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UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM

KARMA AND REBIRTH

The Doctrine of Karma and Rebirth in the Upanisads, early Buddhism and the Bhagavad Gita

Barbara K. Menzie

Thesis submitted for the Degree of Master of Arts

1987

ABSTRACT

This work collates most of what was written in relation to karma and rebirth in the Upanisads, early Buddhist sources, and the Bhagavadgītā.

Attention has been paid to the implications of the psychological aspects of the doctrine and an attempt made to discover, through the writings, the perspective of the people of the times. The writer has searched the sources for areas where there may be similarities or otherwise. Comparing original versions of the relevant Sanskrit sources with existing translations, the writer found certain inadequacies in them and tried to explain the issues raised thereby.

In seeking to trace the origins of the doctrine she took account of hints pointing to the Vedic hymns.

Within each of the stated themes, the Upanisads are dealt with as far as possible in what is believed to be their chronological order. When examining the early Buddhist sources, she sought to ascertain what it was that the Buddha taught in relation to karma and rebirth by using the many birth stories to try to tease out the message. The Bhagavadgītā, with its emphasis on right action, is clear and concise in the way in which it spells out the doctrine and the emotional battle played out by Arjuna gives a graphic description of the process. Throughout, the writer has sought to identify the intrinsic factor which continues from life to life and the determinants which shape the future of the person in the process of rebirth.

## KARMA AND REBIRTH

The Doctrine of Karma and Rebirth in the Upanisads, early Buddhism and the Bhagavad Gita

Barbara K. Menzie

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of the  
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## CONTENTS

<u>CONTENTS</u>	1
<u>Part 1</u>	
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	4
<u>Part 2</u>	
<u>KARMA AND REBIRTH IN THE UPANIŞADS</u>	7
Brāhmaṇas and Kṣatriyas	10
The Three Styles of Upaniṣadic Literature	11
Preliminary Discussion of Vijñāna, Vidyā and Pūrva-Prajñā	14
Desire, Attachment and Bliss	20
The Inner Being - Ātman and ātman	25
What Happens after the Death of a Person	27
The Two Ways	28
The Process of Birth	29
The Operation of Karma	31
The Naciketas Story. Morality, Rituals and Sacrifices	34
What Becomes of this Person?	40
Control of the Mind	43
Transmigration	45
The Intelligential and Elemental Self	46

Spirituality and Will 48

Part 3

KARMA AND REBIRTH IN EARLY BUDDHIST SOURCES 50

Siddhartha Gautama, His Early Life and the Four Signs 50

The Supreme Quest and the Enlightenment. The First Sermon 50

The Teaching of the Buddha 51

The Five Khandhas 53

Birth Stories. Is there a Permanent Self? 56

The Fire Story; The Pot of Milk Story 57

The Story of the Mangoes 58

Jennings' Treatment of Karma and Rebirth 58

The Queen who wished to obtain Wealth, Beauty and Social Order 59

As One Is, So Will One Become 60

A Comparison with the Ideas Expressed  
in the Vedas and the Upaniṣads 61

The Transcendental Force or Causal Tier 63

The Subtle Tier 64

The Transitional Stage 66

The Buddhist Doctrine of Karma 67

The New Existence Springs from the Old 68

The Causes and Dependence of Name and Form 70

The Four-fold Divisions of Karma 73

Past, Present and Future 76

Death - Natural and Untimely 77

Fruitful and Inefficient Karma 78

The Death of Mogallâna	79
Good and Bad Karma	80
Desire and Attachment	81
The Buddha's Belief in Moral Responsibility	82

Part 4

<u>KARMA AND REBIRTH IN THE BHAGAVADGĪTĀ</u>	84
The Origins of the Gîtâ	84
The Style	85
Renunciation of Desire	86
The Nature and Mechanism of Karma	88
Individual Differences	89
The Natural Laws of the Universe: Appropriate Behaviour	90
Passage through Different Worlds	93
What is it that passes on?	94
The Determinants which Prescribe the Future	95
A Creative Force Bound by Ignorance	97
The Maintenance of the Universe	98
Human Embodiment is Involuntary	100
<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u>	102

