is no definite, individuated, continuous self or soul to transfer from one body to the next, it would be inaccurate to say a given, unique personality reappeared in a new body in a succeeding life. Hence no reincarnation of that particular personality. What then *is* transferred from body to body during the rebirth process? The Buddhist term is *vinnana*, which is quite similar in some respects to the *linga sharira* of Indian Vedanta. It is not, however, truly synonymous. There are large significant differences. The *vinnana* is conceived of as a continuous stream of the unconscious or subconscious, karmically-induced, dispositional cravings that are passed on from one birth to the next rebirth. The *vinnana* is then mutable and not eternal in any one manifestation or form at any given time. At death, the physical body disintegrates. The *skandhas*, little bundles of attributes which are finite, also disappear forever. They are (1) form, (2) perception, (3) consciousness, (4) action and (5) knowledge. This is the doctrine of formal Buddhism. Just how accurately it reflects the actual ideas of Gautama Buddha is problematic. And this definition does not please everyone who calls himself a Buddhist. Ask most Buddhists on the street of almost any Buddhist country what he believes is reborn and he will tell you it is the very personality which is propelling his feet at the moment. We often miss the irony in what a formal religion teaches and what the people actually believe and practice.

To escape the cycle of rebirth (*samsara*), the questing mind of the studious, logical Buddhist must penetrate *maya* (illusion) and avoid *advidya* (ignorance). Suffering is the result of “grasping” (*trishna*) while, at the same time, attempting to control and departmentalize existence. Grasping becomes natural to the *atman* in this world. The continual cravings of the senses are a form of it. The attempt to wrench and wrest certain experiences away from other experiences and to covet them is doomed to failure. Everything is intimately connected to everything else in existence. Yet, at the same time, a wise man

must realize all these relationships are relative and temporary. Permanence is an illusion. Everything is related but everything is likewise changing from moment to moment. There is only one word which describes all of creation all of the time, *anicca*, which signifies impermanence. The attempt to apprehend and hold particular aspects of life creates a vicious continuum of grasping and loss followed by more grasping. To the Buddhist, the West's infatuation with compartmentalizing, categorizing, parsing and pigeonholing in the Aristotelian fashion is futile and unacceptable; it is like a dog chasing its tail and not realizing this most rearward appendage is part of his own total being. *Samsara* is the perpetual, cosmic fate of all men who persist in ignorant, grasping behavior. By overfixating on specific ideas, objects, phenomena, cravings—separate pieces of mental and sensual bric-a-brac—while ignoring the wider, fluctuating reality of the total matrix—is to make oneself a captive to them. A man so fixated is like a man fascinated, perhaps hypnotized, by the graceful, undulant, weaving cobra arising from the charmer's basket.

The mind is filled with preconceived ideas. Some have been learned by false, personal experience. Some have been taught to us by misguided teachers. Enlightenment, variously called *satori* or *kensho* in Japanese Zen Buddhism, is attained by a total, immediate, concentrated act of turning away from all future considerations and focusing directly and completely upon the present, thought-free moment. Because the present moment is so brief, there is nothing in it to grasp. When the student perceives this paradox, he is experiencing a release from *trishna*. The student must remain aware that a mind filled with thought is *avidya*, because the mind cannot focus on a single thought without ignoring everything else. He ends by perceiving life in pieces, trying to wrest the desirable thoughts from one another, which also is a form of grasping.

Before one can have a supreme moment of *satori*, like Gautama's experience under the Bo (banyan) tree, many lives of experience and questing for truth are the lot of all men. It is most likely that enlightenment leading to *nibbana* (*nirvana*) will come gradually as an aggregative process much like the Hindu idea of attaining *moksha*. The perceptive turtle learns more along the

way than the rushing rabbit.

Nibbana is not possible until the self or ego is “cooled.” This can be accomplished through controlled effort. Greed, hatred and delusion must be internally conquered as must all other strong passions. As the *vinnana* cools, the ego or sense of self becomes weaker and weaker and *nibbana* more possible. The two greatest enemies along the way are the accumulated karmic baggage with which the self is burdened and all desires to grasp at material reality (or, more precisely, what seems to be “reality”). *Nibbana* is not simple extinction as many Western scholars have believed. It is escape from sorrow, the burdens imposed by materiality, the fires of animal desires. It is also a state of absolute physical annihilation of everything connected with the physical world. But it is not total extinction. As the Sinologist E.J. Eitel noted in his *Handbook of Chinese Buddhism* (a Sanskrit-Chinese dictionary) some time ago, many *bodhisattvas* have defined “Nirvana as the highest state of spiritual bliss, as absolute immortality through absorption of the soul (*spirit* rather) into itself, but *preserving individuality* so that, e.g., Buddhas, after entering Nirvana, may reappear on earth” in a future age. Eitel also notes what Gautama Buddha was said to have uttered during the last moments of his life—that “the spiritual body is immortal”—all of which seems to agree well with the kinds of arguments and evidence about Self and self offered earlier by Humphreys and Rhys Davids.

The 3rd century B.C.E. *Milindapanha* acknowledges that the Buddha still exists yet he has passed “completely away in *nibbana* so that nothing is left which could lead to the formation of another being. And so he cannot be pointed out as being either here or there.” This is the more classic idea of Buddhist extinction, although it is wise to remember that several Buddhist texts have Gautama rejecting the idea of total extinction or annihilation.

The same *Milindapanha* in another place describes *nibbana* as the “City of Righteousness.” This description of the city reads more like something we would expect from a Christian or Muslim saint describing heaven. The liberated self “enters the glorious city Nibbana, untainted and undefiled, pure and white, ageless, deathless, confident, calm and happy, and his mind is

emancipated, perfected.” This latter description was most likely written by a different, later writer, but these two contrasting “visions” serve to remind us that different minds, and different Buddhist schools and sects, have interpreted Buddha’s purported words in a variety of ways and added reams of writing and commentary which profess to mirror Gautama’s actual utterances but in fact reflect, in most cases, only the fancy of some monk’s imagination.

There are less satisfactory and more painful worlds and planes of existence than earth. This is evident when the Buddha teaches about the five lower worlds and upper realms of existence. For example, the lower realm of *Niraya* is a real hell complete with infernal fires not so very unlike the orthodox Christian hell or the earlier Zoroastrian *Drujo Demana*. The animal realm is likened to a cesspool. The spirit realm is like a semishaded desert. The human realm fares better in the shade department—more trees and more shade and a generally more pleasant ambiance. Only the deva realm (actually three worlds) is described as a truly desirable, beautiful place. But humans are not devas (gods) and their world is off-limits and out of reach of human kind. Taken as a group, these other worlds or planes of existence are places of reward, punishment, rest or purgatorial readjustment rather than worlds where much, if any, progress toward *nibbana* is possible. It is the general belief among Buddhists, as it is among Hindus, that earth is where the real learning occurs, and although awakening or enlightenment may happen after death, it is best to awaken during earth life, to rid one’s self of all karma and illusions, escape the multitudinous sorrows of the physical, phenomenal world and pass into the nibbanic state here on earth which, if not Vedantic bliss, is eternal peace. It is theoretically possible to reach *nibbana* in one human life. For practical purposes, this possibility is usually discounted.

Gautama tells us he had in excess of tens of thousands of lives before achieving liberation. The fully liberated entity, a Buddha, is able to recall the most minute details of any of his lives no matter how distant in time. The advanced *bikkhu* (monk), although not yet fully enlightened, is also often able to recall all or many of his past lives at will, as the *Samannapala Sutta* explains:

Once purified, mentally cleansed, the *bikkhu* now focuses his mind on recalling and recognizing past states of his lives.

He recalls the various states of being of his former lives: first one life, then two lives . . . up to fifty lives. Then a thousand lives. Then a hundred thousand lives.

Then he recalls many worlds rising. Then of many worlds falling . . . ‘There I am. That was my name. I belonged to that family. My rank was thus. My occupation was thus.

Such and such were the good times and sorrowful times I experienced. Thus did the end of that life come. Leaving this world again, I was reborn again elsewhere.’ In such fashion does the *bikkhu* recall the attributes and details of his varied states of being during his past lives. (Trans. Schellhorn)

It is not difficult to find references to rebirth in the two hundred or so Buddhist *suttas* and the several thousand commentaries extant. The Wheel of the Law, the idea of the necessity of rebirth until enlightenment, is so fundamental to Buddhist philosophy that it is virtually impossible to speak of Buddhism or to read in its canon more than a few pages without confronting this single, central theme. The wise man, as work after work tells us, endeavors to escape the Wheel. “Be free from the past, free from the future, free from the present. Go beyond them. Force your mind away from all this and you will not experience birth and decay . . . The final body of the enlightened one is done with grasping, attached to nothing, wise in the understanding of the Dhamma.” (*Dhammapada*) The *Majjhima Nikaya* phrases like sentiments slightly differently, “Those impure cankers which lead to rebirth, cause suffering and fester into sorrow, leaving as their heritage birth, decay and death, are extirpated by the truth-finder—hoed up by the roots, making clean ground where once possibly a palm tree grew” (Trans. Schellhorn)

Obviously, Gautama Buddha’s vision of earth-life is not a very happy one. But then, a Buddhist might ask, How many people really live lives without much pain and suffering? When

the Buddhist learns to forego grasping (*trishna*), his new, awakening selflessness is usually matched with a further-enlightened understanding and a concomitant practice of compassion (*karuna*). The Mahayana school of Buddhism, unlike Hinayana Buddhism, which focuses on the individual's path to *nibbana*, offers salvation by faith and compassion as well as knowledge. Pure Land Buddhism, which did not appear until after the 2nd century C.E., is based on faith in the Amida Buddha, one of the countless Buddhas recognized by Mahayana. It is a radical departure philosophically from Gautama's *dhamma*. Devotees accept the Amida Buddha as a form of messiah-figure who will lead his followers to a heavenly paradise simply by repetition of his name. There is no yearning for personal extinction evident here. Quite the contrary, the Pure Land paradise is reminiscent of some of the visions of a heavenly life found in some Hindu doctrines in past and present times. The Pure Land devotee's belief that if he repeats Amida's name (the *nembutsu*) ten times, he will gain salvation, is not so different from the Christian Evangelical idea that declaring Jesus as one's personal savior saves one's soul and guarantees eternal paradise.

Mahayanist spokesmen have long pointed out that seeking *nibbana* simply as an escape from life, without further understanding, is still grasping. They recommend that the subject seeking liberation refrain from withdrawing from society, but instead take a full, active role in social affairs. In this way, the *arhant* (worthy one) can devote himself to acts of compassion for those still blinded by the fogs of *maya*.

It has been said of Buddhism and Indian religious philosophy generally that the vision we are offered of the world is a dark one. But then Christianity, with its original sin and hellfire, and Islam, with its recognition of earthly travail, are not, either one of them, guilty of misconstruing this world as a paradise. Whether the latter two theologies are religions of "doom and gloom," as some skeptics have asserted, is a debatable issue. What is not such an equivocal proposition is the fact that planet earth is an exceedingly vast panoply of astonishingly-wondrous, natural sites and awe-inspiring, diverse, natural beauty. Mother Earth is not the problem. An immature human species is its own worst

enemy—and, from an ecological point of view, increasingly the greatest threat to the well-being of the planet. An enlightened soul, whether it has reached Buddha-status or not, has learned to treat other human beings compassionately—as well as all living things in the total planetary environment.

There can be few, better words than those of the esotericist H.P. Blavatsky to define the large contributions Buddhism has given to the world, “His [Gautama Buddha's] is the only *absolutely bloodless* religion among all the existing religions: tolerant and liberal, teaching universal compassion and charity, love and self-sacrifice, poverty and contentment with one’s lot, whatever it may be. No persecutions, and enforcement of faith by fire and sword, have ever disgraced it.” Would that the same could be said for Christianity and Islam.

Chapter Nine

Other Religions of the East

Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Sikhism

Although Zoroastrianism is now a religion with only several hundred thousand official members, there was a period of over 1200 years (c.7th century B.C.E. to c.7th century C.E.) when Zoroastrianism, and its variant, Mithraism, dominated religious thought in Persia and the margins of its empire until the Islamic conquest of Persia in 636-37 C.E. There is strong, circumstantial evidence that some Zoroastrian ideas, including those of afterlife, may have influenced Greek, Hebrew and Christian religious thought particularly during the Hellenistic period.

The more proper name for the religion known as Zoroastrianism (also Mazdaism, Magism, Parseism, Fire-Worship) is its predecessor religion *Mazdayasni din* (Lit. *Mazda*: the Omniscient Lord, *yasni*: worshipping, *din*: faith from God). It was Zoroaster's original intention to purify and improve it. The name Zoroaster is a Greek rendering of the Zend language name Zarathustra, although we will maintain the Western conventions of using the appellations Zoroaster and Zoroastrianism for the sake of familiarity and continuity.

No one really seems to be certain when the first Zoroaster appeared. Aristotle and Eudoxus assign a date six thousand years before Plato; Berosus claims he was a king of Babylon c.2,200 B.C.E. History tells us that both Herodotus and Pliny knew of the prophet's existence. The modern scholar Bunsen found that Zarathustra Spitama was a part of King Vishtaspa's court around 3,000 B.C.E.

The ancient occult *Dabistan* mentions thirteen Zoroasters. What seems fairly certain is that the name Zoroaster is a generic designation for a series of mystical teachers and law-givers. The

series begins with the “divine” Zoroaster of the *Vendidad* and ends with the last, mortal representative of the series, quite possibly the builder of the fire-temple at Azareksh long before the historical era. To his great discredit, Alexander the Great and his troops destroyed most copies of the sacred works of this creed.

Zoroastrianism is a long-running reworking and refitting of an even more ancient religion, Mazdaism. The system is dualistic, positing a struggle between good (led by Ahura Mazda, the omniscient, omnipresent, supreme God) and evil (led by Ahriman, sometimes referred to as Angra Mainyu) for the mastery of the cosmos, including men’s souls. It is, you might say, a “Star Wars” in black and white. The cosmos is conceived as being a structured, moral creation. Ahriman and his cohort of demons are determined to destroy all that is good. The parallels with later, basic Christian doctrine and ritual are obviously intriguing and suggestive of cross-pollination. Each individual human must make a choice: either opt for good, follow Ormazd (Ahura Mazda) and inherit a pleasing, eternal heaven or be corrupted and risk losing one’s soul to Ahriman. This potential loss is exemplified in the notion of a literal plunge off the bridge (the Cinvat or Chinvat Bridge), which separates heaven and hell. The bridge becomes a metaphor for a trial and judgment of character made at the time of the passage of the soul from the earth. If the judgment is negative, the resulting penalty is some time spent in *Drujo Demana*, which is the Zoroastrian equivalent of Christian hell. It does have, however, the additional advantage of offering a purgatorial situation similar to that found in Islam. Zoroastrianism like Islam teaches most souls will reach rehabilitation sooner or later and join the heavenly host.

