

# Is There a Life After Death?

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**Abstract:** *All the religions of the world - Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Christianity, Islam and Zoroastrianism etc., believe in life after death. The only difference is that the religions of the Indian origin believe in the transmigration of a soul from one body to another, the other religions believe that on the day of final judgment soul united with their bodies will be brought before God for the final assessment of the value of their deeds done by them during their earthly lives. They would then, either be rewarded or punished according to their deeds and would enter the gates of heaven to avail eternal happiness or plunged in hell according to their sinful and evil deeds. Thus, we find that the theory of rebirth becomes a corollary to the law of Karma or the casual law - i. e. Law of cause and effect. The theory of rebirth, therefore, can be called the theory of Karma - conditioned - rebirth.*

**Keywords:** Karma, rebirth, immortality of soul, Heaven and Hell.

## 1. Observation

It has been observed that death is the end of life. No life exists after death. But still people believe that there is one thing that does not die. That is the soul. The Gita categorically says that neither the sword can kill it nor can burn it. Its beyond all possibilities to finish it. So long your karma is good it gives you good result and bad karma leads to bad results. Gita has also emphasized on this point. We all know that life is full of sufferings. The very essential condition of life, human and sub-human are fraught with misery, birth, old age, disease, sorrow, grief, despair and etc all that is born of attachment is misery. Our life on earth is a mixture of sorrows and joy.

Ordinarily, however, we are the victims of three kinds of pains, viz the adhyatamik, adibhautika and adhidaivika. The first is due to intra organic diseases like bodily disorders and mental sufferings such as fever and headache, the pangs of fear, anger and greed etc. The second is produced by extra organic natural causes like men, beasts, thorns etc. Instances of this kind are found in cases of murder, snake bites, prick of thorns etc and so forth. The third kind of suffering is caused by extra organic supernatural causes e. g. the pains inflicted by ghosts, demons etc or an act of natural like flood, earth quake etc.

## 2. Introduction

It would be a hard task to summarize the points mentioned above. However, efforts have been made to give a brief description about it. How the Law of Karma leads to Rebirth which is a corollary to the Law of Karma. How all the inequalities such as some are healthy, some sickly some are learned, some are idiots, some are miserable, some are happy cannot be attained in this life as the span of life in respect of mental sufferings is too short as we all know with the sole exception of Buddhism almost all the religions of the world believe in the immortality of soul because after the physical death of the body it is the soul which survives and transmigrates. The sages ancient of India have tried to explain such anomalies of life through Karma and rebirth. The law of Karma keeps unimpaired the balance wheel of the moral world.

With the sole exception of Buddhism, almost all the religions believe in the immortality of the soul because after

the physical death of the body it is the soul which survives and transmigrates. The soul does exist and does change from one body to another so as to say to bring flexibility in the universe. Has soul been non-existent then death would have been a dreadful destruction. The phenomenon of death is still the instinct of sucking and the fear of death from the time of birth. In the present life, the new born infant has not yet perceived anything that can cause such fears, still the infant shows signs of such feelings. These experiences are possible in him because of his impressions of his previous lives. The only cause that can be indicated in the case of the child's mouth moving towards mothers' milk is the child's desire for milk which again is possible only on the basis of our belief in the continuity of remembrance due to repeated feedings in the past.

It has been pointed out in the yoga philosophy that the yogins can remember the experiences of their past lives by the yogic method. Memories of past lives can therefore in the present life.

A belief in rebirth is not however peculiar to Indian Philosophy alone. It can very well be traced in western philosophy (both ancient and modern as well, since many western schools of thought are found to believe in the theory of immortality of soul with which the theory of rebirth is closely connected.

The theory of rebirth in a sense has its origin in human desire for immortality. Man has a natural love for life and a desire for continued existence after death. The world, with its multicoloured experiences, has a fascination for human mind. Nobody wants to leave the world for good or to pass away in utter emptiness. Man's love for life and the hope of a happy future find expression in his conception of immortality. So, the theory of immortality is found in the philosophical thoughts for the ancient philosophers.

