

## CHAPTER 7

### DEATH, REINCARNATION AND THE END TIMES

In this chapter the discussion of Emmet Fox's religious thought continues against the social and cultural background of Wilber's four-quadrant model (as in chapter 6). Since the two lower halves of the model, the lower-left and the lower-right, suggest shared experiences, it necessitates a look into one of the most universal phenomena, death and dying. An extremely searching question is why some people seem to have everything in this life, wealth, health, success, happiness and longevity, and others have to suffer poverty, disease, handicaps, undeserved failure or even death immediately after birth? Why should this be, we ask, if God is indeed a God of Love, one who is just and powerful? Emmet Fox assures us that in order to provide meaningful answers to this daunting question one should note that men and women are not born free and equal, but are created free and equal, which is quite a different thing. Because they are not born free and equal, they start this life like horses in a handicap race: 'no two bearing an equal burden' (Fox 1979a:234). As a further explanation he suggests that we look into the possibility that this life we are living is not the only life we have had. According to him, we have lived many lives before, and whatever we thought, said or did in those existences, whether good or bad, finds its natural outcome in this life. Whatever we have sown in our previous lives, we are reaping in this present one.

The concept of immortality, or existence after physical death, as well as the prediction of radical changes to occur in humanity's future, is common to all the major religions. It is also being explored with significant results by the larger scientific community of today. A topic of such magnitude needs proper investigation and discussion. However, in this chapter, the focus will be mainly on Emmet Fox's religious thinking regarding concepts such as death, dying, reincarnation and the end times. His line of thought will be compared to other religious teachings.

## 7.1 THE PROCESS OF DYING AND DEATH

In the East the process of dying and the death of a human being are freely acknowledged (not shunned and dreaded) and are profound experiences. Tibet's famous poet saint, Milarepa (in Sogyal 1998:12), says, 'My religion is to live – and die – without regret ... This thing called "corpse" we dread so much is living with us here and now.' Although death is a mystery, there are two things one can be sure about: 'It is absolutely certain that we will die, and it is uncertain when or how we will die' (Sogyal 1998:15). By implication Fox agrees wholeheartedly with Eastern thought and believes that there is no death.

### 7.1.1 Death defined

Although they may be expressed, phrased or interpreted differently, it seems that many religious teachings share comparable insights into the concept of life after death. When a 'person seems to die', Fox (1979a:202) remarks, 'all that happens is that he leaves his body here and goes over onto the next plane, otherwise unchanged. He falls asleep here to wake up on the other side minus his physical body (which was probably more or less damaged) but enriched with the knowledge that he has not really died.' New Thought in general changes the term 'death' to expressions such as 'transition' or 'the soul has gone on to the next experience'.

As an example of topical discussions, Dr Raymond Moody, a Georgian physician, gives evidence in his well-known book *Life after life* of near-death experiences, as well as many accounts of those who were diagnosed as clinically dead, only to be resuscitated to this reality. In the cases he researched the subjects clearly remember their existence in the other realms. Moody (1977:89-90) says that all the people he interviewed expressed 'the thought that [they are] no longer afraid of death' and 'that now the state of death itself is no longer forbidding to them'. Those people who had near-death experiences used analogies such as 'transition from one state to another, or as an entry into a higher state of consciousness or of being' to describe the actual process of dying. Some compared it to a 'homecoming', whereas others likened it to other psychologically positive states, for example 'to awakening, to

graduating, and to escape from jail' (Moody 1977:92). To these people the survival of bodily death is not an abstract possibility, but a fact of experience.

Although Fox repeatedly states that there is no death, he is aware of the fear of it. This fear in people is partly a 'fear of the unknown, and partly as the result of false teaching' (Fox 1979c:171). Sogyal, Buddhist master and author of *The Tibetan book of living and dying*, is someone who plays a special role in Buddhism, both in the West and in the East. His teaching has been embraced by those in the West and by New Thought in general.<sup>1</sup> Sogyal (1998:15) believes that the fear of death arises from deep down where one knows that one 'cannot avoid facing death forever'.

For New Thought forerunner Phineas Parkhurst Quimby<sup>2</sup> (in Seale 1986:93), the fear of death disappears if one is 'acquainted with this mesmerized self and its superior spiritual powers'. It is only when one 'does not yet know his Other and Real Self' that a person dreads death, for such an individual still identifies with his body (Seale 1986:100).

In chapter 4.3 the concepts 'Thanatos' and 'Eros' were discussed. Ken Wilber (1981:61) commented that:

Man's prior Nature is Spirit, the ultimate Whole, but until he discovers that Wholeness, he remains an alienated fragment, a separate self, and that separate self necessarily is faced with an awareness of death and the terror of death.

It was forgetting one's true self, the Atman, that brought about the search for substitutes, the Atman Project. With each emergence from the uroboric stage up the great chain of being, 'the new and higher self expressed new and higher needs, faced new and higher forms of death, and thus demanded new and higher death denials and self-pervations' (Wilber 1981:71). In every stage there was a substitute to deal with the fear of death. In the magical stage certain rites were performed on the death of a person to ward off death in those living. In the mythic stage the belief in a God became that of the saviour and the conqueror of death. And for the rationalist, the question about death is never asked. The one who does ask, 'Is there any meaning in my life which will not be destroyed by the inevitable death awaiting me', is the 'soul that is much too awake. It is a soul on the brink of the transpersonal' (Wilber 1995:263–264).

Wilber frequently pointed out that the very thing (Thanatos) that can assist humanity to be transformed into the next level of evolution is the thing that one fears. This is the reason that everything is done to stay alive (Eros). It takes the breaking down of boundaries that were created between self and an other, the actual dying to one level of consciousness, to transform a being up the ladder of evolution. It is literally the collapse of one floor and the emerging of another. This happens when Thanatos outweighs Eros. The opposite reaction, the effort to beat death, results in what Wilber calls translation. This only brings about stagnation on one level and prevents one from merging with ultimate wholeness, the Atman. According to Douglas Baker (1995:20), a qualified medical practitioner, an occultist with more than forty years' experience, and someone who indirectly bears witness to New Thought teaching, Christianity has done its work well in preaching 'the existence of heaven so that everyone wants to go there, but nobody wants to die'. First one hears that one is born into sin and then one hears about death, hell and purgatory. No wonder that death is feared.

### **7.1.2 The next world**

To the question of where the next world is, Fox answers that it is neither up there, nor down here, but all around us. There is not just one etheric plane, but many, each vibrating at its own density and all interpenetrating one another. They do not interfere with one another, just as the various radio stations do not interfere with one another's broadcasting. The American Hopi Indians also believe in a life after death. Corresponding in essence to Fox's thought, 'their afterlife', is a kind of mirror image of our world, and is 'based in every sense on the principle of opposites' (Kaiser 1991:29). In other words, if it is summer on the earth, it is winter in the underworld; if someone dies on earth, another is born in the underworld. It is this interdependence or interconnectedness of all living things that (as we shall discuss later) enables one to communicate with those in the next life.

To explain the process of death itself, Fox insists that we must understand that we possess two bodies. One is physical and can be seen, whereas the other is etheric and cannot be seen by most, because of its finer vibrations. The best way to explain the simultaneous existence of these bodies is to state that the etheric body does not surround the physical, but

interpenetrates it, as air fills a sponge. Baker agrees implicitly with this description and suggests that the etheric body is a much subtler structure that is made of subatomic particles and is to be found in all living things. He perceives the etheric body as a physiological unit, 'the vehicle which vitalises man's physical organs' through the intake of prana or life force (Baker 1995:29). In the waking state, Fox declares, these two bodies are interpenetrated, but when one goes to sleep, the etheric slips out of the physical and takes with it the consciousness. Although this etheric body 'is composed of several different ethers of different densities', Fox (1979a:203) treats it as one. This is the same with the physical body, which is composed of fluids, solids, gases and organs, but which we refer to as a body, a unit.

The etheric body, which is the repository of all our thoughts and feelings, includes what we call the conscious and subconscious minds. It is also what the psychologist refers to as the psyche and we call our human personality. This is the reason that the personality survives the physical death of the body, as it is not attached to it. Fox shares a very interesting and valuable piece of information that is important in understanding the process of death: there is no sensation in the physical body. When we think we have a pain in the physical body, that pain is actually in the etheric counterpart, and that is why anaesthesia is possible. When the etheric body leaves the physical body, it is still connected by an 'etheric ligament', which referred to in the Bible as the silver cord. This cord can stretch very far, and in some spiritually developed people it can extend into the next plane and even beyond. The only 'difference between normal sleep, and anaesthesia, and the various kinds of trance<sup>3</sup> is a question of how much of the etheric goes out at a particular time' (Fox 1979a:203).