The *Amesha Spenta*, the Immortal Holy Ones, exist to aid devotees along the paths of righteousness, including aid in appropriate thinking, loving service, proper piety and final attainment of salvation and its concomitant immortality. These entities by definition are hardly distinguishable from Christianity's idea of angels and archangels. Other parallels are compelling: Ahriman’s creation by Ahura Mazda, the appearance of a final messianic figure (Sosiosh or Prince Peshotan) who will lead mankind in a final, pitched battle with

Ahriman, the idea of a final judgment of the dead, the notion that everlasting peace will reign after the Armageddon-like, final confrontation, the Moses-like way Zoroaster received the Law on Mount Sabalan from God, the conceit of an original Adam and Eve called Moshya and Moshyana, the division of the initial creation into six parts similar to the Judaic Book of Genesis, a horrific winter which, like Noah's flood, is sent by God to punish humankind for its sins, the Eucharistic-like ceremony of partaking of symbolic milk, water and bread, the celebration of high and low Mass as well as the temptation of Zoroaster by Ahriman to renounce his path which is mirrored by Jesus' similar temptation by Satan. And last, but hardly of least importance, is a similar belief in a blissful life after death for the righteous and a hellish perdition, complete with fire and brimstone, for gross sinners and nonrehabilitative miscreants.

Messiah figures, like the Zoroastrian Sosiosh, are quite common in the major religions of the world. Many Hindus expect the final return of Vishnu as the Kalki avatar, riding a white horse. Sosiosh is also visualized as riding a white horse. Buddhists speak often of the appearance of the Maitreya Buddha, the last of the five, great, earthly Buddhas who is still to come. World Jewry is still awaiting its messiah, and much of the Islamic world awaits the "hidden imam's" return. And Christianity awaits the second coming of Jesus the Christ.

It is a fundamental Zoroastrian position that ordinary mankind wanders the world while filled with illusions, false desires and temptations. The world is a perpetual battleground of good versus evil, and, amid the turmoil, a human being must learn to strive for the path of *asha* (truth, discipline, order, harmony) and avoid the path of *druj* (falsehood, lack of discipline, disorder). Formerly, in the prophet's time, the term *druj* primarily signified the worship of the *daevas* (demons) or "the lie." The religion recognizes all existence as being a combination of matter and spirit. The Zend-Avesta, the general name for the sacred books of the faith, contains several parts, the Vedevdat, the Vispered and the Yasna as well as the Khurde Avesta (Small Avesta). It is in the Zend-Avesta that the cosmic and worldly struggle between *asha* and *druj* is explored and somewhat explicated.

Not only does man have a *fravashi* (spirit or soul) but so does

all of creation, from stones to swans to man himself. This *fravashi*, which is insubstantial and preexistent to the material body, descends to the world of matter to gain experience and knowledge, compassion and a sense of orderliness, to learn the way to cosmic love, harmony and peace. Thus the human entity liberates itself from *druj*. It would seem to be a one-time-only opportunity, although there is some disagreement among Zoroastrian scholars in this regard. The majority believe, like Christians, Jews and Muslims (and unlike Vedantists and Buddhists) that a man or woman is limited to one lifetime to “get it all right.” A minority are not convinced that this is what the holy texts intend to convey. The dispute centers around translation of the remnants of the Zend-Avesta which still exist. The Zend language, an eastern Iranian dialect, is unique. No other works or written texts of any kind have ever been found in that language.

Supporters of the reincarnation hypothesis indicate, among other examples, several statements made in the Yasna, which is one of the three major sections of the Avesta and consists of liturgical rites and rituals. Yasna 30 has been translated as, “Those who were again and again born here will one day unite with Vohuman when Druja is smashed . . .” Yasna 49 reads in some translations, “Souls with bad deeds . . . return to this house of delusion because they were drawn to it due to their evil actions.” Yasna 46, in some versions, reads, “Those who hardened their conscience must return to this house of illusion, when the bridge of selection [Cinvat or Chinvat] must be crossed.”

Framroz Rustomjee, a noted Zoroastrian authority, refers to the translations of earlier Zoroastrian translators, such as Kangaji, Punegar, Spiegel and Mills, and his own translations to argue vehemently (*The Doctrine of Reincarnation*) that passages which purport to demonstrate reincarnation are misconstructions and spurious readings. And yet the very ancient *Desatir* (also call the *Book of Shet*), which has been dated from around 500 B.C.E. or earlier, and purports to reproduce the actual utterances of thirteen different prophets, of which Zoroaster was the last, most definitely alludes to the subject of reincarnation:

And everyone who wisheth to return to the lower world [earth] and is a doer of good shall, according to his knowledge and conversation and actions, receive something . . . until he meeteth with a reward suited to his deeds . . . Those who . . . experience pain and grief, suffer them on account of their words or deeds in a former body, for which the Most Just now punisheth them. (Trans. Mulla Firuz bin Kaus)

Orthodox Zoroastrian scholars are quick to point out that the *Desatir* is not part of the official Zoroastrian canon, and yet it is hard to argue with a source so ancient, especially one purporting to speak as the prophet himself. The issue of whether Zoroastrianism ever supported the reincarnation hypothesis seems to be far from resolved. Hopefully future research will yield a more definitive answer.

There is no question, however, about the importance of the Zoroastrian concept of the *fravashi*. Its similarity to the Christian concept that the soul is a combination of individual consciousness and the Holy Spirit is striking. In Zoroastrianism, only the soul survives death. If liberation has been achieved, the soul rises from the bodily husk to meet its judgment. It is felt that man has been given the powers of adequate discernment to distinguish the path of *asha* from that of *druj*. He has had his *fravashi* (and a guardian angel) to lead him to a righteous end. Only the most perversely and willfully delinquent fail completely.

At death, the soul is judged by a trio of brothers: Rashnu, Sraosha and Mithra. In the present-day language, these names have metamorphosed into Rashn, Sarish and Mehr. This final judgment is comparable to the ancient Egyptian trial in the Hall of Judgment, where the conduct of one's life is weighed against the balance of a feather. Unlike the Christian drama, however, these three "gatekeepers" are often invoked by Zardushtis (followers of Zoroaster) for forgiveness of sins. If the petitioning soul has used his free will wisely and, during his life, faithfully followed the promptings of his *fravashi*, it is admitted to the bliss of heaven (*Garō Demana*). The body is then reunited with the soul and the new entity will live happily ever after, often in

familial groupings. This final reward is a conception common to both Christianity and Islam as well as some Judaism, the former two religions predominantly supporting the idea that the resurrected righteous soul regains a resurrected, material body. The same idea finds some favor in Hinduism but none in Buddhist eschatology.

As for the poor sinners who have not passed muster, there are two alternatives—hell or a kind of purgatorial existence. The truly evil will be destroyed in hell; those showing hopeful signs of rehabilitation are spared for reworking. Here again we can note interesting doctrinal parallels. Both Catholicism and Islam support similar ideas of purgatorial rehabilitation for those souls considered redeemable.

History seems to suggest that the last Zoroaster, whatever the true chronology of his mission, made a large effort to bring order and peace to his countrymen and anyone else who would follow his creed. The four outstanding principles which he taught were (1) the lowering of weapons, (2) the settlement of all disagreements by peaceful means, (3) individual self-reliance and (4) righteous conduct. It is truly unfortunate that this noble religion, which had a great impact for so long on the world, reached its climax, and the beginning of its collapse, with the Arab conquest in the 7th century C.E. Gradually, the Zardushtis dwindled in numbers, oppressed by an Islamic occupation which did not practice the tolerance for this competitive religion that is prescribed by the Qur'an.

It is worth noting that every Zoroastrian devotee swore an oath to renounce violence directed against any other devotee. It was not, by any means, a vow against all violence everywhere, but considering the world as then constituted, it was a noble effort. We should be so fortunate if all contemporary, major religions would sponsor such vows and make them universally inclusive. Even today we could do much worse than to adopt the final words of the Zoroastrian oath: "I praise aloud the thought well thought, the word well spoken, the deed well done."

Jainism

Jainism is in some respects analogous to Buddhism. In other particulars, it patterns many of its customs and holy sites on Hindu templates. It would be a mistake, however, to assume it is a simple collage of its larger competitors. It does, however, support the idea of multiple rebirths and an eternal state of nirvana, but its theory of karma as a subtle *substance* that infiltrates the soul is unusual and very specific to the faith.

Jainism considers itself the primordial religion of the subcontinent of India. Its roots would appear to begin somewhere, sometime in pre-Vedic, Dravidian India in the Indus Valley civilization. The Rig-Veda mentions at least three of the twenty-four Jain saints (called *tirthankaras*). And the period between the Rig-Veda and the appearance of the last, and twenty-fourth, *tirthankara* of this particular cycle of time, Mahavira (Great Hero), was dominated historically by the Naga race and Naga rulers. One of the most prominent of the Nagas, Parsvanatha, is recognized as the twenty-third *tirthankara*.

The first *tirthankara*, Rsabha the Bull, is considered the original founder of Jainism, the entity who uttered the truths which began the present cycle of time. Some Brahmans and Vedantists consider him a minor incarnation of the god Vishnu, which is disputed by Jains. He is, nevertheless, mentioned in the Bhagavata Purana, the Vishnu Purana and the much earlier Yasur Veda.

Basic Jainism denies the authority of the Vedas. It also denies, as do Buddhists, the existence of multiple godheads, personal godheads or a supreme, monotheistic godhead. It does support the concept of the eternity of matter, rejecting the idea that creation has either a beginning or end, a Creator or Destroyer. Cycles of time do exist within this schema, some more positive and fruitful for soul enlightenment than others. The inherent immortality of men's souls is part of doctrine, although not all men's souls are innately capable of achieving liberation. "There is the attainment of the true nature of emancipation when there is the total destruction of the karma accumulated by the soul. And such a state is not to be found without the simultaneous presence of true insight, right knowledge and pure conduct." (*Svatantravacanamrta* of

Kanakasena). Women's souls are relegated to eternal transmigrations: they can never achieve salvation, "We maintain instead that a female body does not provide the kind of support that is required for the attainment of *moksa*, [since *moksa*] is obtainable only by an extraordinary kind of trance that is distinguished by [perfect] knowledge and detachment." (*Muktivicara* of Bhavasena). This kind of male chauvinist attitude may well date to pre-Vedic times. It is certainly not unknown among the later Vedantist. It was Gautama Buddha who created a revolutionary, inclusive, egalitarian doctrine declaring that the attainment of *nibbana* was possible for all human beings.

From the Jain point of view, the greatest problem facing the soul in this world is the struggle to free itself from the immobilizing, enchaining, debilitating bonds of matter. The name of the religion itself reflects this abiding resolve: "Jain" or "Jaina" is derived from two Sanskrit roots, *ji-* (to conquer) and *jina* (saint or conqueror). It is not too much of an oversimplification to say that to conquer matter is saintly, and that is the objective. Once this is achieved, the soul is free to enjoy the four infinities—infinite knowledge, infinite power, infinite perception and bliss beyond definition or description.

Jainism's doctrine and cosmic view is complicated. The *Drstivada*, which is the teachings of Lord Mahavira divided into twelve *Ang-Agams* or *sutras*, is the backbone of a rather large body of religious texts. The universe, including this world, is composed of one living and five nonliving substances. They have always been and will always be eternal, nonmetamorphosing, *uncreated* but all-pervasive. There is no creation story in the Jain canon similar to Osirian, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Judaic and Christian variants. Just one *jiva* and five *ajivas*. The *jiva*, which is living soul-stuff, wishes to regain its freedom and infinitude, which it cannot do while trapped in nonliving *ajiva* matter like stones, plants, animals and humans. Thus the Jain idea of *jiva* differs fundamentally from the Vedantic view. It is a living, nonindividuated, subtle, material substance rather than the monadic, individuated, nonmaterial living soul we usually associate with the latter. The Jain living soul-stuff metaphorically cries out to escape its

entrapment in nonliving matter but cannot free itself until it becomes, through a myriad of rebirths and metempsychotic transfers, part of an advanced organism like a human being who, through the attainment of the right kind of knowledge, can take proper steps to purify itself and rid itself of the *karma* (composed of subtle, infiltrating substance) which is literally imprisoning it. It is said that each soul must be reborn one million times but only eight in human form; the gods must suffer four hundred thousand rebirths but only one as man.

Jainism's idea of *karma* is, then, quite discernibly different from that of the Vedantists and Buddhists. What holds the *jiva* and *ajiva* together is the "glue" or cement of *karma*—a special, unique, subtle, infiltrating *material*. This material percolates into the soul like water infiltrating a soluble matrix by the process of osmosis. Think of the human soul, the *jiva*, as the porous matrix and the water as the karmic, subtle material which is the invading agent. Forget for a moment that water isn't very subtle. Then visualize the soul hardening, as it were, like concrete from the catalytic agency of the invading *karma*, becoming more and more trapped in matter as more *karma* is accumulated in the *jiva*. For the Jains, *karma* is literally infiltrating and encasing; for Vedantists and Buddhists, it is intangible, ethereal. But the result is the same; *karma* keeps the human being tied to the earth and the Wheel or the Cycle of Necessity.

If the individual soul is not continuously watchful and does not strive for a pure and decent life through self-discipline and self-restraint, it will create, unbeknownst to its human subject, an increasingly weighty karmic bondage. Quite literally a negative, spiritual *load*. These subtle particles, seemingly beyond the observation of even the most advanced scientific technology, form their own kind of self-perpetuating state within the *jiva*. Unless the process is reversed, their accumulated karmic weight will survive the death of the subject's body, and the *jiva* will carry it into successive rebirths until it succeeds in sloughing it off and reaching final liberation.