Further, to justify the belief in Karma and rebirth, the Indian Philosophical system refer to the unequal distribution of happiness and misery in this world. Happiness and sorrows are allotted to human beings in accordance with their own actions of the past lives. An individual has got to reap the fruits of all his actions, in one, two or more lives. Sufferings of honest man in the present life are the effects of his actions in the past life. Unless we believe in the operation of such a law of retribution in this world, we shall not be able to

explain why some are born rich and some are born poor, we do find that in this world some are able to acquire name and fame very easily while others have to face for middable difficulties in their struggle for progress.

These riddles of life can be explained only with the help of the doctrine of Karma and rebirth Prof. Anima Gupta, in her article, published in Indian Philosophical Annual 1965 under the caption 'Karma and Rebirth' has shown clearly that the law of Karma also serves as a source of inspiration, courage and encouragements in the form of a law of reformation, courage and encouragement in the form of a law of reformation in the moral life. By means of his own moral efforts and good actions, he can wipe out his evil tendencies and can become brighter and nobler in his subsequent lives. "Man is the maker of his own life. At every moment, he is creating his future life by means of his present action. There is nothing like a fate or destiny making us happy or miserable in spite of ourselves."

So, again it has been pointed out that when an infant is born in this world, it shows a mystery which eminent physicians and scientists, have not been able to unveil as yet. In an effort to solve this we have to believe in a conscious principle apart from the body, it is this soul which assumes a body covered with flesh, blood and bones etc. And so is the saying that the body may be reduced to ashes but not the soul. The *śrutis*, *Smritis* and the *Darshanas* are replete with explanations about the immortality of soul which cannot be brushed aside.

There are thousands rather millions of cases which go to prove that the soul of the body takes another birth after its death. It has been seen in my life a Punjabi Kapoor family with an infant always crying to be taken to Calcutta where her full family resides. Being asked she replied. "Take me to Calcutta and I will show you my family." She was taken there and passing through lanes she took them to her house where she lived. She wanted to remain there but was not allowed to do so. Though we cannot say how this happens but books after books may be written but still it will remain a mystery.

#### **Plato (Period 5 – 4<sup>th</sup> century<sup>BC</sup>)**

Plato, the great thinker of ancient Greece believed in the existence of the soul prior to birth and also in transmigration. He believed the living one comes from the dead and vice versa which proves that the souls of the dead must exist somewhere in the universe out of which they again return in their earthly existence. "The living comes from the dead first as the dead comes from the living, and this if true affords a most certain proof that the souls of the dead exist in some place out of which they come again.

This was stated by Socrates to Cebes in course of their discourse. Explaining more clearly, about the aforesaid argument, Socrates stated that had there have been no transmigration, generation would not have increased and the people would have come to their ultimate dissolution. "If generation were in a straight line only and there were no compensation or circle in nature, no turn or return of elements in their opposite, then you know that all things, would at least have the same form of them."

Plato has advanced several arguments one after another in support of rebirth is the famous Platonic maxim that knowledge is recollection. If knowledge is recollection, then it certainly implies that we have learnt before is reflected in the present. "But this would be impossible unless our soul had been in some place before existing in the form of man, here then is another proof of the souls immortals.

The idea of Plato is similar to that which is incorporated in the *Upanishads*. Kant and also spoken of different births.

#### **Schopenhauer**

Schopenhauer believes in the timeless nature of us will as a thing in itself. It is the one will which is manifesting itself through the multifarious phenomena which fill the vast and the expansive world. "The plant raises its manifestation from the seed, a new individual, that runs through the stem and leaf to the blossom and the fruit which again is the beginning of a new seed, a new individual which runs through the old course, and so on through endless time. Such also is the life of the animals, procreation is its highest point and after attaining to it, the life of the life of the first individual quickly or slowly sinks, while the new life ensures to nature the endurance of the species and repeats the same phenomena." The will is at work undergoing different births so as to ensure the biological immortality of a species.

