



Died: 9.11.1954

# Do You Believe In REBIRTH?

BY: VEN DR K. SRI DHAMMANANDA



Reborn: 14.2.1956

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**Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society**

佛陀教义弘扬协会

Buddhist Maha Vihara  
123, Jalan Berhala, Brickfields,  
50470 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

## Publication of the



### **Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society**

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## Foreword

*Do you believe in rebirth?* was first published on 1.12.1963 as Buddhist Missionary Series No.2. Since its first publication, the booklet has become popular in various parts of the world. This edition is published to felicitate the Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia (BMSM) who have been one of the pillars of the late Ven Dr K. Sri Dhammananda's successful Dhammadutta mission in Malaysia.

Its fervour for producing free publications on the Dhamma, a Buddhist publisher par excellence on authoritative texts and convenor of many important and landmark Buddhist conferences, seminar and Dhammadutta missions locally and overseas colours its glorious history.

The late Ven Nayaka Thera was one of the founding fathers of the BMSM in 1962. Bhante fondly declares the BMSM as his child who supported him in his Dhammadutta mission. The Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society would humbly like to offer our felicitation to the BMSM on the occasion of its 45th Anniversary and also express our gratitude for its years of selfless service to the Dhamma by supporting our late Venerable Chief and our Society.

A big Sadhu to the leadership of the Presidents of the BMSM, the Committee Members and its Ladies, Youth and Welfare Sections. We are always in gratitude to you. We wish you the Bodhisatta Paramittas to continue with vigour your Dhammadutta destiny.

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**Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society**  
**December 2007**

## INVESTIGATING REBIRTH

Many Buddhists tend to accept rebirth as a part of their religious faith. They rely on traditional belief and religious scriptures to reinforce their acceptance of rebirth. However, few make the effort to investigate what rebirth is and how it takes place. Among those who refute the doctrine of rebirth, there are very few who take the trouble to study and to investigate rebirth as a subject. Those who want to know what rebirth is and how it takes place, must study and investigate this subject just as they would study any other subject (chemistry, physics, etc.); after study, they will be able to understand to a certain extent.

Many people are reluctant to accept rebirth because they cannot understand it or because they do not remember their previous birth. Just because they cannot understand or remember their previous life is not a reasonable argument. Remember that rebirth is a process that is not perceptible to the senses. Rebirth cannot be discovered by exact measurement and mathematical calculation or by the application of machines and scientific instruments. Rebirth cannot be photographed, measured or weighed. This does not mean that it is non-existent. Even the materialist scientist does not limit himself to immediately experienced data. The limits of our experience are so narrow that if we did not permit our thinking to go beyond them, human thought would be poor indeed. Modern man has come to the conclusion that there is much in the universe that we cannot perceive by our ordinary sense or even by scientific instruments.

Those who want to understand the subject of rebirth fully, must first eradicate their defilements and emotions from the mind; when the mind is completely purified, they can focus their mind through their psychic power to trace back their previous births.

Understanding Buddhists cannot accept rebirth as a mere theory or a religious dogma. They can accept rebirth as a fact that is subject to investigation and verification. There is much evidence that is available in favour of rebirth. The aim of this booklet is to present some of the lines of investigation along which enquiry into rebirth may be carried out.

## **HISTORICAL EVIDENCE**

The teaching of rebirth has had a long history. From the dawn of civilization, rebirth has been universally held wherever men have lived, whether in primitive cultures or among highly civilized men. Rebirth is found in various forms in many ancient religions and philosophical systems in many parts of the world. Historical documents record that the belief in rebirth - viewed as transmigration or reincarnation - was accepted by some spiritual teachers and many ordinary men in the East as well as in the West.

The earliest record of the idea of rebirth is found in the ancient, Egyptian hieroglyphics, where the soul leaving the body is depicted in the form of a bird. Among the Greeks, rebirth was taught by Empedocles, Pythagoras and Plato. Among the early Christian Church fathers, the belief in rebirth was held by Clement of Alexandria (150 - 220), Justin Martyr, St. Gregory, bishop of Nyasa (257 - 332), Arnobius (290 AD.), Lactantius (early 4th century) and St. Jerome (340-420 AD.). Rebirth was officially declared a heresy in 553 AD. by the Council of Constantinople which was boycotted by the then presiding Pope Vigilius. Philosophers who believed in the possibility of rebirth include Immanuel Kant (1724 - 1804) and Schopenhauer (1788 - 1860).



Immanuel Kant, a famous 18<sup>th</sup> century philosopher who believed in rebirth

## **BELIEVE IN ONE LIFE**

Regarding life after death, we have only two alternative beliefs to choose from. One belief is that there is some sort of survival; the other belief is that there is annihilation. Those who believe in survival after death are usually influenced by the teachings of one religious teacher or another. Those who believe in annihilation have so far failed to present a philosophy that is acceptable to anyone who recognises spiritual values. Hence it is regarding the nature of survival after death that we have to speculate about. We can neither prove nor disprove that we shall continue to exist after our present life has apparently ceased.

Some religions postulate eternal damnation in hell, or everlasting happiness in paradise after death. The eternal residence is believed to be determined according to the belief and the behaviour of the individual during this single life-span here on earth. Is it reasonable to believe that the present, brief span of life is the only existence between two eternities of happiness and misery? Surely the few years we spend here on earth must certainly be an inadequate preparation for eternity.

Now we ask the question, "If a single life here decides the whole course of the future, why is one life only for a few weeks, and another for 70 or 80 years?" For one thing, the person who lives only a few weeks

or years risks less chance of eternal damnation than does the person who lives up to 80. The person who lives only a few weeks or years cannot fully develop and mature his intelligence and understanding. He does not encounter all the pitfalls and the temptations that life abounds with.

If there is only one life on earth, then how could an all loving God permit the heart-burning and sorrow that always accompanies the bereavement of a young child? Moreover, where is the justice and mercy of God who permits one to live only a few years, and permits another to live his full span of life, then consigns the people to eternal damnation or everlasting happiness - depending on the merits and demerits of this single life? In other words, is it reasonable to accept that our entire destiny in eternity is determined by our behaviour here on earth - no matter how short or how cruel this single existence may be?

### **THE BUDDHA-WORD**

The Buddha is our greatest authority on rebirth.

On the very night of His Enlightenment during the first watch, the Buddha developed retrocognitive knowledge which enabled Him to read His past lives. "I recalled," He declares, "my varied lot in former existences: first one life; then two lives; then three, four, five, ten, twenty, up to fifty lives; then a hundred, a thousand, hundred thousand, etc."

During the second watch, the Buddha, with clairvoyant vision, perceived beings disappearing from one state of existence and reappearing in another. He saw "the base and noble, the beautiful and ugly, the happy and miserable passing according to their deeds."



These are the very first utterances of the Buddha regarding the question of rebirth. These references conclusively prove that the Buddha did not borrow this truth of rebirth from any pre-existing source, but spoke from personal knowledge - a knowledge which was supernormal, developed by Himself, and which could be developed by others as well.

In His paean of joy (*udana*), the Buddha says;

"Through many a birth wandered I, seeking the builder of this house. Sorrowful indeed is birth again and again."

In His very first discourse, the *Dhammacakka Sutta*, the Buddha comments on the second Noble Truth: "This very craving leads to rebirth." The Buddha concludes that discourse with the words, "This is my last birth. Now there is no more rebirth."

The *Majjhima Nikaya* relates that the Buddha, out of compassion for beings, surveyed the world with His Buddha-Vision before He decided to teach the Dhamma. At this time, He perceived beings who realized the faults and fears and how they affect a future life.

In several discourses, the Buddha clearly states that beings that have done evil are born in woeful states after their death; and beings that have done good are born in blissful states after their death.

Incidental reference to some of the past lives of the Buddha are found in the *Tipitaka*. Such references are also found in the *Jataka* stories which deal with His previous lives.

In the *Parinibbana Sutta*, an unusual direct reference is made to the departed ones. The Venerable Ananda desired to know from the Buddha

the future state of several persons who had died in a certain village. The Buddha patiently described their destinies.

The above instances can easily be multiplied from the *Tipitaka* to show that the Buddha did expound the doctrine of rebirth as a verifiable truth.

Following the Buddha's instructions, His disciples also developed this retrocognitive knowledge and were able to read a vast yet limited number of their past lives. The Buddha's power in this direction was limitless.

Thus through his own personal knowledge and direct vision and experience, the Buddha spoke on the truth of rebirth.

### **PSYCHIC POWER: RECALLING THE PAST**

Buddhists are generally aware that advanced meditators can gain psychic powers by practising concentration of mind up to the 4th *jhana*. One of these psychic powers is the ability to recall past lives. This power to recall past lives is gained by having access to memories that are available to the sub-conscious mind. Most men do not develop their purity and their concentration to the high stage necessary to achieve this power. Since only a few individuals have exerted themselves and have reached so high a stage of spiritual maturity, the rest of us must rely on the testimony of these saints, just as those who have not travelled to a foreign country have to put their trust in the statement of reliable travellers. Nevertheless, the fact remains that one of the powers of the human mind is the ability to recall the past. Those who have developed this power can directly confirm the doctrine of rebirth. Such persons can read their past just as one might recall a past incident of one's present life.