How is this weighty karmic package sloughed off? Through austerities, fasts, mortifications, confessions, reverence and living a pure and good life. All of these practices help slough off or eradicate negative *karma*. As time passes (and lives succeed

one another), the soul will become more and more enlightened, the negative karmic weight lightened, until finally the thoroughly enlightened soul can live in this world for a time giving service to humanity without being plagued by the importunities of a karmic debt-load. At this stage, liberated souls (*siddhas*) are ready to leave this world for the perfecting world of *Loka-akasa*, where they obtain final enlightenment, deliverance and eternal bliss. The *Loka-akasa* is at the apex of the Jain universe. There is none higher. Even the heavenly beings (*devas*) occupy an abode beneath *Loka-akasa*. There are a total of five parts to the complete Jain universe, including a Lower World which is the abode of infernal beings (*naraki*) and certain demigods such as titans and demons. Beyond these five parts or abodes is nothingness and is known as Space without Worlds or *Aloka-akasa*.

There is no religion on earth which demonstrates more reverence for all life than Jainism. The Jains surpass even the most devout Vedantists and Buddhists in their insistence on protecting the life-force. *Ahimsa*, the doctrine of nonviolence applied to all living things, is central to an understanding of Jain philosophy, religion and culture. The *Sutrakrtanga* (Book of Sermons) states, "If a man kills living things, or kills by using the hand of another man, or consents to the killing of another man, his sin continues to increase." The Jina Mahavira himself observed in the *Dasavaikalika* sutra, "No being of this world should be harmed by a spiritually-oriented person, whether knowingly or unconsciously, because all beings desire to live and no being desires to die." A true Jain will therefore consciously refrain from injuring any living being no matter how small.

The Jains conceive of the entire universe as pulsing with life. Even the sand and stones at one's feet are considered to have consciousness. Everything contains consciousness, although units such as stones, plants and lower animals find their consciousness or developing souls being bound and thoroughly encapsulated by the physical matter of their containers. There is in Jainism a hierarchy of organic and inorganic units. Specifically, five categories are recognized in the scheme of things. These categories are differentiated by the number of senses a unit possesses. The highest category, with five senses,

is composed of gods, men, the souls in hell and the higher animals. The lowest category, the fifth, includes everything with just one sense. Stones, for instance. And bodies of water. Also fire, wind and gases. If one is so foolish to injure the soul of a member of any category, even the lowest category, he risks being reborn among those particular members of that category, quite possibly as whatever it is he has injured. Thus a man who willfully injures a dog, may potentially be reborn as a dog or some other animal. If the remaining sum of his *karma* acquired during all of his past lives is really negative, if he has abused lower life forms ruthlessly and continuously, he might even be reborn as a plant or stone.

The perfect man in Jainism is quite similar to the Hindu *sadhu*. He is exceptionally self-disciplined, without passions and totally immersed in his search for enlightenment. He is likewise convinced that all lives are spiritual weigh stations along the path to final liberation. His soul is burdened, weighed down as it were, during a long series of transmigrations by material, karmic particles. His karmic problems are of his own doing; he created them. Now he must learn to slough them off so that he may reach *Loka-akasa* where his *jiva* will be eternally free and blissful. As with the Buddhists, he does not believe in multiple gods as guiding lights or even, for that matter, in a Supreme Being. He does have confidence in the twenty-four *tirthankaras* as examples and believes the wisdom they have divulged over the ages will lead him finally to his ultimate beatitude.

Essentially, Jainism, like Vedanta—and somewhat like Buddhist rebirthing—recognizes transmigration and metempsychosis. Each separate philosophical and religious system has its own definition of just what exactly is being passed on from birth to birth. All three, however, have a somewhat similar conception of what karma is and how to rid one's being of its effects. Jainism, as well as some Vedanta, supports the possibility of what a Westerner would call a regressive situation whereby the soul is reborn in an animal body or other nonhuman body. This would be considered in the West as a disastrous step backward in any progression of the soul toward a final enlightenment and entrance to an eternal, heavenly state. And so it is interpreted in some Vedanta circles and in Jainism generally

but not exclusively. Two of the most distinguishing differences between Jainism and its two sister religions is its staunch and unswerving belief in the doctrine of *ahimsa* and its definition of a subtle, materialistic karma. All three religions are also gentle philosophies, none more so than Jainism, where it is common practice for members of the Yatis order to wear cloth masks over their mouths to prevent inhaling insects and injuring the insects' souls. Neither Jains nor Buddhists believe in a Supreme Being but Jain *Loka-akasa* is a place whereas *nibbana* is a state of absorbed consciousness (or no-consciousness). All three systems recognize the idea of a hell, although more intellectual Buddhism seems to discount the importance of the concept after an actual state of *nibbana* has been achieved. Many Vedantists accept the idea of multiple cosmic hells and heavens. Final absorption of the soul into Brahman, who is the Supreme All and Everything, leads other Vedantists to minimize the importance of these hells and heavens or to question their theoretical reality in the first place. It would appear few Jains find themselves condemned forever to one of the seven layers of their Lower World. Whether reprieve is possible, should the soul find itself in that unfortunate abode, is questionable though not an impossibility.

Most Vedantists and Buddhists consider Jainism a rather heterodox doctrine which borrowed heavily from both philosophies and then proceeded on a somewhat bizarre course of its own. Conversely, Jains point to archeological evidence that traces Jainism back to the Indus Valley civilization that flourished between 2500 B.C.E. and 1750 B.C.E. They believe that civilization was Dravidian in its origins and that the Dravidians were forced to migrate southward by the militant Aryans. The majority of the sculpted male figures found in high relief in the Valley are standing erect, hands hanging downward along the nude torso. These figures, according to Jain authorities, represent early *tirthankaras* in the *kayotsarga* posture. They do not represent Siva because they lack the third eye and other details used to represent that god. And finally, Jains are proud to remind the inquirer that the Rig-Veda celebrates at least three of the *tirthankaras* including Rama and the first *tirthankara*, Rsabha.

It is quite possible that the doctrine of *ahimsa* has its roots in

pre-Vedic animism. Whatever the truth, it seems obvious that the West would profit greatly from adopting a more reverential attitude toward all life forms and their surrounding environments. Biology and physics today are telling us that, yes, indeed, at the molecular level everything is alive. Could it be in the future that science will discover that everything made of atoms, and perhaps subatomic particles, is a consciousness unit. We may have to radically change our definition of consciousness some day in the future. This possibility leads to interesting questions. For instance, does life-force permeate everything everywhere? It may be soon or a hundred years or more from now that we scientifically confirm this Jainist position, which now seems so far-fetched to many people. It just could be that the Jainist reading of material reality has been accurate all along.

Finally, with what sometimes appears to be a rather quirky philosophico-religious doctrine, the words of the 10th century Jain logician Akalanka reminds us that Jainism is often quite adept at penetrating to essential issues while, in this case, also demonstrating the Jain tolerance for other attitudes. The subject of Akalanka's *stotra* to a Jina is the Jain search for a true God. The last stanza reads, "Whoever knows all that is to know/And can see beyond the rushing waves of rebirth/Whose words, steadfast and true/Stand strong and pure/Such a soul do I cherish and venerate, knowing it deserves the respect of God, recognizing in it the incarnate virtue/Wherein all hatred is overcome/Whether a Buddha, a Mahavira, Brahma, Vishnu or Siva." (Trans. Schellhorn)

Sikhism

Sikhism is a semirevealed religion founded in the 16th century C.E. by Guru Nanak. Of the major religions of the subcontinent, it is the only one that is militant and, along with Christianity and Islam, one of the three largest militant religions of the world. It is a partially syncretic religion combining elements of both Brahmanism (Hinduism) and Islam. The Sikhs follow the teachings of Guru Nanak (1469-1538 C.E.) and the

nine gurus who succeeded him. The religion was founded in the Punjab and considers the Granth Saheb (also called Adi-Granth) as its main text. The Granth Saheb, some of which was written by Guru Nanak, some by succeeding gurus and some borrowed from other religions and secular literature, was collected and assembled by Nanak's successor, Angad (1504-52 C.E.). The final recension of the complete work was performed by the last guru in the line, Govind Singh (1666-1708 C.E.). A belief in transmigration of souls is basic to the doctrine.

According to Guru Nanak, "There is one God, Eternal Truth is his name." This monotheism, cardinal to the Sikh doctrine and inspired by contact with Islam, is compromised today by many devotees attraction to Hindu deities and ritualism. Guru Nanak had no sympathy for mindless, formalistic ritualism popular among some Hindus and Buddhists. Although the three major Hindu deities—Brahma, Vishnu and Siva—are mentioned in the Granth Saheb, their function according to orthodox Sikhism is only to serve as witnesses to the one and only Transcendent One, not to inspire idolatry.

In the Sikh theological system, God is described as both personal (*sagun*) and absolute (*nirgun*). Calling on God for guidance and assistance is considered primary. Just saying, and repeating, His name is thought to be efficacious. The system rejects the Hindu notion of avatars appearing on or returning to earth. The ten gurus are not considered incarnated gods, although it was predictable that many of the faithful would accord them semidivine status. Official Sikhism, just as Islam, rejects the idea that God would incarnate himself in this world. Yet God is everywhere, "He lives in everything. He dwells in every heart. But He does not merge with anything. He lives separately. He lives in all of creation. Yet He is always distinctly Himself. Nevertheless, He lives with everyone. As a flower exudes fragrance, as the mirror casts reflections, so does He abide in everything. Therefore, acknowledge Him in your heart."

It is to the heart of its followers that Sikhism, with its rather simple, basic doctrines, appeals most. There are strong, emotional, *bhakti* and Sufi elements in its appeal to faith. Buddhist subtleties and Hindu niceties are, for the most part, not

found here. It is repeatedly emphasized to the faithful within and without the scriptures that calling on the name of God constantly is necessary for spiritual progress. And calling on God incessantly is recommended as the surest way to navigate through life's treacherous shoals and strong tempests. "Accursed the life of him in the world who breathes without uttering the Name."

The Sikh idea of *nirvan* (or *nirvana*) comes directly from orthodox Hinduism. It is worthy of note that all the ten gurus state that the true goal of life is not necessarily to secure a paradisiacal heaven for one's self but rather to develop the God-essence that is in every human being which will finally, surely merge one with God. Then the light of the soul and the light of God meet again and become, once again, a unity.

Until man realizes fully the God-essence within himself, he is subject, as in traditional Hinduism and Buddhism, to countless rebirths. The karmic law, borrowed from Hinduism, applies to all, whether of high or low caste. In fact, Sikhism has disavowed the legitimacy of the caste system since the original Nanak (all ten gurus are referred to generically as "Nanak"). *Nirvan* is attained through the agency of a guru: "through the grace of the Guru a man dies to self and is born to new understanding, then the soul is free from tainting and is not born again." The use of the term "Guru" here is significant because it must be read two ways. First, any of the ten historic gurus of the faith can speak in Nanak's name for the faith. Secondly, Guru also refers to the Granth Saheb itself. Therefore, through either tutoring indirectly by anyone of the ten gurus or by following the scriptural protocols devoutly, or both, the soul can be led to *nirvan*.

Escape from the bonds of *karma* comes from either man's own efforts or through God's grace. Guru Nanak stated, "There can be no peace for man so long as he thinks that of himself he can do anything." As with most Christianity and Islam, grace is a central concept, the pivotal node upon which the fate of the soul is balanced. Good deeds and purity of living are essential to the soul's progress, but God is the final arbiter. Most traditional Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Islam place a priority on works and deeds, purity of living and the striving of the will for liberation from the fetters of earthly existence. This kind of

emphasis varies greatly among Christian denominations (including the Catholic Church) today with faith and grace now dominant in many quarters, including the evangelical, fundamentalist churches.

The original aim of Nanak appears to have been an attempt to combine Hindus and Muslims into one brotherhood. By the time of the tenth guru, Govind Singh, a final separation of Sikhs from both Hindus and Muslims was officially declared on the Hindu New Year's Day of 1699 C.E. The reasons for the schism were both political and doctrinal. Guru Arjun had been murdered by the Muslim Mogul Emperor Jahangir in 1606 C.E. From then on, the Sikhs became a militant, anti-Muslim brotherhood. Har Govind, his successor, fought many pitched battles with the Indian Muslim community.

From Har Govind's time onward, the leader of the faith was to wear two swords symbolizing the spiritual (*faquiri*) and secular (*amiri*) sides of Sikhism. The wars, nevertheless, continued. Guru Tegh Bahadur (1621-75 C.E.) was beheaded at Delhi by the Muslim leader Aurangzebs. When Govind Singh initiated the final schism between Sikhs and Hindus and Muslims, it was ostensibly intended to put an end to the last vestiges of the caste system among all Sikhs. Officially this was, and is today, the position of the faith. But old traditions die hard and exceedingly slowly, as we have seen from a multitude of examples elsewhere in this book. Unofficially, vestiges of the caste system still linger. Officially, Hinduism was extirpated from the doctrine. The fact is many Hindu rites and rituals, as well as many of the gods of the Hindu pantheon, are still popular with many Sikhs. The observances of these gods thrives among the rural population.

In *The Religion of the Sikhs*, Gopal Singh writes of the Hindus, "The soul does not die, only the body does and the impressions (*sanskaras*) it gathers in one life are transported to another body . . . The Sikh Gurus too support this position . . . They believe that though man has passed through millions of births on various planes of existence—stone, plant, animal, bird—his birth in the human form is the apex of his perfection." For the faithful, this human birth is the "sure indication" of God's grace. It is the great opportunity to evolve finally to a

glorious end, to identification with its original source, to become immortal and partake of the infinite Real. From this ascent through the various planes of existence, there is no descent. One either evolves continuously upward or is temporarily reduced downward to a lower level of spiritual evolution but within the same species.