## INTRODUCTION

It is thought that the Aryan people originated from somewhere in what we now call the steppes of southern Russia. They migrated east and west and by the second millenium BC had advanced through the Hindukush, conquered northwestern India and formed small kingdoms and republics. Successive waves of migrants behind them caused these adventurous people to move further south and eastwards. India was beginning to take shape as a people, a society and a culture. Tribal life had given way to more complex social forms. The social class structure of priests, warriors, farmer-merchants and a lower serving class, which had its origins in the Vedas, was being asserted. Although compared with later times compliance with social custom was still reasonably easy going, it was becoming stricter. There was the establishment of law codes which directed the proper order of human life. The laws of Manu, the Dharmasutras and the Grihasutras were composed at this time. The Hymn period was over and the Upaniṣads were still new. The epics of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana existed in primitive form. The Gitâ is set within the Mahabharata, but since it is incongruent with that work, it is said to be inserted text. Since it is written in the form of conversation, which would have taken many hours, one can only assume that it was formulated in different circumstances and added at a later date because it was valued. In spite of - or arguably, because of - all the expansion and growth of civilisation taking place, the people of India experienced the sorrow inherent in the human condition. Whilst this had been experienced by people in other societies it is arguable that the awareness in India at

this time was greater and deeper than it had been anywhere before. If this were the case, it is possible that human beings experienced themselves, at a spiritual level, as being confined, alienated and disrupted in the phenomenal world. It was all experienced as an endless, sorrowful cycle of birth, death and rebirth, samsāra.

The following study is an attempt to examine the evidence found in the Upaniṣads, early Buddhist works and the Bhagavadgītā of the teaching at that time on karma and rebirth. The literature has been explored for direct and indirect references to these concepts and an effort has been made to understand the underlying causes of the changes which occurred between the teaching's being the esoteric knowledge of forest sages and very few philosophically-minded priests and their becoming the popularised and universally accepted basis of Indian religious thought.

Karma is defined as the natural law of causal relationships. It is sometimes referred to as the law of sowing and reaping. As one sows, so one reaps. One becomes good through good works and evil through evil works. The nearest analogy in modern terms is the language of physics where the strong argument would be Newton's third law. This states that every action has an opposite and equal reaction.

In the Upaniṣads is to be found the first authoritative commentary on the doctrine, although there were hints in the Vedas. The ideas would have been around in popular form for some considerable time and it is easy to postulate that from the time man developed self-consciousness he must have wondered whence he came and whither he went.

Buddhism placed an emphasis on the ethical aspects of the doctrine and played an important role in popularising the teachings.

The Bhagavadgītā derives its main inspiration from the Upaniṣads and is arguably the definitive work on karma yoga. It epitomises the thought and emotions of the people of its time.

For consistency of reference when quoting from the Upaniṣads, all references and text are as found in The Principal Upaniṣads, Radhakrishnan (1953), except where specifically stated otherwise.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE REFERENCES TO KARMA AND REBIRTH IN THE UPANIŞADS  
AS TRANSLATED BY HUME AND BY RADHAKRISHNAN

The Upaniṣads can be said to have dominated Indian philosophical thought, religion and life for a period of some two-and-a-half thousand years. Post-upaniṣadic religions in India had to show accord with their philosophical statements. Upaniṣadic influence spread far and wide, affecting the cultural life of other nations, from China, Japan, Tibet, Korea, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), the Malayan peninsula, and the Indian and Pacific Oceans in the east, to Central Asia and Europe in the west. It is said that the great German philosopher, Schoppenhauer, kept a Latin text of the Upaniṣads beside his bed and declared there to be "no study so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Upaniṣads". In ancient times it was the tradition for groups of people to gather round a teacher for instruction, and the word upaniṣad can be split into three syllables; upa, meaning near; ni, meaning down; and ṣad, meaning to sit - literally, to sit down near. These groups would study problems of the deepest concern. A striking, but not unique, feature of this instruction was that a student had to prove his worthiness by persistence of endeavour before anything would be imparted. So we have such directions as,

"Verily, a father may teach this Brahma to his eldest son or a worthy pupil. And to no-one else....."