Death, according to Fox, is the cutting of the silver cord, the connection between the physical and the etheric bodies. The break in this association indicates the end of our earthly life. When this cord is severed, a person is cut off from his or her physical body and declared dead. This person falls into a kind of deep sleep, which can last for days or even weeks. During this period, the etheric body (the person itself) passes over into the next plane, where in due course it will wake up and his or her new life will then begin. New Thought exponent, counsellor and licensed hypnotherapist Dr Joshua David Stone believes that the deceased loses both the physical and the etheric bodies after death. Afterwards, the deceased takes on

either the average astral body, the mental body, or, for the initiate, even the Buddhic or glorified Lightbody. Fox also states that the etheric body is not a homogeneous thing, but is composed of several different ethers and densities. Fox nevertheless treats it as one body.

Just before the moment we call death, our whole past life flashes by as if we were watching a movie. During this time, it is recorded, it then becomes clear what one's blueprint was for that specific life and how one has attained its fulfilment. This can be very distressful to a soul who has missed the chances offered in life. Fox points out that this can either be an awe-inspiring experience or a terrible one to witness. In Scripture the 'Judgment Books' refer to 'the unfolding of the subconscious mind' (Fox 1979a:206).

To the question of where we go after our physical death and whom we mingle with, Fox shares very definite and profound insights. It is not by chance or luck that we find ourselves in any specific surroundings, but

You will go to the sort of place, and be among the sort of people for whom you have prepared yourself by your habitual thinking and your mode of living while on this earth. No one 'sends' you anywhere. You naturally gravitate to the place where you belong. You have built up a certain character, that is, a certain mentality, by your years of thinking, speaking and acting on this plane. That is the kind of person you are at the moment, and you find yourself in conditions corresponding to your personality (Fox 1979a:209).

He reminds his readers that 'death makes positively no change in you; you are just the same person that you were before it happened. You have full memory and you remember the general events of your life just as well, and often somewhat better, than you did toward the end of your life here' (Fox 1979a:209). So what is true on this plane is true on the other planes. Birds of a feather still flock together.

On waking up in the next plane, the so-called dead person recognises certain familiar aspects in the world about him or her. However, there are also distinct differences. Even if one died as a sick and old person, when one wakes up in the other dimension, Fox suggests, one takes on a healthy and youthful body. What we consider an elderly person is only a person with a mature mind whose body is beginning to decay. On the other side one takes on a body as if one were in the prime of one's life. As one can then see one's etheric body, it becomes as

substantial as the old physical body seemed. Another difference concerns the four dimensions in the other world, as opposed to the three in the physical world. This fourth dimension has often been referred to as heaven, but that is not correct, insists Fox (1979a:207), because Heaven 'is a world of infinite dimension'. Since many people work diligently through their challenges in the physical reality, they move over in a more enlightened state and they often regard this next plane as Heaven. But the next plane is not the conscious presence of God. It is only a limited etheric world – less limited than the earth, but as prone to discord and decay. The only difference is that decay sets in faster than it would on a three-dimensional level and so it seems to a newcomer to be the perfect world. Fox (1979a:211) clearly brings to any confused mind the truth that

You do not 'meet God' on the next plane any more than you do on this plane. God is everywhere. Of course, He is fully present on the next plane just as He is on this plane; but there as here, He is to be contacted only in one's own consciousness by some form of prayer or spiritual treatment. Heaven is that perfect state of consciousness in which one is in full realization of the Divine Presence.

In accordance with Fox's thought, New Thoughter Dorothy Elder (1992:27) claims that the Kingdom of Heaven is within, it is a statement of mind, and 'you do not have to die to go there'. On this 'heavenly' plane there is no limitation or evil, or decay of any kind. If one can attain such a consciousness, one has completed the existence on the etheric planes, just as we completed our physical existence on earth through the process of death, and one continues directly into the realms we call Heaven. Fox states that Moses, Enoch, Elijah and others all overcame the sense of separation from God and dematerialised themselves into this eternal state of freedom.

Fox (1979a:212) admits that there are 'some very unpleasant localities in the next world', but the average person, who may give in to temptation under severe pressure, does not go there. These are the dwelling places of those individuals who deliberately lived their lives in the wrong way, and who have occupied their minds with evil, hatred, deceit or sensuality while still on earth. The orthodox preachers referred to these locations as 'hell', but, according to Fox, hell is not a place of ever-lasting vindictive punishment, because no one 'sends' anyone there. These are the surroundings the delinquents had chosen when they opted for the lower in preference to the higher, and they will stay there until they see the error of their ways and

experience sufficient change. In line with New Thought, Elder regards hell as a figure of speech that 'refers to the suffering an individual may have over some error' – 'the absence of Good' – for 'a loving God could not condemn anyone to such suffering forever' (Elder 1992:26).

The person who benefits least from the changeover is the one who is materially and physically minded. People who are interested only in food, money, possessions and worldly success find themselves in a rather stranded position in the other life, as these things have no meaning there. The addict and the sensualist experience their 'punishment', which is really only the natural consequence of the behaviour in this life. Ultimately they realise that they cannot satisfy their addictions in the next life, as they do not have physical bodies to gratify. In a way this becomes a living hell. So we continue to reap what we have sown, whether in this life or in those beyond. Stone (1994:88) too describes hell as 'most definitely a state of mind'. Like certain metaphysicians, he identifies it as a location, but not as a place where one will burn forever, should one not accept Jesus Christ as one's saviour, as the fundamentalist religions describe it. He expands on this idea (which is also expressed in New Thought teaching): 'People are in hell when they are run by the negative ego, by material and astral desire, and hence are cut off from their own souls.'

A very interesting and even amusing event, according to Fox, which is often the theme of modern movies, is the revelation that immediately after physical death, a person lingers in full consciousness. For example, a man who has died in an accident often does not realise what has happened to him, although he can see it from the etheric body. In full consciousness, he can rush home to tell his wife. His etheric body can move instantaneously over and through any object, although he is not always aware of these newfound abilities. At home he reaches out to his wife, but she, still in the physical body, cannot hear or see him. However, if his thought and intent were strong enough, she would probably report to friends that 'my husband appeared to me for a moment at the time he was killed' or 'I knew that something had happened to my husband long before I got the news' (Fox 1979a:219).

In certain cases a dead person can become what we call 'earth-bound', which means that he



or she remains attached to the earth plane for an indefinite length of time, being unable to go on. This is usually a person who is emotionally so attached to this world, or someone or something, that he or she cannot slip into the coma that helps one across. To prevent this delay in one's journey, Fox (1979a:221–222) advises that one should 'not allow any one thing in the world to monopolize your attention to the exclusion of all other interests'. This correlates with the Eastern virtue of detachment, namely 'a keen, intelligent interest in the things which are with us while they are with us, with complete readiness to pass on to new things when the signal comes'. Of course one can pray for those who have passed on, realising peace of mind, freedom, and understanding for such a person, and reminding such a being that God is Life, and Intelligence, and Love. This is an excellent practice and a sacred duty, confirms Fox.

One will also encounter different sounds and colours in the after-life, and probably the most startling change is that thought reading is the normal means of communication. No longer can one hide behind pretences. What you see is what you are. There are also many locations and conditions to live in, and this corresponds very much to the different countries, cities, societies and cultures on earth. For many people the idea of there being no family life on the next plane may be disturbing. However, there is no need for family life there as we have understood and experienced it here on earth, which was only a temporary arrangement for this existence. Whoever we had a strong emotional bond with on earth, whether one of love or hate, will come into our experience again in the after-life, but this time as a friend or a close associate. That is why Fox so strongly impresses on the minds of his readers and students that it is very important to complete cycles of relationships through forgiveness before one has to encounter them again on another level and in another form. Strong bonds of mutual love will always attract one another in the after-life.

Another topic of great controversy is whether one can communicate with the so-called dead or not. Fox mentions the extremists whose dogmatic answer that it is absolutely impossible to do so, whereas the enthusiasts claim that the deceased communicate with them and direct their actions regularly. Fox (1979a:227) argues that 'communication does occasionally take place, but that it is far rarer than most believers in it suppose, and ... it is always accomplished with considerable difficulty and uncertainty'. Ernest Holmes, founder of Religious Science, believes

in communication with the deceased, but he urges his students to distinguish between a psychic's picture of such a person and the real situation. It is absurd, he declares 'to suppose that we can compel the attention of anyone out of the flesh, any more than one in it'. If we could, he asks, 'what would we hope to gain? People out of the flesh know no more than they did when in the body' (Holmes 1938:380).

A truly spiritual mode of communication, Fox proposes, is to sit down quietly and remind oneself that the one God is omnipresent, to reflect that one's real self is in the presence of God, and so is the divine spark of a loved one in the next phase. Although a direct message may not come through, one becomes aware of a sense of communication. This awareness of the presence of God is prayer and true communication. As a result, Fox (1979a:175) does believe that communication takes place, 'but that the wise dead understand the necessity of our exercising our own power of choice and do not intrude. But they do often come to our aid.'

