

Prarabdha and Punarjanma (reincarnation)

The doctrine of reincarnation is accepted by the majority of mankind of the present day. It has been held as true by the mightiest Eastern nations. The ancient civilization of Egypt was built upon this doctrine, and it was handed over to Pythagoras, Plato, and Ovid who scattered it through Greece and Italy. It is the keynote of Plato's philosophy when he says that all knowledge is reminiscence. The hundreds of millions of Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains have made this doctrine the foundation of their philosophy, religion, government and social institutions.

The doctrine of reincarnation is common to Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. What is reincarnation? Reincarnation is the doctrine that the soul enters this life not as fresh, but after a long course of previous existences, and will have to pass through many more before it reaches its final destination.

1. The soul

What possible motion in the brain causes the idea 'I am I'? This recognition of a real unit does not vary from the cradle to the grave. From childhood to old age, during the whole course of the total change of all brain-molecules the idea 'I am I' is undisturbed. This 'I am I' is soul. It is this soul which makes memory possible. It has its own consciousness and not the consciousness of anyone else, therefore it is a unit existing by itself. The law of the conservation of energy is true in the physical as well as in the spiritual world. Therefore, as no atom can be created or destroyed, so also no soul-entity can be created or destroyed. No powers in the universe can annihilate it.

2. The doctrine of reincarnation

This doctrine assists most when we look at the inequality and injustice and evil in the world and seek the solution. Why is one man born rich and another poor? What is the cause of this apparent injustice? Even those who have belief in the personal creator of the universe must believe in this doctrine of reincarnation in order to exonerate God from the charge of maliciousness.

But people may ask that if this doctrine is true, how is it that we do not

remember our past incarnations. In passing from one incarnation to the other, the soul does not carry its former brain in the new body. Even during the course of one life, do we always remember our past doing?

All experiences that you have had in various births remain in the form of impressions in the Chitta or subconscious mind. They remain in a very very subtle form, just as sound remains in a subtle form in a gramophone record.

3. Prarabdha karma

There are three kinds of Karma.

Sanchita are works which have been accumulated in several previous births; Prarabdha are those which have given the present life and have already started to bear fruit; and Agami(Kriyamana) are the works which are being done in this present life. They will bring fruits in a future life. The Sanchita and Agami are destroyed by getting Brahma Jnana or knowledge of the Self or God. But the Prarabdha can only be exhausted by experiencing their fruits in the present life.

A child is born blind, deaf or dumb—this is due to Prarabdha. One man dies at the age of ninety, another at thirty-five and the third at eighteen; this is due to Prarabdha. Instances like these can be multiplied ad infinitum. In all these cases Prarabdha operates unerringly with scientific accuracy and precision.

But the theory of Prarabdha cannot make anyone a fatalist. For a Bhakta it is all Prarabdha only; for he is a man of self-surrender. He has to glorify the power of the Lord. For a Vedantin it is all Purushartha only; for he is a man of self-reliance. He has to glorify the power of his own strong will. Both are correct from their own viewpoints.

4. The last powerful thought

The last powerful thought that occupies the mind of a man in his dying moment determines the nature of his next birth. You will find in the Gita.

“ Arjuna, that thought with which a dying man leaves the body determines his next state of being.”(8/6)

In every Hindu home the Names of God, such as Hari Om, Ram, Ram Narayan and Krishna are whispered into the ear of the dying man. The idea is that the dying man may remember the Name and form of the Lord and

thereby reach the blissful abode. If a man leads a virtuous life for many years, and if he does Japa and meditation for a lone time, then only, through the force of habit he will remember God and His Names at the moment of death.

5. Linga Sarira

Hindu scriptures say that a man become a Deva or a beast or a bird or vegetable or stone according to his merit or demerit. The Upanishads also corroborate this statement. Kapila also agrees on this point. When a man takes the form of a dog, the animal tendencies, habits, and Samskaras only will manifest. Human tendencies will remain suppressed. Some dogs get royal treatment in the palaces of kings. They move in the cars, eat good food and sleep on cushions. These are all degenerated beings.

After death this physical body, composed of five elements, is cast off like a slough or the coil of a snake. The inner astral body or Linga Sarira, which consists of nineteen Tattvas, viz, five Karma Indriyas, five Jnana Indriyas, five Pranas, mind, Buddhi, Chitta and Ahamkara, goes to heaven, comes back to the physical plane, puts on another physical body and reincarnates. It is this body that contains the impressions of Karmas. This body remains till one gets knowledge of the Self and consequent emancipation. Then it disintegrates and the components get involved in the ocean of Tanmatras.

6. Conclusion

The notion of punar-janma is associated with the idea, first expressed in the Brihad-Aranyaka-Upanishad (4.4.5), that the quality of one's being is determined by the quality of one's actions, so that the doer of good deeds become good, whereas the doer of evil becomes evil. The doctrine of reincarnation extends the idea beyond the orbit of the present lifetime. The connecting link between the various embodiments are karma.

The ultimate purpose of yoga is to escape this never ending cycle of births and deaths, to put a stop to the generation and fruition of karma, and to awaken, to one's identity as the transcendental Self (Atman).