Four Killer Questions: Power Tools for Great Question-Asking

Sue Bohlin provides helpful information for use in helping sharpen the question-asking skills of fellow believers as well as in evangelism. These "understanding questions" help Christians sharpen their biblical worldview and help unbelievers delve into the inconsistencies of their own worldview.



Dr. Jeff Myers of Bryan College and Summit Ministries shares our passion for helping others develop a biblical worldview. One of the tools he offers in developing critical thinking skills is how to use the right question at the right time.

He suggests four "killer questions" to help anyone think critically.{1} The first question is, *What do you mean by that?* In other words, define your terms. The second question is, *Where do you get your information?* The third is, *How do you know that's true?*, and the fourth killer question is, *What if you're wrong?*

Dr. Myers tells this story:

"A friend took a group of third graders to the Denver Museum of Natural History.

"Before he took them inside, he knelt down on their level and said, 'Kids, if anybody in this museum tells you anything, I want you to ask them, *how do you know that's true?*' Giving this question to a third grader is the intellectual equivalent of giving them a surface-to-air missile. These kids walked into the museum; all they knew was, Ask: *How do you know that's true?*

“A paleontologist was going to show them how to find a fossil. Apparently they had intentionally buried a fossil down in the soil sample and she said, ‘We’re going to find it.’ Very clever, right? No, not with this crowd. ‘Cause they started asking questions like, ‘Well, how do you know there’s a fossil down in there?’ ‘Well, because we just know there’s a fossil down there.’ ‘Why do you want to find it?’ ‘Well, because we want to study it.’ ‘Why do you want to study it?’ ‘We want to find out how old it is.’ Well, how old do you think it is?’ ‘About 60 million years old.’

“‘Lady, how do you know that is true?'”

“She patronized them. She said, ‘Well, you see, I’m a scientist, I study these things, I just know that.’ They said, ‘Well, how do you know that’s true?’ Anytime she said anything at all they just asked, ‘How do you know that’s true?’ What happened next proves that truth is stranger than fiction. She threw down her tools, glared at these children, and said, ‘Look, children, *I don’t know, OK?* I just work here!'”{2}

Question #1: What do you mean by that?

The first question is, *What do you mean by that?* You want to get the other person to define his terms and explain what he is saying. If you don’t make sure you understand what the other person means, you could end up having a conversation using the same words but meaning very different things.

When I was a new believer, I was approached on the street by some people collecting money for a ministry to young people. I asked, naively, “Do you teach about Jesus?” They said, rather tentatively, “Yesss. . . .” I gave them some money and asked for their literature (which was in the reverse order of what I should have done). Only later did I learn that they did indeed teach about Jesus—that He was the brother of Satan! I wish I had had this first killer question back then. I would have asked, “What do you teach about Jesus? Who is He to you?”

Get the other person's definition. Let's say you're talking to a neighbor who says, "I don't believe there is a God." Don't quarrel with him: "Oh yes there is!" "No, there's not." Second Timothy 2:24-25 says not to quarrel with anyone. Just start asking questions instead. "What do you mean by 'God'? What's your understanding of this God who isn't there?" Let him define that which does not exist! You may well find out that the god he rejects is a mean, cold, abusive god who looks a lot like his father. In that case, you can assure him that you don't believe in that god either. The true God is altogether different. If it were me, at this point I wouldn't pursue the existence of God argument, but rather try to understand where the other person is coming from, showing the compassion and grace of God to someone bearing painful scars on his soul.

Let's say someone says she is for a woman's right to choose abortion. You can ask, "What do you mean by 'woman'? Only adult women? What if the baby is a girl, what about her right to choose? What do you mean by 'right'? Where does that right come from?" Do you see how asking *What do you mean by that?* can expose problems in the other person's perspective?

Question #2: Where do you get your information?

The question *Where do you get your information?* is particularly important in today's culture, where we drown in information from a huge array of sources. Information is being pumped at us from TV, radio, music, Websites, email, blogs, billboards, movies, and conversations with people who have no truth filters in place at all. Consider the kind of responses you could get to the question, *Where do you get your information?*

"I heard it somewhere." Well, how's that for reliable? Follow with another killer question, *How do you know it's true?*

"Everybody says so." That may be so, but is it true? If you

say something loud enough, often enough, and long enough, people will believe it's true even if it isn't. For example, "everybody says" people are born gay. Doesn't everybody know that by now? That's what we hear, every day, but where is the science to back up that assertion? Turns out, there is none. Not a shred of proof that there is a gay gene.

Someone else may say, "I read it somewhere." So ask, in a legitimate newspaper or magazine? Or in a tabloid? Elvis is not alive, and you can't lose twenty-five pounds in a week. You might have read it somewhere, but there is a word for that kind of writing: *fiction*.

Did you see it on the internet? That could be a single individual with great graphics abilities pumping out his own totally made-up stuff. Or it could be a trustworthy, legitimate website like Probe.org.

Did you see it on TV? Who said it, and how trustworthy is the source? Was it fact, or opinion? Be aware of the worldview agenda behind the major media outlets. Former CBS reporter Bernard Goldberg exposed the leftist leanings of the media in his book *Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How the Media Distort the News*. Most of what you see on TV is what the Bible calls "the world," and we are to be discerning and skeptical of the values and information it pumps out.

Don't be fooled by someone sounding confident and self-assured. Many people feel confident without any basis for feeling that way. Ask, *Where do you get your information?* It's a great killer question.

Question #3: How do you know that's true?

The third killer question is, *How do you know that's true?* This is probably the most powerful question of them all. It puts the burden of proof on the other person.

Most people aren't aware of what they assume is true; there's

simply no other way to see the world. They often believe what they believe without asking if it's true, if it aligns with reality. If you respectfully ask killer questions like *How do you know that's true?*, all of a sudden it can begin to occur to folks that what they believe, they believe by faith. But where is their faith placed?

Sometimes, the kindest thing we can do for people is gently shake up their presuppositions and invite them to think.

The reigning philosophy in science today is materialism, the insistence that the physical universe is all that exists. Something is only real if it can be measured and quantified. We need to ask, *How do you know* there is nothing outside the matter-space-time-energy continuum? *How do you know* that the instruments of physical measurement are the only ones that matter? *How do you know* there isn't something non-physical, which cannot be measured with physical measuring tools? If all you have is a ruler, how do you measure weight? (And if all you have is a ruler, and someone wants to talk about weight, it would be easy to deny there is such a thing as weight, only height and length, a lot like the materialists' insistence that since we can't measure the supernatural, it doesn't exist.)

At the heart of the debate over stem cell research is the question of the personhood of a human embryo. Those who insist that it's not life until implantation need to be asked, *How do you know that's true?* It's genetically identical to the embryo ten minutes before implantation. How do you know those are only a clump of cells and not a human being?

Postmodern thought says that no one can know truth. This philosophy has permeated just about every college campus. To the professor who asserts, "No one can know truth," a student should ask, *How do you know that's true?* If that sounds slightly crazy to you, good! A teacher who says there is no truth, or that if there is, no one can know it, says it

because he or she believes it to be true, or they wouldn't be saying it!

We get hostile email at Probe informing us of how stupid and biased we are for believing the Bible, since it has been mistranslated and changed over the centuries and it was written by man anyway. When I ask, "How do you know this is true?", I don't get answers back. Putting the burden of proof on the other person is quite legitimate. People are often just repeating what they have heard from others. But we have to be ready to offer a defense for the hope that is in us as well.{3} Of course, when we point to the Bible as our source of information, it's appropriate to ask the killer question, "How do you know that's true?" Fortunately, there is a huge amount of evidence that today's Bible is virtually the same as the original manuscripts. And there is strong evidence for its supernatural origins because of things like fulfilled prophecy. Go to the "Reasons to Believe" section of Probe.org for a number of articles on why we can trust that the Bible is really God's word.

There are a lot of mistaken, deceived people who believe in reincarnation and insist they remember their past lives. Shirley MacLaine claims to have been a Japanese Geisha, a suicide in Atlantis, an orphan raised by elephants, and the seducer of Charlemagne.{4} Here's where this killer question comes in. If you lose your life memories when you die, *how do you know* your past lives are real? When you're born into a new body and your slate is wiped clean, *how do you know* it's you?