Native people, especially those of the Aboriginal tradition, whose viewpoints are apparently similar to New Thought, strongly believe in communication with the deceased. The *wirinun* or medicine-man of Aboriginal culture receives special training in extra-sensory perception, which allows him to visit in person the realms of those who have passed on from the physical world. He then communicates with the deceased and receives guidance for his tribe. Another method of contacting other realms is through the hypersensitivity of the nerves – changing one's vibratory level to match that of the next level. It allows the person to move out of his or her physical body and to participate in the other world. Here he or she can remain as long as he or she can hold the vibratory rate firmly. Another group, the Hopi, believe that 'people are able to receive messages from other realms of existence via the spiritual links that connect all living things' (Kaiser 1991:19). This is possible because of the interdependence or interconnectedness of all living things, every separate form being part of a greater whole (as Ken Wilber teaches). Thus, the dead have not passed away forever, but can be contacted and reached by the living.

### **7.1.3 The bardo experience**

Bardo, a Tibetan word that simply means a ‘transition’ or a gap between the completion of one situation and the onset of another, is explained by Joe Fisher (1988:111) as ‘the plane of consciousness between lives’ – that realm that lies beyond our conscious understanding. Fisher, a reporter and author, delves deep into Tibetan knowledge of death and dying, a teaching that is in line with general New Thought. The experiences of the psychic territory that one enters on leaving the physical body have been recorded by Tibetan scribes, and this guidebook, known today as *The Tibetan book of the dead* (Bardo Thodol),

has been recited into the ears of the dying and the deceased in hope of steering the liberated soul across the ‘dangerous ambush’ of the bardo (literally, *bar*, ‘in between’; *do*, ‘island’) and away from the necessity of rebirth (Fisher 1988:111).

To return to an Eastern counterpart, Sogyal distinguishes four bardos: the natural bardo of this life (one’s lifespan from birth to death); the painful bardo of dying (this lasts from the onset of dying until the moment of death itself); the luminous bardo of dharmata (this is the after-death phase); and the karmic bardo of becoming (this is the gap until the next/new birth). He regards the bardos as ‘gaps or periods in which the possibility of awakening is particularly present’. These ‘gaps’ or opportunities to embrace liberation are available throughout life and death. The bardo teachings then become a ‘key or tool that enables us to discover and recognize them, and to make the fullest possible use of them’ (Sogyal 1998:104). These teachings inform us of moments when the mind is exceptionally free and powerful – much more than at any other stage – and one of these significant moments is at death. Death, then, is an opportunity for liberation. This way of perceiving and understanding the process of dying and death encapsulates the difference in opinion between the East and West.

Although references to the word ‘bardo’, as well as this interpretation of it, are absent from New Thought literature, New Thought teaching does embrace the concept of continuation of the soul after death. Detailed explanations of the actual process of dying and the immediate moments and days following this transition are not explicitly explained or dealt with. The conviction of New Thinkers ‘that there is no death’ (Holmes 1983b:90) and that ‘Jesus brought to light the truth that immortality is man’s nature’ (James and Cramer 1957:143) had become sufficient evidence for a belief system that supports eternity, immortality and

continuity of the soul beyond physical death.

Joshua David Stone's (1994:79) explanation of the bardo, 'the three days that follow the actual death experience of the physical body', comes from the teachings of the ascended masters Kuthumi and Djwhal Khul<sup>4</sup>. It reminds us that death 'is life's greatest challenge and its greatest spiritual test and initiation'. As a result, there is an art to dying and those who are uninformed miss the greatest opportunity of their lives, for 'every soul extension, whether prepared or not, will face the transformation called death'. The science of bardo<sup>5</sup> deals with the three days that follow the actual death experience of the physical body. Although Fox (1979c:171) does not explain his reasons for advising people to wait at least three days before cremating or burying the deceased, he acknowledges this period as 'a state of unconsciousness', a time period between the actual death of a person and his or her awakening into the next world.

Fox (1979a:223–224) regards the burial customs of the present world as pagan survivals. That Christians, who believe in the immortality of a soul, will treat a dead body as sacred seems to him to be neither logical nor intelligent. He states that there is nothing sacred about a dead body. It is a worn-out garment and 'should be disposed of in as cleanly and expeditious a manner as possible, and that is all' – one of respect and not reverence. '[T]he beauty of a beautiful body comes from the soul that shines through it, and does not lie in the body itself.' Fox regards cremation as the proper way to dispose of a dead body because 'fire is cleanly, purifying, and respectful'. Djwhal Khul, the ascended master whom Stone's wife, Terri Sue Stone, channels, also strongly recommends cremation over burial: 'It hastens the release of the subtle vehicles from the etheric body', which takes place within a few hours, rather than a few days. In addition, 'it purifies the astral plane; it stops the downward-moving tendency of desire; it prevents the poisoning of the Earth'. He refers to cemeteries as 'unhealthy psychic spots' (Stone 1994:77).

Fox also insists that the ashes should not be preserved because 'only a morbid satisfaction can come from keeping these gruesome relics'. Neither should one erect a monument of any kind, because 'to erect a monument over a cast-off body is just as unreasonable as it would be for you to bury an old suit of clothes and then put a monument over that'. Visiting

gravesites should also be avoided, as the deceased is not there. One should rather honour the memory of a loved one by placing flowers in one's own home or next to a photograph of this person, but this too should not become an everyday practice. The 'wearing of mourning', (wearing something black) for the sake of the deceased, is not advisable, as the person is very much alive. To keep a room 'just as he left it' or to retain other personal things of the deceased is considered wrong and even pagan, especially if it is done in a sentimental or morbid spirit. Of course, discrimination will be needed in what to keep and what to dispose of in order to make way for the living present. Fox, although he feels very strongly about these instructions, advises us to 'go along' with the wishes of older relatives and family when the above ways cannot or will not be executed (Fox 1979a:224–225).

'Excessive grief is to be deprecated', Fox (1979a:220) remarks, as it is bad for both parties. The so-called dead are very sensitive to our thoughts for a considerable time after their graduation, and our grief saddens them and prevents them from focusing their attention on the new life they have started. We should remember that when there was a link of love, we will definitely meet again, and nothing good or beautiful or true can ever be lost. Another point of concern for loving survivors is that sometimes the body of the one passing over seems to undergo violent twitching and contortions. One need not be distressed about such a purely reflex action, as the patient is totally unaware of it, and is slipping gently and comfortably into the next phase.

The subject of suicide is dealt with concisely. Fox (1979a:226) regards conscious and intentional self-destruction as 'a crime severely punished by Nature' for it is 'a refusal to meet the problems of life'. The deceased apparently will not meet friends on the other side and will find themselves lonely and unhappy in a confused mental state. Of course they can be greatly helped by prayer, as they ultimately have to face all over again the precise problem that they ran away from.

Stone's (1994:91) impression of suicide shows a direct connection with New Thought and endorses Fox's thinking: 'It is against universal law to take one's own life.' Such people take their existing consciousness with them and the same lessons must still be learned after death,

so 'he really hasn't escaped very much by checking out'. Patricia Diane Cota-Robles (1993:165), whose teaching resonates with that of Fox and New Thought in general, through her research into the 'realms of truth' came to the understanding 'that suicide is the only way we leave the physical realm prematurely'. Such a soul, on arriving in the hereafter, is immediately shown the results of his or her life on earth and the opportunities that were missed because of the sudden interruption. Although the lessons that were overlooked must now be learned at the inner levels, the soul is not in a material body, which makes the anguish and despair worse. In this world there is no sleep and no escape from one's thoughts. One is therefore confronted all the time with a specific issue. To return to an Eastern adherent and one who supports these theories, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche states: 'When a person commits suicide, the consciousness has no choice but to follow its negative karma, and it may well happen that a harmful spirit will seize and possess its life force' (Sogyal 1998:376). He suggests that in such cases a powerful master must be called upon to perform special rituals and ceremonies to free the dead person's consciousness.

#### **7.1.4 Preparation for life here-after**

The locations in the next phase are really only the out-picturings of the subject's own thoughts. These places, Fox points out, also exist on this plane and we know them as countries, cities, houses and rooms. The main differences are that the next plane has an extra dimension and one experiences a thing instantaneously because of the absence of inertia. Although one will also encounter different sounds and colours in the after-life, probably the most startling change (as stated above) is that thought reading is the normal means of communication. 'On the other side your thoughts are demonstrated immediately' (here Fox (1979a:210) confirms New Thought teaching) and it does not take as long as on earth to manifest. That souls immediately experience what they are thinking can be rather confusing at first. Because the etheric body becomes to them as real as the physical body was on earth, they are rather disconcerted when it constantly and immediately submits to the moulding of their thoughts. No longer can one hide behind any pretence. What you see is what you are.