## **HOW TO RECALL THE PAST?**

A writer on science and Buddhism, Historing Tan, offers an explanation on how man might recall the past. His memory theory is based on the principle of the conservation of consciousness as follows:

Psychologists who studied the memory of human thought speculated that memory was preserved in the protein molecules of the brain cell. On the other hand, physiologists who studied the structure of the human body with radio-isotopes found that nearly 98% of the cells are changed once in a year, and the protein molecules in the brain cell are metabolized almost entirely in one day or two days. The power of memory, however, is preserved to reflect impressions of many decades ago; if hypnotic methods are used, recall goes back to happenings of the past generations and to previous lives. The question arises: in what way do the protein molecules transfer their memory to the newly-born ones while they are dying away? Some scientists have passed their memory over to the newly-born ones through electric impulses. If this is so, then the following conclusion is inevitable: if memory can be conserved in electric energy, why should the consciousness, which produces memory and imagination, not be possible to be conserved in the space which is full of electricity?

If the principle of the conservation of consciousness is valid, it offers a theoretical explanation for rebirth.

## **PSYCHIC RESEARCH**

All evidence of psychic research tends to confirm the teaching of rebirth.

Experiences of some reliable, modern psychics shed light upon this problem of rebirth. These experiences include ghostly phenomena, spirit-communication, alternating and multiple personalities, etc.

The phenomenon of secondary personalities has to be explained either as remnants of past individual experiences or as 'possession'. The former explanation appears more reasonable but the latter cannot be totally rejected.

How often do we meet persons we have never before met and instinctively feel that they are familiar to us? How often do we visit places and instinctively feel impressed that we are perfectly acquainted with those surroundings?

## **SPIRITUALISM**

Many Western spiritualists have now come to accept rebirth as a fact because it is the only valid explanation of certain data which cannot otherwise be fitted into the spiritualist concept. To give only one example, it is well known that spiritualist mediums find it impossible to contact certain people after death, while others are able to do so. This has always been a great difficulty to spiritualists, but the Buddhist answer is a simple one: not all are reborn into the so-called spirit world. Furthermore, some of these planes of existence are too remote from the human world to be accessible to any ordinary medium.

## **HYPNOTISM: A TECHNIQUE FOR INVESTIGATING REBIRTH**

Psychic power takes a long time and a high degree of self purification. Hypnotism seems to provide a short-cut technique for

releasing some of the dormant memories of former lives. Hypnotism is certainly an easier method to tap the memories that are latent in the subconscious mind. For a long time it has been known that under deep hypnosis, events in very early infancy outside the normal range of memory, could be recalled; this method was used increasingly for the treatment of personality disorders. As some subjects show an involuntary resistance to hypnosis, this technique is not universally applicable in order to tap the memories of previous lives. But where it is applicable, it has borne remarkable results to collaborate the doctrine of rebirth.

If a person can be put into a deep, hypnotic trance, his conscious mind recedes and the subconscious starts functioning. If the subconscious can be made to function, it is sharp and has the ability to recall memories that are not available to the normal conscious mind. In a state of deep hypnosis, the subject can regress to a particular point in childhood, infancy, or to a prenatal period where he has access to memories latent in the subconscious mind. In this state, known as hyperamnesia, the subject becomes in effect the child or person he was, and he relives experiences that have long been buried in the subconscious mind.

There are numerous cases on record of persons who have remembered their previous lives while in a deep hypnotic state. Hypnotists working in widely separated countries with subjects of different cultures and traditions have come across what appears to be memories of previous lives. Some of these cases have been investigated, and found to be correct\*. The most famous of these cases is the Bridey Murphy Case in America.

Psychiatrists working with hypnosis (and other techniques) are still reluctant to accept completely the doctrine of rebirth. However, one

psychiatrist, Dr. Alexander Cannon in his book *The Power Within*, offers this conclusion: "For years the theory of reincarnation was a nightmare to me; and I did my best to disprove it, and even argued with my trance subjects to the effect that they were talking nonsense; yet as the years went by, and one subject after another told me the same story in spite of different and varied conscious beliefs, in effect until now, well over a thousand cases have been investigated and I have now to admit there is such a thing as reincarnation."

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\* Some book's which deal with memories of previous lives obtained under hypnosis include:

1. *The Successive Lives* by **Col Albert de Rochas**
2. *The Three Lives of Naomi Henry* by **Henry Blythe**
3. *Who was Anne Okendan?* by **Arnoll Bloxom**
4. *Explorations of a Hypnotist* by **Dr. Johnathan Rodney**
5. *The Search for Bridey Murphy* by **Morey Berenstein**
6. *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation* by **Dr. Ian Stevenson**
7. *The Power Within* by **Dr. Alexander Cannon**

## WHY INEQUALITIES?

When considering this world and when thinking of the diverse destinies of the beings living in this world, it will appear to most thoughtful people as if everything in nature is unjust. Observing the inequalities and unfairness of life, the thoughtful person asks 'Why?' Why is one man rich and powerful while another is poor and distressed? Why is one man all his life well and healthy, while another from his very birth is sickly and inclined to many diseases? Why is one man endowed with attractive appearance and intelligence while another is repulsive

and ugly? Why some people are blind, idiotic or deaf while others are not? Why is one child born amidst utter misery and wretched people, while another child is born in the midst of plenty and comfort? Why is one child raised as a criminal while another is born of noble-minded parents and enjoys all the advantages of the best mental and moral education? Why does one man, often without the slightest effort, succeed in all his enterprises, while another fails in all his plans? Why can one man live in luxury, while another man has to live in poverty and distress? Why is one man happy while another is sad? Why does one man enjoy long life while another is carried away to death in the prime of his life?

Why do such differences exist in nature? How are we to account for the inequality, injustice and discrimination among men? Do these glaring inequalities occur by chance or are they "planned by God"? Neither of these explanations is convincing. If God is merciful, then why did he create such adverse circumstances for man to live in? A merciful God must be capable of doing something to prevent these inequalities. Another explanation is to attribute the inequality to the unfairness of the capitalistic structure of society. But this explanation does not account for intellectual inequality, personality difference, etc. In Buddhism, these inequalities are explained by Kamma and Rebirth.

## **KAMMA AND REBIRTH**

The theory of kamma is the theory of cause and effect, of action and reaction; it is a natural law, which has nothing to do with the idea of justice or reward or punishment. Every volitional action produces its effects or results. If a good action produces good effects and a bad action, bad effects, it is not justice, or reward, or punishment meted out by anybody or any power sitting in judgment on your action, but this is in virtue of its own nature, its own law.

The law of Kamma, unlike the laws of physics, chemistry, etc is intangible, immeasurable and unpredictable. Since it is an imperceptible law, it cannot be demonstrated by scientific experiments.

According to the doctrine of kamma and rebirth, deeds - whether good or bad - have their retribution sometime, somewhere. According to the law of kamma, the circumstances and conditions that make up the destiny of a being come into existence with a previous cause and the presence of appropriate conditions. Just as, for example, from a rotten mango seed never will come a healthy mango tree with healthy and sweet fruits, just so the evil, volitional actions or kamma produced in former births, are the seed or root causes of evil destiny in a later birth.

The only reasonable and sound explanation for the inequality among men is found in the doctrine of kamma and rebirth. Kamma and rebirth offer the only rational, consistent explanation that can satisfy unbiased and impartial thinkers.

The doctrine that rebirth occurs conditioned by kamma was accepted by the Indian teachers of old who preceded the Buddha. It is incorporated in the *Upanishad* and *Vedanta* teachings, as in the *Bhagavad Gita*. The teaching is that rebirth is conditioned by the good and evil that one has acquired in this and in previous lives. As this process of rebirth and death is fraught with much suffering, emancipation from this cycle of births and deaths is the goal of all Indian systems of philosophy. The Buddha taught, "Owners and heirs of their actions are beings, the actions divide beings into high and low."



Kamma and rebirth account for the following:

1. They account for the problem of suffering for which we ourselves are responsible.
2. They explain the inequalities among humans.
3. They account for the arising of geniuses and infant prodigies.
4. They explain why identical twins who are physically alike, enjoying equal privileges, exhibit totally different characteristics, mentally, intellectually and morally.
5. They account for the dissimilarities amongst children of the same family though heredity may account for the similarities.
6. They account for special abilities of men by their parental tendencies.
7. They account for the normal and intellectual differences between parents and children.
8. They explain how infants spontaneously develop such passions as greed, anger and jealousy.
9. They account for the instinctive likes and dislikes at first sight.
10. They explain how in us are found "a rubbish heap of evil and treasure trove of good".
11. They account for the unexpected outbursts of passion in a highly civilized person and for the sudden transformation of a criminal into a saint.
12. They explain how profligates are born to saintly parents and saintly children to profligates.
13. They explain how we are the result of what we were, we will be the result of what we are; in other words, we are not absolutely what we were and will not be absolutely what we are.
14. They explain the causes of untimely deaths and unexpected changes in fortune.
15. Above all they account for the arising of omniscient, perfect

spiritual teachers like the Buddhas, who possess incomparable physical, mental and intellectual characteristics which can be explained only by Kamma and a series of births.