So many people have embraced a pragmatic, expedient standard of, "Hey, it works for me." "It works for me to cheat on my taxes, as long as I don't get caught." "It works for me to spend hours on porn sites late at night since my wife doesn't know how to check the computer's history." "It works for me to keep God in his corner of the universe while I do my own thing; I'll get religious later in life." Well, *how do you know* it works? You haven't seen the whole, big picture. You

can’t know the future, and you can’t know how tomorrow’s consequences will be reaped from today’s choices.

Let me add a caveat here. The underlying question behind *How do you know that’s true?* is really, “Why should I believe you?” It can be quite disconcerting to be challenged this way, so be sure to ask with a friendly face and without an edge in your voice.

Question #4: What if you’re wrong?

One benefit of this question is that it helps us not to “sweat the small stuff.” There are a lot of issues where it just doesn’t matter a whole lot if we’re wrong. If you’re agonizing over a restaurant menu, trying to figure out the best entree, what if you’re wrong? It doesn’t matter. You can probably come back another time. If you can’t, because you’re traveling and you’ll never have another chance, is it going to wreck your life? Absolutely not.

Many of our youth (and, sadly, adults as well) believe that having sex is just part of being social. Many of them believe that sex qualifies as recreation, much like going to an amusement park. They need to be challenged: *What if you’re wrong?* Besides the high probability of contracting a number of sexually transmitted diseases, there is the ongoing heartache of the discovery that “casual” sex isn’t, because of its lasting impact on the heart.

The ultimate question where this matters is, *What do you believe about God?* What do you do with Jesus’ statement “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except by Me”?{5} What if you believe there is no God, or that you can live however you want and God will let you into heaven because you’re not a mass murderer? We need to ask, *What if you’re wrong?* You will be separated from God forever!

It’s only fair for Christ-followers to ask that of ourselves.

What if *we're* wrong? What if we're actually living an illusion that there is a God and a purpose to life? I would say, "You know what? I still lived a great life, full of peace and purpose and fulfillment. Ultimately, if there were no God, it wouldn't matter—nothing would matter at all!—but I still loved my life. Either way, if I'm right or I'm wrong, I win."

These four killer questions are powerful to spark meaningful conversation and encourage yourself, and others, to think critically. Use them wisely, be prepared for some interesting conversations . . . and have fun!

Notes

1. Our fellow worldview apologist Bill Jack of Worldview Academy (www.worldview.org) has also popularized these "killer questions," but they go back all the way to Socrates.
2. "Created Male and Female: Biblical Light for a Sexually Darkened World" conference sponsored by the International Council for Gender Studies, October 10-12, 2003.
3. 1 Peter 3:15.
4. www.fortunecity.com/emachines/e11/86/duncan2.html
5. John 14:6.

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Christmas Articles



Various articles about Christmas by Probe staff members.

Why the Stories of the Virgin Birth Fit Together [Tom Davis]
Tom Davis answers the charge that the two nativity accounts in the gospels contradict each other, showing how well they complement each other by contributing details from two different perspectives.

A Christmas Quiz [Dale Taliaferro]
A quiz concerning the Christmas story from a biblical perspective.

3 Points About Christmas: Evidence for Biblical Truth [Paul Rutherford]
Paul Rutherford suggests using three fulfilled biblical prophecies as an apologetic for biblical truth.

The Star of Bethlehem [Dr. Ray Bohlin]
What was the Star of Bethlehem? Some people suggest is was an astronomical conjunction of planets and stars. But it might have been the Shekinah Glory, a physical manifestation of God's presence on earth.

Christmas Film Favorites [Todd Kappelman]
Todd Kappelman highlights some favorite films of the Christmas season, encouraging Christians to enjoy the films while separating the sacred from the secular: *A Christmas Carol, Miracle on 34th Street, How the Grinch Stole Christmas, It's a*

Wonderful Life, and *A Charlie Brown Christmas*.

Truth You Can Sing About: 5 Christmas Carols [Steven Davis]
Probe Radio producer Steven Davis wrote the scripts providing devotional insights into five Christmas carols, and his son and Mind Games Camp alumnus Jon Clive Davis wrote and performed the music underneath.

Truth You Can Sing About: Part 2 [Steven Davis]
Probe Radio producer Steven Davis wrote five more scripts providing devotional insights into five Christmas carols, and his son and Mind Games Camp alumnus Jon Clive Davis wrote and performed the music underneath.

Truth You Can Sing About: Part 3 [Steven Davis]
For the third year in a row, Steven Davis and his son Jon Clive Davis collaborated on a new look at five Christmas carols, accompanied throughout each day's broadcast by new compositions of each carol.

The Theology of Christmas Carols [Dr. Robert Pyne]
A look at the theology behind five Christmas carols: Come Thou Long Expected Jesus, Hark the Herald Angels Sing, Joy to the World, O Little Town of Bethlehem, and O Holy Night.

Christmas SHINY! [Sue Bohlin]
The visible presence of God in the Old Testament—the Shekinah glory—shows up again at Christmas. No wonder we like shiny, sparkly things that remind us of the glory of heaven!

Is Christmas Necessary? [Jerry Solomon]
Christians have had to respond to the customs of the surrounding culture since the beginning of the church. In the end, though, Christmas is necessary only in terms of its historical and theological content.

Reincarnation: The Christmas Counterfeit [Sue Bohlin]
Sue blogs that Jesus is the only person who had a life before His birth, which we celebrate at Christmas.

Celebrating Christmas Wrongly? [Sue Bohlin]
Sue suggests that our motives are what determines whether we're celebrating Christmas right or not.

Loving God Through Xmas Music? [Sue Bohlin]
Sue Bohlin suggests that believers practice discernment as we listen to Christmas music, putting each song in the right category and allowing each category to point us to Christ.

Why I Won't Apologize For Watching Hallmark Christmas Movies [Sue Bohlin]
Cultivating a biblical worldview, seeing everything through the lens of creation|fall|redemption, has led Sue to see how the happy endings of Hallmark movies point to the Ultimate Happy Ending in the book of Revelation.

The Christmas Story: Does It Still Matter? [Rusty Wright]
Christmas often means time with family, hectic shopping, parties, cards and gifts. But what about the first Christmas? Why is the original story the baby in a manger, shepherds, wise men, angels important, if at all? The answer may surprise you.

The First Christmas Wreath [Jimmy Williams]
The founder of Probe Ministries examines the role of the wreath in Christmas.

The Great Light [Jimmy Williams]
A short essay on the role of light at Christmas.

The Stable [Jimmy Williams]
Jimmy Williams examines the symbolic and prophetic role of the stable in Christmas.

Are You Listening? Do You Hear What I Hear? [Rusty Wright]
Have you ever missed a great opportunity because you weren't listening carefully? Twenty centuries ago some clues to impending good news of monumental import eluded most folks. Fascinating prophecies of Jesus' birth and life bring

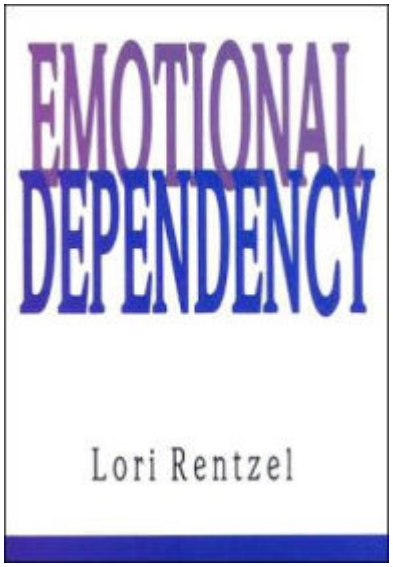
revealing insights into your own life today.

“Are ‘Twinflame’ Relationships Real, From God, or Demonic?”