The Granth Saheb's prescription for liberation from earth-life and identification with God in heaven is not, as uttered by Guru Nanak, terribly complicated, "How is he [man] bound to the round of coming and going [transmigration] and how is he released? How may he be united with the Eternal God? He who has God's name in his heart and on his tongue becomes beyond desire, as God himself is. Man comes and goes in the natural way [according to karmic law]. He is born because of the desires of his mind. The God-minded are liberated and are not bound again for they dwell on the word and reach liberation through the Name." There is no other religion of size that emphasizes more the importance of thinking about the Name, vocalizing the Name and calling upon the Name for assistance than Sikhism. One verse of the Granth Saheb states, "Without God's Name birth into this world is useless. Without the Name one ingests poison, speaks evil, dies meritless and so transmigrates"; another reads, "The man who has the love of God's commands in his heart is said to be *jivan mukt*," which translates to "liberated while still embodied." Outward shows of religious faith devoid of real inner substance did not impress Guru Nanak, "Some wander about wearing ochre robes, pretending to be yogis or sannyasins. Within them all is desire and they long for clothes and food. They waste their lives in vain. They are neither householders nor world renouncers. The reality of birth and death [transmigration] has not ceased to hang over their heads."

Sikhism, since the days of Govind Singh, is a fighting religion similar to its two big brothers, Islam and Christianity. The salient difference is that Sikhism officially acknowledges the fact whereas there is nothing in the Qur'an or Christian Bible to support a case for *offensive*, militant behavior. The militant side of Islam and Christianity has devolved from false interpretations of scripture, sometimes by clerics, often by extremist groups, or from false assumptions about doctrine by the ignorant and

uninformed which have no scriptural merit. The militant side of Sikhism was inspired by a desire to protect itself from physical provocation directed against its members by Muslim and Hindu sources. Political schemers, religious zealots and self-seeking opportunists continue in all the major world religions to interpret scripture to their own advantage so that it will reflect their own selfish interests, misrepresenting their faiths and misleading the ignorant and naive. As the French proverb says, the more things change, the more they remain the same.

Chapter Ten

Taoism and Confucianism

Tao and tao

At first glance, Taoism and Confucianism seem to have little in common and neither one to qualify as a candidate for a discussion of afterlife and immortality. This is both true and not true. Classical Taoism finds speculations about immortality and concern for afterlife to border on the foolhardy, whereas religious Taoism is much involved with these subjects both theoretically and practically. The latter has a strong interest in all possible measures which might prolong the biological life of the body almost indefinitely. These two kinds of Taoism developed almost simultaneously side by side beginning in the 3rd century B.C.E. Early Confucianism took little notice of such subjects. Since, however, the introduction of Buddhism in China around the 2nd century C.E., both religious Taoism and Confucianism have been much influenced. Since the triumph of the Communist Revolution in 1949, the public expression of these two systems (and Buddhism as well), whatever their remaining vigor, has gone underground.

The two acknowledged fathers of classical (philosophical) Taoism are Lao Tsu (c. 604-531 B.C.E.), the validity of whose historicity is somewhat in doubt, and Chuang Tsu (4th century B.C.E.), whose historical existence can be verified. The classic, central core of Taoism is found in the book *Lao Tsu* (also called *Tao Te Ching*) and the collection of Chuang Tsu's works called the *Chuang Tsu*, which explores, according to the author, "the realm of Nothing Whatever" where "now and long ago are one." Just how much of the *Lao Tsu* is actually Lao Tsu's own work is problematic. Some contemporary scholars believe it was written by a historiographer, Lao Tan, who served the Chou royal

administration. Others believe it to be a compilation from multiple sources. There is much less doubt that Chuang Tsu (or Chuang Chou) authored the material in the collection with his name.

The *Tao* (lit. “way” or “the way”) can be thought of as the dynamic principle of the universe by which all things are created, exist and then persist for awhile before seeming to desist and disappear. It is also the state of all that is at any given moment (and all that is not). The Taoists are convinced that any attempt to ultimately define the Tao is doomed to failure because what is Tao is practically indefinable. Western assays at definition—primal dynamism, divine infinitude, inexhaustible beingness, fathomless reality—end up sounding hollow and unsatisfying. Lao Tsu wrote, “The way that can be vocalized is not the constant way” and “The way conceals itself in being nameless.”* Chuang Tsu added, “Tao cannot be conveyed by either words or silence. In that state which is neither speech nor silence its transcendental nature may be understood.” It is such statements as these that remind us that Gautama Buddha refrained from any attempt to specify the exact parameters of Ultimate Reality or of the nirvanic state.

Neither classic, philosophical Taoism or religious Taoism (also called sometimes Neo-Taoism or *Hsien* Taoism) have within their doctrines a concept of reincarnation. Likewise, there is no rebirth of the soul or spirit per se. But as the *Lao Tsu (Tao Te Ching)* makes clear, spirit persists, “Let the kingdom be governed according to the Tao, and the manes of the departed will not manifest their spiritual energy. It is not that those manes have not that spiritual energy, but it will not be employed to hurt men. It is not that it could not hurt men, but neither does the ruling sage hurt them.”** There are, however, intimations of possible reappear-

*All quotes from the *Lao Tsu* and *Chuang Tsu* are from the James Legge translations.

**Manes are the sacred spirits of the dead.

ance in both the *Lao Tsu* and the *Chuang Tsu*. The *Lao Tsu* states, “He who does not fail in the requirements of his position, continues long; he who dies and yet does not perish, has longevity” and, “Great, it [the Tao] passes on (in constant flow).

Passing on, it becomes remote. Having become remote, it returns. Therefore the Tao is great” Also, “Men come forth and live; they enter (again) and die.” The *Chuang Tsu* advises us, “There is no end to the Tao. Things indeed die and are born, not reaching a perfect state which can be relied on. Now there is emptiness, and now fullness;—they do not continue in one form Decay and growth, fullness and emptiness, when they end, begin again.”

In fact, there is a certain Taoist subtradition, probably influenced by Buddhism, which speaks of the former lives of Lao-Tsu: as Kwang Chang Tsu in the time of the Yellow Emperor, as Hwang Ti and as Po-Chang in the time of Yao. According to Sinologist Herbert A. Giles, the Hsieh Tao-Hang stone tablets declare that he appeared periodically from the early time of Fu-Hsi until, and including, the much later Chou dynasty. It would not be wise to assume that the spirits of most mortal, common men necessarily followed in parallel tracking the illustrious spirit of this advanced soul. He was early on considered special; later he was accorded semigodly status. Spirit, if not soul, is in the Taoist tradition eternal or virtually so. Taoism recognizes various kinds of spirits. There are lofty spirits who have become gods, sky spirits, nature spirits and the spirits of men. The acknowledgment of the existence of ancestral spirits is extremely important to the Chinese psyche. It has been the primary impetus to all Chinese religious experience and practice and dates to prehistoric times. It is, in fact, an impulse which seems to be very similar to what may have inspired paleolithic and neolithic burial activities, such as leaving personal items and especially food within the burial mounds. The Taoists, and the Confucians as well, believe that honoring dead ancestors more or less assures the survival and happiness of their ancestors. And no one wants angry spirits interfering with the living. On the other hand, recognizing and propitiating spirits may encourage them to be friendly and helpful. Anthropologically, we have seen similar rites being practiced among certain Pacific Islanders, Amerindians and other peoples and cultures. The Peruvian Quechuas have a rich tradition of this kind of observance, even in modern times. Ancestor worship and cults of the dead were most probably the norm rather than the exception among most pre-

historic peoples.

The normal practice among many Taoists and Confucians is to create a plaque, often of wood, upon which is inscribed the name and sometimes the image of the deceased ancestor and to pay obeisance to his symbolic image at appropriate times of the year, such as the anniversary of the ancestor's death. Often food and drink offerings are presented. And this practice leads to an interesting question: Do the homage-doers believe the spirits can literally consume such offerings, which would imply they have a material body (perhaps a quite subtle one) capable of ingestion, or is the offering totally symbolic? In many cases where more than one propitiator is present, it is common practice for the presiding priests (if there happen to be some) to consume the offerings. This suggests that the offerings represent symbolic acts. Possibly the consuming priests are seen as vicarious substitutes for the ancestors. Some researchers have opined that it is the aroma of the offerings that arouses and pleases the spirits of the dead.

Even before Buddhist influences began to affect Taoism (in the 2nd century C.E.), it is clear that Taoism was not projecting a destiny for the soul or spirit which spelled absolute extinction. There is central to the Taoist conception of the Tao an everlastingness which cannot be ignored or repudiated. What is Tao has always been and will always be. This is not a cosmology that began with a "big bang" or is cyclical in its expansions and contractions. What is eternal and will remain eternal, beyond time, in some "way" or another. This isn't exactly an early form of the law of the conservation of matter and energy but it is not a repudiation of such an idea, either.

In the *Chuang Tsu*, the adept Pu-liang Yi is in a yoga state (many Taoists have traditionally practiced yoga), moving from lower planes of perception to higher planes with correspondingly more refined enlightenment. We are told:

After three days, he was able to banish from his mind all worldly matters . . . in seven days he was able to banish from his mind all thought of men and things . . . after nine days, he was able to count his life as foreign to himself. . . after this he was able to see his own individuality. That

individuality perceived, he was able to banish all thought of Past and Present. Freed from this, he was able to penetrate to (the truth that there is no difference between) life and death;—(how) the destruction of life is not dying, and the communication of other life is not living.

Several things are notable about the above quotation. First of all, it could very easily be mistaken for a Buddhist's glimpse of *nibbana* (nirvana). Here existence goes on beyond life and death. One gets the impression that Pu-Liang Yi is being absorbed into an active Tao but it is not destroying his identity, his beingness or extinguishing him. What allows him this vision of the Greater Reality is, we are told a few lines later, his sense of "Tranquillity amid all Disturbances." That is, he has learned to control his self which everyone must do if they wish to meld effectively with the Tao or, in Hindu/Buddhist terminology, reach a state of *moksha* or *nibbana*.

The roots of religious Taoism (or *Hsien* Taoism) can be traced to very early periods in Chinese history. Interest in long life (*shou*) is apparent on some inscriptions of early Chou bronzes. References to the subject also appear in the *Book of Poetry*. From the 8th century B.C.E. onward, there is an increase in the number of written cultural references to "becoming an immortal" and escaping death. Whereas the philosophic Taoists turned their backs to such foolishness, believing the physical body was relatively unimportant and fantasies of immortality irrelevant within the workings of the Tao, there was a definite market for such ideas, especially among the poor in the hinterlands. And, needless to say, humanity in general has long demonstrated an attraction to the idea of the spirit's potential immortality as long as historical records have existed, with prehistoric evidence suggesting the interest precedes written accounts.

By the 4th century B.C.E., the quest for immortality, especially of the physical body, had gained appreciable momentum. We now have the spectacle of two essentially, dramatically opposed points of view existing at the same time and both calling themselves Taoism. The *Hsien* Taoists (*hsien* means "immortal") became convinced that the right formulas of exercise, foods and drugs could be discovered that would prolong

the life of the physical body almost indefinitely and possibly lead to eternal immortality on earth or in the heavens. By the time of the Ch`in (221-207 B.C.E.) and Western Han dynasties (202 B.C.E.-9 C.E.), the alchemical quest for immortality had gained much momentum. This is due in no small part to the first Ch`in emperor's frantic efforts to find an elixir that, when ingested, might guarantee him eternal life. He dispatched an expedition to the Eastern oceans to discover the site of the "Isles of the Blessed;" blessed, that is, because they were the home of Immortals and the source where immortality elixirs could be obtained. The account cannot help but remind us of the Greek and Roman fascination for the blissful "Islands of the Blessed" where dead heroes were reputed to abide. The Greeks and Romans, however, had placed this heavenly paradise in the opposite direction—the Western oceans. Still later we find some Taoists believing that these Immortals inhabited the mountains of Central Asia presided over by the Queen of the West, Hsi Wang Mu. It was reputed that in her courtyard was a peach tree which produced magic fruit once every one thousand years. Whoever partook of it would never die. (The West developed similar myths, apples usually taking precedence over other fruits.) And there developed still later in China fascinating "legends" of the Immortals who inhabited the moon.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the search for means of prolonging life gave birth to Chinese alchemy and ultimately Chinese chemistry. The situation at this time, and for the next several succeeding centuries, is analogous to the later European, medieval alchemists' attempts to transmute metals and discover the elixir of life.

The succeeding centuries saw all manner of treatises filled with recipes, techniques and "good advice" on how to prolong the life of the body. There were natural herbal concoctions as well as chemical soups, including the ingestion of powdered gold and cinnabar (which is mercuric sulfide and poisonous). Some advocates recommended breathing exercises and gymnastics of various kinds, which are comparative, in some cases, to Hindu yoga. Foods were given special priority. It was often recommended that one should not eat any of the five common grains, these being associated with the dark *yin* power of the

earth. A trade in magic charms (including magic bronze mirrors) flourished. Certain sexual practices were recommended, others were more or less proscribed. But above all else, the Taoist seeking long life and possible immortality must learn to regulate his *ch`i*, the vital breath and energy of the Tao which permeates everything including the human body. At the same time, he must practice virtue, including Confucian-like filial piety and benevolence to one's fellow humanity. According to Ko Hung, author of the *Pao P'u Tsu*, a single negative action will nullify an accumulation of one thousand one hundred and ninety-nine positive ones. One can only wonder how he settled on such a figure.

There are several assumptions inherent in these practices and prescriptions which are worthy of note. Most primary is the belief that man is a natural component of the universe, both heaven and earth, and is suffused with *Ch`i*, which loses force over time in the human body unless it is revitalized. Secondly, a man who lives in essential harmony with the universe's natural energy can expect to continue existing as long as heaven and earth do. Hence the efficacy of maintaining one's *Ch`i* by any honorable means possible. The various techniques mentioned earlier are tailored to overcome destruction of the psychophysical mechanism of the body and mind which the Chinese have historically recognized as interdependent. Faithfully practicing the techniques mentioned can possibly bring about immortality by creating a new energetic, embryonic self that escapes bodily death. Perhaps it is possible to create a new energetic self which escapes death, but the skeptics remind us that in Chinese literature there is no verifiable account of this kind of phenomenon having happened—a human returning to earth in the flesh because he has successfully regulated his *Ch`i*.

Eventually, all sects of Taoism traced their origin to the new revelation from Lord Lao Tsu to Chang Tao-ling in 142 C.E. which established him as "Celestial Master." His appointed task was to present this new manifestation of the Tao for the salvation of those who believed in the Tao, repented their trespasses and swore fealty to his chosen Taoist master. A priesthood was rapidly developing. The master orchestrated a harmony between the gods and the petitioner. The petitioner wore in his waistband

a list of his protective gods who could be called upon when needed. This list was also a passport to heaven when needed. Ritualism was developing apace with the priesthood. The Taoist devotee now was expected to periodically confess his sins and renew his contract with the gods. Institutionalized religious Taoism considers an individual moral discipline and the careful, orderly observance of rituals of paramount importance. Both philosophical Taoists and Confucians would applaud the former; Confucians would also applaud the latter imperative while philosophical Taoists would place the latter practices in the humbug category.