## **INDIVIDUAL ACHIEVEMENT AND PERSONALITY**

The pre-existence of human beings is supported by the great variety and degree of achievement found among the people. There is a huge gap between the capacities and performance of people in spiritual, moral, intellectual and artistic fields. This great gulf in the achievement of human beings separates the primitive from the advanced type of beings. This suggests that the spiritual, moral, intellectual and artistic stages are the result of an evolutionary process through a long period.

On the one hand, there are the ordinary runs of humanity with their average attainments. On the other hand, there arise in this world highly developed personalities and Perfect Ones like the Buddhas. Could they evolve suddenly? Could they be the product of a single existence?

How are we to account for personalities like Homer and Plato, men of genius like Shakespeare, infant prodigies like Pascal, Mozart, Beethoven and so forth?

How can these huge differences between men of highest attainments and those of lowest attainments be accountable in terms of the one-life theory? How can the greatness of such men as Socrates, Einstein, Gandhi, etc evolve within a single life-span? Surely these attainments represent the results of past achievements.



Homer, the famous Greek poet and author who was a genius in his era



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, child prodigy musician who wrote musical compositions before the age of six

## CHILD PRODIGIES

Child prodigies appear on this earth from time to time. Although these child prodigies do not constitute direct evidence for rebirth, they do, however, present a phenomenon for which biology and other sciences cannot account.

How are we to explain the extraordinary talents and faculties of these child prodigies?

- *Bentham* who in his fourth year could read and write Latin and Greek.
- *Babington Macaulay* who in his sixth year wrote a Compendium of World History.
- *Thomas Macaulay* the writer who could speak like an adult when he was only one-and-half years old. At age seven, he was writing history.
- *Beethoven* who gave public performances when he was only seven.
- *Mozart* who wrote musical compositions before his sixth year.
- *Voltaire* who read the fables of Fontaine when he was three years old.
- *Christian Heinecken* who could talk within a few hours of his birth,

repeat passages from the Bible at one, answer any questions on Geography at two, speak French and Latin at three, and be a student of philosophy at four.

- *John Stuart Mill* who could read Greek at three.
- *William James Sidis* at age two, could read, write and speak French, Russian, English and German. At eight, he also knew some Latin and Greek.
- *Sir William Hamilton*, the British diplomat could speak Hebrew at three, and by the time he was seven, he was said to have more knowledge on this subject than an average university student studying it. Hamilton could speak twelve languages including Persian, Urdu and Hindustani.
- *Ferruco Burco* the Italian boy who could conduct a full symphony orchestra when he was only four years old.
- *Giancella de Mareo* an Italian girl who conducted the London Philharmonic Orchestra when she was eight years old.

It is interesting to note that prodigies and geniuses for the most part came from parents who possessed no such skill at all.

Explaining prodigies seems to be a problem for scientists. Some medical men are of the opinion that prodigies are the outcome of abnormal glands. The extraordinary hypertrophy of glands of certain individuals may also be due to a past kammic cause. However, scientists do not explain why glands hypertrophy in just a few and not in all people. The real problem remains unsolved.

Is it not reasonable to assume that these prodigies and geniuses acquired their skills in their previous lives? Their talents can be explained as the results of intensive cultivation in the past. There seems to be no other adequate explanation for such extraordinary faculties.



Voltaire, the famous French philosopher child prodigy and outspoken supporter of social reform of the dogmatic and closed European society. He could read fables of Fontaine at the age of three



Ludwig van Beethoven, famous child prodigy who gave public performances at the age of seven

## REMEMBERING THE PAST

### a) THE SUBCONSCIOUS MIND AND MEMORY

If rebirth is a fact, then why do most people not remember their previous lives? Most human beings do not even remember the details of their infancy. Nor do they remember the day they were born. There is a belief that it is difficult for the following categories of human beings to remember their past existence if and when they are reborn as human beings:

- 1. Children who die young.*
- 2. Those who die old and senile*
- 3. Those who are strongly addicted to drugs or intoxicants.*
- 4. Those whose mother, during conception, have been sickly or have had to toil laboriously or have been reckless or imprudent during pregnancy.*
- 5. The children in the womb being stunned and startled lose all knowledge of their past existence.*

The fact remains that the human mind seems to operate in such a manner that it does not remember all the past events. The mind and its workings are generally not understood by most people. Little do we know of the subconscious which is the major portion of the mind that we do not usually utilise. In this part of the mind are latent the memories of all our past experiences including those of our previous lives.

It has been scientifically demonstrated by western science that our ordinary consciousness is but a reflex of our subconscious, no more important in reality than the light of the moon is when contrasted with the light of the sun; in this simile, the moon-light represents the ordinary consciousness and the sunlight represents the subconscious. Modern science also accepts the hypothesis that in the subconscious there is complete memory not only of all the minutest of detail of our present life, but of past states of conscious existence parallel to our present existence.

It is a good thing we do not remember the mistakes, miseries and prejudices of our previous life as they would make the present life intolerable. There are rebirths in states that are non-human, where impressions are not registered in the consciousness clearly. A series of such lives will completely obliterate all memories.

#### b) THOSE WHO CLAIM TO REMEMBER THE PAST

Evidence for rebirth is available from the testimonies of those who claim to spontaneously remember their past lives. In such cases, the memories of the previous lives come spontaneously from the normal, conscious mind.

Authentic reports about children who remembered their previous lives come not only from India and the Buddhist countries, but also from

Christian countries in Europe and America where there is no belief in rebirth. Competent investigators have checked the memories of these children and have found some of them to be distinct and true.

Some extraordinary persons, especially children, spontaneously develop, according to the laws of association, the memory of their past birth. There are numerous cases on record of children and others who have been able to recall their past lives under normal consciousness and to give a multitude of details. Some of these have been checked, verified and authenticated by competent research workers. Forty-four such cases are referred to by Dr. Stevenson of the University of Virginia and discussed in his book on Rebirth.

The American scientist, Dr. Ian Stevenson, who is the author of *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*, stated that years of research into the question of rebirth has left him convinced that there "may be life after death". Dr. Stevenson has been trying to verify the theory of rebirth since 1961 when he first visited India. Until now, he and his computer have investigated and scientifically analysed 1,200 claims of rebirth including 170 cases from India. Dr. Stevenson says that the majority of the cases he studied "are suggestive of reincarnation." The highest number of rebirth claims came from India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, Turkey, Syria and Lebanon and the majority of those who remember their previous lives were children. Dr. Stevenson says that there is no reason for poo-h-pooing the claims of rebirth as superstition and that rebirth merits serious academic research. He says that in some cases, origin of birthmarks like moles and warts could be traced back to stab injuries or shot wounds received in previous lives.

A single such well-attested case is in itself enough for a discerning student to believe in a past birth.



Prof Dr Ian Stevenson, the famous research scientist from the University of Virginia, USA who has investigated hundreds of cases of people who could recall their past lives.



Dr Jim Tucker, currently Assistant Professor of Psychiatric Medicine at the University of Virginia, USA has researched many cases of recall of past lives.

## NO SOUL

The Buddhist doctrine of rebirth must be differentiated from the transmigrating and reincarnation of other systems which postulate the existence of an eternal soul. Buddhism, however, denies the existence of a transmigrating, permanent soul.

To justify the existence of endless happiness in an eternal heaven, and unending torment in an eternal hell, it is absolutely necessary to postulate the existence of an immortal soul. Otherwise, how can what is sinned on earth be punished in everlasting hell?

"It should be that the old distinction between soul and body has evaporated," said Bertrand Russell, "Quite as much because 'matter' has lost its solidity just as mind has lost its spirituality. Psychology is just beginning to be scientific. In the present state of psychology, belief in immortality can at any rate claim no support from science."

According to this learned author of "*The Riddle of the Universe*" - "The theological proof that the personal creator has breathed an immortal soul (generally regarded as a position of the Divine soul) into man is a



pure myth. The cosmological proof - that the 'moral order of the world' demands the eternal duration of the human soul - is a baseless dogma. The theological proof - that the 'higher destiny' of man involves the perfecting of his defective, earthly soul beyond the grave, rests on a false anthropism. The moral proof - that the defects and the unsatisfied desires of earthly existence must be fulfilled by compensative justice on the side of eternity - is nothing more than pious wish. The ethnological proof - that the belief in immortality is an innate truth that is common to all humanity - is an error in fact."

## **UNDERSTANDING THE ANATTA (NO SOUL) TEACHING**

To understand rebirth, one must understand the Anatta teaching first.

As long as man fails to see things as processes, as movements, he will never understand the Anatta (no-Soul) teaching of the Buddha. It is very difficult for people to break the habit of continually thinking of their own mind and body and the external world as inseparable and whole units. This is why people impatiently ask the question, if there is no persisting entity, no unchanging principle like Self or Soul (Atman), then what is it that experiences the results of deeds here and hereafter? In other words, is it the doer of the act or another who reaps its results in the succeeding birth?