Does the term “twinflame” come from God? Does it come from a “divine” source? Would this be considered demonic due to its telepathic tendencies and reincarnation belief? I have a family member who thinks they have found their “twinflame” and believes that he has a “higher” connection with this person then his wife. I have been brought up in a Christian home, and feel that this goes against everything that I have been taught. Did Jesus himself preach about reincarnation? What can I say to this person to let them know that “twinflames” do not exist?

I had never heard of the word “twinflame” till we got your question, but as I researched it, I had to chuckle with rueful recognition of the relational dynamics. Websites addressing this supposed “twinflame” phenomenon of one soul in two bodies describe the breathtaking rapture of an immediate and intense connection with another person that often overshadows actual real-life relationships (such as a spouse, as in your family member’s case). What’s really happening is that a person becomes infatuated with their *perception* of someone else, imbuing the object of their intense affections with a kind of “magic” fueled by their imagination and fantasy; in their mind, the other person is more beautiful, smarter, more eloquent, more sensitive and more of an amazing match than the all-too-real known quantity of the flesh-and-blood people they

do life with. As Focus on the Family's Dr. James Dobson said early in the days of the internet when we were discussing the ugly downside of online relationships, of course the fantasy wonderfulness (my words, not his) of the other person is going to overshadow the spouse who leaves socks or towels on the floor!



Someone has put a New Age spin on an old, old temptation of *relational idolatry*. Putting another person or the relationship up on a pedestal as the most important thing in life is idolatry, and it is sin. Lori Rentzel nailed this concept in her excellent essay "Emotional Dependency." (You can find the essay online here. It is also available published as a little booklet by InterVarsity Press.)

Interestingly, as I read about "twinflame" to a friend who spent decades as a lesbian activist, her comment was, "Oh, there's the beginning of a lesbian relationship!" The intensity of relational idolatry is a counterfeit to true intimacy no matter the gender of the people involved. (Consider my blog post The Dark Underside of Female Friendships.)

You asked about supposed "telepathic tendencies and reincarnation belief." There can certainly be a demonic component to this kind of relationship because there are layers of deception going on, including belief in previous lives. Probe has several articles and answers to email about reincarnation you might find helpful (and no, Jesus didn't preach about reincarnation because it's not real):

The Mystery of Reincarnation – A Christian Perspective
Does the Bible Talk About Reincarnation?"
"Was Reincarnation Ever in the Bible?"

[“You Should Research Reincarnation and the Lost Words of Jesus”]
[Reincarnation: The Christmas Counterfeit]

Having read the entire Bible multiple times and studying it for decades, I assure you that Twinflames is not a biblical concept. No, it doesn’t come from God.

What can you say to your family member to let them know that “twinflames” don’t exist? How about something like, “I am very concerned that you are buying into a deceptive lie about this other relationship that threatens to wreck your marriage and your spiritual life. I’ve done some research; please consider that the concept of ‘twinflames’ is a made-up idea to justify illegitimate attractions to another person. I can give you more information if you want it.”

I send this with a prayer that God will open the eyes of your family member before he drives his marriage off a cliff.

Blessing you,
Sue Bohlin

Posted March 2017

Addendum 2/20/2021:

Having received scores of comments on this topic since publishing this page 4 years ago (and not being willing to allow that amount of falsehood and confusion on our website by posting them), I am more convinced than ever that the idea of Twin Flames is one of the most clever, heartbreaking, demonic deceptions ever invented. The degree of anguish that people have shared over this powerfully evil deceit demonstrates why the Lord Jesus said that Satan comes to “steal, kill, and destroy” (John 10:10). This is yet another one of his nasty methods of hurting people and holding them hostage through a lie.

Lots of people have written that the Twin Flames phenomenon is in the Bible, but it's not in the text. For example, identifying Jesus and Mary Magdalene, and David and Jonathan, as Twin Flames. Claiming that Adam and Eve are the original Twin Flames. That the Song of Solomon is all about a Twin Flame relationship. There are lots of relationships in the Bible, including intense ones, but no Twin Flames. It's not there.

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"Does the Bible Talk About Reincarnation?"

Does the Bible ever talk about reincarnation?

The short answer is "No; the Bible nowhere speaks of reincarnation." Unfortunately, however, some people have claimed to find evidence for this belief in the Bible. For example, John the Baptist is often claimed to be the reincarnation of Elijah.

This is a popular "New Age" sort of interpretation. Of course, no respected biblical scholar would accept this interpretation as true.

And it certainly wasn't the view of Jesus, His disciples, John the Baptist, or the Gospel writers. Luke 1:17 tells us that John came in the "spirit and power" of Elijah, which is far different than asserting that John was the reincarnation of Elijah. In addition, it's important to remember that Moses and Elijah appeared to Jesus, Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration. But as Geisler and Rhodes observe, "Since

John [the Baptist] had already lived and died by then, and since Elijah still had the same name and self-consciousness, Elijah had obviously not been reincarnated as John the Baptist." Third, we must remember that Elijah never died (2 Kings 2:11); therefore, he doesn't fit the reincarnation model.

An important verse to bear in mind in these discussions is Hebrews 9:27. This verse teaches us that we die once, and then face God's judgment. The consequences of that judgment, according to the Bible, are eternal—not temporal (Matt. 25:46; 2 Thess. 1:9; Rev. 20:10-15).

If you would like more information about this subject, please see the following two resources on Probe's website:

1. The Mystery of Reincarnation — www.probe.org/the-mystery-of-reincarnation/

2. "Was Reincarnation Ever in the Bible?" — www.probe.org/was-reincarnation-ever-in-the-bible/

Shalom in Christ,
Michael Gleghorn

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"You Should Come to Hinduism"

I read your article by Rick Rood about Hinduism. I think the author is lacking in the study of Hinduism. Christianity as I see is very monotonous in the sense that it has only the bible, a single book and the priest would go over and over all his life career as a priest. Whereas Hinduiism is like a universe, one would not be able to complete studing the Vedas

or puranas in his life time. The Dharma Sastra is very unique and reading that alone would make you understand what is Hindu religion. It does not discriminate any other faith whereas Christianity and Islam does. Hinduism is not a pagan religion as claimed by Christianity and Islam. Hinduism gives you the freedom to start from nursery and once you have reached the upper level you do not need any form of idol. That makes the religion unique from others. The author says "Hinduism lacks any understanding that God created this world for a good purpose." What made him think so? In fact, Hinduism has a better understanding and knowledge of the purpose than Christianity or Islam.

An important factor almost universally accepted is that faith in a divine power shapes the destiny of mankind. Sanathana Dharma had famous Saints who had expounded their own specific philosophy. "Just as a man discards worn out clothes and puts on new clothes, the soul discards worn out bodies and wears new ones." (2.22) Hindus believe that the Atman is eternal it transmigrates from one living thing to another according to its karmic action.

Hinduism speaks of the existence of heavens above and hells below. The former are sun filled, inhabited by gods and innumerable divine souls. The latter are dark worlds (asurya lokas) and populated by all the dark and demonic forces. The individual souls go into these worlds according to their deeds. But they do not stay there permanently till the end of destruction. They go there basically as a consequence of their actions, either to enjoy or to suffer. In either case they learn the lesson and come back to earth to start a new earthly life all over again.

The Hindu concept of reincarnation is alien to western people. It is mostly misunderstood and misinterpreted, partly because of ignorance and partly because of some inherent mental blockage natural to the single minded pursuit of religious faith along rutted paths. It generated a lot of controversy

because it directly challenges the western notion of one life, one heaven and the final day of judgment.

Today this fundamental concept of Hinduism is finding many new adherents and believers all over the world. The reasons are many. Firstly, a great mass of evidence is gathering in favour of reincarnation through the personal experiences of many who chanced to remember their past lives and were able to record their experiences in stunning details for the posterity. Secondly, the modern theories of hypnotic regression are gaining acceptance in many parts of the world. There are now many institutions which help interested individuals to remember their past lives as a part of their spiritual awakening. Thirdly. many enlightened psychic masters like Edgar Cayce confirmed beyond doubt that reincarnation is not just a theory or imagination, but a definite reality.