In the years to come, popular Taoism expanded and gradually assimilated quite a number of disparate groups with mixed doctrines. During the troubled times of the 2nd century C.E., the teachings of Chang Chueh were competitive with those of Chang Tao-Ling. Those who received his advice were, among other things, required to produce confessions which were carried to the mountain, buried in earth and soaked in river water and by such means were communicated to the spirits of Heaven, Earth and Water. The charge for these services was five bags of rice, the same charge levied by Chang Tao-Ling for his teaching. The two competitors became known as the “five bags of rice” men. Chang Chueh went on to form a group of adherents known as the Yellow Turbans, which were sometimes violence-prone until finally subdued and assimilated into the greater tradition.

By the 3rd or, at the latest, 4th century religious Taoism was firmly established, and the search for methods or means of prolonging earth-life and/or achieving heavenly immortality continued unabated. Ko Hung’s *Pao P`u Tsu (Book of the Master Who Embraces Simplicity)* offers detailed instructions on how to prepare chemical formulas. As a summary, we are told: “If you attain only one of these nine cinnabars, you can become immortal . . . But if you ingest the nine cinnabars and want to ascend to heaven, you may do so . . . In any case, you can come and go as you please, without impediments. Nothing will be able to harm you.” (Trans. Deborah Sommer) What a pity for Ko Hung’s devotees that neither Ko Hung nor the devotees realized how poisonous a compound like cinnabar really was. Death, however, was often rationalized in such cases as a fortunate

translation to Heaven, a hypothesis which, we might add, has some eerie similarities to the recent Heaven's Gate cult and their attempt to reach extraterrestrial, heavenly bounds and potential immortality by suicidal mass poisoning. The difference, of course, is that the Taoists ostensibly did not know how poisonous the elixir they were ingesting was whereas the modern cults did.

The northern state of Chin was conquered by the Hsiung-nu in 316 C.E. causing many of the Chin upper class to flee southward. They brought the Celestial Masters' doctrine with them which, over time, was blended with the alchemical practices of the southeastern Taoists. The period 364-370 C.E. saw the rise of Yang Hsi and the Perfected Ones. He claimed to have received revelations more enlightened and elevated than any previous ones to date from the Heaven of Supreme Purity (*Shang-ch'ing*). The Perfected Ones commenced a revisionist campaign of sorts, rewriting earlier texts, reformulating advice on sexual practices as acts of spiritual union, advocating "new" alchemical ideas and prophesying the advent of a messianic sage called "lord of the Way, sage who is to come" whose projected arrival was 392 C.E. Hsu Mi, a retired state official and friend of Yang Hsi, was busily receiving and transcribing texts for the Perfected Ones. These came to be known as texts of the Mao-shan sect. Mao Shan is a reference to a mountain near Hsu Mi's retirement home. A little over a century later, Tao Hung-ching (456-536 C.E.) collected some of the Yang Hsi texts and the Hsu family texts and produced a work called the *Chen-kao* (Declarations of the Perfected). The Mao-shan/Shang-ch'ing scriptures thus came to be one of the cornerstones of the religious Taoist edifice.

Buddhism made gradual but significant inroads into religious Taoism which strained to assimilate ideas of competing major sects, with competing scriptures, especially those of the Celestial Masters, the Shang-ch'ing (Upper Clarity) and the Lingbao (Numinous Gem). Buddhism introduced new ideas of its own: new ways of praying, the ordering of monks and the concepts of transmigration, karma, hell and the Western Paradise. It is probable that a Lao-Tsu or Chuang-Tsu would have been flabbergasted by the Buddhist concept of hell. The transformation of traditional Taoism, both philosophic and religious, was so profound over time, that it has led some

observers to conclude that Taoism became a secondhand, Chinese version of Buddhism.

Scriptural attempts were made to distinguish certain kinds of religious Taoism from contrasting competition. An example would be the Celestial Masters' text entitled *Scripture of the Inner Explanations of the Three Heavens* (hereafter referred to as *Inner Explanations*). The Test is a discursus explaining the superiority and primacy of the Celestial Masters' cosmogony which had recently been challenged by two new Taoist schools, the Shangqing (Shangching) school and the Lingbao school. It is also a critique of "deviant ways" reflected not only by Buddhism but by some of the lesser Taoist sects which have disappeared from memory and, in some cases, even history. In the first chapter, toward the end, is a discussion of "transforming influences" of Taoism as opposed to Buddhism. Although Taoism does not at this time refute the possibilities of rebirth, it is contended that in Taoist practice "the pneumas [variations of Chi or vital cosmic energy] of life cause the adept's entire body to rise and fly off in transcendence." The transforming influences of the Buddhist adept, especially the death pneumas, "cause the adept to pass through oblivion and be reborn." (Trans. Stephen A. Bokenkamp) The obvious conclusion to be drawn is that the Taoist way, particularly the Celestial Masters' way, is a superior method of transcendence. Why bother with a needless cycle of return when liberation can be achieved quickly by the enlightened Chinese way.

Between 364-370 C.E., Yang Xi channeled a number of texts ostensibly transmitted to him from celestial beings. These texts are known as the Shangqing (Upper Clarity) scriptures, a name reflecting the high heaven of their origin. They were in many instances revisions of Celestial Masters' material that would profoundly affect the future development of Taoist ideology and ritual. One of these, *The Upper Scripture of Purple Texts Inscribed by the Spirits* (hereafter referred to as *Purple Texts*) is a compendium of meditative materials leading to individual transcendence in addition to a number of alchemical mini-tracts. These texts describe the effective practices which deities had formerly used in their past lives. We are provided with the biography of Li Hong, a mortal who achieved celestial status and

was deified. We are told that Li Hong is a messianic figure who will reappear in the world at the end of this world-age to rescue the seed people, certain mortals chosen for salvation because of their outstanding virtues or actions or bodily signs. It is one of many cultural versions of a common, ancient theme: the death of a god or king, (such as Osiris, Krishna, Peshotan, Tammuz, Orpheus and Balder) who miraculously returns to the world or whose return is expected and awaited. You might call it the Chinese Taoist version of the Christian Advent and the 144,000 elect.

Li Hong as the Sage Lord regulates everything below the ten heavens. He has jurisdiction over mortals and will appear in the future to usher in a time of Great Peace but only after an Armageddon/Book of Revelation-like period when “All the evil will be eradicated at once; all the violent will be destroyed.” (Trans. Bokenkamp) Then the meek, who have survived and those who have faithfully studied the Tao (or, more truthfully, Shangqing doctrine), will be further instructed on a purified earth. These are the “seed people,” and it is within their power, if they study assiduously and live pure lives, to become spiritually “Perfecteds” and “Transcendents” and thereby take their place as immortals in the heavens.

Around 400 C.E., not long after the revelations of Yang Xi and in the same part of China (southwest of Nanjing), the Lingbao scriptures appeared. These gave birth to a new school of Taoism which, like the Shangqing school, wished to revise Celestial Master Taoism. But there are several great differences between Shangqing and Lingbao Taoism. The Lingbao scriptures freely adopted and adapted Buddhist ideas and rituals with the long-held Taoist belief that Buddhism was only a foreign version of Taoism, having been created when Lao-Tsu went westward to teach and proselytize among the barbarians. Another large difference is that Lingbao Taoism separated itself from the private, elitist practices of the Shangqing and Celestial Master priests and their doctrines, declaring themselves interested in the salvation of *all* human spirits.

The Lingbao scripture entitled *The Wondrous Scripture of the Upper Chapters on Limitless Salvation* (hereafter referred to as the *Scripture of Salvation*) is one of the earliest and best known

of the Lingbao texts. The text's catalytic, special, celestial language is fashioned to focus the perfect, healing, cosmic power of the Tao on the problem of souls suffering in purgatorial-like conditions on earth. Many people may find the language, even in the translated replica, as being arabesque and stilted. However, stylistic considerations aside, it is especially significant that the *Scripture of Salvation* is one of the Lingbao texts which demonstrates the acceptance of the increasingly popular Buddhist idea of rebirth—an acceptance which offers a description of rebirth which is nuanced and remodeled in a way that would not be offensive or otherwise unacceptable to traditional Chinese ideas of filial piety and familial, memorial sensibilities. The death-rebirth scenario proceeds as follows. Generation upon generation of ancestors, as well as souls suffering in darkness, including bitter, deceased souls, “all alike will be saved . . . After the regulation nine years detainment, they will receive rebirth . . .” (Trans. Bokenkamp) Then, after proper study of the “highest” (read Lingbao) scriptures, their attainments and virtues while on earth will entitle them to the position of “divine Transcendent.” They will be finished with the work of earth and ready for the bliss of the heavens. This process applied to all souls, whether living or dead. A Lingbao devotee need not worry excessively about the fate of his ancestors. If they were not in the process of being reborn, they were “saved” and had become a “Transcendent” in Lingbao heaven. The salvific formula was really quite simple: recite repeatedly the *Scripture of Salvation* and follow directions.

In 397 C.E. the *Ling-Pao Ching* (*Classic of the Sacred Jewel*) appeared, written by a member of Ko Hung's clan who claimed to have channeled the spirit of a 3rd century C.E. ancestor. This scripture was destined to create another branch of ideology on the Taoist tree and ritually replace much of the Celestial Master tradition. Lu Hsiu-ching (406-477 C.E.), a historian, collected and edited the *Ling-Pao* texts. In the North, during the Wei dynasty (386-534 C.E.), Taoism was established at the royal court in 400 C.E. Between 415 C.E. and 423 C.E. K'ou Ch'ien-chih claimed to have channeled Lord Lao (Lao-Tsu). Lord Lao, he asserted, was entrusting him to further reform the Celestial Master tradition. This entailed supporting the Wei court as a

Taoist kingdom, rejecting popular cults, repudiating messianic uprisings and disavowing sexual rituals. K`ou was appointed to the office of “Erudite of Transcendent Beings.” Within a year, he was proclaimed Celestial Master and, for the next twenty years, assiduously promoted the Taoist position at court. In 440 C.E., the king was offered and accepted the title Perfect Ruler of Great Peace. Between 444 C.E. and 446 C.E., this monarch proscribed the practice of Buddhism, which was rapidly gaining popularity, and other “excessive cults.” Although Buddhism was soon established (452 C.E.) as the state religion by a new monarch, Taoism had proved itself as a potent political alternative to Confucianism and Buddhism and would remain, in the political arena, a potential power which commanded attention and respect. By the 5th century C.E., basic religious Taoism had assumed the ideological morphology it would carry into the future, although there were always new scriptures being generated and new minor schools being sporadically founded over the passage of time.

There are really two Taoisms, philosophic and religious, and the twain shall never meet. They are as different as yin and yang, apples and oranges. Philosophic, classical Taoism is firmly anchored in the writings of Lao-Tsu and Chuang-Tsu, and it changed very little over time. There are still followers of this Way today but they are numerically outnumbered by religious Taoists. Philosophical Taoism is an intellectual’s discipline. It is a private, individualistic doctrine almost completely devoid of ritual. There is no priesthood.

Religious Taoism developed from folk beliefs and folk practices and ritualism. It owes much to the universal human concern for long life and possible immortality of the spirit. A philosophic Taoist doesn’t waste time worrying about whether his individual spirit will survive death or whether certain practices and rituals might assure its eternal immortality. The religious Taoist, on the other hand, is greatly concerned with these questions. The early alchemical experiments of its founders were the most compelling motive behind the formation of what became the faith. Religious Taoism today is flush with contending schools and contending practices. As with most major religions, its popularization over the centuries has created

all kinds of external fluffiness and puffery around its central core beliefs, especially the search for immortality. It appeals to the masses who are awed by lavish ritualism and who often mistake outward display for holy, inner substance, who are happiest when performing rote exercises, directed by a fostering priesthood, and not asked to think too much. The religious Taoist expects and wants to be told what to do to save himself; the philosophic Taoist believes each individual must determine his actions and reactions himself in accordance with the rhythm of the Tao, as best as he can determine it. When referring to Taoism, it is almost obligatory to state which kind of Taoism is being referenced. This is seldom done and inevitably causes problems in communication.

Classical Taoist philosophy is probably not going to appeal much to the Jewish, Christian or Muslim quester after immortality who insists on carrying beyond death the totality of his former personality complete with a new, physical approximation of his present body. If he insists on a well-regulated, materialistic heaven with a perceptible God-in-residence, he is going to be appalled at the indefiniteness of the linear dimensions of this *nibbana-like* state. Here considerations of personal consciousness and egos, anthropomorphic gods and Western-style accommodations with substantial magnificence do not exist. The very idea of them seems irrelevant and distracting. Almost all Christians and Muslims will reject the offer, even the idea, of this kind of immortality. The prospect of the eternal Tao, in contrast, might very much appeal to the individual who, previously, believed the best that the future after death could hold for him would be the eternal scattering and perpetual, random cosmic recycling of his remaining atoms and what was once *his* very own energy. Paradoxically, this is the least a classical Taoist attitude offers; it is also possibly the most.

At the other end of the classical Taoist equation, where Buddhist doctrine has become an active integer, a *nibbana-like* existence becomes a possibility—if the individual is willing to strive to enlighten himself. We are all part of the Tao whether we like it or not, every atom of us, dead or alive. The Taoist-Buddhist believes that if we want to understand what the Tao really is, if we desire to develop an enduring, eternal, mental and

spiritual understanding of the true nature of the Tao, and become a perceptive experiencer of it, we must train ourselves to make the transition from life to afterlife, from ignorance to persevering perceiver. Not all Buddhists believe in the total extinction or annihilation of all soul-remnants in the *nibbana* state. Some Chinese Taoist are attracted to this interpretation. The skeptic will be quick to point out that no one really knows what exactly the Tao is, hence the plethora of earth-religions all pretending to knowledge they do not have.