To say that he who sows is absolutely the same as he who reaps is one extreme. To say that he who sows is totally different from he who reaps is the other extreme. The simple reason for this is that what we call life is a flow of physical and mental processes or energies arising and ceasing constantly. Thus it is not possible to say that the doer himself experiences the results because he is changing now, every moment of his life. Yet life is a continuous process. The child is not the same as the

adolescent, the adolescent is not the same as the adult; they are neither the same nor totally different persons. There is only the flow of bodily and mental processes. Thus Buddhaghosa in the Visuddhi Magga says,

“No doer of the deed is there,  
No one, who experiences its result;  
Bare phenomena flow on  
This alone is the right view.”

The change and continuity of life can be illustrated by considering the evolution of the butterfly. In its initial stage, the butterfly is an egg. Then it turns into a caterpillar. This process occurs in the course of one life-time. The butterfly is neither the same as, nor totally different from, the caterpillar. Here also there is a flux of life, or a continuity.

### **MAN: A PSYCHO-PHYSICAL PROCESS**

Man believes that he has some eternal entity within himself. He calls this eternal entity by different names: soul, Atta, self, ego, I, me, personality, being, etc. The Buddha taught that what we take to be as something eternal is merely a combination of changing psycho-physical forces or energies. The process of these psycho-physical forces is not static but constantly becoming and passing away. This psycho-physical process is also called the five aggregates. What is called a 'being' is nothing but a combination of these ever-changing aggregates or forces: aggregate of matter (rupa khandha), aggregate of feeling or sensation (vedana khandha), aggregate of perception (sanna khandha), aggregate of mental formations (sankhara khandha) and aggregate of consciousness (vinnana khandha).

Birth is the combination of these five aggregates. Life is the existence of the five aggregates. Death is the dissolution of the five aggregates. Rebirth is the recombination of the five aggregates.

Buddhism does not totally deny the existence of a personality in an empirical sense. It denies, in an ultimate sense, an identical being of a permanent entity; but it does not deny a continuity in process. The Buddhist philosophical term for an individual is *santati* - that is, a flux or continuity. This uninterrupted flux or continuity of psycho-physical phenomena conditioned by *kamma*, having no perceptible source in the beginningless past nor any end to its continuation in the future, except by the Eightfold Path, is the Buddhist substitute for the permanent ego or eternal soul in other religious systems.

## **REBIRTH WITHOUT A SOUL**

One must first understand the Buddha's analysis of man as a psycho-physical process (or a combination of ever-changing aggregates) in order to understand how rebirth can be possible without a soul to be reborn.

According to Buddhism, birth is the coming into being of the aggregates (*khandhas*).

Just as the arising of a physical state is conditioned by a preceding state as its cause, even so the appearance of this psycho-physical phenomenon is conditioned by causes preceding its birth. The present process of becoming is the result of the craving for becoming in the previous birth. The present instinctive craving is conditioning life in a future birth.

As the process of one life-span is possible without a permanent entity passing from one thought-moment to another, a series of life-processes is possible without anything to transmigrate from one life to another.

"If there is no soul to be reborn, then what is it that is reborn?" This is the question that King Milinda asked Ven. Nagasena.

"A psycho-physical combination (mind and body / *Nama Rupa*) is the answer, oh King." replied Ven. Nagasena.

"But how, Ven. Sir? Is it the same psycho-physical combination as this present one?"

"No, oh King. But the present psycho-physical combination produces kammically wholesome and unwholesome volitional activities. Through such kamma, a new psycho-physical combination will be born.

"Then, Ven. Sir, can rebirth take place without passing over of anything?"

"Let me illustrate, O King: if a man lights a lamp with the help of another lamp, in this case, does the light of one lamp pass over to the other lamp?"

"No, Ven. Sir."

"Just so, O King, does rebirth take place without transmigration.

## SAMSARA: THE WHEEL OF EXISTENCE

The constant succession of birth and death of each individual life-flux is technically known as *samsara*. *Samsara* is the recurrent wandering of the life-flux in the ocean of birth and death.

Concerning *samsara*, the Buddha says:

"Without cognizable end is this *samsara*. A first beginning of beings who, obstructed by ignorance and fettered by craving wander and fare on, is not to be perceived."

This life-stream or *samsara* flows *ad infinitum*, as long as it is fed by the muddy waters of ignorance and craving. When these two are completely cut off, then only does the life-stream cease to flow; then rebirth ends, as in the case of Buddhas and Arahats. The ultimate beginning of this life-stream cannot be determined, as a stage cannot be perceived when this life-force was not fraught with ignorance and craving.

The round of rebirths or *samsara* does not automatically come to an end. Nor is there any point at which all beings revolving in *samsara*, gain their release by reason of its ceasing, for it has no temporal boundaries.

By understanding *samsara*, we are able to gain assurance that there is, in truth, a moral principle governing the universe. By learning to use these laws in the right way, we become able to control and to guide our individual destiny by a higher spiritual purpose and towards a more certain goal.

If life can extend forward in time beyond the grave, it must surely

be capable of having extended from the past into the present. 'From the womb to the tomb' has its complement in 'From the tomb to the womb'; to be born many times is no more miraculous than to have been born once.

The Buddha explained *samsara* or the process of the wheel of existence in his teaching of Paticca Samuppada.

## **THE PROCESS OF REBIRTH: PATICCA SAMUPPADA**

How rebirth occurs has been fully explained by the Buddha in the Paticca Samuppada.

Paticca Samuppada is a discourse on the process of birth and death; it is not a theory of the evolution of the world from primordial matter. It deals with the cause of rebirth and suffering in order to get rid of the ills of life. It makes no attempt to solve the riddle of an absolute origin of life.

To develop a clear insight into the conditioned nature of all things and to understand how rebirth is dependent on certain conditions, one must first investigate the Twelve Links of the Wheel of Life as explained by the Buddha in Paticca Samuppada.

Ignorance is the first link or the cause of the wheel of life. Ignorance of things as they truly are and ignorance of oneself as one truly is, is the ignorance that clouds all right understanding.

Dependent on ignorance arise activities (*sankara*) which include moral and immoral thoughts, words and deeds. Actions, whether good or bad, which are directly or indirectly rooted in ignorance, must

necessarily produce their due effects: they tend to prolong wandering in the ocean of life. Nevertheless, good deeds that are free from delusion, hate and greed are necessary to get rid of the ills of life.

Dependent on activities arises relinking or rebirth-consciousness with the present and is the initial consciousness one experiences at the moment of conception.

Simultaneous with the arising of the rebirth-consciousness, there occur mind and matter (*nama-rupa*). From this psycho-physical phenomena evolve the six senses.

Because of the six senses, contact sets in.

Contact leads to sensations or feelings.

Dependent on feelings arises craving which conditions attachment if the objects are desirable.

Attachment produces becoming (*bhava*) which in turn, conditions future birth.

Old age and death are the inevitable results of birth.

These links or conditions that make up the Wheel of Life can be summed up thus: if, on account of a cause, an effect arises, then if the cause ceases, the effect must also cease. In other words, when A arises, then B arises; when A ceases, then B also ceases.

The reverse order of the Paticca Samuppada will make the matter clear:

Old age and death are only possible in and with a corporeal organism, that is to say, a six-sense machine. Such an organism must be born which presupposes birth. But birth is the inevitable result of past kamma or action which is conditioned by attachment to craving. Such craving appears when sensation arises. Sensation is the outcome of contact between the senses and sense objects. Hence the organs of sense cannot exist without mind and body. Mind originates with a rebirth-consciousness which is due to ignorance of things as they truly are.

This process of birth and death continues *ad infinitum*. A beginning of this process cannot be determined as it is impossible to conceive of a time when this life-flux was not encompassed by ignorance. But when this ignorance is replaced by wisdom and the life-flux realises Nibbana, then only does the rebirth process terminate.

### **CONDITIONS FOR BIRTH AS A HUMAN BEING**

According to the scientific point of view, we are the direct products of the sperm and ovum cells provided by our parents. But science does not give a satisfactory explanation with regard to the development of the mind which is infinitely more important than machinery of man's material body.

From the scientific point of view, we are absolutely parent-born. As such, life precedes life. However, with regard to the origin of the first protoplasm of life, scientists plead ignorance.

From the Buddhist point of view, we are born from the matrix of action. Parents merely provide us with a material layer. As such, being precedes being. At the moment of conception, it is kamma that conditions the initial consciousness that vitalizes the foetus. It is this invisible



kammic energy, generated from the past birth, that produces mental physical phenomenon to complete the trio that constitutes man.

Concerning the conditions for birth or for the conception of beings, the Buddha says,

"A germ of life is planted when three conditions are found in combination. If mother and father come together, but it is not the mother's fertile period, and the 'being-to-be-born' is not present, then no germ of life is planted. If mother and father come together and it is the mother's fertile period, but the 'being to-be-born' is not present, then no germ of life is planted. If mother and father come together, and it is the mother's fertile period, and the 'being-to-be-born' is also present, then by the combination of these three conditions, a germ of life is planted."