If you look at the personality of an ordinary human being, you will realize that there is a lot in him, that is grosser and denser which cannot be purified and transformed in the shorter time of one life span. What is a hundred years or less than a hundred of life on a scale of millions of years of continuous evolution of life on earth? Does not it sound illogical to say that we would remain static from the evolutionary point of view, while change is the nature of life and every thing else all around us is changing and evolving constantly?

It is very obvious that God did not create the worlds and the beings in His likeness, but in exact opposite to it. If He would have created everything in His true likeness then there would have been no differentiation and no possibility of any movement. Creation would have remained static, without an aim and purpose, offering no scope for movement and change.

It is true that God is hidden in every aspect of His creation. But that which is visible and sensible is not His true self. It is His negative and false self, which tries to compete with Him and fight for its own individuality, and finally, having

lost the battle, would move towards Him in total obedience.

Thus the whole drama of creation seems to start with the creation of His individual selves that hide themselves in His negative selves so that a movement away from Him and then again back to Him can be initiated and sustained. The Hindu scriptures describe this process variously with such expressions as: "the true self hides behind the false self, God enters into Prakriti, self becomes enveloped with ignorance." There is more that one can explain but I am afraid there would be no space left to write so I would end here saying it is the open mindnes of the Hindus that the Christians and Muslims took advantage in India that these two religion is surving there and Cliff Roberston had the chick to say Hindus are living in darkness. There can be 1000 of him trying to convert Hindus into Christianity but millions would be converting to Hinduism in the west. People are beginning to realize the importance of yoga and the believe in incarnation and Atman in the west so soon I am afraid the churches would see empty congregation and priest and pastors would have to retire. It is not my wish but it is the Karma of the Christians who had dreamt of converting all the Hindus in this world. Come be true to yourself and discover what Hinduism has for all.

Thanks for your kind letter. Rick Rood is no longer with Probe Ministries. As you are already well aware, both Hinduism and Christianity are vast, intellectually fascinating, and ancient faiths. But insofar as they have very different views on the nature of God, the nature of man, the nature of the cosmos, what happens to a person after death, etc., it is clear that they cannot both be right (although they could both be wrong).

Such complex issues cannot be settled quickly over e-mail. We at Probe are quite convinced that Christianity is true. Our entire website, with over 1,500 written resources, is devoted to explaining why we think this. But we respect your right to disagree.

The Bible is a book of history and there is a huge wealth of evidence from archaeology and extra-biblical historical sources to commend it to us as such. What's more, it claims to be a revelation from the one true God, who created all things. This claim is either true or false. While I believe that there are good reasons for embracing the claim as true, I cannot prove this with absolute certainty. Nevertheless, we must do our best to examine the various claims of the different religions, compare these claims with all the evidence we can find, and attempt to decide which (if any) are actually true.

But here's my point. Suppose that Hinduism is true. What follows from that for me as a Christian? If the material world is ultimately maya, and its reason for being is simply lila, and if all is one, and Atman is Brahman, then (sooner or later) I will realize this and get off the wheel of rebirth. It may take many lifetimes, but I will eventually realize that all is one, that I am Brahman. Nothing (of eternal consequence) follows from my temporary ignorance.

But now suppose Christianity is true. What follows for those who do not come to Jesus alone for salvation from the holy wrath of God against our sin? Eternal punishment away from the presence of God, the only true and ultimate Source of all that is true, beautiful and good. In light of all the evidence that Christianity is really true (here I must simply refer you to our website), and since we must make some sort of choice regarding these issues, and since absolute certainty may not ultimately be possible, it seems to me that the safest bet is on the God of the Bible. Of course, in the long run, we must each be willing to take personal responsibility for the choice that we make – and be willing to accept the consequences that follow from it.

Wishing you all the best,

Michael Gleghorn

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“You Should Research Reincarnation and the Lost Words of Jesus”

I came into your site because I was interested in what you had to say about reincarnation. I got to looking around and first I do whish to say that it is a wonderful site. I do have some problems with it though. I have been baptized a Baptist. Of course. I used to believe as you do. I have done alot of study on the Bible and other religions. I still believe in Jesus and that he died for my sins. I love the lord with all my heart and soul. But I do not believe that my father would send me to a place of fire and torment. I have the gift of discernment of the spirit. This has been accepted by several churches in my area. I can tell you all about a person after a short time with them and I see spirits, ghosts demons whatever you wish to call them. I can also see into the future somewhat. I do not try to do any of this, it just happens when it happens. This is a gift the lord gave me. Yet you people tell me I am going to hell for it.

I have found several contradictions in the bible myself, a book that I would at one time have died for. I spent a long time asking God to show me the truth. I believe he did. And still is.

I never picked up a bible till I was 24 years old. I went to church when I was younger, but never payed a whole lot of attention, because I did not feel they were teaching the true word of God. I was 6 years old when I realized this. I am very

happy that you love the lord so very much. But even Jesus stated that the Bible would be Tampered with and those that did it would be punished. So why is it so hard to believe that it has happened? You are so ready to believe all the others things that have come true so why not this? Alot of God's word was not even put in the Bible. Do some research yourself on reincarnation and the old church, the older christian belief, and you will find the lost words of Jesus. Did you know that they destroyed the original Bible when they wrote the new King James Version, and then told everybody that it was the original? I believe that you have to worry about being decieved also. Just like the rest of us we must learn the truth for ourselves and stop depending on everyone but God. He says do not trust man, but only him.

Hello _____,

Although (as you yourself realize) we would disagree about the issue of reincarnation, it seems that the more fundamental issue about which we would differ is the Bible – particularly whether or not it is a trustworthy message from God.

You said you found some contradictions in the Bible, but you didn't say what they were. Have you ever attempted to see if there might be good explanations for such alleged Bible difficulties? If not, and if you're interested in exploring this issue, please allow me to recommend the following site: www.tektonics.org. This site has explanations for hundreds of alleged Bible difficulties.

You also said that the Bible was destroyed at the time of the King James translation. I'm afraid your information is incorrect on this point. For instance, we have thousands of New Testament manuscripts going all the way back to the early second century. The King James translation wasn't done until 1611 – hundreds of years after our earliest manuscripts (which we still have). So it's simply not true to say that the Bible was destroyed at this time. If you would like to explore this

issue further, please visit Bible.org at http://www.bible.org/topic.asp?topic_id=5. Here you will find dozens of articles about the Bible by very competent and capable Christian scholars.

Hope these resources prove helpful. Thanks again for writing and God bless you!

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

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"How Do You Explain Knowledge of Past Lives Unless It's True?"

On the History Channel I saw a program on reincarnation, in which a woman named "Jenny Cockel" had memories of being in Ireland. She remembered facts about her previous life, such as the name of her eight children. She drew the correct map of her childhood town, gave an accurate description of her house etc. These things were later found to be true. How can a woman remember the name of her 8 children, the place where she lived, what was in their house (two oval-shaped photos, one of her and a child and the other of a soldier) this accurately? Is there any other proof of people more solid than this of people remembering their past life? Her past life son says what she says is exactly correct, and only she could know it. Please see this program on the History Channel. Please tell me something about other solid experiences that support reincarnation.

Since the Bible's teachings do not allow for reincarnation to be true ("It is appointed unto man to die once, and after that comes judgement," Hebrews 9:27), we believe that the type of information given to people like Jenny Cockel is the result of the deception of demons. These fallen, sinful beings have been around people since Adam and Eve. They know all kinds of information not available to people naturally, and they will feed this information to those open to believing it.

This is similar to the stage "psychics" who have their shills circulate among the audience, picking up information that the "psychic" would never know on his own, and then this outside information is fed to the performer via a small earpiece receiver. When he reveals it publically, people are impressed with his "supernatural" knowledge.

Demons have no trouble knowing geography to be able to feed someone specific map information, nor do they have trouble collecting genealogical information on a family, or descriptions of physical artifacts, to feed someone. (Demons are sneaky. They can't read minds, but being spirits, they can speak in ways that we think it's our own thoughts. That's what I mean by "feeding.")

(For a purely natural explanation, it's also possible that people gained information from reading books and other sources that they forgot about.)

I hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

Wicca: A Biblical Critique

Dr. Michael Gleghorn examines some of the fundamental doctrines of Wicca, offers a biblical critique of those doctrines, and highlights the differences between Wicca and Christianity.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

The Goddess and the God

By some estimates, Wicca "appears to be the fastest growing religion in America."{1} But what exactly is "Wicca" anyway? One scholar writes, "The modern religion of Wicca, otherwise known as Old Religion, Magick, Witchcraft, the Craft, and the Mysteries, is part of the neo-pagan movement."{2} In this article I hope to accomplish two things. First, I want to outline some of the fundamental doctrines of Wicca; second, I want to offer a biblical critique of those doctrines.

Let's begin with Wiccan theology. Although some Wiccans are devoted exclusively to the Goddess, most worship both the Goddess and the God. Raven Grimassi, a Wiccan scholar, has written, "The Source of All Things, also known as the Great Spirit, is generally personified in Wiccan belief as a Goddess and a God."{3}

It's important to point out that the Goddess and God are merely *personifications* of this ultimate source of all things. The Source itself is both "unknowable" and "incomprehensible."{4} It is perhaps for this reason that some "Neo-Wiccans" have simply abandoned such personifications altogether, choosing rather to view the gods as simply "detached metaphysical concepts."{5} But for those who embrace such personifications, the Goddess has often been associated with the moon (and has thus sometimes been called the *Queen of Heaven*).{6} She is also known in three aspects, corresponding

to the three stages of a woman's life: Maiden, Mother, and Crone.{7} She was alleged to have reigned "with a male consort called *The Horned One* who was a nature god and was also associated with the sun."{8} Interestingly, this god was not only viewed as the consort of the Goddess, he was also her son as well. Each year he was born of the Goddess, became her lover, and died-only to be reborn once more the following year from his own seed! This was known as the Year God cycle and was associated with the fertility of the land and the annual cycles of seedtime and harvest.{9}

Interestingly, modern Wicca shares many similarities with the ancient fertility religions of Canaan, religions specifically condemned by God in the Bible.{10} For instance, the Wiccan Goddess is revered by some as the *Queen of Heaven,* by others as *Astarte*.{11} But in the Bible, the worship of Ishtar, the queen of heaven, and Astarte, or Ashtoreth, is repeatedly condemned, as is the worship of her consort, known sometimes as Baal, sometimes as Tammuz.{12} Thus in Judges 2:11-13 we read: "Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord . . . they provoked the Lord to anger . . . they forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtoreth." But if the only true God rejected the ancient Canaanite religions and their practices, would His reaction to modern Wicca likely be any different?

The Watchers

"The Watchers is a concept common to most Wiccan Traditions, although they are viewed differently by the various systems within Wicca."{13} Raven Grimassi describes these "Watchers" as "an ancient race who have evolved beyond the need for physical form."{14} However, he is quick to add that, historically, the "Watchers" have been conceived in a diversity of ways. For instance, in the early Stellar myths the Watchers were "gods who guarded the Heavens and the Earth."{15} Later, he says, "the Greeks reduced them to the

Gods of the four winds, and the Christians to principalities of the air."{16}

The connection, observed by Grimassi, between the Wiccan concept of the Watchers and the Christian concept of angels may find some validation in the Bible. In Daniel 4:13-17, the pagan king Nebuchadnezzar relates a dream to Daniel. He tells him that during the dream a "watcher, a holy one, descended from heaven" and pronounced a judgment that is said to be "by the decree of the watchers . . . a command of the holy ones . . . that the living may know that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind." Most conservative commentators understand the "watchers" in this passage to be angels. One commentator writes, "The king is probably referring to the angels which were known to him through the Babylonian religion."{17} But that these beings are indeed the biblical angels seems evident from the fact that they are acting as *messengers* of the Most High God.{18}

In light of this connection between the "watchers" and angels, it is interesting to note that "Rabbinic and Cabalistic lore" made a distinction between good and evil Watchers.{19} This distinction parallels the biblical distinction between good and evil angels, or angels and demons. Indeed, Grimassi notes, "In the *Secret Book of Enoch*, the Watchers . . . are listed as rebellious angels who followed Sataniel in a heavenly war."{20} We find a similar incident recounted in Revelation 12:7-9, where we read of a heavenly war in which Michael and his angels cast Satan and his angels from heaven to earth.

With this in mind it is interesting to note that Richard Cavendish, in his book *The Powers of Evil*, "lists the Watchers as the Fallen Angels that magicians call forth in ceremonial magick."{21} This remark is especially noteworthy when one considers Grimassi's comments concerning "the relationship that exists between a Wiccan and the Watchers."{22} Grimassi points out that "every act of magick that a Wiccan performs is observed and noted by the Watchers."{23} Furthermore, he says,

“There is a definite link between the ‘powers’ of a Wiccan and their rapport with the Watchers.”{24} But since the God of the Bible clearly prohibits magic, is it likely that these “Watchers” should be thought of as good spirits (inasmuch as they oppose the ordinance of God)?{25}

The Art of Magick

Wiccans view magick as a genuine possibility because of humanity’s intrinsic connection both to Deity and a supernatural order. Raven Grimassi states: “The art of magick is one of creation. . . . The power to create from *thoughts* is linked to the divine spark within us. We create in accordance with the divine formula that created all things.”{26}

But how is this possible? Grimassi explains, “The astral plane is the link between the divine world and the physical. . . . Whatever manifests on the astral plane will eventually manifest on the physical plane.”{27} And human thought can manifest on the astral plane.{28} Thus, for one accomplished in the art of Wiccan magick, the power to secure a desired effect in the physical world is alleged to begin with the careful creation of a thought-form on the astral plane.{29} Grimassi continues: “Thought-forms begin to appear in the astral material, which then become vehicles for the spirits or deities that have been invoked (through which they will respond to the desire of the magickal intent).”{30} If done properly, “the magickal seeds planted in the astral plane” will eventually bear fruit on the physical plane.{31} This is the basic theory behind Wiccan magick. And one practitioner has boasted, “No matter what type of coven magic is used, it is usually effective.”{32}

Might there actually be some truth to this? Indeed, there might. The book of Exodus tells us that the Egyptian magicians were able to duplicate, by means of “their secret arts,” the initial plagues God brought upon Egypt!{33} Furthermore, the text never hints that this was done by any means other than

some genuine secret power. In light of this we might ask why God is so opposed to the practice of magic. After all, couldn't such power be used for good, as well as evil? But God specifically warned the Israelites: "There shall not be found among you anyone" who practices divination, witchcraft, sorcery, or spiritism.{34} Why is this?

Could it be that the "secret power" of magick is due, not to its various rituals, symbols and gestures, but rather to the supernatural intervention of spirit beings? In Acts 16 we read of a demon-possessed slave-girl described as "having a spirit of divination . . . who was bringing her masters much profit by fortunetelling."{35} This passage clearly ties the power of divination to demons. With this in mind, it's interesting to remember Grimassi's admission: "There is a definite link between the 'powers' of a Wiccan and their rapport with the Watchers."{36} Wiccans view the Watchers as a race of highly evolved spiritual beings.{37} But these beings are linked with angels and demons in other religious literature (including the Bible).{38} Is it possible that God prohibits magic because He wants to protect people from involvement with demons?

The Summerland and Reincarnation

Like Christians, Wiccans do not believe that physical death is the end of personal existence. Nevertheless, in its details the Wiccan doctrine of the "afterlife" differs substantially from the biblical view. How so?

To begin, Wiccans do not accept the biblical doctrines of heaven and hell. Rather, they believe that after physical death, "Wiccans pass into a spirit world known as the Summerland . . . a metaphysical astral realm of meadows, lakes, and forests where it is always summer. It is a Pagan paradise filled with all the lovely creatures of ancient lore, and the gods themselves dwell there."{39} The Summerland is viewed as a place of rest and renewal for the soul before its rebirth into the physical world.{40}

The belief in the soul's rebirth into the physical world, also known as reincarnation, is another way in which Wiccan doctrines differ from those of biblical Christianity. Though the doctrine of reincarnation is completely unbiblical, many Wiccans actually believe it is taught in the Bible. Raven Grimassi cites John 9:1-3 as evidence that even Jesus and His disciples believed in reincarnation![41] In this passage Jesus' disciples ask Him about a man born blind: "'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?' Jesus answered, 'It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was in order that the works of God might be displayed in him.'" Grimassi comments: "Jesus does not denounce the question of this man's existence prior to this birth, but explains that [his blindness] had nothing to do with his sins prior to his present life."[42] But is this interpretation correct? Is Jesus really affirming that this man existed *prior* to his present life?