#### **Mc Taggart**

Mc Taggart (the well known English thinker believing in rebirth) has also stated that any evidence which will prove immortality will also prove pre-existence. He believes that the nature of man is such that it involved both a life prior to death and a life after death. In his opinion, processes, begun in this life, are sometimes finished at a life after death. In his words, "we continually find that death leaves a fault without a retribution, a retribution without a repentance, a preparation without an achievement, while in other cases, where the life has lasted longer, a similar process is complete between birth and death. If men survive death, we must expect that these processes, when not worked before death, will be worked out in a future life." Mc Taggart has remarked that our friendship with some persons grows intimate within a very short period of time and it seems to us as if this bond of friendship in existing between ourselves and those persons since time immemorial. This in his opinion, is due to our intimacy with those persons in previous existence, is the same form or other. In his words –

"The love which comes at first sight, and the love which grows up through many years in this life, would be referred to similar causes, whose similarity would account for the similarity of the effects. Each would have arisen through long intimacy, and the only difference then would be that in one case the intimacy has been suspended by death and rebirth." He thus, feels that memory is not lost even after death.

#### **Eustace Miles**

E. Miles, the author of 'Life after Life' has expressed his belief in reincarnation. In the 'Preface' to the book he has remarked "I think that the theory of reincarnation namely,

that one life in this world follows after another life. ”8 In chapter XXIX of the said book he has stated –

“It seems to be a rational theory, aiding us to realize the justice, love and wisdom of power encouraging us to work sensibly, without worry and fear, without carelessness or narrow selfishness, setting a premium on an all round training of the self, applying many strong motives for right thought and action, and so forth. And for my own part, I cannot see any objection to it that is curious to me. ”9

### **The Law of Karma**

The doctrine of Karma is really nothing but the casual law operating in the moral sphere. Just as every effect is supposed to have a cause in the physical world, in the same way pleasures and pain of life are supposed to be the effects of human actions which are, therefore, the causes of man’s suffering and enjoyment of the worldly life. Man is said to be the architect of his own fortune, he has created his own destiny by his own action. He is using his own powers and faculties voluntarily to serve his various purpose which are either good of bad. He is also experiencing the effects of his present actions in the present life in the form of pleasures or pains, so the necessary tie between action and its fruit is a fact and not a mere superstitious belief. ‘As you sow, so you reap’ is the real truth. Action that falls within the domain of law of Karma is a voluntary action which the agent undertakes after due deliberation only with a view to doing some good to himself either directly or indirectly. Hence, it is just and proper that he alone would reap the fruits of all his actions, if not in this birth, then certainly in other births other wise justice is violated.

### **Rebirth - Supplement to Law of Karma**

The belief in the law of Karma along with supplement in the form of the theory of rebirth is, therefore, necessary to explain the apparent inequalities of life. In actual life, virtuous are often found to suffer and grown under heavy burden of pains and miseries, whereas vicious persons are found to prosper. Again persons, born of the same parents are brought up in the same environment attain different grades of success in life. Some are long - lived, some short lived, some powerful, some weak, some are healthy some sickly, some are learned, some idiots, some are happy and some miserable. We may ask – Are all these inequalities of life man - made ? At least equality cannot be attained in respect of the span of life and also in respect of the mental sufferings of man. We often come across persons who are so constituted that in spite of their best efforts they cannot be happy even though they enjoy all sorts of physical comforts. The sages of ancient India have tried to explain such apparent anomalies of life through karma and rebirth. The law of Karma keeps unimpaired the balance wheel of a moral world.

### **Immortality of Soul:**

With the sole exception of Buddhism, almost all the religions of the world believe in the immortality of soul because after the physical death of the body it is the soul which survives and transmigrates. The soul does exit and does change from one body to another to bring so to say flexibility in the universe. Had soul been non - existent then death would have been a dreadful destruction. It is the soul

which when leaves one’s body, brings life to another form of existence. Those who compare man’s life to a machine saying that life is also a mechanical process, consisting of various material parts and that defect in the main spring of parts leads to the cessation of heartbeat, i. e. death, we can simply reply by saying as to why it is not possible to replace the material mind of a machine like man when every part of a machine can be effectively replaced. The phenomenon of death is still a mystery which scientists and eminent physicians have not been able to unveil as yet. In an effort to solve this, we have to believe in the existence of a conscious principle apart from the body, it is this soul which assumes a form covered with flesh, blood and bones etc. And so is the saying that the body may be reduced to ashes but not the soul. The religious scriptures of the Hindus comprising of the Sruits, Smritis and the Darshanas are replete with explanations about the immortality of soul which cannot be brushed aside. Though Buddhism denies the existence of soul, yet it states that it is nothing more than a stream of changing moments of consciousness. Just as a busy flame may lit up another flame before blowing out, similarly, the last conscious moment of the preset life gives rise to the first conscious moment of the next life and blows out. In this sense, the next life is nothing but a continuity of the same series, hence rebirth is possible without a permanent soul.