For a being-to-be-born here, somewhere a being must die.

The birth of a being - which strictly means the arising of the aggregates or psycho-physical phenomena in this present life - corresponds to the death of a being in a past life - just as (in conventional terms) the rising of the sun in one place means the setting of the sun in another place. This enigmatic statement may be better understood by imagining life as a wave and not as a straight line. Birth and death are only phases of the same process. Birth precedes death, and death on the other hand precedes birth. This constant succession of birth and death in connection with each individual life-flux constitutes what is technically known as *samsara* - recurrent wandering.

If science could ultimately succeed in generating life from non-living matter, if babies could one day be born from test tubes, this achievement would make no difference to the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth according to kamma. The kammic energy may manifest through

vital elements brought together artificially in the same way as it does through the natural biological processes. The artificial production of living organisms may deal the final blow to the theory of divine creation, but it will not in any way affect the Buddhist explanation of life.

## CONDITIONS FOR REBIRTH: THE NIYAMAS

Kamma alone does not create life. Kamma is only one of the five orders or processes or *niyamas* which operate in the physical and mental realms. Each of the five *niyamas* helps to produce a life; each is a condition for the life. Every mental or physical phenomenon can be explained by these all-embracing processes or *niyamas* which are laws in themselves.

1. *Utu Niyama*: refers to the physical, inorganic order. This order includes such phenomena as the seasonal winds and rains, the unerring sequence of the four seasons, characteristic seasonal changes and events, the causes of wind and rains, the nature of heat, etc.

2. *Bija Niyama*: refers to the physical, organic order. This order includes such phenomena as germs and seeds: how rice is produced from rice seed, how sugar taste results from sugar-cane or honey, the peculiar characteristics of certain fruits, etc. The scientific theory of cells and genes and the physical similarity of twins may be ascribed to this order.

3. *Kamma Niyama*: refers to the order of action (condition) and result. This natural law states that desirable and undesirable acts produce corresponding good and bad results. As surely as water seeks its own level, so does kamma, given opportunity, produce its inevitable result - not in the form of reward or punishment but as an innate sequence. This sequence of cause and effect is as natural and necessary as the way of the sun and the moon.

4. *Dhamma Niyama*: refers to the order of the norm; e.g. the natural phenomena occurring at the advent of a Bodhisatta in his last birth. Gravitation and other similar laws of nature, the reason for being good, and so forth, may be included in this group.

5. *Citta Niyama*: refers to the order of the mind or psychic laws. This order includes such phenomena as processes of consciousness, constituents of consciousness, power of mind, etc. All psychic phenomena which are inexplicable to modern science are included in this order: telepathy, telesthesia, retrocognition, premonition, clairvoyance, clairauidience, thought reading, etc.

## **MODES OF BIRTH AND DEATH**

### **FOUR MODES OF BIRTH**

Buddhism explains four modes of birth: egg-born beings, womb-born beings, moisture-born beings and beings having spontaneous births.

The beings that have a spontaneous birth are generally invisible to the physical eye. Conditioned by their past Kamma, they appear spontaneously without passing through an embryonic stage. Spirits (*Petas*), divine beings (*Devas*) and *Brahmas* belong to this group.

## FOUR MODES OF DEATH

In Buddhism, death is assigned to one of the four causes:

### 1. Exhaustion of the Reproductive Kammic energy

The Buddhist belief is that, as a rule, the thought, volition or desire, which is extremely strong during a life-time becomes predominant at the time of death and conditions the subsequent birth. A special potentiality is present in this last thought moment. When the potential energy of this Reproductive Kamma is exhausted, the organic activities of the material form in which is embodied the life-force, cease even before the end of the lifespan in that particular plane. This often happens in the case of beings who are born in states of misery; but it can happen in other planes also.

### 2. Exhaustion of the Natural Life-Span

The expiration of the life-term varies in different planes. Natural deaths, due to old age, may be classed under this category.

### 3. Death due to the simultaneous exhaustion of the Reproductive Kammic energy and expiration of the life-term.

### 4. The opposing action of a stronger Kamma that unexpectedly obstructs the flow of the Reproductive Kamma before the life term expires. Sudden, untimely deaths and deaths of children are due to this cause.

Death, according to Buddhism, is the cessation of the psycho-physical life of any one individual existence. It takes place by the passing

away of vitality, i.e. psychic and physical life-stream of consciousness. The only difference between the passing of one thought to another in a single life-time and of the dying thought-moment to the rebirth consciousness, is that in the latter case, a marked perceptible physical death is apparent to all.

## **WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A MAN DIES?**

When a man dies, earth returns to earth; water returns to water; air returns to air; fire returns to fire and space returns to space.

But what happens to a man's craving force? Craving is an energy and hence like all other forces, it must follow the fundamental law of physics - the law of conservation of energy: energy cannot be created nor destroyed but can only be transformed from one form into another.

When this physical body is no more capable of functioning, energies do not die with it, but continue to take some other shape or form which we also call life. In a child, all the physical, mental and intellectual faculties are tender and weak, but they have within them the potentiality of producing a full-grown man. Likewise, physical and mental energies which make up the so-called being, have within themselves the power to take a new form and grow gradually and gather force to complete their form. As there is no permanent substance, nothing passes from one moment to the next. It is a series that continues unbroken, but changes every moment. This series is like a flame which burns through the night: it is not the same flame nor is it another. Likewise, a child grows up to be a man of sixty; yet the man of sixty is not the same as the child of sixty years ago, neither is he another person. Similarly, a person who dies here and is reborn elsewhere, is neither the same person, nor another. It is the continuity of the same series. Nevertheless, the individual is responsible

for whatever he does - in his life-time. Whether the flux dies here and is reborn elsewhere, or whether it continues to exist in the same life-form, the essential process is continuity.

Just as an electric light is the outward manifestation of invisible electric energy, even so is the outward manifestation of invisible kammic energy. The bulb may break and the light may be extinguished, but the current remains and the light may be reproduced in another bulb. In the same way, kammic force remains undisturbed by the disintegration of the physical body and the passing away of the present consciousness leads to the arising of a fresh one in another birth. Here the bulb can be compared to the parental cell of the body and the electric energy to the kammic energy.

Suppose a person was 'A' in his last birth, and is 'B' in this birth. With the death of 'A' the physical vehicle, the outward manifestation of kammic energy is abandoned. Then, with the birth of 'B', a fresh physical vehicle arises. Despite the apparent material changes, the invisible stream of consciousness continues to flow, uninterrupted by death. This stream of consciousness carries along with it, all the impressions received from the tributary streams of the senses. Conventionally speaking, must not 'B' be responsible for the actions of 'A' who was his predecessor?

### THE MIND OF A DYING MAN

Suppose a person is about to die. This critical stage may be compared to the flickering of a lamp just before it is extinguished. To this dying man is present a kamma of some good or bad action committed either during his life-time or immediately before his dying moment. A *kamma nimitta* or *gati nimitta* may appear in the mind of the dying man.

*Kamma nimitta* is a symbol or a mental reproduction of any sight, sound, smell, taste, touch or idea which dominated his activity during his lifetime. Thus a butcher may see a vision of knives or dying animals. A kind physician may see his patients coming to him. A devotee may see an object of worship, etc.

A *gati nimitta* is a 'symbol of destiny' or a sign or the place where the rebirth is to occur. Such a symbol frequently presents itself to the dying person. Such premonitory visions of destiny may take various forms such as a fire, forests, mountainous regions, a mother's womb, celestial mansions, etc. Then these indications of the future birth occur, and if they are bad, they might at times be remedied.

In Buddhist countries, it is the custom to recall to the dying man's memory his good actions performed by him, in order to help him to have a happy and pure kammical state of mind, as a preparation for a favourable rebirth. Thus his relatives arrange to show him some religious objects for his good benefit. Or perhaps they let him hear a religious sermon or chanting of suttras.

The process of consciousness in a dying person proceeds feebly. Just before the moment of death, one of his previous actions connected with one of the five senses, actually presents itself in the avenue of consciousness. Then the dying man grasps that object with craving; his dying mind runs on grasping. At the end of his mental process or cessation of his life continuum, the death-thought, the last phase of his present being, arises and with his passing away, that thought grasps the object of kamma and then passes away. This is called death.

The direction of the new grasping or the place for the new birth is determined by the dying consciousness. Thus a wicked man can be

reborn in a fortunate sphere if only his dying thoughts are noble. Likewise, however noble and moral a man may have been, his virtue serves no immediate purpose if his dying thoughts happen to be ignoble or immoral. Certainly the immediate consequence of a good action is good. But such an action when placed against the background of a whole lifetime of bad action has very little good effect, and so the resultant good effect is at the most very short-lived. The overwhelming bad takes its overwhelming toil. One of the reasons for embryonic or infantile diseases can be attributed to such weak last thought moments. On the other hand, a man who has led an evil life may be reborn in a good sphere due to the fact that in some previous life, he had done much good which took effect before the death. Such last hours are very strong and decisive in determining a man's destiny in his next birth.