It's important to understand both the disciples' question, and Jesus' response, from within the historical context of first century Judaism. "The Jewish theologians of that time gave two reasons for birth defects: *prenatal sin* (before birth, *but not* before conception) and *parental sin*."[43] In other words, first century Jewish rabbis did not believe that birth defects resulted from bad karma in a previous incarnation! Rather, they thought such defects arose either from the sins of the parents being visited upon their children, or from the sin of the child while still in the mother's womb.[44] Although Jesus denies that either of these causes was responsible for this man's blindness, we must still bear in mind that His *disciples* were asking this question from within a first century Jewish context. We must also remember that elsewhere the New Testament explicitly affirms, "[I]t is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment."[45] Thus, far from affirming the Wiccan doctrine of reincarnation, the New Testament clearly denies it.

Is Wicca Another Way to God?

Scott Cunningham claimed, "All religions have one ideal at their core: to unite their followers with Deity. Wicca is no different."{46} He also wrote, "Perhaps it's not too strong to say that the highest form of human vanity is to assume that your religion is the only way to Deity."{47} But is it really true that there are many ways to God, or is there only one?

Although it's quite common in today's pluralistic society to assume that all the enduring religious traditions of mankind are equally valid ways to God or Ultimate Reality, there are tremendous philosophical difficulties with this belief. Since we are here concerned with both Wicca and Christianity, let's briefly compare some of the fundamental tenets of these two religions and see what we come up with.

Wiccans appear to believe in the essential divinity of human nature. Raven Grimassi writes, "[E]verything bears the 'divine spark' of its creator."{48} He also claims, "Souls are like brain cells in the mind of the Divine Creator, individual entities and yet part of the whole."{49} Thus, there doesn't seem to be any clear distinction in Wicca between humanity and Deity. This explains why the Witch Starhawk could confidently declare, "there is nothing to be saved *from* . . . no God outside the world to be feared and obeyed."{50}

Christianity, however, maintains a firm distinction between God and man. Man is created in God's image, but he is neither God nor a part of God. Furthermore, although man bears God's image, his nature has been corrupted by sin, which separates him from God. Man's need, therefore, is to be saved from his sins and reconciled to God. This explains the significance of Christ for Christianity. As Peter put it, "Christ . . . died for sins once for all . . . that He might bring us to God."{51} Christians believe that God dealt fully and finally with man's sin through the death and resurrection of His Son.{52} Thus, contrary to Wicca, Christianity teaches that

there *is* something to be saved from and that there *is* a God outside the world to be both feared and obeyed.

Because of their differences, the law of non-contradiction makes it impossible for both of these religions to be true. It's therefore interesting to note Charlotte Allen's observation: "In all probability, not a single element of the Wiccan story is true. The evidence is overwhelming that Wicca is . . . a 1950s concoction . . . of an English civil servant and amateur anthropologist" named Gerald Gardner.{53} But surely such questionable historical origins cast doubt on the truth of Wiccan religious beliefs as well. Christianity, however, is firmly rooted in the historical reality of Jesus of Nazareth, whose claim to be the *only* way to God was clearly vindicated when God "furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."{54}

Notes

1. Charlotte Allen, "The Scholars and the Goddess" *The Atlantic Monthly* (January 2001): 18.

2. Fritz Ridenour, *So What's the Difference?* (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 2001), 209.

3. Raven Grimassi, *The Wiccan Mysteries: Ancient Origins and Teachings* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2000), 33.

4. Scott Cunningham, *The Truth About Witchcraft Today* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 1999), 76.

5. Grimassi, *The Wiccan Mysteries,* 33.

6. Ibid., 25.

7. Cunningham, *The Truth About Witchcraft Today,* 73.

8. Grimassi, *The Wiccan Mysteries,* 26.

9. Ibid., 88-89.

10. Ridenour, *So What's the Difference?,* 210. This is not to imply, of course, that Wicca itself is ancient. The antiquity of Wicca has been seriously challenged by modern scholarship.

11. Grimassi, *The Wiccan Mysteries*, 25; Cunningham, *The Truth About Witchcraft Today,* 72.

12. For instance, see Judges 2:11-17; 2 Kings 23:4-14; Jeremiah 44:15-23; Ezekiel 8:14-15. For documentation concerning the consort of Ashtoreth being Baal and/or Tammuz see J.D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenney, eds. *The New International Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1987), s.v. "Ashtoreth," 100-01; "Tammuz," 986. For documentation that Ishtar, the queen of heaven, was associated with Tammuz see Trent C. Butler, gen. ed. *Holman Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, Tennessee: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991), s.v. "Ishtar," 721; "Tammuz," 1321.

13. Grimassi, *The Wiccan Mysteries,* 99.

14. Ibid., 100.

15. Ibid., 101.

16. Ibid.

17. Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), 103.

18. Compare Daniel 4:17 with 4:24.

19. Grimassi, *The Wiccan Mysteries,* 102.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., 103.

22. Ibid., 106.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid. This is not to imply that Wiccans explicitly worship Satan or demons (understood in the Christian sense). They are very careful to say they do not, and we should take them at their word. At the same time, is it legitimate to ask if one can be deceived by the devil without actually worshipping the devil? For while Wiccans may not worship the devil, the Bible seems to indicate that they have nonetheless been deceived by him. Wicca, for example, rejects the biblical doctrines of God, man, Christ, sin, salvation, etc. As a religion, therefore, Wicca helps prevent men and women from coming to a saving knowledge of God through faith in Jesus Christ. The Bible, however, declares that this is also one of the activities of Satan! It reveals that the devil "has blinded the minds of the unbelieving" to keep them from saving faith in Christ (see 2 Cor. 4:3-4). It is for this reason that Christians, while acknowledging that Wiccans do not worship the devil, nonetheless view the religion of Wicca as a means of Satanic deception since it keeps its followers from saving faith in Christ.

25. See Deuteronomy 18:9-13.

26. Grimassi, *The Wiccan Mysteries*, 140.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., 150.

29. Ibid., 140-41.

30. Ibid., 140.

31. Ibid., 159.

32. Cunningham, *The Truth About Witchcraft Today,* 125.

33. See Exodus 7:11-12, 22; 8:6-7.

34. See Deuteronomy 18:9-13.

35. See Acts 16:16-18.

36. Grimassi, *The Wiccan Mysteries*, 106.

37. Ibid., 100.

38. Ibid., 101-03.

39. Ibid., 30.

40. Ibid., 32.

41. Ibid., 113.

42. Ibid.

43. Norman L. Geisler and Ron Rhodes, *When Cultists Ask: A Popular Handbook on Cultic Misinterpretations* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 175.

44. Ibid.

45. Hebrews 9:27.

46. Cunningham, *The Truth About Witchcraft Today,* 77.

47. Ibid., 66.

48. Grimassi, *The Wiccan Mysteries*, 26.

49. Ibid., 27.

50. Starhawk (Miriam Simos), *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 9, cited in Ridenour, *So What's the Difference*, 213.

51. 1 Peter 3:18.

52. See Romans 4:25.

53. Allen, “The Scholars and the Goddess,” 19.

54. See John 14:6 and Acts 17:31.

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The Mystery of Reincarnation — A Christian Perspective

Can reincarnation be true? Dr. Pat Zukeran examines evidence for this Eastern belief and compares it to the Biblical concept of resurrection.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

Eastern Doctrine of Reincarnation

Many cultures throughout the world have long held to the concept of reincarnation. A recent Gallup Poll revealed that one in four Americans believed in reincarnation. Reincarnation literally means, “to come again in the flesh.” World religions author Geoffrey Parrinder defines reincarnation as “the belief that the soul or some power passes after death into another body.”{1}

Reincarnation is a major facet of the eastern religions of Hinduism and Buddhism. Many sects have variant views of reincarnation. Here is a general summary of the basic principles. Most hold to a pantheistic view of God. Pantheism comes from the Greek *pan* meaning “all” and concept of *theism* meaning “God.” In Pantheism, God is an impersonal force made up of all things; the universe is God and God is the universe. All created beings are an extension of or an emanation from

God.