(Chând. Up. III. 12. 5 and 6)



and

".....let no-one declare this most secret doctrine to anyone who is not a son, who is not a pupil, who is not of a tranquil [mind]....." (Maitri. Up. IV. 29)

There are numerous other such instructions. Thus the Upaniṣads became identified with mystery and secrets which were passed on only to a tested few. (The Philosophy of the Upaniṣads, Deussen [1906])

Although the number may exceed two hundred, there are said to be thirteen principal Upaniṣads. Śankara commented on eleven and Radhakrishnan on eighteen. Like all early Indian literature they were anonymous, although some texts have become associated with the renowned sages who had become exponents each of certain of the doctrines contained therein. Teachers and pupils discussed and defined different views when they gathered together in pariṣads or spiritual retreats. The era of the Upaniṣads was that of a highly developed civilisation and can be compared in terms of development to the pre-technological age of modern history. We are considering a time which ran from somewhere around 700BC to between 400 and 300BC. It was an age of great stability which, not unreasonably, was accompanied by a deeply entrenched reliance on tradition. The Upaniṣads were part of the Veda and as such belonged to śruti, or revealed literature. They are said to be timeless, originally emanating from God, or visioned by seers. The Vedas were composed by the seers when they were in a state of being inspired by God. Man contemplated and God revealed. The Upaniṣads come at the end of the Vedic period and are the concluding portions of the Vedas, that is,

Vedanta, which means literally the end of the Vedas, although the word is now used for the system of philosophy based on the Upaniṣads. The Veda was a whole literature, most of which is now lost, and was a product of many centuries. This literature was handed down from generation to generation. There was no written word during this time and, because of this, memory was strong, tradition exact, and the knowledge was passed on orally. Veda comes from the root word vid, which means to know, knowledge, par excellence, sacred wisdom. From all this we can deduce that there was not only great stability during the time of the origination and transmission of the Vedas, but also an aura of spiritual enquiry and a deep desire for understanding. Unlike the Vedic hymns, where the accent was on the inter-relationships of, and meditation on, the wonders of the outside world, the Upaniṣads specialise in intra-relationships and philosophical speculation. Meditation is on the metaphysical based on the mystic approach and the significance of the self. One is entreated to undertake a quest into one's innermost nature to discover one's inner essence or being. Sacrifices are declared to be inferior and ritualistic religion is criticised. Truth is within oneself.

The ideas that are being voiced in the Upaniṣads came from the Vedas. The teachers were either the families who carried out priestly functions or from those who were of royal blood. There tended not to be a strong demarcation between the castes in many tribes, although in some it would have been clearer than in others. It would not have been uncommon for the king to have also held the role of high priest. Those who were from the priestly caste were called brahmaris̥is̥ and those from the princely caste were rajaris̥is̥. Since both of these groups of people would be

involved in the life of society there would be an almost inevitable degeneration of the spiritual life. To avoid this a third group of people kept themselves apart. They lived a life of renunciation and were referred to as the silent sages or munis. They passed on their pure spiritual achievement to disciples who had adopted their lifestyle and in this way their teaching was preserved.