### **Concept of Heaven and Hell**

Non - Indian religions believe that on the final day of judgment the souls of the dead are compensated according to their deeds and goes to Heaven or Hell. They are not reborn on the earth as the Indian Religions believe. Indian Religions also believe in Heaven or Hell. Punishment and reward are interlinked with Hell and Heaven.

### **Zoroastrianism:**

The soul after the physical death of man remains for three days with the body and meditate upon its deeds. On the fourth day, the soul leaves the body and proceeds to the place of judgment. God’s archangel keeps a record of every man’s deeds on earth and those having good records are sent on earth and those who performed evil deeds are sent to Hell. If good and bad deeds are more or less equal, the soul is sent to a kind of purgatory. On its way to heaven or hell, the soul has to cross a bridge called Chinvat bridge. For a soul destined for hell it becomes hard to walk where it is tormented by a hog. . Eventually it falls off the bridge and goes to hell. The allotment of hell and heaven is not permanent. At the end point ‘Ahura Mazda’ would appear and wipe out evil from earth and establish a reign of complete good over the earth. At that time souls from the hell will be brought and purified and they will join the righteous souls and new cycle of earth will begin:

### **Islam:**

According to Islam though the physical body is consumed by the earth in the grave but the spiritual body remains uncorrupted till the day of judgment. In the intermediary period, the soul rests in a place called “Al - berzakh”. When exactly the dooms day would come is only known to Allah and it will be pronounced by the blowing of a trumpet. This will be the day of judgment and on this day all the dead would rise from their graves. Their souls would reunite with their bodies and brought before Allah by his angels and after

scrutiny, those who have performed good deeds would go to heaven and those with evil deeds would go to hell. The path to heaven is easy and the path to hell is full of thorns. On its way to heaven or hell the soul has to pass over a bridge called 'Alsirat'.

The path to hell is like a sword's edge and being unable to cross it they fall below in the abyss to hell.

### Christianity

Like Zoroastrianism and Islam, Christianity also believes that on the Day of Judgment, the souls united with their bodies will be brought before God for final assessment and according to their deeds would go the heaven or hell. But prior to the Day of Judgment Christ would reappear on the scene. During the intermediary period Christianity believes that particular individual after his physical death, if he is in love of God he would straight away go to heaven and those who lived a sinful life to hell. But those who have been stained by sins but shown repentance are sent to the purgatory for purification and then goes to heaven.

## 3. Conclusion

### Arguments in Favour of Rebirth:

In conclusion, I would like to sum up the main arguments advanced in support of rebirth:

- (i) The general view is that ignorance of the real nature of reality arouses a desire in the mind of an individual for material enjoyment and this desire in its turn inspire the individual to perform egocentric and interested actions. Such actions lead to rebirth.
- (ii) There is unequal distribution of happiness and misery in the world. The law of Karma as the law of retribution is supposed to lie at the basis of such unequal distribution. Happiness and sorrows are allotted to human beings in accordance with the action of their past lives. An individual has to reap the fruits of all his actions in one, two or more lives. Unless we believe in the operation of such a law, most of the riddles of life cannot be explained.
- (iii) An infant shows the signs of suckling and the fear of death from the time of its birth. In the present life, the new born infant has not yet perceived anything that can cause such fears, still the infant shows signs of such feeling. These experiences are possible because of the impressions of his previous life. The only cause that can be indicated is the child's mouth moving towards mother's milk which again is possible only on the basis of our belief in the continuity of remembrance due to repeated feedings in the past.
- (iv) The eternity of soul favours the theory of Karma - dependent rebirth. As the soul is not destroyed with the dissolution of the body, it takes repeated births in order to fulfill the deeds of its previous births and reap the fruits of action.
- (v) Yogins, can remember the experiences of their previous lives by the yogic method. Memories of past lives, therefore, can be revived in the present lives. Further, there are thousand of genuine cases where children have narrated their past lives and after due verification, have come true.