### **REBIRTH IS IMMEDIATE**

The difference between death and birth is only a thought moment: the last thought-moment in this life conditions the first thought-moment in the so-called next life which in fact is the continuity of the same series. During this life itself too, one thought moment conditions the next. The question of life after death is not a great mystery.

Rebirth takes place immediately irrespective of the place of birth, just as an electro-magnetic wave that is projected into space is immediately reproduced in a receiving radio set. Rebirth of the mental flux is also instantaneous and leaves no room whatever for any intermediate state (*antarabhava*). The Buddha-word does not support the belief that a spirit of the deceased person takes lodgement in some temporary state until it finds a suitable place for its birth. According to certain beliefs there is an intermediate state where beings remain for one to seven weeks until the forty-ninth day. This view is contrary to the teachings of Buddhism.



The following dialogue between King Milinda and Ven. Nagasena illustrates the immediacy of the rebirth process:

"Venerable Nagasena," said King Milinda, "If somebody dies here and is reborn in the Brahma-Loka, and if somebody dies here and is born in Kashmir, which of them would arrive first?"

"They would arrive at the same time, oh, King!"

"That is strange; please explain."

"In which town were you born, oh King?"

"In a village called Kalasi, master."

"How far is Kalasi from here, oh King?"

"About two hundred miles, master."

"And how far is Kashmir from here?"

"About twelve miles, master."

"Now think of the village of Kalasi, Oh King! "

"I have done so, master"

"And now think of Kashmir, oh King!"

"It is done, master."

"Of which of these two, oh King, did you think the more slowly and of which the more quickly?"

"Equally quick to think of both, master."

"Just so, oh King, he who dies here is reborn in the world of Brahma."

"He is not reborn later than he who dies and is reborn in Kashmir."

"Give me one more example, master."

"Suppose two birds were flying in the air and they settle both at the same time; one upon a high tree and the other upon a low tree. Now what do you think - which bird's shade would first fall upon the earth?"

"Both shadows would appear at the same time, master."

"Just so, oh King, both men are reborn at the same time, and not one of them earlier and other later."

## **REBIRTH IN OTHER PLANES OF EXISTENCE**

Buddhism does not teach rebirth only on the human plane or level. Buddhism teaches that rebirth is possible in any of the thirty-one planes of existence. The human plane is only one of these planes.

According to Buddhism, living beings are infinite in number and so are world systems. Nor is the impregnated ovum the only route to rebirth. Earth, an almost insignificant space in the universe, is not the only habitable plane and humans are not the only living creatures. As such, it is not impossible to believe that there will always be an appropriate place to receive the last thought vibrations. A point is always ready to receive the falling stone.

Even the modern scientific outlook does not completely eliminate the possibility of other modes of life existing on other planets. Science recognizes that invisible, intangible forces shape the visible world. According to Buddhism, mental energy flows out to operate in the conditions of the physical world and the result is rebirth in the human world - or rebirth as an animal is possible. The same mental energy may flow out to operate in other realms - then other forms take shape and the result is rebirth as spirits, etc.

The Buddha says that beings can be broadly classed into thirty-one distinguishable groups. Beings subject to unfortunate sense-experience are of four kinds: those in states of torment, animal, ghost and lesser earth-bound spirits. Human beings form another class which is subject to both fortunate and unfortunate sense-experiences. There are six classes of celestial beings or gods. More fortunate than these celestial beings are sixteen classes of Brahmas also of godly nature. Four further classes of Brahmas are taught to exist; rebirth into these spheres being achieved by developing the state of high mental concentration (*Jhana*) known as the conception of nothingness, and conception of neither perception nor non-perception. Ordinary man's experience is, of course, limited to only few varieties of these beings, and the existence of the other varieties remains mere knowledge.

## **REBIRTH IN SUB-HUMAN REALMS**

According to Buddhism, it is possible for a human being after death to take rebirth on a lower biological level or in a subhuman realm. Buddhism recognizes that man can be reborn as an animal; this teaching is not acceptable to all people.

The life-continuum expresses itself through material forms. These material forms are merely temporary visible manifestations of kammic energy. The present physical body is not directly evolved from the past physical form, but is the successor of the past form-being and is linked with it through the same streams of kammic energy. Just as an electric current can be manifested in the forms of light, heat and motion successively - one necessarily being evolved from the other – so the kammic energy may manifest itself in the form of deva, man, animal, or other being - one form having no physical connection with the other. It is one's material form which varies according to the skill or unskillfulness of one's past actions. And this again depends entirely on the evolution of one's understanding of reality.

Instead of saying that man becomes an animal, or an animal becomes man, it would be more correct to say that the kammic force which manifested in the form of man may manifest itself in the form of an animal.

On one occasion two ascetics, Punna and Seniya, who were practising ox-asceticism and dog-asceticism respectively, approached the Buddha and questioned him as to their future destiny. The Buddha replied,

"In this world, a certain person cultivates thoroughly and constantly the practices, habits, mentality and manners of a dog. He, having cultivated canine practices, upon the dissolution of the body after death, is reborn amongst dogs,"

In the same way, the Buddha declared that he who observes ox-asceticism will after death, be born amongst oxen.

This story illustrates how man can be born as an animal, in accordance with the law of affinity.

Some people believe that rebirth can take place only in a physical and human body. To deny the possibility of rebirth in the animal world, is a negation of the universal applicability of the moral law of cause and effect which the Buddha consistently proclaimed. Buddha says that if the kamma of the last thought moment before death is on a low moral level and so governed by any of the unwholesome factors associated with lust, hatred and delusion, the next manifestation of the causal continuum will be on precisely that level. In other words, rebirth as an animal or in a lower state will result.

There are times when man's mind operates at the animal level; in his mind he is an animal. If his thoughts are again and again on that low level, and if his last thought-moment at death is of the same kind, why should not its product in the new arising be an animal? In other words, if the dying person cherishes a base desire or idea or experiences a thought, or does an act which benefits only an animal, his evil kamma will condition him for birth in animal form. The kammic force will then manifest itself in animal form. This does not mean that his past good kamma tendencies are lost. They also lie in a dormant state seeking an opportunity to rise to the surface. It is such a good kamma that will later effect a birth as a human being.

When, for instance, an animal is about to die, it can experience a moral consciousness that can ripen into a human birth. This last thought-moment does not wholly depend on any action or thought of the animal for generally it is dull and is incapable of doing any moral action. It depends on some past deed which it has done during its round of existence and which, for a long time, has been prevented from producing

its results. In its last moment, the animal therefore might cherish ideas, desires, or images which will cause a human birth.

Poussin, a French writer illustrates this fact by the law of heredity: "A man may be like his grandfather but not like his father. The germs of a disease have been introduced into the organism of an ancestor, for some generations they remain dormant, but suddenly they manifest themselves in actual diseases."

## **THE TRUTH OF REBIRTH**

The truth of rebirth is of great consequence to all. There is hardly a man who has not yearned from where he came or where he is going. A natural prompting of the heart is to understand the mystery of life and death. To understand and to accept rebirth as a fact is to give a serious meaning and purpose of life. Life no longer appears as a dreary round of events and circumstances. New hopes are felt and new visions are opened up. To understand and to accept rebirth is to receive a sense of moral responsibility in an ordered universe. To understand rebirth is to realize that all are fellow passengers in the great journey of life; all are subject to the same universal laws and fundamental principles. All are brothers and sisters in the ocean of life and death.



Dhammaruwan could chant Pali Suttas from memory at the age of 2 years old despite not being able to even read at that age. Recordings of his Sutta chanting in the 1960s are available and authenticated. His unique chanting style could be traced back to the 10<sup>th</sup> Century. His Sutta recall ability is unparalleled till today.

## REBIRTH CASE HISTORIES

### The Case of Michael Croston

Michael Croston was born in Liverpool, England. When he was 11 years old, he travelled for the first time to visit his mother's original home on the Yorkshire moors. He had never been to that part of the country before. Yet when he and his parents drove along the narrow roads, he seemed to know every turn. Suddenly a heavy mist came; the parents admitted they were lost. To their astonishment, the boy gave them directions for reaching their destination, a lonely farmhouse that could be approached only by back-lanes and many confusing turn-offs. Young Croston could not give any explanation as to how he knew the way.

That night at the farmhouse, his parents and uncles talked about Michael's grandfather. Michael listened carefully for he could recognise many of the events that they discussed. During that evening, the eerie knowledge came to Michael that he was his grandfather.

The next morning, Michael took out one of the farm horses and rode it without any effort, although he had never been on horseback before. He seemed to know every detail of the country landscape about him.

On the second night, young Michael could not sleep. Something was wrong about the chimes of the big grandfather clock downstairs in the farmhouse. The chimes of that clock were tormenting him. "I felt as if I were trying to remember something," Michael later wrote in his diary. "Then as the clock struck two, I suddenly remembered. I raced downstairs and ran my hand over the back of the old clock. My fingers touched a secret spring and a small panel fell open. There was a large tin box. It opened easily. Inside were bundles of notes."

Michael discovered the grandfather's life savings. His grandfather had died at two o'clock in the morning. He was stricken with a sudden stroke and so was unable to tell where he had hidden his life's savings.

Today, members of the Croston family still verify the extraordinary details of Michael's discovery.

### **The Case of Dorothy Jordon**

Dorothy Jordon was a typist in Liverpool, England. One day Dorothy went to a Liverpool cinema to see the historical picture of the death of Lady Jane Grey. In the midst of the picture, Dorothy suddenly shouted, "It's all wrong; I know I was there; I was there!"

Later Dorothy revealed that she had felt that she was actually living the scenes in the film. Memories of events portrayed in the film came to Dorothy. Some of these memories were not the same as certain events portrayed in the film: in the film, Lady Jane Grey leaned out of her window in the Tower of London. Dorothy insisted that the window had been too high for the lady to have looked through. In the film, the crowds were silent as the lady went to her execution. Dorothy remembered that the real crowds screamed and shouted. Again the film did not show a boy kneeling in prayer by the scaffold, or the black wrist band the executioner had worn. Dorothy pointed out these details.

Historical investigation after Dorothy's outburst showed that she was right about the details: the window was too high; the crowds did shout; the boy was kneeling in prayer; and the executioner did wear the black wrist band. Although she had no experience of this kind, Dorothy is now convinced that she had lived before as Lady Jane Grey's lady-in-waiting.



## **The Case of Gnanatillaka**

Gnanatillaka is her name, she was born on 14th February 1956 in Kotamale in Sri Lanka (Ceylon). The case started in 1960 when she was only four and a half years old. Then she told her parents, "I want to see my father and mother."

"We are your parents," the mother explained.

"No," insisted Gnanatillaka, "I want to see my real mother and father. I will tell you where they are living. Please take me there."

Gnanatillaka explained to her parents how to reach the house where her real parents were living. It was situated near a tea estate in Talawakele, about thirty miles from where they were living.

The parents ignored their little daughter's strange story. As the days passed by, Gnanatillaka would constantly ask to be taken to see her real mother and father.

Soon the story began to spread. A few professors from the University of Ceylon and Venerable Piyadassi Maha Thera came to know of the story. They decided to investigate. They listened to Gnanatillaka tell her story about the time when she was a boy whose name was Tilakaratna. They recorded all the details. According to the information she gave, they went with Gnanatillaka to visit the house that she had described.

Gnanatillaka had never visited that house in her present life; nor had she ever been to the particular area where the house was located. Also the two families had no connection with each other and so did not know of each other's existence.

When they entered the house, Gnanatillaka introduced the professors to the parents of the house. "This is my real father and this is my mother." Then she introduced her younger and older brother and sisters. She gave the correct nick name for each brother and sister.

The former-life parents were interviewed. They described the character and habits of their son who had passed away on 9th November, 1954.



Turin Tilakaratna  
Died: 9.11.1954



Gnanatillaka  
Reborn: 14.2.1956

When Gnanatillaka saw her former younger brother, she refused to look at him or to talk with him. Later the former parents explained that the two brothers were always fighting and quarrelling with each other. Perhaps Gnanatillaka was still holding a grudge from her previous life when she was a boy.

When the local school master heard the story, he went to the house to see for himself. As he entered the house, Gnanatillaka introduced him as her teacher. She was also able to remember the lessons and homework that the teacher had given her as a boy in the previous life.

Gnanatillaka was also able to point out the graveyard where he was buried in his previous life as a boy.

Gnanatillaka's story soon spread far and wide. A researcher who

specialised in rebirth cases, Dr. Ian Stevenson of the University of Virginia, flew from America to Ceylon to investigate the case. After his investigation, he said that this case was one of the very best on rebirth, both in evidential detail and in psychological aspects.

An interesting book on Gnanatillaka's case has been published in the Sinhala language in Ceylon. This book presents photographs along with the documentary evidence collected.

### **The Case of the Castle Door**

An English psychical researcher, Dr. H. Carrington, tells of a case of historical 'pre-knowledge' which he investigated: a man visited an old castle which he had never seen before. Suddenly he stopped in front of an old brick wall. "There used to be a door just here," he said as he pointed to the wall. Nobody in the castle remembered such a door. Inquiries brought to light the fact there had, indeed, been such a door, but it had been bricked up many years before and no trace was left. The man could give only one explanation for this strange knowledge: he had been in the castle at some previous time. He was sure that he was not in the castle in this life. But he knew that he was in the castle before.

### **The Case of the Fair in Avenbury Village**

The English authoress, Edith Oliver, once visited the village of Avenbury for the first time. During the visit, she had a memory of an avenue of huge grey stones leading out from the village. Near the stones she recollected a village fair being held. But nobody in the village had heard of either the avenue or the fair. Edith Oliver followed up her recollection with a local historian. He took the trouble to make a search among the village records and turned up the facts that both the avenue

and the fair existed. The stones had been taken away before the year 1800, and the last village fair had been held in 1850.

### **The Case of a Child Prodigy**

Ma Hla Gyl was a six year old Burmese girl. She showed an unusual intelligence combined with a most amazing memory: she could read the most difficult Pali verses a few times, memorize and recite them promptly and correctly. In a test given to her, she was able to recite without error, a page from the Pali Patthana after looking at it for one minute. The child could also understand what she read, and was able to give the meaning in Burmese.

### **David's Strange Memories**

This case was described by an English woman to Dr. Leslie Weatherhead, who had done research on "Reincarnation". The English woman holds a university degree in science. The story is about her son, David, who died in childhood. On three different occasions, David showed remarkable, strange memories:

When he was seven, his mother took David to Rome. An archaeologist friend accompanied them to a recently excavated village near Naples. Suddenly, David started running about, very excited and happy. He climbed up a Roman bath and knelt down to look at the symbols on its mosaic tiles.

"Here's our bath," David shouted to his mother. "And here's my favourite tile; the one with the bull on it, Marcus liked the one with the fish - "Then David burst into tears; he begged his mother to take him away. David kept repeating something which his mother could not understand. She only knew that it "had been terrible."

On another occasion, David and his mother visited some caves on the Channel Island of Guernsey. These caves had once been used as a prison for French soldiers. Suddenly, David began tapping on a cave wall. He insisted that there was another cave behind and that a man had been walled in this cave. His mother was horrified at her son's idea. "But I watched them do it," David insisted. David was so upset about this incident that his mother decided to make a few inquiries. David then offered the name of the prisoner who had been walled in.

Eventually, the Guernsey authorities agreed to tap the cave. They found a door that had been bricked up. Behind that door they found the skeleton of a man. A close search of the local records showed that a prisoner of the name given by David, had served a sentence on the island and he "had died in captivity".

On yet another occasion, David was taken to the British museum. In the Egyptian section he stepped up to one of the many cases and remarked casually that there should be some initials on it. He said that the initials were in a kind of white paint on the underside of the case. To humour him, his mother asked him to draw the initials. David scribbled three Egyptian hieroglyphics. "That was my name," he said. "But you weren't here then," replied his mother. "I was a kind of Inspector," said David, "I had to mark the coffins to be sure they were satisfactory."

David's mother now believes that only the theory of rebirth could explain her son's extraordinary behaviour on each of the three occasions.

## **The Case of the girl from Sri Lanka**

A seven-year old girl student of Sri Lanka won all the prizes for Indian dancing. She displayed the skill of an expert dancer although no one taught her the art in this life. When questioned as to how she acquired her skill, she explained how she learned it in India from her elder sister. She gave vivid details about her home in India. She gave an account of her brothers and sisters. She described the location of their house situated near a river where steamers came up, etc.

## **The Case of the Mexican Child Healer**

In 1880, at Ver Cruz, Mexico, a seven-year old child possessed the power to heal. Several people were healed by vegetable remedies prescribed by the child. When asked how he knew these things, he said that he was formerly a great doctor. At that time, his name was Jules Alpherese. This surprising faculty developed in him at the age of four.

## **The Case of Bridey Murphy**

A hypnotist Morey Berenstein, put Mrs. Ruth Simmons into a deep hypnotic trance. In the trance, Mrs. Simmons remembered a previous life in Ireland 160 years ago when her name was Bridey Murphy. Mrs. Simmons had never been out of America, nor did she have any knowledge of Ireland beyond that of an average American housewife. During a series of hypnotic sessions, Mrs. Simmons gave many details of Bridey's life. She told of her childhood, her marriage to a lawyer named Brian McCarthy, her home near St. Theresa's church, the sound of the church bells, etc.

After obtaining as much information as he could about Bridey's life, Berenstein gave the job of research to a firm of Irish lawyers. The firm investigated and gave their report which verified many of the facts which Mrs. Simmons had given in her trance.