Material possessions and wealth have no value on the next plane as thought is immediately

demonstrated, so there is no need to purchase anything. Think it, and you've got it. However, the mental and spiritual wealth that one accumulated while in the third dimension accompanies one to the next world. It does not matter in which world one found oneself, if a person can clearly conceive and truly understand anything, he or she will bring it into manifestation in his or her life. On earth the process of manifestation is just so much slower than in the other world. It therefore takes great control and practice to make sure that one thinks what it is that one wants to experience. Habitual negative thinking while on earth does not make this process any easier. That is why it is so important to entertain only holy and positive thoughts while still in the physical dimension.

The teaching about the power of thought in Aboriginal initiation ceremonies accords strongly with New Thought principles, although New Thought does not refer to it directly. Aboriginal thought states that although the lower levels in the Dowie, spirit world, are very similar to those in the physical world, 'the Dowie dimension, however, is thought built' (Havecker 1991:65). Yet another statement from the Eastern world that parallels New Thought is Buddhism's revolutionary insight that 'life and death are in the mind, and nowhere else'. It also reveals the mind 'as the universal basis of experience – the creator of happiness and the creator of suffering, the creator of what we call life and what we call death' (Sogyal 1998:46). To the question whether there is something one can depend on that does survive what we call death, the answer is the truth of the changeless, deathless, unending nature of mind – a total agreement between New Thought, Fox in particular, and Eastern teaching.

To prepare oneself for the next world is to live correctly today. This includes leading 'a clean, honest life, embodying in your conduct the highest that you know at the time'; being useful to others; and learning about the truth of being and the nature of God (Fox 1979a:228). It matters little what roles one takes on for one's performance on the stage, for it is not about the role, it is about the acting. Understanding the omnipresence of God and the power of thought are the two supreme lessons that are set for this school and experience. Returning to the concept of watching a play-back of one's life while dying and realising immediately one's shortcomings reminds Brenda Johnston, New Age exponent who shares insights from the masters, as well as personal experiences, of her seer friend's response. Referring to this notion, he said, 'I

don't want this to happen ... So I am going to do the very best I can in this life to serve and share my knowledge' (Johnston [sa]).

Fox (1979a:228) argues: 'Your business is to live here in this world while you are here; to face up to your problems here and to try to solve them; and to live in the next world when you get there.' If it is true that 'where you go when you die is determined by the last thought in your mind before death' – that at the time of death one is attracted like a magnet to the level of consciousness one has achieved – then it is important to strive to gain as much spiritual growth, understanding, and realisation of God in order to achieve the highest possible passing (Stone 1994:73).

Fox and New Thought in general teach that we have always been spirit and never separated from the source. Not even death can rob a person of that birthright. In other words, if one understands the spiritual make-up of a being while living in the material world, one can already benefit from the power of thought, if it is wisely applied, and this becomes more apparent in the after-world. It is thus understandable that Fox and others underline the importance of the control of one's mind and thoughts, for they know that miracles can be demonstrated. Reaching the fourth dimension, however, is not the end of this evolutionary process of a soul in its journey to realisation of God. Once a soul has developed sufficiently both mentally and spiritually on the fourth dimension, it will graduate to the next phase, which is the fifth dimension, and onto even higher planes, where the etheric vibrations are far less limited than the lower planes.

New Thoughter Ervin Seale (1986:99) concludes: 'In terms of our true self, we are not born and we shall never cease to be. This means that we are now in eternity, the life that does not change.' Ernest Holmes (1938:388) again prepares, not to die, but to live: 'The thought of death should slip from our consciousness altogether ... and when this great event of the soul takes place, it should be beautiful, sublime ... a glorious experience.'

## **7.2 THE CONCEPT OF REINCARNATION**



The Dalai Lama, in the preface of *The case for reincarnation* (Fisher 1983), reminds readers that: 'Reincarnation is not exclusively a Buddhist or Hindu concept, but is a part of the history of human origin. It stands as a proof of the mindstream's capacity to retain knowledge of physical, vocal, and mental activities.' This idea 'is related to the theory of interdependent origination and to the law of cause and effect' (Fisher 1988:7).

Fox's religious thinking regarding death, dying and reincarnation resonates with most other religious thinking, particularly the Eastern philosophies. Herman Wolhorn links Fox's exquisite knowledge and inspiration partly to his understanding of the concept of reincarnation – in other words, one had many experiences in the past. He also includes pure inspiration: 'Inspiration gives anyone who seeks it in any particular field to which he gives his attention, knowledge and information that no one else has' (Wolhorn 1977:101). Like Fox, Wolhorn believes that there is only one source, and that is divine mind. All inspiration and knowledge originate from this source and Fox devoted the greater part of his lifetime to the search for facets of truth, which culminated in unveiling some of these mysteries to humankind. That there is no death, according to Fox, means that one has access to this source all the time.

Although a foreign concept to many in the West, as well as one of the major differences between Eastern and Western philosophies, the idea of reincarnation is reaching much wider recognition. When we arrive as a new-born baby, Fox remarks, we are unconscious at first, and then we take our first breath and become conscious, with which our earthly journey has begun. This continues until we are ready to move into the next phase, after which we experience another birth, but this time into a world very different from the one we were accustomed to. Thus, the process of reincarnation continues as a part of a greater evolutionary whole, or, as Holmes (1938:371) points out, 'making life a continuous stream of self-conscious expression'.

### **7.2.1 Immortality**

Immortality or existence after physical death is a common belief among major religions and is significantly explored and researched by the scientific community. New Thinkers and those

who follow the same line of reasoning are convinced that there is immortality and that what we have accomplished until now is merely a part of all that we will do. The principle of immortality posits that human beings are limitless God-beings. Therefore, insists Holmes (1938:372), 'Death cannot rob him of anything if he be immortal.'

If one adds together reincarnation and karma (the two concepts still to be discussed), the result is immortality. A person is made up of 'matter and spirit, of form and soul, of self and higher Self', but on death casts off matter, form and self, while spirit, soul and higher self remain, always immortal, 'but still in the process of growth and unfoldment' (Baker 1995:64).

### **7.2.2 The doctrine of reincarnation**

Reincarnation, also known by terms such as 'reproduction', 'counterfescance', and 'metempsychosis', refers to the reappearance on earth of the same individual, time after time. It is believed that the roots of this teaching are deeply imbedded in religions – that is, in the inner teachings or esoteric phase of all religious systems (Christian and other fundamental occult doctrines). Yogi Ramacharaka (1935:225), whose teaching reaffirms New Thought beliefs, declares that 'the doctrine of Re-birth is the only one that is in full accord with the Christian conception of ultimate justice and "fairness".'

Although the idea of reincarnation and karma as spiritual truth could involve an important revelation for many, this does not necessarily imply that it is accepted by all metaphysical philosophies. The Western world is regarded as being ignorant about the topic of reincarnation. Mystic and contemporary scholars agree that references to reincarnation were left out of the Bible.<sup>6</sup> Fox also believes that reincarnation is not taught directly in the Bible, but is referred to obliquely. Yogi Ramacharaka (1935:231–232) develops this thought:

While the majority of modern Christians bitterly oppose the idea that the doctrine of Metempsychosis ever formed any part of the Christian Doctrine, and prefer to regard it as a 'heathenish' teaching, still the fact remains that the careful and unprejudiced student will find indisputable evidence in the writings of the Early Christian Fathers pointing surely to the conclusion that the doctrine of Metempsychosis was believed and taught in the Inner Circle of the Early Church.

Russell Chandler (1988:267), on the other hand, quotes evangelical Christian John Snyder, who stated that biblical evidence for reincarnation 'is merely the product of wishful thinking and faulty literary criticism'. He also refers to Mark Albrecht's remark that although the ideas of karma and reincarnation are believed in Eastern, Gnostic and occult traditions, the Bible never mentions them, but refers instead to resurrection. Chandler, a veteran journalist and religious writer, regards resurrection as the Christian's answer to Job's (14:14) question, 'If a man dies, will he live again?' He concludes that 'reincarnation is incompatible with resurrection. They cannot both be true, despite efforts to synthesize or harmonize the two' (Chandler 1988:268–269). His validation for this remark lies in the historical evidences for the resurrection of Jesus, which he considers are 'far superior to those advanced for the theory of reincarnation'.

One of the most popular biblical references to reincarnation is Matthew 16:13–17, where Jesus asked his disciples who the people (as well as the disciples) thought the Son of Man was? In their answers they referred to John the Baptist, Elijah and Jeremiah, and Simon Peter revealed that, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' In Matthew 11:11–15 John the Baptist is considered a reincarnation of the Old Testament prophet Elijah or Elias (the Greek form). This idea is expanded in Matthew 17:10–13. John 9:1–3 tells a story of a blind man that indicates a belief in reincarnation. When the disciples asked Jesus who was responsible for this 'sin' (blindness), Jesus replied, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.' Another example of declaring pre-existence before physical birth is found in John 3:13, where Jesus states, 'No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven.' The prediction of the return of the prophet Elijah is found in Malachi 4. That God knew Jeremiah before he was born is referred to in Jeremiah 1:5. Jesus affirmed his own pre-existence with the words 'before Abraham was born, I am' (John 8:58). As the most-cited New Age text to 'contain "vestiges" of reincarnationism' Chandler (1988:267) suggests John 3:3, 'I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' In his opinion Jesus' explanation indicates a spiritual birth and does not imply reincarnation. Another text that (he believes) rules out the idea of reincarnation is Hebrews 9:27, where it is stated that 'man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment'. Of course, the argument that the Bible cannot be wrenched out of context to defend reincarnation applies to the converse.