Living things possess a physical body and an immaterial entity called the soul, life force, or Jiva. At death, the life force separates from the body and takes a new physical form. The law of karma determines what form the individual will take. This law teaches that one's thoughts, words, and deeds have an ethical consequence, fixing one's lot in future existences.{2} Our present state is the result of actions and intentions performed in a previous life. The amount of good or bad karma attained in our present life will determine if one returns in a higher or a lower form of existence.

One will endure hundreds, even millions of reincarnations, either evolving into a higher or lower form of life to work off the debt of karma. This cycle of reincarnation is called the *law of samsara*. Eventually one hopes to work off all bad karma and free oneself from the reincarnation cycle and attain unity with the divine. This freeing from the cycle of reincarnation is called *moksha*. The soul is viewed as imprisoned in a body and must be freed to attain unity with the divine.

Each school of thought varies in their teaching regarding how one attains ultimate deliverance from the reincarnation cycle. Most agree that it is only from the human form one can attain unity with the divine. Deliverance from the bondage of the body can be attained through various means. Some schools teach that through enlightenment that comes from knowledge, meditation, and channeling, one can break the cycle. Other schools teach that deliverance comes through faith and service to a particular deity or manifestation of the divine. In return, the deity will aid you in your quest for moksha. Other schools teach that one can attain deliverance through discipline and good works.

Much of the reincarnation teaching in the West is adapted from the teachings in the eastern religions. Is there evidence that

proves reincarnation to be true? We will examine these next.

Evidences for Reincarnation

Leading reincarnation researcher Dr. Ian Stephenson, head of the department of Neurology and Psychiatry at the University of Virginia, believes there is compelling evidence for reincarnation. Proponents give five proofs: hypnotic regression, déjà vu, Xenoglossy, birthmarks, and the Bible.

The first proof is hypnotic regression. Reincarnation proponents cite examples of individuals giving vivid and accurate descriptions of people, places, and events the individual could not have previously known. Today there is a small branch of psychology that practice past life therapy, the belief that one's present problems are the result of problems from a previous life.

However, the accuracy of facts attained from hypnosis remains highly questionable. First, some people are known to have lied under hypnosis. Second, human memory is subject to distortions of all sorts. Third, under hypnosis a patient's awareness of fantasy and reality is blurred. Dr. Kenneth Bowers, a psychologist at the University of Waterloo and Dr. Jan Dywane at McMaster University states:

> ". . .although hypnosis increases recall, it also increases errors. In their study, hypnotized subjects correctly recalled twice as many items as did unhypnotized members of a control group but also made three times as many mistakes. During hypnosis, you are creating memories."{3}

Fourth, studies have shown that under hypnosis, patients are easily influenced by leading questions. In the process of hypnosis, the patient is asked to release control of his or her consciousness and body. Hans Holzer states, "Generally women are easier to hypnotize than men. But there are exceptions even among women, who may have difficulty letting

go control over their bodies and personalities, something essential if genuine hypnosis is to take place."{4} In this state, memories can be altered by the cues from the hypnotist. For these reasons, many law courts do not consider testimony under hypnosis reliable evidence.

Past life recall can also be attributed to the influence of culture. Cultures heavily steeped in the doctrine of reincarnation create an environment conducive to past life recall. The countries of India, Sri Lanka, Burma, and western Asia have a very high number of cases. Many who make claims of past life recall win the respect of their society. In areas like these the culture can have a strong influence on one's subconscious mind. If reincarnation is true, past life recall should be prevalent in all cultures, not primarily in one area.

Finally, the majority of the incidents occur among children. Dr. Stephenson states, "Many of those claiming to have lived before are children. Often they are very emotional when they talk of the person they used to be, and they give minute details of the life they lived."{5} Children are the most susceptible to suggestion and their testimony should be viewed with caution.

At best, the evidence from hypnotic regress can only suggest a possibility of reincarnation, but it does not conclusively prove it.

Déjà vu refers to a distinct feeling you have been to a place or performed an event before, while engaged in something that is presently happening. Reincarnation proponents attribute this to a previous life. However, researchers give alternate explanations. In our subconscious, we often relate a present event with a past one that the conscious mind does not remember. Since the two events are similar we often fuse the events together in our minds, thus creating an impression that we have experienced this before. Other researchers have shown

that the data that enters the eye is sometimes delayed for a microsecond on its way to the brain. This leads one to think that they have seen the data before.

Xenoglossy is the sudden ability to speak a language one has never learned. Reincarnation advocates attribute this as the language one spoke in a previous life. However, cryptoamnesia can account for this phenomenon. In cryptoamnesia, an individual forgets information that was learned earlier and recalls it at a later time, not knowing its source. It is possible that one can hear foreign terms through the media or as a child and recall these when prompted.

The fourth proof is the appearance of unique birthmarks that are similar to those possessed by a deceased individual. However, it is difficult to show any connection to reincarnation. Similarity does not prove sameness.

These alternative explanations can explain most of the evidences for reincarnation. However where they fall short, we must entertain the possibility of demonic possession where a foreign spirit takes control of the person as demonstrated several times throughout the New Testament. Demonic spirits have existed for thousands of years and are not limited by time and space. The information they possess can be injected into a person's mind during possession. Eastern meditation techniques allow for this possibility. Dr. Bro writes of Edgar Cayce, the father of the New Age movement, "Cayce's power came without equipment, in quiet. He appeared to empty himself, to hollow out his consciousness as a receptacle, a conduit."{6}

Even reincarnation advocates believe that many cases of past life recall can be attributed to possession. They confess that it is difficult to determine whether a past life recall is the result of reincarnation or possession. William de Arteaga states, "In reference to the demonic counterfeit hypothesis, we can safely say that for many past life visions it is the most solidly verified hypothesis of all."{7}

Edgar Cayce stated, “That’s what I always thought, and against this I put the idea that the Devil might be tempting me to do his work by operating through me when I was conceited enough to think God had given me special power. . . .”{8}

Although the evidence can be interpreted to support reincarnation, it cannot conclusively prove it.

Biblical Evidence for Reincarnation

Although reincarnation proponents cite the Bible as proof of their claim, the Bible refutes the idea. It teaches that we live once, die once, and then enter our eternal state. Hebrews 9:26b-27 states, “But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people. . . .” The focus here is on the sacrificial work of Christ. Instead of the continual animal sacrifices needed to atone for sins under the old covenant, under the new covenant Christ paid for sins once and for all.

In the same way as Christ, who appeared only once, man is destined to die once. Just as there is finality in Christ’s sacrifice, there is finality in man’s physical death. After that, the soul faces the judgment before God to determine one’s eternal destiny. Once judgment is delivered, Scripture gives no evidence that sins can be atoned for in another time of living on earth (Rev. 20:11-15; Luke 16:19-31; Matt. 25:31-46).

The passage often appealed to by those who support reincarnation is John 9:1-3, which states, “As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'” Reincarnation proponents claim that in this passage the disciples are attributing the man’s blindness as the result of bad karma from a previous existence.

However, Jewish theology attributed birth defects to two factors. Prenatal sin committed by the baby after conception, but before birth, or sin committed by the parents. Genesis 25:22, the struggle of Jacob and Esau in Rachel's womb, was interpreted as a conflict that resulted from prenatal sin. Exodus 20:5 states that the parents' sin often had repercussions on their offspring. However, in the passage in John 9:1-3, Jesus refutes any connection between the man's defects and any previous sins, thus putting an end to any concept of karma.