Just as Nitchze exaggerated aspects of Zoroastrianism to create the idea of a Superman, who was later made unintentionally into a grotesque parody by German Nazism, some later misinterpreters of the *Chuang-Tsu* found in its Man of Supreme Inward Power, the True Man, the Supreme Man, a worthy double image to Nitchze's creation. At one point, the *Chuang Tsu* states of the enlightened Tao practitioner, "Fire cannot burn him who is so perfect in virtue, nor water drown him; neither cold nor heat can affect him injuriously; neither bird nor beast can hurt him. This does not mean that he is indifferent to these things; it means that he discriminates between where he may safely rest and where he will be in peril" Is it any wonder that during the Boxer Rebellion some misguided Taoist zealots believed they could withstand a hail of bullets with physical impunity. The results of such misplaced convictions were predictable.

There is another side of the Taoist vision. It is far more humble and modest and reflects an attitude that is nonacquisitive, nonsensual, generous and almost totally naturalistic, basic, simple and honest. The *Lao Tsu* says, "In the highest antiquity, the people did not know that there were rulers. In the next age they loved them . . . In the next they feared them . . . How irresolute did those earliest rulers appear, showing by their reticence the importance which they set upon their words! Their work was done and their undertakings were successful, while the people all said, 'We are as we are, of ourselves!' When the Great Tao ceased to be observed . . . there ensued great hypocrisy." These words suggest that the virtues of Jean Jacques Rousseau's Noble Savage resided in these "simple" people—that they were living much more in harmony with the Tao than the later

bureaucrats of the cities and the courtiers surrounding the Chinese royal families. It was a near-utopian existence which a Jeremy Bentham would have readily understood.

With the Confucians “the subtleties of decorum” and “the solemnities of ritual” were very important. Whereas the Taoists were convinced that the Confucians lost Tao with their zealous pursuit of order and power, the Confucians were convinced that if one followed the Way of the Mean, which the master also called *Tao*, one could live a practical, ethically-clean and happy life within a highly-structured, hierarchical society. This society was led from the top by the Son of Heaven (as ruler or emperor) who would reign wisely and benevolently over the collected masses. Confucius’ idea of the Son of Heaven’s administration approximates what Plato had in mind for the rule of the perfect philosopher-king. For Confucius, to achieve this kind of successful rule, ritual and organization were primary. For most Taoist, “. . . ritual is the mere husk of loyalty.” But the Confucian focus has never been on the mechanics of the cosmos or the subtle workings of nature or the human heart. Certainly not on immortality of the spirit. Its overriding perspective is shaped by what is happening at one’s feet, the practical, diurnal, mundane problems at hand.

On the surface, Confucianism is a philosophy absorbed with the imminently practical virtues of wisdom (*chih*), altruism (*shu*), sincerity (*hsin*), righteousness (*yi*), compassion (*jen*), faithfulness (*chung*) and propriety (*li*). The emphasis is on the moral and ethical with special consideration given to propriety and practicality. Order in society is established and maintained through proper ritual and organization. The Confucians’ focus is straight ahead and downward, not skyward. Metaphysical abstractions do not much interest them.

Confucius spoke little of Heaven or spirits and avoided speaking about the gods, afterlife and immortality. The first mention of spirits is early in the *Analects*: “The master said, ‘To sacrifice to a spirit with which one has no proper association is merely to curry favor with it.’”^{*} In division or chapter three, we are told, “When he sacrificed to ancestral spirits, he did so as if they were actually present: when he sacrificed to other spirits, he did so as if they were actually present. The master said, ‘If I do

not really take part in the sacrifice, it is as if I did not sacrifice at all.” Later, “Fan Ch`ih asked about wisdom. The master said, ‘To perform the obligations properly due to the people, and to pay reverence to ghosts and spirits, while keeping a distance from them—this may be called wisdom.’” We notice the implicit recognition here that spirits can act for good or evil, that they are potent, and hence the advice to keep a certain distance. It is a belief that is quite ancient, probably in existence in paleolithic and neolithic times, and long predates the time of the Master. And finally we have the statement, “Chi Lu asked about serving the spirits of the dead. The master said, ‘While you are not able to serve men, how can you serve their spirits? Chi Lu added, ‘I venture to ask about death?’ He was answered, ‘While you do not know life, how can you know about death.’” The focus is clear. Concentrate on what you know and what is knowable.

In regards to Heaven, we are treated to the following exchange, “The master said, ‘I would prefer not speaking.’ Tsze-kung said ‘If you, Master, do not speak what shall we, your disciples, have to record?’ The Master said, ‘Does Heaven speak? The four seasons pursue their courses, and all things are continually being produced,

*All quotes from the *Analects* are taken from the James Legge translation.

but does Heaven say anything.’” The gist seems clear. One does not philosophize about what is unknowable. It is far better to concentrate on what is observable. Does this mean Confucius had no religious sensibilities or that practical Confucianism is without a religious sense? The evidence would seem to indicate otherwise in both cases, a conclusion which is gradually gaining a following among Western researchers.

The Confucians have no ostensible Primal Source, *except for Tien* (Heaven), no recognized God of gods, *except for Tien*, although they do have gods or minor deities, and *they do believe in the survival of spirits* (or individual souls), which is what ancestral worship is all about. It is Heaven (*Tien*) that orders the world and brings either peace or disruption to human affairs. And it is Heaven that establishes a ruler through the Mandate of Heaven (*Tien-ming*). The ruler of men is *Tien-tzu*, the Son of

Heaven. A bad ruler loses his mandate which brings calamity upon his people. *Tien* is often conceived as being personated. It can also be read as another term for the *Tao* of the Taoists, and Confucius was all too aware of how inscrutable the workings of *Tien* could appear to human intelligence as were the classical, philosophic Taoists. But he was always aware of its workings and the primacy of those workings above all else. His infrequent references to it seem, nevertheless, to reveal a religious sensibility within him.

When Confucius referred directly to Heaven, he did so reverently and with the utmost respect. When paying tribute to legendary ruler Yao, he says, "Great indeed was Yao as a ruler! How lofty! It is only Heaven that is great and it is only Yao who modeled himself upon it." Earlier in the text, on being asked by the commander and chief of the state of Wei, Wangsun Jia, to explain a statement, he replied, "The saying has got it wrong. When you have offended against Heaven there is nowhere you can turn to in your prayers." And later still, he chides his disciple, Zilu, for trying to procure retainers for him when he was in no position to honorably employ them, "In pretending that I had retainers when I had none, who would we be deceiving? Would we be deceiving Heaven?" Early in the *Analects*, recognizing the priority of the Mandate of Heaven and addressing three things the educated gentleman fears, he remarks, "He is in awe of the Decree of Heaven [Mandate of Heaven] The small man, being ignorant of the Decree of Heaven, does not stand in awe of it." Yet in middle age, Confucius can say of himself, "at fifty I understood the Decree of Heaven."

Elsewhere in the *Analects*, Confucius bemoans the fact that no one understands him, "I do not complain against Heaven, nor do I blame man. In my studies, I start from below and get through to what is up above. If I am understood at all, it is, perhaps, by Heaven." And, returning from a meeting with Nanzi, the wife of Duke Ling of Wei, whose reputation was less than sterling, he is met with the disapproval of his disciple Zilu. The "Master swore, 'If I have done anything improper, may Heaven's curse be on me, may Heaven's curse be on me!'" There is no reason to believe these words are a mere thoughtless exclamation; there is good reason to suppose they affirm Confucius' concern about

Heaven's involvement in man's affairs. In fact, there is evidence that he believed he had been chosen by Heaven for a sacred task. Informed that Huan T'ui, Minister of War in Song, was out to kill him, he asserted, "Heaven is author of the virtue that is in me. What can Huan T'ui do to me?" When surrounded by an angry crowd in Kuang because he had been mistaken for the rogue, Yang Huo, he repeated his conviction that Heaven had chosen him for a monumental task, "With King Wen dead, is not culture invested here in me? If Heaven intends culture to be destroyed, those who come after me will not be able to have any part of it. If Heaven does not intend this culture to be destroyed, then what can the men of Kuang do to me?" This is not a particularly modest statement from a man who was known to have his immodest moments—and it certainly doesn't qualify as a remark by a man who expects to die in the immediate future.

The preceding quotes from the *Analects* build a strong case in favor of the hypothesis that Confucius was inherently a religious man and that Confucianism is, if not a full-blown religion, a philosophy with strong, often almost silent, religious undertones. Too little attention has been given to the significance of ancestor worship in both Taoism and Confucianism. It is a very ancient practice that is about as fundamentally religious as any practice can be. And one predicated on the major assumption that spirits persist after death. Unfortunately, it is not very well understood or appreciated by Westerners and ignored by Western Christianity. Nevertheless, it assumes a fundamental doctrinal position not only in Taoism, Confucianism and Shinto but is a radical and inseparable part of many lesser native religions worldwide. Confucius inherited this ancient practice; he never gives any indication that he does not support it. In fact, the evidence tells us he was a quiet supporter of it and a practitioner of it. He interpreted his own Mandate of Heaven as the affairs and practices of man. This was his focus, his foreground. He left alone the religious background he had inherited, and the affairs of Heaven, gods and spirit, for others to contemplate and define. He never felt comfortable discoursing about religious abstractions, admitted as much and avoided doing so whenever possible.

In today's world, most Chinese religious practice is an

exercise in eclecticism. The Taoist may have blended Buddhist elements into his practices. The Confucian may actually have Taoist and Buddhist elements in his personal, religious crucible. Most overt, religious observances have gone underground since the Peoples' Revolution. The extent of religious practice in today's China is difficult to estimate. But if the formerly closed society of yesterday's Soviet Union is an accurate indicator, we might safely speculate that religious practices continue *soto voce* and *sub rosa*.

Chapter Eleven

Shintoism: The Old Religion That Would Not Die

In today's Japan, state census figures indicate that the great majority of Japanese claim allegiance to both Shintoism and Buddhism. This was not always the case. Traditional Shinto was the only religion of the country prior to the introduction of Buddhism in the 6th century C.E. Since then the popularity of Shinto has waned and been reinvigorated several times until the present day. World War II ended the practice of state Shinto, which had become a vehicle for propaganda supporting national feelings of superiority and divine manifest destiny. What is practiced today is secular Shinto, which has its local variations but is essentially the Shinto of centuries past minus the more overt political overtones.

Traditional Shintoism (Jap. "the way of the gods") has prehistoric roots that are animistic, polydemonistic, polytheistic and pantheistic. It is the largest religion in the world at this time which is closest to, and reflects most purely, its prehistoric and early historic roots. It is taken for granted, wrote Hirata Atsutane, that after death "a person becomes a soul and a god" This soul, whether actually achieving god-status or not, is considered immortal. Rebirth or reincarnation is not a part of the common doctrine. But, as with Chinese Taoism and Confucianism, ancestor worship is an important element of the faith. With Shinto, it is indispensable. Without it, the Shinto vision of heaven and earth becomes almost a virtual impossibility because, as Atsutane declares, "The love of the gods of heaven and earth is great beyond words . . . but the gods who are closely attached to my house and person are truly, as Motoori says, the souls of my ancestors and we ought to be specially careful not to

treat them with neglect.”

Original Shinto believed all objects were alive and possessed an animating power (*See* Jainism) or spirit (*kami*). This belief is still prevalent. *Kami* are often distinguished by their extraordinary attributes such as unique, outstanding differences, great or unusual accomplishments or exceptional, demonstrated or perceived powers. God status was always accorded to members of the royal families as exemplified in the envoy to Okisome Azumabito's poem “On the Death of Prince Yuge (from the *Manyoshu*, 8th century C.E.): ‘Our lord and prince/ Being a god/Has gone to life unseen/in the manifold clouds of heaven.’” In its vitalistic reverence for the life-force, the Shinto doctrine is not far removed from similar early Vedanta and Jain ideology. Having retained this vitalistic reverence over time, it is not surprising then to find today in rural areas the survival of general nature worship, spirit worship, even phallicism and fetishism. The first historical texts (the *Kojiki* or Record of Ancient Things and the *Nihongi* or Chronicles of Japan) venerated by Shintoists tell us of rocks, rivers, mountains and trees, some of which had the power of speech. Divinity in these more ancient times was considered extant and emergent everywhere.

The early Shintoists created a vast pantheon of gods and spirits (all considered *kami*), the great majority of which were nature divinities—polytheistic personifications of the natural world. The total number of *kami* has been considered as high as 8,000,000,000 in the popular mind. The *Nihongi*, however, states the number as 800,000. The *Engishiki* (Institutes of the Engi Period) lists the names of three thousand one hundred and thirty-two heavenly and earthly *kami*. Whatever the count, the number of *kami* recognized by Shinto is obviously very high. Many Shintoists considered any deceased spirit as a *kami*. And it is possible for a living human to qualify as one. For at least fifteen hundred years, and probably much longer, the Japanese have venerated their *kami*. The name Shinto, however, was not created until the 6th century C.E. to distinguish its rather amorphous doctrines from the invasive threats of Buddhism and Confucianism.

From earliest times, the idea of a soul or spirit was an innate

part of the Shinto belief system, even when it was a rather disorganized system comprised of a number of cults spread over the archipelago. This soul today is considered to have a two-part nature. The *nigi-mitama* part is nonaggressive, of good cheer and associated with good physical and mental health as well as prosperity. The *ara-mitama* is its polar opposite, the *yang*, you might say, of this *yin yang* combination, and is aggressive and impulsive. The *ara-mitama* can, if not controlled, lead one into trouble. It is interesting—and not in a few cases without its Western World counterpart—that the soul is sometimes conceived of as a ball of light or fire which can be seen after death if the conditions will allow. Sometimes the soul hangs around for awhile after its physical container ceases to function (cases of which we also have reported from primitive societies worldwide as well as from industrialized societies), but ultimately it leaves to become an eternal spirit or god, a *kami*. *Kami* is a term always signifying the divine, no matter of what gender or status. Ostensibly these *kami* join the other spirits and gods of Heaven. These gods include Izanagi-no-kami and his wife, Izanami-no-kami, two of the major creative gods of the Shinto pantheon who were sent to earth and are given credit for producing most of the world as we know it, including man, mountains, meadows, trees, fire, water This creative eruption was more or less capped by the formation of the divine rulers of earth, first and foremost of which was the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu. She finished the formative process by creating such essentials as rice fields and the irrigation canals of the “Reed Plains,” an ancient name for Japan. It is through her genetic line that the imperial family traces its lineage of divine right. And it is she who is given credit for organizing the rituals and doctrine of Shinto, chief among which are those which apply to purification of the body and soul.