### Brāhmanas and Kṣatriyas

In the Upanisads we have references to teachers from both Brāhmana and Kṣatriya castes functioning within the framework of society. Because of the nature of each caste's role in society, each would have its own characteristic contribution to make to the development of thinking through its teaching. The Brāhmanas, coming from the priestly caste, had duties and responsibilities which were in respect of the spiritual welfare of the people. Whilst on the face of it one might expect that to include preparation for death, it would probably be reasonable to assume that these priests had evolved a fairly structured and formalised relationship with their flocks, and that any teaching or preparation for life after death would involve merely the practice of rituals and sacrifice. The knowledge was presented in mythological form and its spiritual message was that award commensurate with one's life came after death. Once a civilisation has developed to the point where relative luxury is available for most of the populace, the tendency is for spiritual matters to be left to specialists. However, as time passes people get tired of rituals and one can visualise that when this situation arose during the period under

discussion matters would be discussed at court where the predominating influence would be that of the Kṣatriyas.

The background of the Kṣatriyas was very different from that of the Brāhmaṇas. In Brhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad 1. 4. 14, the Kṣatriyas are clearly defined as the custodians of justice and truth. It is dharma or the rule of law which ensures that the weak enjoy justice. Dharma is the embodiment of truth and all are subordinate to it. This responsibility apart, the Kṣatriyas were the warrior caste. Surrounding this role in society would be a general ethos of adventure. Being closely acquainted with death they would have been highly motivated towards enquiring about, and seeking an understanding of death. Their leaders would also have been motivated to providing an approximate and convenient explanation of death and would have had a pragmatic approach to it.

### The Three Styles of Upaniṣadic Literature

The earliest Upaniṣads list ideas which had been circulating for centuries. In those times ideas were expressed through metaphors rather than through concepts and we do not know the extent to which they were taken literally. It is not possible to state a precise chronological order of succession among the Upaniṣads. They came about as a result of activity of the different Vedic schools and the intercourse which took place between those schools. Since all the principal Upaniṣads contain earlier and later elements side by side, one has to attempt to determine the age of each separate piece according to the development of the thought

to be found expressed in it. Deussen followed Müller in demonstrating that there are three approximate divisions of time which can be applied when treating the Upaniṣads as a whole, and these divisions have since been confirmed by such authors as Radhakrishnan and Keith. They are:-

I. The Ancient Prose Upaniṣads

Brhad-āraṇyaka

Chândogya

Taittiriya

Aitareya

Kaushitaki

Kena

These are the Vedanta texts of the existing Vedic schools, the earlier parts being closely interwoven with Brâhmaṇas and Araṇyakas. The language is almost entirely that of the Brâhmaṇas and, although stilted, has a natural charm.

II. The Metrical Upaniṣads

Kaṭha

Īśā

Śvetâśvatara

Muṇḍaka

Mahânârâyaṇa

There is a great difference between this period and the one preceding it. The traditional ties with the ancient Vedic schools seem to have been lost and the symbolic narration of the Aranyakas has also gone. We find that there is a constant recurrence of individual verses and characteristic phrases. Almost throughout, the language is metrical.

### III. The Later Prose Upaniṣads

Praśna

Maitrī

Māṇḍūkya

The prose used in these writings is very different from that of the ancient Upaniṣads. It does not have the archaic style and is more like that of the late Sanskrit prose, being complex and repetitious. (Deussen [1906] pp 23-26)

In terms of the language used, the earlier Upaniṣads seem to have been written more explicitly than the later ones. This suggests a greater degree of shared internal representations during later times, which is probably a reasonable expectation.

### Preliminary Discussion of Vijñāna, Vidyā and Pūrva-Prajñā

In order to clear up any ambiguities which exist with regard to the true meaning that lies behind some of the concepts involved when studying the ancient writings, it is proposed to take a closer look at some words which have been treated differently by different translators and/or interpreters.

