

Death and Re-birth

HH. The only way to avoid death is to avoid being born [13.1.72]

The last chapter of *A New Model of the Universe* has the title 'Sex and Evolution'. It starts by reiterating the idea of recurrence which was dealt with in full in the preceding chapter, but now linking it with physical love, sex:

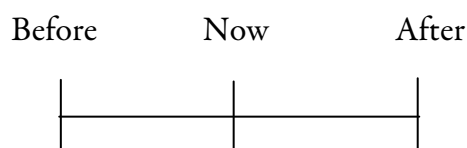
The enigma of death is connected with the enigma of birth, the enigma of disappearance with the enigma of appearance. The enigma of birth or appearance is connected with the enigma of love, with the enigma of sex, i.e. of the division of the sexes and their attraction to one another.

A man dies, and the moments of his death agony, the moments of his last thoughts and realisations, his last sensations and last regrets, are connected with the sensations of love which create new birth. Which precedes and which follows the other? All this must be simultaneous. Then the soul sinks into sleep and then re-awakes in the same world as before, in the same house, with the same parents.

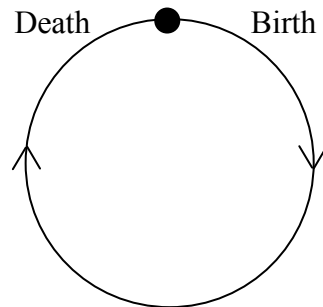
What happens at the moment when, according to the old allegory, the serpent bites its own tail, and when the death agony of one life comes into contact with the sensations of love which begin another life?

Ouspensky goes on to describe the meaning of 'birth', how human evolution relates to different levels of sex, and finally the relation between sex and mystical experience. However, for the moment we should perhaps revise the ideas about recurrence and see how they stand in the light of HH's comments on birth and death (conveniently collected together in the booklet *Birth and Death*).

Ouspensky had strong feelings about recurrence starting with early childhood experiences of *déjà vu*. He later combined the Nietzschean concept of recurrence with his own ideas about different dimensions of time: just as there are three dimensions of space, there are three dimensions of time; six dimensions in all. He stated that we have an incorrect view of time as being linear:



Here a person is born in a certain year and dies in another and disappears. This is the Fourth Dimension, or first dimension of time. In Ouspensky's Fifth Dimension (or second dimension of time), repetition occurs, so when someone dies they return to start the same life again – recurrence:



There is also a Sixth Dimension (or third dimension of time), in which different possibilities are realised. So recurrence of a life may not necessarily be a totally mechanical repetition; even the time of birth or death may vary from one life to another. People who have attained a high state may escape recurrence and maybe relocate themselves to a different time.

Most if not all of the memories of a previous life are lost with rebirth. *Déjà vu* may perhaps be the exception to this rule though there is a neurological explanation for it. Ouspensky's novel *The Strange Life of Ivan Osokin* makes the point that even if someone were to remember their previous life, it might not help them to change things. Ouspensky hoped that he would remember more in his next life and shortly before he died he made his closest followers drive him to the places he had known in England. He also believed in the importance of a 'conscious' death.

Ouspensky noted dryly that man is incapable of inventing a theory of survival after death that is totally wrong and HH said much the same:

A person who dies has never written back to say what happens to him after death. Therefore, the only course open to us is to take authority from our Holy Scriptures on subjects relating to death and thereafter. [13.1.72]

HH seemed to subscribe to Indian philosophy in the following beliefs:

- The subtle and causal bodies survive death.
- After death the soul is reborn in a different body.
- Except in rare instances memory of previous lives is lost.
- The possibilities in the new body depend on what happened in the past life.
- The last thought before death is important.
- The prime purpose is to escape the wheel of life and death.
- For rare souls union with 'the Lord' is achieved upon death.

It is difficult to be certain but he seems to have favoured reincarnation rather than recurrence.

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The last quotation in *Birth and Death* is highly pertinent:

RG. I would like to ask a personal question. Perhaps, like the example given of the poet Valmiki, I am finding it easier to make efforts in a peaceful old age than in a turbulent youth. But old age means the certain approach of death. What attitude should be formed about this?

Having observed how the realisation that I have to die spurs me on to greater effort, I now see death as the universal opportunity which must not be missed. Apart from intensifying efforts, are there any special steps which should be taken?

H.H. The day one comes into this world one's departure is also ordained. It is certain that one who is born must die sooner or later but it is only the body which is born and then dissolved, for the dweller within neither comes from anywhere nor goes anywhere. Thus the only preparation is to establish complete detachment from the body. When the mortal body dissolves back into its physical elements, the subtle and causal bodies survive, waiting for the next time round, for they will only be dissolved after full liberation. Therefore, not much importance need be given to the death of the physical body; and all one's efforts should be aimed at preparing for total liberation. To achieve that, one has to be alert and awake so that the internal subtle body of Antakharan can be purified by knowledge and meditation.

When all impediments are removed and no limitations remain, the so-called consciousness of the individual will merge into universal consciousness. This is the only opportunity worth looking for and for which to intensify efforts. This alone is the real opportunity which no-one should miss. Two distinct directions of work have been given to help - the meditation and the knowledge - and both are valid. Devotion on its own is a valid way, and since both ways lead to liberation and full realisation either singly or together, it is possible to realise the ultimate unity here and now by either way. It doesn't really matter if the body dies today or in ten years time for even when the body is incapable of engaging in physical efforts, the Antakharan is still capable of going towards either liberation or bondage. Liberation is possible when meditation becomes natural and all hindrances are removed. Going by the way of knowledge one realises the identity of the Self as none other than the Absolute, and all concepts of limitations are discarded. There is no other special way, but meditation and knowledge become special when one decides to treat them very sincerely without missing a single moment for constant awareness. On the whole, the way of meditation is easier than the way of knowledge. Just use the will you were originally given. [3.1.93]

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This synopsis of the different views about birth and death does not do justice to either Ouspensky's or HH's thinking, and there is much in both approaches that has never been explored. Perhaps we could read the relevant parts of *New Model* and *Birth and Death* privately and see if we should pursue the ideas further.