Although *The Aquarian gospel of Jesus the Christ* (transcribed from the Akashic Records in the nineteenth century by Levi, a pastor and medical doctor from Belleville, Ohio) cannot be compared with the more authentic and historical gospels of the Bible, one does come across a reincarnational passage in which Jesus, after listening to a group of youthful singers and musicians in Lahore, comments:

These people are not young. A thousand years would not suffice to give them such divine expressiveness, and such purity of voice and touch. Then thousand years ago these people mastered harmony. In days of old they trod the busy thoroughfares of life, and caught the melody of birds, and played on harps of perfect form. And they have come again to learn still other lessons from the varied notes of manifests (chapter 37:13–15) (Levi 1977:76).

The similarities between New Thought and the primal shamanic religion seem evident in the writings of Zulu shaman Credo Mutwa (1996:201). Mutwa states: ‘We in Africa believe that the soul goes through a number of incarnations in its development – toward reaching the goal of maturity.’ He perceives the present human stage as just one of several stages ‘through which the soul must pass’ in its ‘upward movement through various incarnations’. Mutwa accepts that there is such a thing as reincarnation. Experiences of possessing knowledge of previous lives, memories of incidents that do not belong to this reality and knowledge of intimate details about a stranger are just some things that have happened to him (and others). This belief is endorsed by the Aboriginal culture. Aborigines perceive ‘the Yowie, or soul, that incarnates in human form’ as one that ‘has evolved from innumerable lower forms of life, at each step gaining new experiences which enable it to be attracted to and successfully build about itself a higher form’ (Havecker 1991:19).

It is important to distinguish between reincarnation – the soul of a human taking on a series of physical bodies, still in human form, with interspersed periods of withdrawal from physical life – and the concept of transmigration – the movement or journey of a human soul into other life forms such as animals. The latter thought is not generally accepted by leading spiritual thinkers of either East or West, as Elder’s (1992:20) remark reveals: ‘This teaching in Western metaphysics excludes transmigration of the soul into an animal – only into a human body does reincarnation apply.’ Whereas the term ‘reincarnation’ captures the intention of the Hindu view

of life after death, the Buddhist view is more adequately expressed by the term 'rebirth'. 'Reincarnation' implies the continued uninterrupted existence of a substantial 'soul', and Buddhism has discarded that view.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, Swami Prabhupada, Founder-Acarya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, differentiates between the transmigration of souls in animal bodies and the transmigration of human souls. He states: 'Animals transmigrate in only one direction – upward – but human beings can transmigrate to either a higher or a lower form of life.' The point of arrival depends on the living entity's desire. He believes that 'once you come to the human form, if you don't cultivate Krsna consciousness you may return to the body of a cat or dog' (Prabhupada 1981:49–50).

Where Credo Mutwa does differ from mainstream New Thought thinking is that he and his clansmen believe that when people die, they are reborn as animals, trees, bushes or even as various types of insect – albeit in a different part of the world and at a different time. If they should be reborn as human again, they are considered lucky.

Huston Smith, scholar, writer and professor emeritus at Syracuse University, USA, discusses the religions of man. In the chapter on Hinduism he refers to the individual soul or jiva entering the world mysteriously. These souls 'begin as the souls of the simplest forms of life, but they do not vanish with the death of their original bodies'. He and Fox agree that the spirit is not dependent on its body, just as the body does not depend on its clothes. He quotes the well-known verse from the Bhagavad-Gita: 'Worn-out garments are shed by the body; worn-out bodies are shed by the dweller' (Smith 1964:67). Confirming this thought, the Bhagavad-Gita states:

As the embodied soul continually passes, in this body, from boyhood to youth, and then to old age, the soul similarly passes into another body at death. The self-realized soul is not bewildered by such a change. For the soul there is never birth nor death. Nor, having once been, does he ever cease to be. He is unborn, eternal, ever-existing, undying and primeval. He is not slain when the body is slain (Prabhupada 1976:24, 27).

Fox does not think that reincarnation is necessary:

We are here on the earth planet to learn certain lessons. We are here to develop spiritually. We are here to acquire full understanding of and control over our mentality; and this cannot be done in one lifetime.

Many students have asked ‘Why can this not be done in one lifetime?’ Fox replies that the ‘explanation lies in man’s mental laziness and inertia; in his reluctance to change himself radically, to pull himself out of a rut when once he gets into it, to adopt new ideas and adapt himself to changing conditions’. It is because of ‘man’s conservatism and tendency to self-satisfaction and, above all, in his ignorance of his own unlimited potentialities’ (Fox 1979a:240–241). If one objectively observes every phase of life, from the first cry of a newborn baby to the last sigh of an aged person on his or her deathbed, then one will realise that every moment is a lesson or a step in the bigger picture of a life. And every step is really like one lifetime. To learn to walk, to speak, and even to write are all natural steps (lives) within a process. A person literally learns step by step or lifetime by lifetime.

The reason that we do not remember our previous lives is really a blessing in disguise, according to Fox. It is like nature drawing a veil of forgetfulness over one to hide all knowledge until one is sufficiently developed to be ready to remember it.<sup>8</sup> A person can hardly remember the earlier days of one’s life, and one can barely handle certain issues from the existent past. How then will one cope with so many more memories and challenges from other lives? Obviously these memories could become very destructive to such a person. Some people do have glimpses from the past, however, and these can be extremely useful. It is said that ‘the whole history of all your past lives is stored away in the deeper levels of your subconscious, and thus it is that your mentality today – and consequently your destiny – is the logical outcome of all the lives that you have lived up to the present’ (Fox 1979a:247).

Many questions have been raised about whether we chose our parents, and why we were born into a specific family? Fox (1979a:247) states we did not choose our parents, but that ‘each one of us is born into the conditions which exactly fit his soul at the time of incarnation’ and ‘we go to the parents whose nature and conditions correspond with the state of the soul when it incarnates’. This statement is precisely what many modern students refer to as

‘choosing our parents’. Fox describes the process as a soul in full consciousness in the etheric realms, who remembers the main events in the previous life, waiting for the moment of conception to attach itself to a fertilised cell. At that moment it loses consciousness and moves into a coma, from which it begins to emerge and remember at the moment of birth again. From the moment of conception the subconscious mind is active and is busy building the new body for the journey ahead. In other words, it is the ‘baby’s own subconscious that builds its body in the uterus, and it builds it in its own image and likeness – that is why our bodies express the things that are in the soul’, for ‘our environment is always but the outpicturing of our soul’ (Fox 1979a:248). It is important to note that no one has sent or selected us but, because like attracts like, our mature soul will find its ideal place at the time, which will also provide the opportunity it needs to develop still further its good qualities and overcome its weaknesses, if it so desires. Even if a child seems out of place in a certain family, or grows apart from them in later life, the original and underlying likeness attracted the soul for that experience.

The statement that there is no such thing as heredity may come as a surprise to many, but one has to understand that ‘no one ever “inherits” anything from his parents or his ancestors’. If a soul joins a family with, say, tuberculosis, this soul potentially already had these conditions. The circumstances of the family then produce an opportunity to break with such an unhealthy cycle, if the soul so chooses this time. The soul may not even have any of the family’s conditions, but will be attracted to it because of other similarities and challenges. Fox (1979a:252) summarises this process: ‘So you yourself are your own ancestors, and at some time or other you have produced your own personal character; and all your external conditions arise out of that.’ This New Thought understanding is expanded in Divine Science’s statement that one’s only heredity is pure inheritance, for there is only One God and Father of all. ‘When we know how to claim being “heirs of God” we shall know our true inheritance. This is the truth that makes us free’ (James and Cramer 1959:149). ‘Differences in talent, like differences in opportunity, are the result of our activities in other lives’, comments Fox (1979a:253, 254), and there is no reason to be stupidly proud or stupidly ashamed of one’s parents or family. One should make the most of life and one’s talents without ‘either sighing for the impossible or fleeing from the inevitable’.