In the first and second verses of the fourth Brāhmaṇa in the Brhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad, the process of death is described, emphasising the gradual withdrawal of the senses. When life has departed from the body, the soul, or the self, finally departs. The soul leaves the body at death according to its perception, desires and attachments in the life then ending. It is no longer in the grip of the mortal body, but is part of the great life-force pervading the universe. However it is not necessarily free. It is in the power of that which has departed earthly form with it - namely experience, knowledge and past work. Radhakrishnan has translated these verses as set out immediately below, but there are differences of opinion between him, Hume and Werner with regard to the latter part of verse 4. 4. 2.

4. 4. 1        "When this self gets to weakness, gets to confusedness, as it were, then the breaths gather round him. He takes unto himself those particles of light and descends into the heart. When the person in the eye turns away, he becomes non-knowing of forms."

4. 4. 2 "He is becoming one, he does not see, they say; he is becoming one, he does not taste, they say; he is becoming one, he does not speak, they say; he is becoming one, he does not hear, they say; he is becoming one, he does not think, they say; he is becoming one, he does not touch, they say; he is becoming one, he does not know, they say. The point of his heart becomes lighted up and by that light the self departs either through the eye or through the head or through other apertures of the body. And when he thus departs all the vital breaths depart after it. He becomes one with intelligence. [sa vijñāno bhavati:] What has intelligence departs with him. [sa vijñānam evānvavakrāmati:] His knowledge and his work take hold of him as also his past experience. [taṁ vidyākarmaṇi samanvārabhete pūrva-prajñā ca]"

(Radhakrishnan [1953])

Hume translates the latter part of verse 2 as follows:-

"He becomes one with intelligence.

[sa vijñāno bhavati:]

What has intelligence departs with him.

[sa vijñānam evānvavakrāmati:]

His knowledge and his works and his former intelligence [i.e. instinct] lay hold of him.

[taṁ vidyākarmaṇi samanvārabhete pūrva-prajñā ca]"

(The Thirteen Principal Upanishads, Hume [1931])

Hume has translated vidyâ as knowledge, which, in this context, is taken to be that special kind of knowledge defined by MacDonell as being,

"learning and science, especially the 3-fold knowledge of the Vedas. The knowledge that the Vedas talk about."

(A Practical Sanskrit Dictionary, MacDonell [1976])

It is obvious from the context that Hume's translation of karmanî as works is not literal, but may be taken to be results of fruits of his work or action. He translates vijñāno as intelligence and then goes on to translate pûrva-prajñâ as intelligence also, adding in parenthesis, "i.e. instinct". These two Sanskrit words do not have the same meaning and, as will be shown, to attribute to them the same meaning causes confusion and misunderstanding. In examining Hume's translation it must be borne in mind however that the concept of intelligence in the western world was relatively underdeveloped in the years leading up to his first publication of The Thirteen Principal Upanishads, that is, prior to 1921. The notion of the IQ-index had been introduced only in 1912, saw much development during the 1914-18 World War, and it was as late as 1927 before steps were taken to factorise the global concept of intelligence. No criticism is meant here of previous translations of intelligence, since it is recognised still in modern psychology that it is infrequent for two people to have precisely the same in mind when using this word. In fact it is customary to find the word intelligence qualified in order that its meaning is understood in the context in which it being used.

Radhakrishnan translates vidyā in the same way as Hume. When it comes to karmanī he makes it quite plain that he is talking about the effects of one's conduct according to the impartial law of ṛta. One gets exactly what one deserves. Vijñāno is translated as intelligence, but pūrva-prajñā as past experience. In his commentary he makes reference to Śankara, who gave an example to support the translation. (Radhakrishnan [1953] p 270)

Werner is in agreement with Hume and Radhakrishnan on the translation of vidyā, but he amplifies by describing it as what has been "consciously and actively appropriated". (Werner [1977] p 55) One could say it is active, as opposed to passive, learning; understanding as opposed to rote-learning; and affective, not cognitive, learning. In addressing himself to the phrase sa vijñāna bhavati, Werner translates it as "he becomes a purely mental being". (Werner [1977] p 54). Savijñāna is treated as one word meaning with-consciousness so that savijñāna bhavati means that he becomes a being with-consciousness - a gandharva, a discarnate spirit ready and waiting to form another physical body given the opportunity.