Another passage is Matthew 11 where Jesus states that John the Baptist is Elijah. Reincarnation proponents interpret John as being the reincarnated Elijah from the Old Testament. This cannot be true for the following reasons. First, in 2 Kings 2, Elijah never died, but was taken to heaven. In the reincarnation model one must die before one can take on a new form. Second, in Matthew 17 Elijah appears with Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration. John the Baptist had lived and died by this time. If he had been the reincarnation of Elijah, John would have appeared instead. John came not as the reincarnation of Elijah, but in a metaphorical sense as Elijah in that he was filled with the same spirit and power as Elijah. So the Bible does not affirm reincarnation.

Reincarnation and Resurrection

The Bible teaches that what happens after death is a resurrection, not reincarnation. First Corinthians 15 is one of the clearest passages on what happens to the human soul after death. Like the reincarnation proponents, we agree that the immaterial component of man separates from the body at death and survives eternally. We both agree that the soul inhabits another bodily form.

The major difference is this: reincarnation proponents believe that the soul inhabits many bodily forms in an evolutionary progress toward union with the divine. This can happen over

millions of years or in a shorter period. The Bible teaches in Hebrews 9:26b-27, as previously discussed, that we live once, die once and then enter into an eternal state.

Our eternal state is described in 1 Corinthians 15. Verse 20 states, “But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” By “firstfruits” Paul was drawing on the imagery found in the Old Testament. The firstfruits were prior to the main harvest and served as an example and an assurance of the harvest that was coming. So Christ’s resurrection is a precursor and a guarantee of the believer’s resurrection. His resurrection greatly differs from the reincarnation model.

First, Christ’s resurrected body physically resembled His earthly body. It had physical properties displayed by the fact that He could be touched, He communicated, and He ate. His glorified body also possessed supernatural attributes. He was able to walk through walls, appear and disappear, and ascend to heaven.

Paul describes the glorified body as having a different kind of flesh from the earthly body. He states, “All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another, fish another. There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies. . . .” The new body will be imperishable and immortal. It will be a spiritual body that is designed for life in heaven. The glorified body will not suffer the effects of sin or the effects of time, sickness, or pain.

The unrighteous, however, enter a state of eternal torment immediately after death. Luke 16:19-31 demonstrates this point. In this example the unrighteous wealthy man enters hell immediately at death. In Matthew 25 the goats enter a state of eternal punishment with no hope of escape.

In summary, these are the differences. First, reincarnation teaches that the migration of the soul occurs over many

lifetimes while resurrection occurs once. Second, reincarnation teaches we inhabit many different bodies while resurrection teaches we inhabit only one body on earth and a glorified immortal body in heaven that resembles our earthly one. Third, reincarnation teaches we are in an evolutionary progress to union with God while resurrection teaches we arrive at our ultimate state immediately at death. The Bible does not support reincarnation and it must not be confused with the doctrine of the resurrection, which is very different.

Notes

1. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Dictionary of Non-Christian Religions* (Philadelphia; Westminister Press, 1971), 286.
2. John Noss, *Man's Religions*, New York: MacMillan Press, 1980, 90.
3. Elizabeth Stark, "Hypnosis on Trial," *Psychology Today,* February 1984, p. 35, as cited by Geisler and Amano, *The Reincarnation Sensation*, 67.
4. Hans Holzer, *Life Beyond*, Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1994, 176.
5. Dr. Ian Stephenson, quoted in *Life Beyond* by Hans Holzer, Chicago: Contemporary Press, 1994, 167.
6. Harmon Bro, *A Seer Out of Season: the Life of Edgar Cayce*, (New York: New American Library, 1989), 13.
7. William de Arteaga, *Past Life Visions: A Christian Exploration* (New York: Seabury, 1983), p. 174, as cited by Geisler and Amano in *The Reincarnation Sensation*, 80.
8. Thomas Sugue, *The Story of Edgar Cayce: There is a River*, (Virginia Beach: Association for Research and Enlightenment, 1973), 219, as cited by Geisler and Amano in *The Reincarnation Sensation*, 79.

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“Was Reincarnation Ever in the Bible?”

I have a question about reincarnation. My father recently read this book called *Many Lives, Many Masters* by Dr. Brian Weiss. It is about a psychiatrist who explored the past lives of one of his patients through hypnotic regression.

In the third chapter he claims that reincarnation was in the Bible but was later removed. I quote from the book:

> **“There were indeed references to reincarnation in the Old and New Testaments. In A.D. 325 the Roman emperor Constantine the Great, along with his mother, Helena, had deleted references to reincarnation contained in the New Testament. The Second Council of Constantinople meeting in A.D. 553, confirmed this action and declared the concept of reincarnation a heresy.” (p. 35-36)**

Is this true?

I would like to answer two issues in your e-mail. The first is about past-lives regression through hypnosis. Our friends at the Watchman Fellowship have a MOST interesting article by their director, James Walker, called “The Day I Hypnotized a Reincarnated Prospector.” The point was to demonstrate to a Dallas Seminary class the powerfully deceptive nature of the cults and the occult. I highly recommend this article: www.watchman.org/na/chair10.htm

Secondly, concerning your question about reincarnation being excised from the Bible. Similar to what your father found in the book he read, a section of Shirley MacLaine’s book *Out on a Limb* records these comments from her New Age mentor, David:

> “The theory of reincarnation is recorded in the Bible. But the proper interpretations were struck from it during an Ecumenical Council meeting of the Catholic Church in Constantinople sometime around 553 A.D, called the Council of Nicea. The Council members voted to strike those teachings from the Bible in order to solidify Church control.” [New York: Bantam Books, 1983, pp. 234-5.]

Dr. Paul R. Eddy, Associate Professor of Theology at Bethel College in St. Paul, Minnesota, responds:

> “In response to this claim, we must begin by pointing out a few basic historical inaccuracies. First, The Council of Nicea, the first of the seven Ecumenical councils, took place in 325 A.D. It was concerned with the teachings of Arius and their implications for a correct understanding of the person of Jesus Christ. The documents from this Council offer no evidence that the topic of reincarnation ever came up for discussion, let alone that it was condemned and removed from the Bible. No doubt this claim means to refer, rather, to the fifth Ecumenical Council, held in 553—the Council of Constantinople. The primary purpose of this Council was to ease the tensions in the Church caused by the Council of Chalcedon 100 years previous. Again, there is no evidence whatsoever that the idea of reincarnation was ever discussed, let alone condemned and purged from the Bible. What the reincarnationists are probably referring to here is the condemnation of Origenism, which included belief in the pre-existence of the soul. This should not, however, be confused with the notions of the karmic cycle of reincarnation. This is clear from Origen’s own words on this matter when he writes of “the dogma of transmigration, which is foreign to the Church of God not handed down by the Apostles, nor anywhere set forth in the Scriptures.” Other early theologians, including Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Gregory of Nyssa, also explicitly rejected the idea of reincarnation. Another problem with this theory is the fact

> that manuscripts of the Bible exist dating back to the third century. For example, the Bodmer Papyri (dated around 200-225), the Chester Beatty Papyri (dated around 200-250), Codex Vaticanus (dated around 325-350), and Codex Sinaiticus (dated around 340) are all documents written centuries prior to the 533 Council, and none of them reveal any supposed reincarnationist teachings that were removed from later editions of the Bible! Beyond this, it is known that the core canon of the Bible was essentially recognized and acknowledged throughout the orthodox Church as early as the late second and early third centuries, as evidenced by the list contained in the Muratorian Fragment (dated around 170). All of this points towards the impossibility of a conspiratorial purgation of the doctrine of reincarnation—or any other doctrine for that matter—from the Bible during any of the Ecumenical Councils." [ittsy.com/focusonthefaulty.com/reincarnation-and-the-bible/]

I hope you can see that the burden of proof is on the reincarnationists to show us those supposed Biblical passages supporting reincarnation! The idea that the original versions of the Bible containing teachings on reincarnation were all confiscated and burned—another fantasy floating around these days—is merely that, a fantasy. There is no evidence for any myth of reincarnation taught in the Bible, either past or present. Hebrews 9:27 nails that coffin shut: "It is appointed unto man to die once, and after that comes judgment."

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin