

Cycle of Rebirth

(by Sri. Ulpiano Manlangit)

Part 1

The theory of re-birth is almost as ancient as thought itself and some accept it as the fruit of ancient psychological experience. As this doctrine is as old as human thought itself, it is likely to endure as long as human being continue to think.

The philosophical appreciation of the theory, the Greek word metempsychosis means the insouling of a new body by the same psychic individual. But since the word is long and pedantic it has to be abandoned. Reincarnation is now the popular term, but the idea in the word leans to the gross or external view of the fact and begs many questions. Some mystics prefer re-birth for it renders the sense of wide, colourless, but sufficient meaning and referring to the Sanskrit term, '*punarjanma*', "*again birth*" thus commits to us to nothing but the fundamental idea which is the essence and life of the doctrine.

Re-birth has never been proven by the methods of modern science, neither has it been disproved, for modern science knows nothing about a life-before- or a life-after for the human soul, its domain stops with the flesh, brain and nerve, the embryo and its formation and development. Modern science has neither any apparatus by which the truth or untruth of rebirth can be established. The person who expects to weigh, measure and register spiritual things by physical standard has nothing but disappointment and failure before him, for he will never receive the proof he seeks. Physical apparatus is intended for physical objects only - the world of spirit has its own set of apparatus, which alone is capable of registering its phenomena.

The purpose of our study of the tenets of rebirth is to try to understand the nature of this cycle/ wheel of births and deaths to which the soul is bound through its long human life; to see where it turns, and how; to understand how the bond that binds the soul to it may be loosened, may be broken; to see what is the change in the soul by the breaking of the bonds, by the loosening of the chains; and lastly to understand what are the means for the loosening, how this soul, bound on the wheel is to seek out its liberty, its freedom, because it is Brahman.

In the Upanishads the word wheel is used over and over again, that there is a recurring repetition of a certain sequence of events. As the wheel turns, as every part of it in turn is uppermost, and any spot you may choose on it will return to the place where you originally observed it, so it is with the births and deaths in this wheel of Brahman that we are bound. The pilgrim-Self travels from his particularity and samskaras to the Universality of the Universal "I", and the Self is the Hamsa (one who travels along the road) who is continually traveling in the infinite Brahman-wheel, which is the Universe.

The revolving wheel is revolved by God, and on God; it revolves by the splendour of the Supreme, it does not move by its own nature: "By the splendour of the Supreme, the Brahman-wheel revolves (Shvetashvatara, vi, 1.). Thus the idea of continual revolution of all things, a recurring sequence, a Universe revolving by the divine impulse, impelled by love and propelled by the law of karma, founded on the divine nature, and to that wheel of the Universe, the pilgrim-souls are bound; bound not by

their own nature, which is freedom, but bound by the vehicles into which they have entered for the gaining of experience. It must always be remembered that it is only the vehicles, which are bound. It is as though you were chained not by your limbs but only by your clothes, our wondering, our pilgrims are not bound. You cannot bind the Jivatma any more than you can bind the sunlight; but the shadow, which the sunlight throws, is bound to the wheel of births and deaths.

Where does the wheel of births and death revolve? It revolves within the vaster wheel of the Universe as we have just discussed, and the revolutions of this wheel are confined within the three worlds. The succession of births and deaths is only through the three worlds familiar to us as the Triloki. There are three worlds, the physical plane, the astral and the mental or devachanic plane. On the last plane, the mental has a dividing line therein in the recurrence of births and deaths that is the lower and higher mental plane. The arupa sub-planes are divided into three planes and the rupa are four; the wheels of births and deaths do not enter the upper three, the arupa, the formless. The three lower - the mental, astral and physical disintegrate under the sway of death and these only are subject to birth and death. Death does not mean only death on the physical plane but death on the successive planes. On each, the body belonging to it, is disintegrated after death, leaving only one particle, the permanent atom, in which the experience of the body is preserved. The wheel turns, then in the three worlds.

Mortal plane - where the wheel turns	Immortal Plane
LOWER MENTAL PLANE	ATMIC
ASTRAL PLANE	BUDDHIC
PHYSICAL PLANE	CAUSAL OR UPPER MENTAL

Fig 1 – The mortal & immortal plane

In order to gain a comprehensive knowledge of the regions or realms of life after death one will need to study in detail the nature and activity of each of these planes of life after death. Figure 1 shows the mortal or the lower three planes and the immortal part of life. There are however seven such planes or realms of life – Adi, Anupadic, atmic, buddhic, mental (consisting of causal and lower mental), astral and the physical plane.

1	ADI – first Cause
2	ANUPADIC – MONAD
3	ATMIC
4	BUDDHIC
5a	CAUSAL OR UPPER MENTAL
5b	LOWER MENTAL PLANE
6	ASTRAL
7	PHYSICAL

Fig 2 – Planes of Life after Death.

The life on the other side of the grave is the land where there are no tears, no sighs, where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage, and where one gets the opportunity to realise oneself to one's full perfection. Adi means first. The Adi plane refers to the first cause, the divine light, the first plane, the undivided Lord, the Father or the Creator, it is from this plane that the forming of the other realms and further creative activity takes place. Next one must note the origination of the Monads or units of consciousness, for whose evolution in matter the field of a universe is prepared. These units of consciousness are generated within the divine life on the Adi Plane before the field for their evolution is formed. Thus the many arise in the one by that act of will of the divine life, the first cause or God on the Adi plane. The Monads are described as sparks of the Supreme Flame. The Flame is the Lord or Ishwara in His manifestation as the first cause on the Adi plane and the undetached sparks are the Monads. A Monad may thus be defined as a fragment of the divine life, separated off as an individual entity by the rarest film of matter, matter so rare that, while it gives a separate form to each, it offers no obstacle to the free intercommunication of a life, thus encased, with surrounding similar lives. A monad is consciousness plus matter. The Monad is the Jivatma of Indian philosophy, the Purusha of the Samkya, the particularised self of the Vedanta. Whilst the roots of their life are in the Adi plane, the Monads themselves dwell on the Anupadaka plane. No English equivalent exists for Anupadaka, which means without vesture or without clothing or without any additional veil. The Monads are in tune with and respond to the divine vibrations of the Adi plane, but are not in tune with and do not respond to the vibrations of the lower planes, whereas the divine light or Lord or Father of the Adi plane is in tune with the vibrations of all the lower planes. These Units of Consciousness, known as Monads has not yet been made perfect through suffering. Hence each of the Monads is to go forth into matter in order to be sown in weakness that he may be raised in power. Whilst omniscient, omnipresent on his own plane – the Anupadaka – he is unconscious, senseless on all the others, he is to veil his glory in matter that blinds him, in order that he may become omniscient, omnipresent, on all planes, able to answer all divine vibrations in the universe, instead of only to those of the highest levels. As the Monads derive their being from the Divine Light or Father or the Lord of the Adi plane, the will of the Lord or Father to manifest is also the will of the Monads. Hence the whole process of the evolution of the individual 'I' is an activity chosen by the Monads themselves. We are here in the world of matter, because we as Monads, willed to live, we are Self-moved, Self determined.

Why? and How? Why –because each world has its own function in the unfolding of the Jivatmic powers, and the shaping of the bodies through which these powers are expressed; we remember that these bodies are the shadow of which the Jivatma is the sunlight. On the lowest plane, the consciousness is developed to the point where it is definite, clear and precise; where the outlines are fully seen, where there is no blurring, where everything is shaped, defined and clear. He is here for this and for gathering of experience to be used up for growth and unfolding in the next two worlds.

Out of this world he passes by death and enters the next world, the astral world. What does he do there? Carrying with him in his memory all the life, which he has lived on the physical plane, he begins to learn the results of what he did on the physical plane. He experiences many a bitter pain as an outcome of folly, of ignorance, of evil doing, in the mortal world and a great part, indeed, does Kamaloka play in his early tuition; many of his primary lessons are given most effectively in that bitter school. For with

him every animal craving he has fostered during his earthly life remains with him as a craving that can not be satisfied in Kamaloka. Thus he learns that he must conquer this animal in him, that it may not gnaw (eat) him after the death of the body. That part of the experience garnered, he passes on into mental plane a peaceful and a happy dwelling-place, and thence into the third world, the higher mental plane. There he has only available mental body as his vehicle of consciousness, with everything that contains - his memories of the past, his thoughts, his emotions, his nobler desires, all those activities which make up our conscious mental life in the three worlds; those are his possessions in the world of the Devas. And they're looking back over the past, he begins to work for the future. He changes his experiences into faculties, which he will exercise in the next life on the physical plane. And when all this is over, when all the ear of the harvest sown in the physical world has been reaped, when the fruits have been eaten and nothing remains which has not been assimilated by the Jivatma; then he casts away the emptied mental body and hands the whole results on to his permanent vehicle, the true manasic body whilst the now useless lower vehicle is scattered, and goes back to the reservoir of thought-stuff, of mental matter. Only the results of the mental experiences are handed down to the receptacle, the Karana Sharira of the Atma. Then comes the time for rebirth into the physical world, and the will to live in the physical world awakens. Ichchha, now desire for physical life, is the impulse which draws another, a new mental body and a new astral body round their respective permanent particles, and then a new physical body for a fresh sowing, a fresh gaining of experience. Such is the working of the wheel in each of the three world, and such its purpose - the gathering of experience, the suffering of the results of evil experience, and the enjoying of the fruitage of the experience of good, assimilated for fuller and richer sowing on the return to earth. Such the logical sequence, such the value of each of the worlds in which the cycle/ wheel is turning. Hence the necessity of births and deaths, every birth is coming into a world and every death is a passing out of a world. We die out on the world of Devas to be born again into this mortal world. Birth and death are only phrases, used to mark the succession of experiences in the three worlds.

1	ADI PLANE	
2	ANUPADKA PLANE	MONADS
3	ATMIC PLANE	ATMIC BODY
4	BUDDHIC PLANE	BUDDHIC BODY
5A 5B	UPPER MENTAL OR CAUSAL PLANE LOWER MENTAL PLANE	CAUSAL BODY MENTAL BODY
6	ASTRAL PLANE	ASTRAL BODY
7	PHYSICAL PLANE	PHYSICAL BODY

Fig 3 – Man’s Corresponding Bodies/vehicles to the Planes of Life.

The next stage is the forming of the 5 lower planes i.e. atmic, buddhic, mental (consisting of causal and lower mental), astral and the physical plane. This stage of development also brings with it evolved beings, at various stages of development, who form the normal and typical inhabitants of these planes. These beings have been brought over by the divine light, which manifests the Adi plane from a preceding evolution. They are now sent forth to inhabit the plane for which their development fits them, they co-operate with the work of the divine light or Lord and later with man in the general scheme of evolution. There are many grades of these beings known by

different names in various religions for example the Angels of Christianity or the Dewas or shining ones of the Hindus. The 330 million Gods of the Vedas belong to this category. These beings of various grades inhabit the various planes below the Anupadaka plane.

As the ego has exhausted the causes that carried him into the davachan and the experiences gathered have been wholly assimilated, the ego begins to feel again the thirst for sentient material life that can only be gratified on the physical plane. The thirst is known by the Hindus as *trishna*.

The soul falling into the second soul slumber is caught up by the currents of the Karmic attraction and is carried on toward re-birth in an environment, and with ties, in accordance with the sum total of its character and desires. Our character is the sum total of our desires, therefore Desires is the motive power of Karma and through Karma our re-births. Karma is the law of spiritual cause and effect, we are punished not because of our sins but by them; we are rewarded not because of our good deeds but by them. In short our reward and punishment arise by the very nature of our character.

Those who are re-born on earth is not reborn against there will or desire. They are re-born because they actually desire it; their tastes and desires have created longings that can be satisfied only by renewed life in the flesh. As long as desire remains alive it tends to attract the soul towards object and environment which is likely to satisfy it. This principle applies to the soul on the Astral plane as well as on earth life. It is only when the soul begins to see the worthlessness and illusory of earthly desires after many earth lives, that it begins to become attracted to the higher nature of life and escaping the flowing current of earthly re-birth.

Desires, high or low are the seeds of action and the impulse toward action is the distinguishing feature of desire. Desire wants always to 'have thing', or to 'do things', or to be things. Love, even of the most unselfish kind is a form of desire so is aspiration of noblest kind. A desire to benefit others is as much a desire as its opposite. In fact many unselfish souls are drawn back into re-birth simply because of insistent aspirations to accomplish some great work for the race, or to serve others, or to fulfill some duty inspired by love. But high or low, if these desires are connected in any way with the things of earth, they are re-birth motives and rudders.

All the powers of the desire-nature have to be drawn out, hence man is plunged into a world of full of objects which awakens desires, and on tasting them he feels pleasure and pain. These experiences influence rebirth. *Man is said to be "desire-formed"*, shaped up desire, and again, that a man's desire carry him to the place where the forms are found which gratify those desires. He becomes attached to worldly objects attained by himself, and having arrived at the last works which he performed, he goes from one world to another. So long as these desires exist he wanders from world to world. How then is he to get away from this continual wandering, if he must go his desires lead him. We must remember that desires for astral things, guide him to the astral world, or to heaven, as much as the desire for the physical objects leads him back to the world; desires for objects in the astral world bind him with stronger chain, are more subtle than those that bind us here; and if we desire the joys of heaven, the gladness of God, these are still stronger, still more subtle, and by all these we are

bound to the cycle of births and deaths. Hence it is written in the Kathopanishad: *“when all the desires refuge in the heart are loosened, then the mortal becomes immortal and so we begin to realise that these desires must be in some way shaken off”*. **All desires have to be destroyed except the desire of the Self, that one desire must remain, for that is the nature of the Self. The love of the Self for itself is its own very nature; and that remains in the sunlight when all the shadows of desire for the lower worlds have gone. The desires that here you know, belongs to the bodies and pass with the bodies; the desire for the Self ever remains and by that which leads to Self-realisation and you become immortal.**

Now let us turn to thought, which manifest as mind, the aspect of consciousness in the mental body. *Man is thought-made*. For each aspect of the Self created its own form. Hence desire or will-formed, thought-formed and activity formed is man. As he thinks in this world, so he becomes in the next world. Therefore, let him think on Brahman, **Right thought is the way to the breaking the bonds which are woven by wrong thought. So long as we think of ourselves as the body, we shall be bound in the body; so long as we think of ourselves as the mind, we shall be bound in the mind; so long as we think of ourselves as the lower, we shall remain in the lower. So also when we think of ourselves as the Self, we shall become the Self.** Not by the eye may he be seized, nor by the voice, nor by the senses, nor by tapas (devotion, penance or asceticism), nor rites; but *by meditation he is seen*, the partless, when the intellect is purified by limpid wisdom. This subtle Self is to be known by the intelligence, every mind of creatures by the lives (senses) is pervaded; in this is purified, the Self reveals himself (Mundaka, III, i, 89).

The third aspect is of Kriya, activity, resulting in works. *The Self is activity-made*, as well as will-made. **And to get rid of this chain of works, he must know that it is not he who works, but the Self that is working in him. When the works become sacrifices, their binding nature is destroyed.**

Understanding at least partly the theory of the binding to the wheel of births and deaths, by the chains of desire, of thought, and of activity, we must ask: how shall liberation be attained? The Upanishad tells us of the relation between sleep and death, that when in sleep we see a man lying bereft of speech, of sight, and so on, all his faculties have withdrawn into Prana, and carried out of the body into another world. When he wakes, as sparks go out in all directions from the blazing fire, so from the Self the Pranas go forth to their several stations in the physical body. The return of the Self with the Pranas is then the waking from sleep. It is the symbol of waking from death.

In order that we may have courage to go through the long struggle of births and deaths, the Upanishad declares that “That the Self is to be known”. For man cannot work for that which he feels to be entirely out of reach, and he must first gain the conviction that the finding of the Self is possible, before he will enter the path at the end of which he will win his freedom. The first step that is given in the Kathopanishad is that: No man may find the Self who has not “ceased from evil ways”. The second step is: So long as a man follows an evil way and loves it, so long as the Self is hidden from him by the cloud that he may not pierce; he must see wrong as wrong, he must recognise it, must repudiate it, must say: “It is not I”. And when he has so repudiated evil, he must subdue his senses, he must concentrate his intellect. Intellectual appreciation with purity and self-control can mean the realisation of the Self? A man

who has not ceased from evil does not attain the Self, even by knowledge. The means of obtaining the Self are “restraint, subdual work. Restraint of the desires; subdual of the mind; work for the purification of the body; when a man is thus striving, then he may understand the steps in his own nature by which he rises. He must learn to separate himself from the whole desire-nature: *“This is not I”*; and he must say it by life as well as lips. Then he must learn to say of the ever-wandering mind: *“This is not I”*; and must learn this by concentration, by meditation, by fixing the thoughts, and thus free himself from its bondage. And then comes the body of knowledge, as it is called Buddhi, the Pure Reason; he must learn to say this: *“This is not I”*, great as it is. Then he obtains the body of Atma, Aham, which is the place of joy; and even of that he must say: *“This is not I”*, for the “I” must go. The time comes when he says only: ***“The Self is all”***. The stages therefore to follow are: Free yourself from the senses, by identifying yourself with the mind. Then repudiate the mind by identifying yourself with Buddhi, the Reason. Then repudiate Buddhi, and identify yourself with Atma. Repudiate even that as a shadow, and identify yourself with the Monad, the true Jivatma. And then casting that away, identify yourself with Ishvara, the Supreme. It is written that when a man beholds Ishvara, he obtains the highest identity.

The thinking, which is effective, is the thought, which identifies itself with the life and not the form. And it must not be the saying, but the living which means that in the midst of the body we live as though bodiless; that all the movements of the outer objects lying around us, which gives joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, which elate and which depress, which encourage and which menace, that all these cease to have any power, because we say by our life, not by our lips;” The senses are not myself, *I am not they”*.

Many have reached the stage where they can say that things do not attract them, but few are they who can say that nothing repels them, and they must no more repel than attract. For repulsion is as much a bond on the self as is attraction, and while you are repelled by any living thing, you are not free. You are still, by repulsion, under the domination of outer objects; you have not identified yourself with them.

We judge the path of others far better that we confine ourselves to our own path, and try to tread that aright; when I say of my brother that he follows an evil path and therefore that he should be despised and condemned, am I not seeing the outer and not the inner? His Self may know that the path which to me is evil is the path which is needed to give him the experience that he lacks: perchance, until he has had that experience he is bound and not free, and the Self chooses that path in order that experience may be gained which shall break some fetter that still binds him.

He who likes to hear unkind criticism and cruel gossip, and he, who will not see the Self in all, cannot expect that the shadow will begin to fall away, and allow the glory of the Self to be a little more visible.

The truly practical comes out of the metaphysical, in that out of right thinking comes right living, and out of right understanding comes right loving. In truth, the trues thinking means the truest living. Thought must be free and unfettered, otherwise you will have stagnation and death. If you think falsely, you will, you will act mistakenly; if you think basely, your conduct will suit your thinking. So think your noblest, your highest, your purest. Think the best you can not the worst. Aim high, for the higher the arrow is aimed, the higher the marks it hits. Keep your own ideals lofty, while you

keep your judgment of others charitable; and your ideals shall lift you, and your charity shall raise your fallen brother. For never yet a man rise by being trampled on. Man only rises by being loved in the midst of his sins and follies, and as we deal with our brethren, Jesus Christ said: love your neighbours as yourself, so do Those who are above us deal with our outer selves. Finally with the words of the Upanishad: “ The embodied Self, beholding his real nature, obtains his true end, and every pain ceaseth” (Shvetashvatara,ii,14).