Werner goes further than Radhakrishnan in his explanation of karmanī, works. He classifies karma as being of mental character in the same way that knowledge and experience are of mental character, and points out that, by the time of the older Upaniṣads, karma had two meanings, as it did later in Buddhism and Hinduism, where it meant action and volition, the latter meaning how you are mentally predisposed to act. When dealing with purvā-prajñā, Werner refers to it as previous experience which has

become inborn intelligence. He stresses the importance of previous experience, saying that, combined with knowledge, it is even more important than karma. The combination of this knowledge and past experience is what is available to man as inborn intelligence when he is reborn. It is the degree to which man has done away with his basic ignorance which determines his future form.

In support of this argument one could hypothesise by extrapolation from modern psychology's understanding of perception, which is that it is a function of stimulus and past experience, although psychology does not recognise readily past experience prior to conception. At the very first stimulus experienced by the embodied being at the beginning of a worldly existence, previous experience brought forward is interacted with to produce a novel perception and commence the building of that entity's experience in that lifetime. In this way one is proffering the argument that a being does not commence life with a mental tabula rasa.

Knowledge is seen as a somewhat slower process involving assimilation, but having, of course, an effect on the experience as it did in the previous life or lives.

Karma is seen as being an even longer-term process with a changing tendency or volition extending maybe over more than one life. If there is any substance in these conjectures, purvâ-prajñâ is seen as being of greatest importance, since it has the most immediate impact on the path of the being.

In order to extract the meaning from the verse it would seem essential to differentiate between viññāna and purvā-prajñā. A reasonable definition of the latter could be previous experience or inborn intelligence, but even this may benefit from some amplification. The previous experience need not always be memory, but could be described as digested previous experience. For example, one may have unconscious memories of past experiences causing one to shrink instinctively from immoral actions. In the western world purvā-prajñā is the basis of that which, when developed, is known as conscience, or super-ego according to Freud. Another example of the effect of this component may be found in an examination of newly-born infants. No two behave exactly alike in a way which goes beyond that which can be explained satisfactorily by differences in the circumstances in which the infants are found. Thus when Hume used the word instinct he was not entirely wrong. In the concept of purvā-prajñā there is explicitly the predisposition to act in a peculiar way to events within one's environment prior to any opportunity for behaviour to have been learned. Viññāna, sometimes known as mind, manas, as it was in the Rg Veda, means of mental character, mental nature, the name given to the whole mental part of man. It also means of unconscious mind, that is, mental being, knowledge, action and previous experience. It is what we would call person, or personality, or structure of personality with all its mental capacities, but without the material body. (Werner [1977] p 56) Whilst the word intelligence as a translation of viññāna is not strictly correct, it is not absolutely wrong, because it can be used to describe this set of mental processes. It is highly probable that it is this older, and now less common, use of the word which people have in mind when they use expressions like, "Is there

intelligent life elsewhere in the universe?", for this is not a novel question, but simply a repetition in modern language of one of man's longstanding queries. One could describe vijñāna as that part of another being with which one communicates.

The standardised Sanskrit in which these teachings were eventually set down uses two distinct words from which it can be concluded justifiably that the original language of the teachers did so too. The fact that they used two words is indicative of a clear distinction of meaning.

#### Desire, Attachment and Bliss

In the world of change, two instruments of causality are desire and attachment. The Upaniṣads highlight the need for there to be no ambivalence with regard to these emotions. The teaching is expressed in both mythological and rational terms. The laws of the universe are set out in support of the existence of God. "From fear of him the wind doth blow." (Taitt. Up. 2. 8. 1. ; Kāṭha Up. II. 3. 3.) Here is a beautiful expression of the power which is implied by the concept of God. There follows a description of how the people of the time perceived the cosmos. The approach is that of an enquiry concerning bliss. A human bliss is said to be that of a good youth who is ready to act and is strong in mind and body. A hundred-fold this state is that of human fairies, manuṣya-gandharva, the human spirits who are awaiting the opportune time to incarnate. The description proceeds in this vein with divine fairies, deva-gandharva, coming next. By inference, they are those spirits who

are poised for their chances of manifestation in a higher world. They are followed by Fathers, who would be those already in a higher world, but who are destined to reincarnate here on earth on the exhaustion of that karma which brought about their births in that higherworld. They have to return to learn again. Next are gods-by-birth, those whose residual karma has ensured their remanifestation in a higher world. Then there are gods-by-work. They have earned their place and could be described as the junior ranks of the divine beings. After them there are gods, that is, divine beings, followed by Indra, Bṛhaspati, Prajâpati and Brahmâ, the latter being the ultimate. Each state of bliss is said to be one hundred-fold that of the one preceding it and each one is likened to the state of a man well versed in the Vedas and who is not subject to desire. The ultimate, the bliss of Brahmâ is said to be  $10^{20}$  greater than the bliss of the human. The whole account could be seen as a mythological description of levels of consciousness from ignorance to knowledge, avidyâ to vidyâ. At the same time one has also to become desireless, except for the desire to do that which is right. All the higher attainments of bliss are dependent on the desireless state. Only the bliss of humans does not have this injunction. The stress is on the possibility for man to attain the ultimate in his lifetime. He does not have to wait for death, but can manifest greater consciousness in his present life, so raising his state.

The fantastic bliss of Brahmâ baffles description and one could argue that the people of the time who were receiving this teaching would have had to have been highly cognitive to have even begun to assimilate these ideas. It must be assumed that the teacher was not just out to impress,

because the teaching goes way beyond that which would have been required simply to make an impression, or merely to boggle their minds. This exposition of the attainment of the ultimate reality is also given in Bṛhad-âraṇyaka Upaniṣad IV. 3. 33., although the order and power of the ascension are different.

In verse 12 of the Īśâ Upaniṣad the emphasis is on attachment.

"Into blinding darkness enter those who worship the unmanifest and into still greater darkness, as it were, those who delight in the manifest."

One who does not believe in becoming is heading for a lower plain of existence. Likewise one who is attached to becoming will go even lower. Here it is being emphasised that desire to attain the state of Brahmâ is nevertheless desire and by its very nature is a block to attainment.

The causal relationship between desire and rebirth is brought into focus in Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad III. 2. 1 and 2.

"The wise men who, free from desires, worship the Person, pass beyond the seed [of rebirth]."

"He who entertains desires, thinking of them, is born [again] here and there on account of his desires."

Desire creates the situation for rebirth; karma is the mechanism by which rebirth comes about. Without desire and attachment there would be no

rebirth. Verse 2 also makes it clear that the relinquishment of desire produces a situation in one's present life after which there will be no rebirth.

"But of him who has his desires fully satisfied, who is a perfected soul, all his desires vanish even here [on earth]."

In Maitrī Upaniṣad I. 4. King Bṛhadratha, who has attained the state of non-attachment, clearly recognises the transience of the world. Some things rise and some things fall. Some things are desirable, but in their turn they become undesirable. So he is pleading for a way out of the trap of desiring things which appeal, for it is the desiring of things which are desirable which brings about repeated rebirths. This is set against the background of previous verses which have taken great pains to point out that, no matter how beautiful the body is, there is ultimately only one end for it. That the desireless state is a necessary and sufficient cause is what is being said in VI. 28. of the same Upaniṣad. However much one may qualify for release from samsāra in other ways, unless one has encompassed the desireless state, one is tied to the ceaseless round of birth, death and rebirth. The same exhortation to the need for disattachment from desire is made in Maitrī VI. 38. The stumbling-block to the attainment of immortality is indeed desire and attachment to the objects of desire. (Bṛhad-āruṇyaka Upaniṣad IV. 4. 6 and 7) It is the influence of desire and past work combined which produces the mortal form. Chândogya Upaniṣad VIII. 1. 6 states that

".....Those who depart hence without having found here the self and those real desires, for them there is no freedom in all the worlds."