A world of inequality with contrasts between poor and wealthy, sick and healthy, right and wrong, happiness and sorrow or suffering does not harmonise with an all-loving and caring God. Unless one believes that this life is not the only life, but a part of a greater evolutionary whole, the suffering does not make any sense. The theory of reincarnation 'enables a man rationally to believe in Divine justice', declares Yogi Ramacharaka (1935:225). Fox agrees that through reincarnation the soul obtains all kinds of experiences by playing all kinds of role in the great human drama. It offers one a logical and satisfactory explanation of what is happening in one's lives and in the world. He nevertheless encourages his readers to be part of the world, but not from the world. One has to incorporate one's spiritual understanding into the practical life one is living in this existence, always mindful of the presence of God.

Anderson encapsulates New Thought beliefs by emphasising the importance of living life to the fullest each moment, and not waiting for a reincarnational opportunity to improve it. 'Let us all do as vigorously and constructively as we can to make this indispensable moment as beautiful as possible', he insists. He encourages his readers to think of themselves as new each moment, and 'having the special perspectives provided by your past momentary selves, you are believing in what could be called momentary reincarnation. You constantly are being reborn to great new possibilities' (Anderson 1991:53). As with Ken Wilber's great chain of being, Anderson sees that 'you are essential to the whole of things. You here now are an essential link in God's great chain of becoming' (Anderson 1991:53).

The Bible does not refer to reincarnation in any definite way. Fox (1979a:239) explains that 'the Bible teaches us to concentrate on the task of achieving our reunion with God'. It teaches us to seek actively to liberate ourselves from all limitations. Surely Fox must have been aware that the Bible purposefully left out the references to reincarnation, unless his statement directs the mindfulness of the student to living life fully in the present moment. The Bhagavad-Gita underlines this thought: 'The wise, engaged in devotional service, take refuge in the Lord and free themselves from the cycle of birth and death by renouncing the fruits of action in the material world. In this way they can attain that state beyond all miseries' (Prabhupada 1976:36). Russell Chandler (1988:268), in asking why the church did not suppress reincarnation, answers that the church did not need to, for 'the theory wasn't a serious option



in Christian belief.

To the question of whether it is absolutely necessary to come back, Fox answers, no. If the first time around, a person could live a life that concentrated only on the presence of God, it would not be necessary to come back. However, we can scarcely do this in one life, and therefore we grow in stages until we eventually 'grow up' spiritually. Charles Fillmore (1981:166) maintains: 'Reincarnation will continue until the ego awakens to the Christ Mind and through it builds an imperishable body.' He also believes that reincarnation 'is not an aid to spiritual growth, but merely a makeshift until full Truth is discerned'.

It was stated previously that those who can perform magic have the power to ward off the death of those still living and the return of the deceased spirit. This statement is the closest that Wilber comes to the idea of reincarnation. He did not discuss reincarnation in the sources I consulted, and therefore one questions the place of reincarnation within his great chain of being. When one dies, does one transcend and integrate all of what was? Does it shift one into a higher, deeper and more significant level, regardless of one's spiritual and mental development? In other words because one dies, does this consequentially shift one higher and deeper? Wilber argued that transformation (Thanatos outweighing Eros) can be regressive, progressive or transcendent. And if any part of any whole is repressed, it becomes pathological and affects all the parts with which it is linked. This seems to endorse the belief in karma (what one sows, one will reap), and to determine whether a soul moves on or is stuck on any specific level (reincarnating to that level to complete the lesson).

An important aspect of the doctrine of reincarnation, and the reason that it is exceedingly unpalatable to many people, is that it makes a person directly responsible for his or her present condition. Many dislike having to face this responsibility, and some prefer to blame God, their parents, or the existing political system for making them what they are. According to the aphorisms of Patanjali, another Eastern counterpart who is in accord with New Thought principles, the doctrine of reincarnation

implies a profoundly optimistic belief in the justice and order of the universe. If it is we – and not God, or our parents, or our fellow men – who have made our present predicament, then it is we who can change it.

We have no excuse for self-pity and no reason for despair. We are not helplessly doomed. We are under no mysterious prenatal curse (in Prabhavananda and Isherwood 1960:76).

Esotericist Blavatsky (1952d:82) comments on the idea of reincarnation: 'Man must, in short, know who he was, before he arrives at knowing what he is.'

### 7.2.3 Karma

The cosmic law clearly determines that like attracts like, or, as Jesus' teaching emphasised, that what you sow, you will reap. This great law of cause and effect is seldom understood. This law works in two ways – if one sows good or bad, little or a great deal, one will reap the results according to those measures. In the East this law of cause and effect is known as karma.

The concept of karma (intentional action), which, according to Krüger (1991:182), was adapted by the Buddha, is echoed in the knowing 'that the moral quality of one's life determines one's fate in the next life'. Sogyal (1998:92) regards karma as that, 'whatever we do, with our body, speech, or mind, will have a corresponding result. Each action, even the smallest, is pregnant with its consequences.' Thus, a little poison can cause death, just as a tiny seed can become a huge tree. Karma cannot decay or disappear. It resides within one until the conditions are right for its manifestation, even if it occurs in another life. He also declares that karma is a satisfying explanation for extraordinary differences between people. There is no such thing as 'by chance' or 'good luck'. The Buddha said, 'What you are is what you have been, what you will be is what you do now' (in Sogyal 1998:93). Smith agrees with other scholars that the parallel to karma in Western religions is found in the sowing and reaping concept. However, he believes that in the East this understanding is 'absolutely binding and brooking no exceptions' (Smith 1964:68). This law of cause and effect, or karma, is what Ken Wilber proposes with his four-quadrant model. Every interior, however confused or serene, has its manifestation or result in the exterior.

'Karma is not punishment', insists Fox (1979a:260–261), it 'is really the perfect opportunity that ever-kindly nature gives us to acquire just the knowledge and experience that we need.'

He considers it unfortunate that people talk about ‘bad karma’, for karma is neither good nor bad. It is the result of one’s thoughts, deeds and actions – ‘by their fruit you will recognize them’ (Matthew 7:16). Fox (1979a:262) then tries to make his point as clear as possible by stating ‘that there is nothing fatalistic about the Law of Karma. You have free will – not omnipotence, but always a choice within reasonable limits – and always you can choose the higher or the lower’. Sogyal (1998:95) does not regard karma as fatalistic, or predetermined. ‘Karma means our ability to create and to change. It is creative because we can determine how and why we act.’ New Thought teaches that we can change at any given moment. One of the psychological corollaries of the idea of karma commits the believer who understands it to complete personal responsibility. Each person is totally responsible for his or her actions, whereas most people in the West prefer to project their shortcomings and difficulties outside themselves. Nevertheless, karma teaches that by making the best use of whatever talents one has, one can attain even greater ones. The opposite is also true. Fox (1979a:263–264) concludes his thoughts on karma by affirming that ‘you do not have to accept any set of conditions or any kind of karma if you will rise above it in consciousness’, for ‘any difficulty, any dilemma, can be surmounted by whole-hearted prayer’.

Regarding the law of cause and effect, Fox (1979b:21) is adamant that ‘it is your habitual mental conduct that weaves the pattern of your destiny for you’. Therefore no one can keep another out of his or her kingdom, or put him or her in there, for ‘the story of your life is really the story of the relations between yourself and God’. That every seed must inevitably bring forth after its own kind is the essence of the law of cause and effect, or sowing and reaping, and ‘thought is the seed of destiny’ (Fox 1979a:265), just as enlightenment is an evolutionary process.

#### **7.2.4 Liberation from the cycle of rebirth**

‘Ultimately, all karma’, comments Swami Prabhupada (1981:109), ‘whether good or bad, is unfavorable, for it binds us to the material world.’ The Bhagavad-Gita reinforces this statement: ‘Those who are not faithful on the path of devotional service, O killer of the enemies, cannot achieve Me. Therefore, they come back to birth and death in this material

world' (Prabhupada 1976:152).

In Krüger's (1991:105) interpretation of Buddhism, 'rebirth was the presupposed background to the teaching of liberation, rather than its focus', for 'the focus was liberation here and now'. This confirms the general religious thought of Fox and others. A life lived fully in the consciousness of God has no fear of life or death, 'because God is All, and God is Good' (Fox 1979a:230). Liberation from the wheel of karma is available to anyone who chooses at any given moment to rise above any ordeal in consciousness. Such a person enjoys total freedom.

Austrian teacher, philosopher and founder of anthroposophy, Rudolf Steiner finds a parallel in New Thought when he states that a person and the physical world had a spiritual, and not a material, origin, and that both have a spiritual destiny. Referring to reincarnation he comments:

It is a quite wrong approach to the subject to speak about it as if it were merely a matter of repeated earth-lives, [for reincarnation is seen] as a great rhythm of being, through which man, as a spirit-being, passes continually from a spirit-existence to a physical one, and back again, in a gradual ascent of spiritual evolution (in Shepherd 1955:125).

Psychotherapist M Scott Peck (1978:263), in his best-selling book *The road less traveled*, matches this thought by highlighting that 'spiritual growth is the evolution of an individual' and that 'our lifetime offers us unlimited opportunities for spiritual growth until the end'.