When the report was published, the Bridey Murphy Case became a great controversy in America. Many westerners who had previously believed that rebirth was a false belief, revised their opinions after reading "**The Search for Bridey Murphy.**" Practically all newspapers and magazines carried views for and against the doctrine of rebirth. Opinions were divided. Two groups openly opposed the case: (i) those who wanted to discredit and debunk the case which they interpreted as an attempt of the Devil to deceive man (ii) The materialists who wanted to preserve their theory that there can be no survival after death. Yet Mrs. Simmons was accurate enough to arouse the interest of the open-minded people who were prepared to weigh the evidence dispassionately and to arrive at a reasonable conclusion without any preconceived theory. Many came to accept that this was a genuine case of rebirth.

### **Two Previous Lives of Glenn Ford**

Glenn Ford, a popular American film star, under hypnosis was able to reveal and evoke memories of two previous lives, one as a Scotsman and one as a Frenchman. The lives dated all the way back to 1650. In one former life, Glenn revealed himself as a roguish cavalry officer who was killed in a duel after making amorous advances to a nobleman's lady. In another he was a music teacher who preferred the corral to the conservatory. In both of them, he had one thing in common with his present life, a deep seated love of horses.

The first previous life Ford recalled was that as a music teacher named Charles Stewart who was born in 1774, at Egin, Scotland and died there of consumption in 1812. Talking in a thick Scottish dialect, Charles Stewart spoke of teaching girls how to play the piano when he would have preferred to have been in the stable with his beloved horses. When Glenn listened to a tape of the session, he was not surprised by his Scottish accent, but he was amazed at his ability to play the piano. Under hypnosis when reliving the life as the music teacher he could play the difficult works of Beethoven and Mozart like an expert.

The second previous life Ford recalled was as a man called 'Launvaux' who was an officer of the elite Versailles horse cavalry at the time of Louis XIV of France (1643 -1715). Launvaux described himself as something of a dashing rake, and that he met a violent and early death, an event which he relived under hypnosis writhing in agony. Launvaux did not like the aristocracy of the times but fell in love with a woman who was a member of it. When her husband learned of the relationship, he arranged for an expert to insult Launvaux and provoke a duel which would end in the death of Launvaux. "Where I was pierced by the sword strangely enough, I have a birth-mark that hurts me still at times. This is unexplainable," remarked Glenn.

Glenn Ford is convinced that he has lived other lives and will live still others in the future. There is for instance, the blank space in his subconscious mind between the death of Launvaux in 1684 and the birth of Charles Stewart in 1774; plenty of time for another life or two.



Glenn Ford, a famous American actor who could recall two of his past lives



## **REBIRTH IDEAS IN ENGLISH POETRY**

### **"Hellos" by Shelly**

Worlds on worlds are rolling ever,  
From creation to decay,  
Like the bubbles in a river,  
Sparkling, bursting, borne away,  
But they are still immortal  
Who through birth's oriental portal  
And death's dark chasm hurry to and fro.

### **Visions of the Daughters of Albion by William Blake**

Tell me where dwell the thoughts forgotten till thou call them forth ?  
Tell me where dwell the joys of old? and where the ancient loves,  
And when they will renew again, and the night of oblivion past,  
That I might traverse times and spaces far remote, and bring  
Comforts into a present sorrow and a night 'of pain?

### **Poem by Dante Gabriel Rosseti**

I have been here before,  
But when or how I cannot tell,  
I know the grass beyond the door,  
The sighing sound, the lights beyond the shore,  
You have been mine before,  
How long ago I may not know.

### **Poem by John Masefield**

I hold that when a person dies,  
His soul returns again to earth,  
Arrayed in some new flesh disguise,  
Another mother gives him birth,  
With sturdier limbs and brighter brain,  
The old soul takes the roads again.

### **Light of Asia by Sir Edwin Arnold**

Who toiled a slave may come anew a prince,  
For gentleness and merit won,  
Who ruled a prince may wander earth in rags  
For things done and undone.

### **Addressed to an Infant by Dorothy Wordsworth**

Oh, sweet new-comer to the changeful earth,  
If, as some darkling seers have boldly guessed,  
Thou hadst a being and a human birth  
And wert erewhile by human parents blessed,  
Long, long before thy present mother pressed  
Thee, helpless stranger, to her fostering breast.

### **The Duchess of Malfi by Webster**

I know death hath ten thousand several doors  
For men to take their Exits; and 'tis found  
They go on such strange geometrical things,  
You may operate them both ways.

## CONCLUSION

Buddhists regard the doctrine of rebirth not as a mere theory but as a verifiable fact. The belief in rebirth forms a fundamental tenet of Buddhism.

However, the belief in rebirth is not confined to Buddhists; it is also found in other countries, in other religions, and even among free thinkers. Pythagoras could remember his previous birth. Plato could remember a number of his previous lives. According to Plato, man can be reborn up to 10 times. Plato also believed in the possibility of rebirth in the animal kingdom. Among the ancient people in Egypt and China, a common belief was that only well-known personalities like emperors and kings have rebirth. A well-known Christian authority named Origen, who lived 185-254 A.D., believed in rebirth. According to him, there is no eternal suffering in a hell. Gorana Bruno, who lived in the sixteenth century, believed that the soul of every man and animal transmigrates from one being to another. In 1788, a well-known philosopher, Kant, criticized eternal punishment. Kant also believed in the possibility of rebirth in other celestial bodies. Schopenhauer (1788-1860), another great philosopher, said that where the will to live existed, there must be of necessity life. The will to live manifests itself successively in ever new forms. The Buddha explained this 'will to exist' as the craving for existence.

It is possible but not very easy for us to actually verify our past lives. The nature of the mind is such that it does not allow most people the recollection of their previous lives. Our minds are overpowered by many mental hindrances. Because of these hindrances, our vision is earth-bound and hence we cannot visualise previous births, just as a mirror does not reflect an image when it is covered with dirt. We cannot see the

stars during day time, not because they are not there in the sky, but because they are outshone by the sunlight. Similarly, we cannot remember our past lives because our mind at present is always over-burdened with present, day-to-day events and mundane circumstances.

The Buddhists do not believe that the present life is the only life between two eternities of misery and happiness, nor do they believe that angels will carry them to heaven and leave them there for all eternity. They believe that this present life is only one of the indefinite numbers of states of being and that this earthly life is but one episode among many others. They believe that all beings will be reborn somewhere for a limited period of time as long as their good and bad kamma remains.

What is the cause of rebirth? The Buddha taught that ignorance produces desire. Unsatisfied desire is the cause of rebirth. When all unsatisfied desire is extinguished, then rebirth ceases. To stop rebirth is to extinguish all desire. To extinguish desire, it is necessary to destroy ignorance. When ignorance is destroyed, the worthlessness of every such rebirth, considered as an end in itself, is perceived, as well as the paramount need of adopting a course of life by which the need for such repeated births can be abolished.

How does rebirth take place? When this physical body is no more capable of functioning, energies do not die with it, but continue to take some other shape or form, which we call another life. The kammic force manifesting itself in the form of a human being can also manifest itself in the form of an animal. This force, called craving, desire, volition, thirst to live, does not end with the non-functioning of the body but continues to manifest itself on another form, with the co-operation of existing cosmic energies, producing re-existence which is called rebirth.

Yet today there are people in various countries of the world who have spontaneously developed memory of their past births. The experiences of these people have been well-documented in newspapers. Some of these people never accepted that there was such a thing as rebirth until memory fragments of their previous lives came to them. Much of the information they received about their past lives have been investigated and found to be valid.

## EDITOR'S NOTE:

The research on past lives and rebirth continues till this day. Once limited to Asia only, it is now researched worldwide as more evidences and cases of past recall lives appear in North America and Europe. Hypnotic regression into past lives are also possible today. You could go to many websites on this subject that is truly shaking the one life theory held by some religions which forms their core belief.

Read, research and explore these findings with an open mind in the spirit of the Kalama Sutta, the Buddhist Charter of Free Enquiry and Thought. The Buddha advocates us to be open minded, critical, inquisitive and test even his teachings. Homage to the Buddha, our Teacher for encouraging us not to be blinded by delusion and myth but to be open to the Truth. Homage to His Dhamma which becomes clearer by the day and stands the test of time and science to remain unrivalled and unchallenged. .

Many new books have since appeared too on the subject of past lives. Among them are:

1. *Life Before Life: A Scientific Investigation of Children's Memories of Previous Lives* by **Dr Jim B. Tucker**
2. *Old Souls: Compelling Evidence from Children Who Remember Past Lives* by **Thomas Shroder**
3. *European Cases of the Reincarnation Type* by **Dr Ian Stevenson**
4. *Where Reincarnation and Biology Intersect* by **Dr Ian Stevenson**
5. *Many Lives, Many Masters* by **Brian L. Weiss**
6. *Mirrors of Time: Using Regression for Physical, Emotional and Spiritual Healing* by **Brian L. Weiss**

**December 2007**

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- Sunday Dhamma Classes for Children & Adults
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- |  |                   |                      |
|--|-------------------|----------------------|
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| • Special Talk                         | Friday            | 1.00p.m.             |
| • Dhamma Talk                          | Friday            | 8.00p.m.             |
| • Meditation                           | Mon, Tues & Thurs | 8.00p.m.             |
| • Bojjhanga Puja                       | Saturday          | 7.30p.m. - 8.30p.m.  |
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