Spiritual and physical cleanliness is very important to Shintoism. Once a body was dead, it was regarded as impure. Shinto abounds with various taboos associated with anyone who is in close contact physically with a deceased person—food preparers, funeral-goers, burial personnel et cetera. A certain time limit is usually specified to be observed before the contamination and defilement of a contactee is considered

purified. Blood is also regarded as impure and menstruation taboos are common. Blood associated with the physical body defiled the living. There is the famous account given in the *Nihongi* of Izanagi's sojourn to *Yomino-Kuni*, the world of the dead, where the body of his deceased wife, Izanami, resided for a time. The primary attribute of the place seems to be fetidness. Izanagi exclaims, "I have reached a very disgusting, dirty, defiled and impure world . . . I must cleanse myself of the rot clinging to my body." It becomes obvious from reading the *Engishiki* just how much death was thought to be a defilement and impurity to be avoided if at all possible. Shinto kami greatly dislike death, and practicing Shintoists are no different. Even the term for death was taboo at the Great Shrine of Ise, according to the *Engishiki*, and also at the Kamo Shrine in Kyoto. Instead of using the term for death at these shrines, the term *naoru* ("be as ever") was substituted. *Yomino-Kuni* was not originally conceived of as a true Hades or like a Christian hell. However, Buddhist influence somewhat altered the perception of some Shintoists. We have, for instance, the following statement made in the *Wa Rongo* (or "Japanese Analects" 1669 C.E.), ". . . hold to the truth or to your grief because the invisible punishment from Heaven will sooner or later catch up with you, and the evil-natured will be thrust into Hell . . . If you act against the will of Heaven and Earth, I am sure you will lose not only Divine Grace but remain forever unsaved in Hell." Such lines today could have easily come from the mouth of a Billy Sunday, a Billy Graham or a Pat Robertson.

Shinto history can be divided into four major periods. The first begins in prehistory and lasts until the introduction of Buddhism in 552 C.E. This period is notable for having no written scriptures, the faith being transmitted orally with great regional variations. The second period is when Shinto and Buddhism vied for religious supremacy, but native Shinto had some distinct disadvantages. Doctrine was being written and interpreted in terms of Chinese thought. Not only Buddhist ideas but Confucianism were discernibly shaping the faith. Buddhism, much the strongest influence, triumphed for awhile. The reasons for this now seem obvious. Shinto lacked structure, organization and a defined canon offering an explicit, consistent philosophy.

Buddhism had all of these, including a permissive liberalism which allowed the graceful assimilation of foreign elements. The Buddhists proclaimed that Shinto was only primitive Buddhism. Shinto divinities were being identified with Buddhist gods. Many Shinto ideas were interpreted as Buddhist ideas in disguise. For instance, it was not difficult for Buddhism to incorporate the nebulous Shinto idea of a posthumous spirit into Buddhist theory of what exactly of the human personality or ego survived death. Buddhist ideas about rebirth do not appear to have caused much resistance. The wealthy and better educated were attracted to the more sophisticated ideas of this Chinese-Indian import, and for awhile, the future for Shinto looked bleak.

The third period is defined from roughly the 9th century until the renaissance of a purer Shinto, freed of Buddhist dominance, which began in 1868. It is, nevertheless, worthy of note that during the early 10th century, several especially important collections of religious and state rituals were put into writing which helped greatly create a stronger, future foundation for Shinto scripture. The most prominent of these was the *Engishiki* and its eighth book, the *Norito*, which contains many liturgical texts still in use.

The great, practical problem of the third period was the overwhelming power and defiant resistance of the regional shoguns (military dictators) who opposed the imperial court. From the 12th century to the mid-19th century, when shogun power was at its peak, the emperor's person remained more or less sacrosanct but his power was fettered. Toward the end of this period, during the reign of the Tokugawa family, Shinto incorporated many Confucian beliefs and practices, which was the beginning of the gradual elevation of the role of the emperor as divine father of the nation and the recognition of himself and his offspring as the rightful heirs in perpetuity, through the unbroken line of descent from the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu, to the emperorship.

The fourth period began in 1868 when some of the Tokugawa clan shifted their allegiance from the shoguns to the emperor. With the deposition of the dictatorial war lord, Yoshinobu, the emperor was at last elevated in status to the virtually unopposed position of sole political and religious leader of Japan. Shinto

became the embodiment of the national conscience. Many Buddhist influences were now exorcised from Shinto practice and a long period of religious and political hegemony ensued, lasting until Hirohito's renunciation of divinity in 1945.

Unfortunately, Shintoism has had a long history, almost from its origins, of supernationalistic militancy interwoven within its core ideology. In addition, the inherent Shinto idea that the Japanese people were superior to other races kept it insular and dangerously xenophobic while contributing to imperialistic ambitions always rationalized as heavenly-inspired and divinely-mandated. Militant urges, feelings of innate superiority and the conviction that Heaven supported its manifest destiny created a volatile mixture within Japan which was exploited by political and military opportunists and contributed greatly to the national mania for empire which led to World War II. State Shintoism was declared illegal by General Douglas McArthur as governor of postwar Japan. Secular or communal Shinto, however, was not outlawed and survived. It now thrives among a sizable minority of religious Japanese in the cities and a majority of citizens in the rural countryside.

Chapter Twelve

Islam: Faith, Deeds and Immortality

Islam, founded by Muhammad in what is now Saudi Arabia in the 7th century C.E., is one of the world's largest religions with over a billion followers. It is considered, like Christianity, a daughter religion of Judaism. And, like Christianity and Judaism, it supports the concepts of human souls and afterlife. The word "Islam" literally means "surrender [to God]." A Muslim is a human being who unequivocally submits to God's (Allah's) will.

The basic creed of Islam is defined by the simple formula, "There is no god but God [Allah], and Muhammad is the messenger of God." However, for a Muslim to be a thoroughly true Muslim and assure the acceptance of his soul into Heaven, he is enjoined to accept seven articles of faith called the Emanul Mufassil (Faith Listed in Detail). These are: (1) Belief in God, (2) Belief in angels, (3) Belief in revealed scripture, (4) Belief in divinely-inspired prophets, (5) Belief in the final Day of Judgment, (6) Belief in the predestined governance of this world and all of creation by God and (7) Belief in life after death. In addition to these articles are five religious duties known as "the Pillars of Islam." They are (1) Reciting the creed, (2) Worshipping in a manner prescribed by canon law, (3) Giving charitable contributions to the poor and needy, (4) Fasting at appropriate times and (5) Performing a pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*) at least once in life if health and finances permit one to do so.

The concepts of soul and free will are pivotal eschatological ideas needed for a basic understanding of what Islam is all about and what it offers to the faithful. Muslims believe that when the

one and true God (Allah) created this world and everything in it, He offered the gifts of free will, self-awareness and personal responsibility for one's actions to every living and nonliving thing in His creation. The plants and animals, mountains, streams and meadows—everything in creation except the human soul-stuff yet to be formed into man and the spirit entities which would become known as jinn (invisible spirits)—politely refused the offer. The human soul-stuff accepted the offer as did the soon-to-be-realized jinn. These gifts, called “the trust” in the Qur`an, created a new human being with powers and potential beyond the otherwise carefully programmed universe. Now humans had reasoning ability, self-awareness and free will. What they could feasibly accomplish seemed almost unlimited. Of course, the willingness to accept personal responsibility for actions both good and bad accompanied the proposal. And the ability to choose right or wrong, to accept, deny or ignore God had its consequences.

Interestingly enough, the Qur`an states that it was foolish for humans to accept such an offer fraught with grave risks and potential negative consequences to the soul. Whereas a Westerner relishes his free will, the primary goal for a Muslim is to make sure he/she completely surrenders all their will as soon as possible to the will of Allah and, while a sojourner in this world, strives to live as pure a life as possible, filled with a multitude of good deeds, so that when the Day of Judgment finally comes, Allah will accept the soul's return to His heavenly domain. Failure to surrender one's ego to Allah, to refuse to recognize His ultimate authority over creation, can result in the soul's being denied a place in Heaven, at least until it is rehabilitated or, more accurately, rehabilitates itself. The orthodox view has been that the human soul has one chance, one life in which to surrender itself—although, as we shall see, there are several verses of the Qur`an which hint at the possibility of rebirth or reincarnation. These verses are usually ignored by Muslim clerics and Western scholars as are several possible references to rebirth or reincarnation found in the Christian New Testament. A partial failure to surrender completely, accompanied with Allah's mercy, can result in a protracted stay in a purgatorial dimension until the soul is cleansed enough to

justify repatriation to Heaven.

There is a special place for souls that are not pure enough for Heaven and yet not so corrupted as to deserve a cleansing stint in Hell proper. It is an elevated spot between Heaven and Hell called “the Heights.” This locale is not identical to Christian Purgatory or Abraham’s Bosom but a parallel concept. The Muslim soul detained between Heaven and Hell has quite literally a view beneath of chaos, cacophony and hellfire. Above him lies suspended the peaceful bliss of a Paradise beyond his wildest imagination. He can at once see both and is dually inspired to review the course of his past life and seek God more vigorously.

There are several direct references to the soul being outfitted with a new body in Heaven. Surah II 259 reads, “. . . We may make you a sign to men, look at the bones, how We set them together, then clothe them with flesh.” (Trans. M.M. Pickthall) Or Surah LXXV 3-5, “Thinketh man that We shall not assemble his bones? Yea, verily. Yea, We are able to restore his very fingers. But man would fain deny what is before him.” (Trans. Pickthall) Other references to future lives have caused some Western researchers to suspect that these are actually references to rebirth and/or reincarnation. Surah II 28 reads, “How do you deny Allah, and you were dead and He gave you life? Again he will cause you to die and again bring you to life; then you shall be brought back to Him.” (Trans. M.H. Shakir) Surah XL 11 states, “They shall say: ‘Lord, twice you have made us die, and twice you have given us life. We now confess our sins. Is there no escape from Hell?’” (Trans. N.J. Dawood) The statement in Surah XXX 11 also leads some researchers to believe it is a reference to a rebirthing process, “God produceth creatures, and will hereafter restore them to life: Then shall ye return to him.”* As we have indicated, this pronouncement and the others are virtually ignored

*All extended quotations from the Qu`ran which follow are from the George Sale translation.

by orthodox Islam, and it is almost impossible to find any evidence of a discussion of it by Muslim clerics of the present or past.

In the beginning, before human souls were incarnated, they

existed as a composite, primordial, undifferentiated spirit-soup. From this matrix, Allah fashioned each individual, unique soul. And to make sure each of these souls started out on its journey with a sense of right and wrong, He gave each soul a *fitrah* or moral conscience. This is a built-in natural indicator to help guide the experiencing soul to purity and goodness and a proper sense of the greatness and mercy of God. The Qur`an, Surah XCI 7-10, says, “. . . by the soul, and Him who completely formed it, and inspired into the same its faculty of distinguishing, and power of choosing, wickedness and piety: Now is he who hath purified the same, happy; but he who hath corrupted the same is miserable.”

Unlike Christianity, Islam teaches that we are all born sinless. There is no “original sin” concept; Adam and Eve were forgiven after repenting their indiscretions. There was no need for a savior to die on a cross to expunge original sin, present sins or future ones. Mankind is recognized as imperfect but perfectible. Islam also does not accept the idea of a holy Trinity. Allah is a supreme, singular entity. He does not need to die Himself, or through a surrogate, at any time for any reason. He cannot be divided. He has no partners, wives, sons or daughters. He has no personal gender nor does He show preference in gender. His domain and reign are infinite in time and space. No human has ever viewed His presence: none could bare to behold Him. He takes an active role in His Creation and tests His human, free-will subjects. We are continually given the chance to surrender our will to Him. After all, our soul was created by Him and will return to Him. We are His boldest, potentially most elevated creation, even potentially more elevated than the angels, who have no free will. We are free to recognize Him and His omnipotence at any time and to return of our own free will to His domain and His succor. It is Allah’s position, as presented by the Qur`an, that it would indeed be a foolish creation which rejected its benevolent Creator who was offering it eternal Paradise, not as a slave but as a worthy, sharing participant.

Unlike Hinduism, which often conceives of each individual, human soul as a spark of mostly unrealized god-stuff, Islam believes Allah created everything but is separate in His majesty and the stuff of His being. In other words, Allah’s spirit does not

in fact dwell *within* the soul of mortals, as many Christians believe. Muslims look askance at Christians and others who believe they are little gods or potential little gods, chips, as it were, off the Godly block. They furthermore reject the idea we are all sons and daughters of Allah. In Islam, Allah has no relatives whether real or figurative. Such ideas seem to the faithful not only false but vain. Allah is, and remains eternally, supreme in His own being.

The journey of the soul at death, although showing some similarities to certain particularities of Judaic thought, is rather unique unto itself. Islam teaches that at the moment of death, the soul rises in the throat. An angel named Malikul Mawt (the Angel of Death) appears and removes the soul (*ruh*) by grasping it and pulling it out of the body. If the soul comes from an evil person or a God-denier, the angel tears it away forcefully. If the soul is that of a virtuous, faithful person, the process of extraction is much more gentle. It is foolish to wait until the last moment to discover one's faith in Allah. Last-minute conversions and death-bed repentances are generally rejected.

Once the soul has been extracted, the angel of Death will hold it directly over the deceased's body. Now the soul has a clear, vivid picture of his/her lifeless body and those gathered in attendance about it. For them, the angel and his soul-cargo are invisible. At this point, the virtuous soul will usually call out "Take me forward." The unfaithful soul is stupefied, uncertain what is transpiring and often displeased with the course of events.

Now the angel, (or angels), gently guides the soul, wrapped in paradisiacal raiment, to Heaven. Here they must pass through the entrance gates. The name of the deceased is announced as the angel(s) proceeds to the highest Heaven. Once having arrived before Allah, He commands that his servant's name be written in *Illiyum*. *Illiyum* is the ultimate record of all records, a sort of Book of Life. The souls who appear there are assured of getting into Heaven on Judgment Day. The angel(s) is then directed to take the deceased's soul back to earth for interment in the earth because He promised them that as He created them from earth, into earth He would return them, then from earth He would raise them up once again.