Aware of the vastness of such a topic as life after death, Fox (1979a:230) included a footnote:

I would impress upon readers of this essay that no written description can really do justice to the subject. It can but hint and suggest the truth. However correct the itinerary of a journey may be, it is likely to seem somewhat dry and unattractive when read, since the beauty and joy of the new adventure must evade the written word. This essay, of course, describes the experiences of the soul between incarnations.

### **7.3 THE END TIMES**

It is interesting to note how Fox, in the early 1900s (1933), engaged himself in thoughts about

the end times. Even at that time he spoke of the end of an age and the dawning of a new one. He challenged his listeners by reminding them that the old ways of thinking had come to an end, and that one would have to adapt oneself to a completely new outlook on life. To him, this newness was not merely rearranging old ideas into new patterns; it meant a complete change in all of our fundamental values, a completely new way of looking at all human problems – in fact a new age. A great deal of written material has appeared over the years regarding the quest of the New Age and the debate still continues. This section will comment briefly on Emmet Fox's ideas of the end times, and provide a sketch of the various periods or ages in general.

Humanity, finding itself on the threshold of a new age, is again ready to receive a new teaching. Fox is adamant that the time has arrived when humanity has to drop the old narrow concepts about God and embrace a revolutionary new concept of humanity's relationship with God. Fox's reaction to the complaints of churchmen about empty pews on a Sunday is that the old theological sanctions, which once meant so much, are no longer taken seriously by the masses. He quotes Jan Christian Smuts: 'Humanity has once more struck its tents, and is again on the march' (Fox 1994:95). The transformation of humanity during the emergence of the New Age has always been the central idea. 'Only through a new mind can humanity remake itself, and the potential for such a new mind is natural', comments Marilyn Ferguson (1980:45), a leading New Age theoretician. The notion that one is spiritually free, the steward of one's own evolution, and that humankind may choose to awaken to its true nature, thereby achieving a new dimension of mind, is in accordance with general New Thought belief.

Although there are significant similarities between New Thought and the New Age, there are also prominent differences. However, this religious movement has entered a promising new age, a period in which humankind will face major transformations and changes. The 'new' of New Thought, according to its adherents, is expressed in Romans 12:2, 'Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.' This principle inspires New Thinkers to approach the challenging changes of a new age with empowerment and responsibility.

Fox has pointed out that the history of humankind proceeds through the unfolding of distinct

periods or ages. Each of these periods has its own characteristics, has provided humanity with lessons and challenges, is fundamentally different in every aspect from its predecessor, and is not a mere improvement on or expansion of it, and each age lasts for about two thousand years (to be precise, 2 150 years). The last age brought Western Christian civilisation, as it was known, but it has now fulfilled its mission and is drawing to a close, with a new age already upon us, says Fox. Actually, the predicted new age has already materialised.<sup>9</sup>

He explains all of this by means of the zodiac. He does not suggest that one has to have an understanding of astronomy, but he considers it necessary that one should know the natural processes of the earth and its cycles.<sup>10</sup> Fox acknowledges the place of astrology, as it will always play a part in the effort to understand the larger universal spirituality. The zodiac, with its twelve signs, reveals the destiny of humankind and symbolises the most fundamental thing in the nature of people. 'It is nothing less than the key to the history of the Human Race, of the psychology of the individual man, and of his regeneration or spiritual salvation' (Fox 1994:96). The Bible, which Fox regards as the great fountain of truth, has the zodiac running through it from beginning to end.<sup>11</sup>

Fox reminded us that in the New Age (The Aquarian Age), everything is going to change and be new – even our politics, ecclesiastical institutions, relationships, and methods of doing our daily work. Radical changes will occur and for the better. New Age adherent Patricia Diane Cota-Robles (1997:30) echoes Fox's sentiments by emphasising the significance of each new age, because over the two thousand year cycle it 'creates a major shift of energy, vibration and consciousness on Earth'. The effects of such a brand new force field are truly awesome.

The exact time of the beginning of an age is still a matter of disagreement among astronomers, New Thought and New Age writers. It is generally accepted that the sun entered the zodiacal sign Taurus in the days of the historical Adam, heralding the beginning of the Taurian Age. When the sun entered the sign of Aries, beginning the Arian Age, it was linked with the life of Abraham in the Old Testament. Fox regards each age as an opportunity for a lesson to be learned. According to him each of these ages had its own teacher who came to teach a particular lesson. Thus the teacher of the Arian Age was Abraham, who raised the

standard of the One God. This age was a tremendous step forward in the history of humanity, who came from a religious background of idol worshipping. It is known symbolically as the Age of the Ram or Sheep, and Fox frequently comments that throughout the Bible sheep are used to symbolise thoughts. The symbolic link between watching one's thoughts and the shepherd watching over his sheep is a clear indication of the Arian lesson working itself out in the radical thought – 'For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he' (Proverbs 23:7).

At the time of the rise of the Roman Empire the sun entered the sign Pisces, also known as the Fishes, and this announced the Piscean Age. Fox (1994:107) refers to this period as 'the epoch of orthodox Christianity'. The great teacher and leader of that age was, of course, Jesus Christ, referred to in the early days of Christianity as the fish. The sign of the fish and its element, water, were emphasised during this time. Because Jesus was making fishers of men, the disciples became known as fishermen, just as the Old Testament leaders were shepherds. The fish as the symbol of wisdom becomes 'the technical term for the knowledge of the Allness of God and of the power of prayer' (Fox 1994:108).

The Age of Aquarius followed the Piscean Age, symbolised by a man carrying a pitcher of water in his right hand. According to *The Aquarian gospel of Jesus the Christ* (chapter 157, verses 29–30) Jesus referred to the beginning of this Age in these words:

And then the man who bears the pitcher will walk forth across an arc of heaven; the sign and signet of the son of man will stand forth in the eastern sky. The wise will then lift up their heads and know that the redemption of the earth is near (Levi 1977:229).

Fox refers to the man with the water jar as the gardener. It will be the gardener's job to unite mentally the lessons of the previous two ages. He mentions that the stage has been reached where the lesson about the need for thought control has been learned, and the wisdom has been contacted and appreciated. In other words, he insists that the conscious and the subconscious minds stand almost precisely in the relationship of gardener and garden. Thus, the gardener sows the seed in the soil that is ready prepared, waters it, but leaves it to nature to make it grow. He compares this symbol to what happens in spiritual treatment or scientific prayer, where 'we speak the Word, but we leave it to the Divine Power to make the demonstration' or 'I have planted; Apollos watered; but God gave the increase'. The dominant

note of this New Age, observes Fox (1994 :109), 'is to be Spiritual development and Spiritual demonstration'.

When asked about the great teacher and prophet of the Aquarian Age, Fox (1994:110) insists that it 'is not to be any man or woman, or any textbook, or any organization, but the Indwelling Christ, that each individual is to find and contact for himself'. After thousands of years of upward striving, humanity is ready to do without any idol or personal prophet, but to contact the Living God at first hand for themselves. This is the age when the multitudes of people are approaching an advanced stage of spiritual consciousness. Jesus himself, observes Fox, said that unless he went away, the Holy Spirit couldn't come. This statement was to assist humanity to become detached from a personality and to find the infinite, incorporeal God for themselves. Each one must now become the captain of an own soul and the autocrat of an own life, taking responsibility for an own life and its outcome.

The real significance of the zodiac, which permeates all human culture, is that it gives humanity an opportunity to learn about God. Fox maintains that the twelve signs of the zodiac present everyone with the opportunity of knowing God in twelve different ways. This observation is closely linked to the question of the real reason for humankind being on the earth. There is no doubt in Fox's (1994:97–98) mind that 'that we are here to learn the Truth of Being. That we are here to become self-conscious, self-governed entities, focal points of the Divine Mind, each expressing God in a new way.' Knowledge of the zodiac provides this lesson.

Although Ken Wilber does not refer to the various ages or even the zodiac, his writings indicate an understanding of evolutionary progress. The various levels, stages and waves of human existence remind us of the ages of the zodiac. Wilber's models also postulate a movement upwards on the ladder of hierarchy, and one that not only moves toward the ultimate wholeness, but also emerges from it. This movement or evolutionary shift, as it transcends each successive wave or stage, includes the previous one. It is this integral development, a combination of the left-hand and right-hand quadrants that indicates the end of one stage and the beginning of another. Each teacher from the various periods in the



zodiac presented humankind with a new consciousness, and Fox has stated that the new teacher of the Aquarian Age will be the individual's indwelling Christ. This is indicative of Wilber's (1981:349) idea of what a real New Age would be 'if everybody truly evolved to a mature, rational, and responsible ego, capable of freely participating in the open exchange of mutual self-esteem'.

Fox also contemplates the idea of a bigger universe and other life forms scattered throughout the universe. He predicts that soon, in the new age, we will come to the understanding that God is the God of the universe and of many other races and that this earth is not an island unto itself.<sup>12</sup> Fox (1979a:200–201) has no fear of death: 'The same God is on the other side of the grave as on this side.' In other words, 'there is no death! Our stars go down to rise upon some fairer shore.'