### Life is full of Sufferings

As we all know – "Life in full of suffering." The very essential conditions of life, human and sub - human are fraught with misery, Birth, old age, disease, sorrow, grief, despair and death etc. all that is born of attachment is misery. Our life on earth is a mixture of joys and sorrows. There are indeed many pleasures of life, and also many creatures who have a good share of them. But many more are the pains and sufferings of life and all living beings are more or less subject to them. Even if it be possible for any individual to shun all other pains and miseries, it is impossible for him to evade the clutches of decay and death.

Ordinarily, however, we are the victims of three kinds of pains, viz, the adhyatamika, adhibhautika and adhidaivika. . The first is due to intra organic causes like bodily disorders and mental sufferings, such as fever and headache, the pangs of fear, anger and greed etc. The second is produced by extra organic natural causes like men, beasts, thorns etc. Instances of this kind are found in cases of murder snake bite, prick of thorns and so forth. The third kind of suffering is caused by extra - organic supernatural causes, e. g. the pains inflicted by ghosts, demons etc or an act of nature like flood, earthquake etc.

Now, all men desire to avoid every kind of pain. They want, once for all, to put an end to all their sufferings, and have enjoyment at all times. But that is not to be. We can not have pleasure only and exclude pain altogether. So long as we are in the frail body with its imperfect organs, all pleasures are to be mixed up with pain or at least, be temporary. Hence we should give up the hedonistic ideal (eat, drink and be merry) of pleasure and rest content the less attractive but rational end of freedom from pain. All the arts and crafts of the modern man and all the blessings of modern science give us but temporary relief from pain or short - lived pleasures. These do not ensure a total and final release from all the ills to which our mind and body are subject.

### Cause of Suffering

Briefly speaking suffering in life is due to (i) birth (ii) the will to be born (iii) our mental clinging to objects (iv) craving to enjoy objects (v) sense object contact which is due to the six organs or cognition, the five - senses and manas and lastly (vi) ignorance. It is a general rule that our sufferings are due to ignorance. In the different walks of life we find that the ignorant and uneducated man comes to grief on many occasions because he does not know the laws of life and nature. The more knowledge we have about ourselves and the world we live in, the better fitted are we for the struggle for existence and the enjoyments of life. But the fact remains that we are neither happy nor free from pain and misery because we do not have the perfect knowledge of reality the moment we got the knowledge, we shall attain freedom from suffering.

### Cessation of suffering and the path to liberation

In order to attain the path for cessation of suffering one should have right view, i. e. knowledge of the truth. One should have the correct knowledge of the truths of suffering. Then there is the right resolve i. e. one should have firm determination to reform life in the light of truth. Right speech or control of speech which should consist in

abstention from lying, slander, unkind words and frivolous talk. One should have the right conduct and right livelihood i. e. desisting from destroying life, from stealing and from improper gratification of the senses and earn his livelihood by honest means. Right effort - one cannot progress steadily unless he maintains a constant effort to root out old evil ideas and prevent evil thoughts from arising anew. Then there is right concentration. One who has successfully guided his life in the light of the aforesaid rules and thereby freed himself from all passions and evil thoughts is fit to enter step by step into the four deeper stages of concentration that gradually take him to the goal of his long and arduous journey - cessation of suffering.

These four stages which lad ultimately to liberation have not been discussed because it is not possible for the common man to reach that stage because modern man with few exceptions isnot ready to trod the blessed path. In this materialistic age people have become too engrossed in earthly desires and dishonest means. Having right views, conduct, speech, livelihood, mindfulness and efforts do not have a place in their hearts. People have lost purity of heart and body.

(Ideas based on Buddhistic Philosophy of Suffering)

#### **4. Conclusion**

From the points raised above we can safely conclude that life is not a bed of roses but full of thorns and it is the causes which lead to suffering which is due to (i) birth (ii) the will to be born (iii) our mind clinging to objects (iv) craving to enjoy objects (v) sense object contact which is due to the six organs of cognition, the five - senses and manas and lastly (vi) ignorance. In the different walks of life we find that the ignorant and uneducated man comes to grief on man occasions because he does not know the laws of life and nature. The more knowledge we have about ourselves and the world we live in, the letter fitted are we for the struggle for existence and the enjoyments of life. But the fact remains that we are neither happy nor free from the pain and misery because we do not have the perfect knowledge of reality the moment we get the knowledge, we shall attain from suffering.

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