The soul of an evil person at this point is in trouble. The heavenly gates will not open for him. Allah then commands that this person's name be cataloged in *Sijjin*, the book or registry of Hell. He now commands the angel(s) to return this soul also to the earth from whence it came.

What follows now for the soul, according to many Muslims, is a waiting period similar to traditional Judaic doctrine. The soul is placed in the earth where the physical body was interred to wait for the final Judgment Day. It is a process which can be compared to cold storage—a process, nonetheless, that is much more pleasant for the souls of the faithful than those of the wicked, the immoral and the God-denying.

The name for this life in the grave is called *Barzakh* or “the Partition.” It begins when two angels with black faces and blue eyes, Munkeer and Nakeer, are sent to the grave site of the deceased. They ask the deceased's soul three key questions: (1) “Who is your God?”, (2) “What was your manner of living?” and (3) “Who is your prophet?” The correct answers in respective order are “God,” “Surrendering to Allah's will” and then the name of the prophet the deceased had followed. Islam doesn't deny that there were other great prophets sent with God's messages before the appearance of the prophet Muhammad on earth. They accept, for instance, Abraham, Noah, Moses and Jesus as legitimate conduits of Allah's Word as well as several other non-Judeo-Christian prophets. They do insist, however, that Muhammad is the last of this long, prophetic line.

If the deceased's soul answers the three questions correctly, a rather miraculous scene unfolds. His good deeds personify into an entity who tells him, “I have good news. Allah accepts your deeds, and you are now entitled to receive eternal Paradise.” A window opens to Heaven and a similar one to Hell. The soul is shown the seven levels of Hell and then is given a brief glimpse of the level it has earned in Paradise. But Paradise is not immediately attainable. Now the angels increase the size of the storage compartment. Warmth and confidence-reassuring light shines within the enclosure. The soul is advised to sleep and dream pleasantly until the final Day of Judgment.

If the questions are not answered correctly, the angels metamorphose into terrifying Nemeses, striking the soul-body

with a heavy mace-like object, and cause the storage compartment to shrink in size until it becomes horrifyingly constricted. The evil deeds committed in life by the soul personify themselves into a grotesque, demon-like entity who speaks terrifying words, "I have bad news. I am your evil deeds come back to life. You were a sluggard in obeying Allah and quick to disobey Him. May Allah repay your evil deeds with evil deeds." Later, the angels return each day to thrash the soul-body and force it to look through a window which frames a view of the soul's future place in Hell. This repeated torment will continue unabated until the final Day of Judgment when the soul will proceed to its rightful, earned destiny.

There are seven sects in Islam in addition to the main two divisions, Sunni and Shiite. Some sects offer a figurative explanation for the "Beating in the Sepulcher." William R. Alger noted that the Motozallite sect reacted to the above schema in "utter denial." But the majority of Muslims accept the gruesome fate of the evil soul in the grave *before* the act of Final Judgment as literal truth. However, the intermediate state of virtuous souls before Final Judgment has long been the subject of speculation and disagreement among some Muslim clerics. It is generally agreed that the souls of prophets are directly admitted to Heaven upon death. It is also generally agreed that the souls of martyrs also pass directly to Heaven. But as to the souls of virtuous commoners, the clerical verdict is not so clear. Many believe these souls must reside until Final Judgment within their burial enclosure, albeit warm and lighted, their slumbering souls filled with pleasant dreams. On the other hand, many Muslims have the opinion that these virtuous souls sojourn for awhile in one of the lesser seven Heavens, enjoying a taste of future blessedness. As for the souls of deceased non-Muslims, the general understanding is that they all will have to experience the "punishment of the grave." Muhammad was constantly encouraging the living to pray for protection from the punishments that the unfaithful, the immoral and the evil would receive. The Qur`an is chock-full of warnings such as, they who do not believe shall have garments of fire fitted to them, and they shall be beaten with red-hot maces or, they shall be taken by the hair of their heads and their feet and flung into hell, where they

shall drink boiling water. The true believers, lying on couches, will look down upon the infidels in hell and scoff and scorn them. Statements like these bare witness to an inherent strain of violence, a retributive inclination, a lack of compassion and an almost sadistic attraction to the spectacle of human punishment which some observers of the faith have found disturbing.

On the Day of Judgment (*Youmul Qiyamah*), Allah will gather together every human and jinn who ever lived. It is prophesied that a cataclysmic Last Day will immediately precede that final Day of Judgment. Then Allah will proceed with the reckoning of each individual soul. The Qur`an clearly states the need for just retribution for those who have frittered away the great opportunity Allah has given them to master their selves and thereby prove worthy of His eternal Paradise and the immortality of their souls. For evil-doers, requital is necessary. For those who have been victimized and wronged, redress of their suffering is necessary. The Qur`an tells us that will be the Day of final, ultimate recompense. Every living thing, including plants and animals which been abused and misused by careless, cruel or misguided human beings, will be allowed to represent themselves and bear witness against their abusers.

As to when exactly the Day of Judgment will occur, Muhammad answered similarly to what is stated in the Book of Daniel, "They ask you about the hour, tell them only God know when it will occur. When it does occur, humans will be taken completely by surprise and wish it had never come." A famous passage of the Qur`an describes the Day in these words:

He asketh, when will the day of resurrection be? But when the sight shall be dazzled, and the moon shall be eclipsed, and the sun and the moon shall be in conjunction; on that day man shall say, where is a place of refuge? By no means: There shall be no place to fly unto. With thy Lord shall be the sure mansion of rest on that day: On that day shall a man be told that which he hath done first and last. Yea; a man shall be an evidence against himself: And though he offer his excuses, they shall not be received. (Surah LXXV 6-15)

Some say the Day of Judgment will happen in a twinkling of the eye. Others say Muhammad declared that it would last fifty thousand years because of the extended time needed to adjudicate the future of so large a number of souls. During the period of the Last Day, all material substances in the cosmos will be destroyed—all living things, including all human bodies as well as the angels and the jinn. During the Resurrection, which follows the Last Day, the souls of all the dead, those recently perished and those who have resided for some time in the “cold storage” of *Barzakh*, will be brought to a great heavenly plain. There they will be given new bodies that will look exactly like their former earth-bodies with two major exceptions. They will be without any genetic defects or scars from personal injuries. From the vantage point on the plain, the distant yet looming, lurid pit of Hell will be visible.

The newly incarnate souls will then be divided into appropriate groups following the prophet of their particular religious persuasion. Jews will stand behind Moses, for example, and Christians behind Jesus. Muslims will queue behind Muhammad.

Allah will remain hidden behind a large veil as He conducts the trial, one soul at a time. The Qur`an and Hadith (any sayings or actions attributed to Muhammad) spell out in great detail the protocol of these proceedings.

The complete record of each individual’s life will be read, deed for deed. Witnesses will be called for prosecution and defense. The good and bad deeds of each former mortal’s life will be piled up in a heap next to them. Those who have been wronged by the subject under consideration will be allowed to help themselves from the pile of the defendant’s good deeds. Obviously, it is wise for one to have a large pile of good deeds with which to begin the proceedings, because that pile is almost invariably going to suffer shrinkage. Finally, the residue of good and bad deeds is weighed on a scale in a ceremony reminiscent of the Egyptian Osirian judgment of the dead. It is worthy of note that before this weighing commences, the subject’s record of prayer is examined. If it fails to pass muster, all the individual’s good deeds are disqualified. Hence the Muslim’s fidelity to daily prayers. Those scholars who have argued that

Islam is a religion based solely on deeds rather than faith and deeds might find it prudent to reconsider their position. Good deeds are seen as a proof of faith. And they are expected to continue for all one's mortal days, just as day follows night. This position is a near parallel to the Apostle Paul's opinion on the subject found in Christian scripture.

Each subject must ultimately receive Allah's final verdict, which is in some cases a sentence. Each freshly reembodyed soul is made to understand the reasons why his particular verdict is being rendered. Then he returns to the line of his respective prophet, if he has one. When all the judgments are forthcoming, everyone is led to the edge of the looming pit of Hell. Amid leaping flames and intense heat, the newly judged stand awed or terrified, as the case may be. Those guilty of the most despicable crimes are the first to be pitched headlong by the attending angels into the maw of the seething fire-pit. The remaining subjects must now pass over the gauntlet known as *al-Sirat*, which is the bridge that arches over the pit of Hell and leads to Paradise on the far side. *Al-Sirat* recalls the Zoroastrian conception of *Chinvat*, the bridge spanning *Drujo Demana*.

We are told that *al-Sirat* is razor-thin and studded with all manner of protruding, sharp, jagged edges which cut and maim. More people will fall from *al-Sirat* than will make it across. The virtuous will cross easily, unimpeded and unscathed. Those good souls who had committed minor sins which were not forgiven them will suffer some lacerations and bruising before making it to the other side. Those with a heavy burden of major sins will only make it so far before being caught up and toppling netherward into the waiting inferno.

Once across *al-Sirat*, the Qur'an proceeds to describe the true magnificence of Islam's Paradise (*Jannah*, lit. garden). The plural, Gardens of Paradise, is a more accurate designation for this Heaven because there is a hierarchy of seven heavens, each one reputed to be more magnificently sensual than the next lower one, yet even the lowest of which, we are told, is practically beyond man's imagination:

But for the pious is prepared a place of bliss: Gardens planted with trees, and vineyards, and damsels with

swelling breasts, of equal age with themselves, and a full cup. They shall hear no vain discourse there, nor any falsehood. This shall be their recompense from thy Lord; a gift fully sufficient . . . (Surah LXXVIII 31-36)

And,

God will introduce those who shall believe, and act righteously, into gardens through which rivers flow: they shall be adorned therein with bracelets of gold, and pearls; and their vestures therein shall be silk. (Surah XXII 23)

Some Westerners have raised their eyebrows at what seems like a highly materialistic perspective on what purports to be a spiritual realm. Muslim scholars have replied to such criticism with the retort that this is Allah's gift to those who have denied themselves the material indulgences of earth to attest to their self-control while under temptation and to affirm their great faith in Allah. It is maintained that a luxuriant *Jannah*, where the senses are surfeited if such is the desire, is Allah's reward for living a morally pure, ascetic existence and for the good deeds selflessly performed. Once the "test" has been passed, the heavenly-arrived, if he wishes, is allowed to experience some things which were, in another realm, under different circumstances, either disapproved or forbidden. And, defenders of the faith argue, how different are these Heavens, after all, from the commonplace Christian belief that Heaven is . . . well . . . a simple place of pearly gates and streets paved with gold with angels ceaselessly singing the praises of the Most High. Furthermore, as any comparative scholar well knows, Hindu scripture, literature and art offer descriptions and depictions of the sacred heavens every bit as lush and enticing as anything found in the Qur'an. The same could be said for certain Buddhist sects.

Islamic Hell (*Jahannum*), presided over by the angels of Hell, has seven levels just like *Jannah*. Each individual has earned his level, the sentence having been determined primarily by how little he/she believed in Allah and how wicked the subject has been while on earth. The lowest level, it should come as no

surprise, is reserved for the worst sinners. The many descriptions of *Jahannum* found in the Qur`an and Hadith rival in number and graphic detail the sumptuous descriptions of Heaven found elsewhere in the text:

And they who believe not shall have garments of fire fitted unto them: boiling water shall be poured on their heads; their bowels shall be dissolved thereby, and also their skins; and they shall be beaten with maces and iron. (Surah XXII 19-21)

Dante Alighieri was familiar with the Qur`anic descriptions of *Jannah* and *Jahannum*. He used the latter as an inspiration for the levels of Hell he created in *The Inferno*. He earned the wrath of a large portion of the Muslim world by making the prophet Muhammad a character within the book's content. Such an act is considered blasphemous to Muslims, although Dante was probably unaware of the insult he had committed.

Unlike Christian Hell, Satan (Shaitan) and his demons are not in control. Allah's angels take care of maintenance and guard duty there. Satan is, however, very active on the planet's surface, as are his minions. Hell is a place Allah created solely for punishment. Unlike Christian Hell, where there is no reprieve, no recourse of any kind and thus no hope, Allah shows his mercy in periodically removing some souls from its bondage once they have purified themselves and served out the term of their punishment. In these instances, at the appropriate time, angels appear to administer what is called Water of Life over the wounds of the penitent's body. This act regenerates the body to a form which is suitable for at least the lower levels of Paradise. The angels now escort the cleansed soul in a fresh body to whatever level of Paradise his former good deeds, whatever they were, merit.

Despite much ignorance and misunderstanding of this religion in the West, Islam historically has been tolerant of Judaism, Christianity and other religions practicing in Muslim countries—provided that the belief and practice of Islam was not challenged head-on by these competitors. In fact, the historical record of this tolerance (with a few notable exceptions, such as the

treatment of Zoroastrians in Old Persia) stretches out over twelve hundred years from the 8th to the 20th century. In the Muslim view, the greatest intolerance of the Crusader Period was not due to Muslim oppression so much as to Crusader zeal and fanaticism. Muslims and Jews coexisted remarkably well until the formation of modern-day Israel, and the expropriation of Muslim lands that went with it, which sparked the Arab-Israeli conflicts. These conflicts have continued to fester, erupt and endanger world peace since 1948. As an example of the previous, long, successful coexistence between Arabs and Jews, some Jewish historians refer to the period when Jews lived in Muslim-ruled Spain as the Golden Age of Judaism. The present, dangerous situation is a worrisome problem of immense proportions. It is one of the world's great misfortunes that a minority of Muslim, Jewish and Christian fanatics, misconstruing their religions scriptures out of ignorance, intolerance, self-interest and self-righteousness, have been able to shape (and distort) the course of events in the Near East in the recent past and present to the extent that they have. Gross self-interest and self-righteousness have encouraged unconscionable political positions and military actions within governments which should know better but which all too often are as much a cause as an effect of misdirected thinking.

Finally, let it be noted that the Qur`an praises all true, God-loving, faithful souls who live virtuous lives whether Muslim, Jew, Christian or otherwise, "Surely those who believe, and those who Judaize, and Christians, and Sabeans, whoever believeth in God, and the last day, and doth that which is right, they shall have their reward with their Lord. There shall come no fear on them, neither shall they be grieved." (Surah II 62) In other words, good souls faithful to God are guaranteed eternal life in Paradise. They need have "no fear" of the searing flames of *Jahannum*.