The underlying foundation of Fox's thinking, and of those who are in accord with New Thought teaching, is the power of the mind. (This methodology was discussed in detail in earlier chapters.) A natural conclusion is that a new age, or a new world, is really a new mind, for deep change in a person or an institution comes from within. A reminder comes from General Smuts, who points to a whole-making principle in mind itself. As living matter evolves to higher and higher levels, so does mind, for mind is inherent in matter. He describes a universe that is becoming ever more conscious. Ken Wilber (1995:43) also underlines personal involvement: 'In the self-organization paradigm, evolution is the result of self-transcendence at all levels.' This line of thinking corresponds with New Age headliner Marilyn Ferguson (1980:29), who maintains: 'Human nature is neither good nor bad but open to continuous transformation and transcendence. It has only to discover itself.' Wilber (1995:375) also mentions a profound truth in human development, that 'one can fully transcend any level only if one fully honors it first. Otherwise one's "development" is simply a reaction to, a reaction against, the preceding level, and thus one remains stuck to it with the energy of disapproval.'

Russell Chandler warns readers that dangers lurk in many forms and to be suspicious of any therapy, course or teaching that manipulates energy, deprecates the value of the mind or critical thinking that cannot provide solid evidence or evaluation, and that is based on 'secret'

knowledge revealed only to an inner elite. Fox, on the other hand, tells his readers that there is nothing to fear as the coming changes bring about a certain amount of disturbance and temporary chaos. He foresees the human race emerging with flying colours, purified, strengthened and emancipated. He is nevertheless aware of the personal challenges ahead, as well as the negative mental attitude of some people that could jeopardise their protection and leave them open to further negative consequences. One's personal fate, he declares, depends on one thing only, and that is 'the condition in which you keep your consciousness'. If one's consciousness is one of goodwill towards all, exercising an attitude of mental peace and no hostile thoughts for others, then one will be safe. 'The only real protection in any kind of danger is the knowledge of Scientific Prayer, or the Practice of the Presence of God' (Fox 1994:112–113).

Fox reminds his readers that the world will not come to an end and that the human race is not doomed. It is going through difficult and changing times, but humanity has gone through challenging periods before and has come through them triumphantly. He knows this because he believes that 'the captain is on the bridge'. For him, God is still in business and he advises one to 'realize the Presence of God where trouble seems to be, to do your nearest duty to the very best of your ability; and to keep an even mind until the storm is over' (Fox 1984:32).

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Sogyal was a guest speaker at the conference of the Association of Global New Thought in Palm Springs, California in 2000.
- 2 Quimby did not think of death as others did. 'By a mesmerized subject I can prove that there is no death as it is understood by all Christians', he writes. He suggests that 'every person has two identities: one called the natural man and the other the real man or God or Wisdom'. Through a technique called mesmerism or hypnosis, as it later became known, it was proved to him 'that an individual can act with all his usual faculties entirely independent of the body'. His understanding of a person's two identities resulted in his teaching 'that there is another self, a superior self, that does not die with the body because it is not dependent upon the body' (Seale 1986:36–37, 93–94).
- 3 Fox gives the following scriptural references for the word 'trance': Numbers 24:4, Acts 10:10, 11:5 and 22:17.
- 4 Dr Joshua David Stone, New Thought exponent, counsellor and licensed hypnotherapist, in his book *The complete ascension manual: how to achieve ascension in this lifetime* (1994), devotes a chapter to explaining the cosmic hierarchy with the evolutionary stages of the soul's journey back to the Godhead. An adept who has passed the sixth initiation, which leads to resurrection or ascension, has his or her vehicles completely transformed into light. Such an ascended master now has the choice of remaining in service on the physical plane or of returning to the spiritual world. Ascended masters Kuthumi and Djwhal Khul assist humanity from the spiritual realms and teach through the method of channelling.
- 5 Stone maintains that the three days following death, the bardo, can become the greatest opportunity for the dying person. The first phase allows the person to merge with the light of God, a very important and significant moment for a soul. However, because of ignorance of the dying process, many do not realise that they should merge with this light. This is either because of religious notions or because of the fear of the light itself; being too heavily drugged by medical doctors; for some who only knew a materialistic life, the idea of God is the furthest thing on their minds; and others are too concerned about their family and estates. If this first opportunity was missed, the soul will be given a second chance to merge with the light, though this time the light is toned down and is not as bright as before. This is still a very important phase, which could even now result in liberation from the wheel of birth. If both of the previous stages were missed, the soul enters a three-day period of reviewing his or her life. This is often referred to as

the 'valley of judgement' – not judgement in the ego sense of the word, but looking at one's life with clearer spiritual insight that may have been available while on earth. It is a unique time, a spiritual test, for it allows a person to improve, to set the records straight, or to change any negativity into a positive outcome for the next existence.

- 6 A meeting of the Second Council of Constantinople in 553 AD. Russell Chandler, on the other hand, believes that this council did not consider reincarnation, as it was of no great concern to the early church fathers. He admits, however, that the council rejected the idea of the pre-existence of the soul (a view held by church theologian Origen).
- 7 J S Krüger brings the scholar's attention to the difference between the Buddhist terminology of rebirth and the Hindu view of transmigration. 'The term reincarnation may be useful to cover both the Buddhist and the Hindu view', he remarks, 'but it is not precise enough to express the Buddhist view.' He then suggests that, 'in early Buddhism there was little or no abstract, speculative interest in rebirth as such' (Krüger 1991:104–105).

Given the sense of the radical impermanence of all things finite – 'a human body must vanish' and 'my body falling apart like a decaying cart' ([sn]1966:13) – well-known author Huston Smith (1964:115) predicts the Buddha's answer as 'No' to the question 'Does man continue to exist after death'? Krüger (1991:105) admits that the Buddha did teach life after death, but 'in the sense of continuity, not in the sense of the identity of an imperishable entity'. In Buddhism there is no mention of the imperishable soul as a spiritual substance that is carried over from life to life. It is consciousness, the fifth aggregate of which the human personality is temporarily combined, that Krüger regards as the link between lives that ensures continuity. The other four, 'form, sensation, perception and emotional and volitional factors' are all equally causally conditioned and cease to exist on death. Although consciousness cannot survive by itself as a changeless entity or permanent substance – for it 'remains dependent on the physical factors' – it is instrumental in bringing forth 'the new personality, in conjunction with a new body' (Krüger 1991:104).

- 8 New Ager and New Thought advocate Patricia Diane Cota-Robles (1997:5) explains that when a person enters into embodiment, 'the Band of Forgetfulness was placed about our brows', so that the pain of separation, despair and hopelessness on earth could be felt and experienced as part of humanity's evolution and the healing of miscreated energies. Forgetting about former embodiments gave a person a clean start, so to speak. However, without remembering the past, this current horrendous life does not make sense to one.
- 9 These times of ever-expanding vistas were prophesied by Grey Eagle (in Kotzé 1995:xi): 'The drums of

the thoughts have been beating hard and the message has gone out from the gathering places all over the world. The time for you, human race, has come to go home. The long road ends.'

- 10 According to *The Aquarian gospel of Jesus the Christ*, astronomers suggest that the sun and its planets revolve around a larger central sun, which requires something less than 26 000 years (some indicate a period of 24 000 years) to make one revolution. The orbit of the sun is called the zodiac, which again is divided into 12 signs, familiarly known as Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius and Pisces. It thus takes the solar system a little more than 2 100 years to pass through one of these signs, and the period that the earth is held in the embrace of a particular constellation is called an age. A New Age begins when the earth moves from the force field of one constellation into the force field of the next constellation in its counter- clockwise journey.
- 11 Fox (1994:96–97) refers to the following examples as reminders that the zodiac features in the Bible and is found all over the world, among all races, and in all ages: the twelve sons of Jacob and the twelve tribes of the Old Testament; the twelve disciples of the New Testament; excavations among the most ancient ruins in Asia have revealed representations of the zodiac; it was known among the Egyptians and the Chaldeans; it was engraved on the temples of Greece and Rome; the American aborigines in Mexico and Peru were acquainted with it; Chinese records refer to it; Pythagoras taught it; it turned up on forgotten islands in the Pacific; and it is to be found in medieval cathedrals (the great circle at Stonehenge is really a type of zodiac).
- 12 Brinsley Le Poer Trench, author of *The sky people* (1960), frequently refers to the people coming from the sky as visitors to the planet earth in order to mingle with the mortals. He believes that these sky people are showing humanity the way to raise and realise its true galactic status, and that it is man's destiny to live among the stars, enjoying the fellowship and respect of his fellow godlike galactic beings. Once again, a perspective like this adds a different dimension to New Thought as it not only challenges its traditional thought, but also introduces new perspectives.