If one has not acquired the knowledge that the soul is in everything and also satisfied all desires except real desire, that is, desire for TRUTH, then one is destined for rebirth. Doing deeds here on earth without attachment, dedicating all action to God, results in the inner being not being bound. There will be no carrying over of the fruits of the action to other incarnations. (Īśā Up. II.)

The objects of the senses deny one who is attached to them recognition and recollection of the ultimate. The logicity of this argument is well set out in Maitrī Upaniṣad IV. 2.

".....like the waves in large rivers there is no turning back of that which has been done previously; like the tide of the ocean, the approach of one's death is hard to keep back.....like a painted scene, falsely delighting the mind and therefore it has been said, "Objects of sound, touch and the like are worthless objects to a man", the elemental self through attachment to them does not remember the highest state."

### The Inner Being - Ātman and ātman

A term already encountered and one which inevitably raises problems in western translations of the Upanisads is the word soul. It does not have the same meaning as the apparently equivalent modern western concept. To appreciate the inherent difficulty here one has to understand something of the Christian religion which underpins modern western culture. Christianity was founded and substantially developed in a part of the world in which, at that time, the philosophy of Aristotle held sway. Ancient Greek philosophy accepted that all things were based on some inner causal activity which gave them their forms and controlled their individualistic developments, and thus was not exclusive of the Sanskritic model. However, there was an inbuilt block to proper understanding of that model. Aristotelian logic may be described as the logic of proper things. (Wholeness and the Implicate Order, Bohm [1983] p 60) Things could not be conceived of as being the product of their component parts, but rather were seen as possessing unitary properties. From this understanding it can be seen that the founders and developers of Christianity would not imagine any inner being other than a unitary one. By the time philosophical thinking had moved beyond that stage, in the Renaissance, Christianity was too well established for any likelihood of reappraisal on an issue so fundamental to its tenets. It must be remembered therefore that the notion of a unitary soul is alien to Upaniṣadic thinking. The Greco-philosophical way of thinking did not exist in India.

We have to refer to the universal life force, Ātman, as it is seen to manifest within the individual, âtman, and, for convenience in this process the use of upper- and lower-case letters is a helpful artifice, although in Sanskrit there is of course no upper- or lower-case. Ātman is the inner controller, the seer of seeing, the hearer of hearing. It is the universal divine force or life essence which controls all the constituents so that they become individual beings. A great mischief was perpetrated by whomever first translated âtman as soul. In the Upaniṣads, Yājñavalkya spoke only of structural elements. (Bṛhad Up. III. 2.) If there is any Sanskrit expression which comes near to embracing the identification of a part of the universal life-force peculiar to an individual it is jivâtman. Jivâtman is man's subjective and imperfect impression of that within him which is in fact Ātman. Notwithstanding this, the Indian Vedic philosophy contained the belief that something survived the death of the individual, was peculiar to the individual, and formed the basis of another life in whatever world. The crux of the argument is that this something was not a singularity. The meaning of âtman which comes through is that of the all-pervading, ever-present life-force of the universe, the breath of life - ".....the individual life process, manifested in breathing....." (Werner [1977] p 49) - so it is not surprising that neither Vedic nor Upaniṣadic literature contains any reference associating aḥa or âtman with that which transmigrates. For the purpose of this present work the word soul shall normally be taken as meaning that plurality which passes on.

### What Happens after the Death of a Person

The second Brāhmaṇa of Chapter VI of Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad is devoted to a mythological explanation of what happens after the death of a person. Specific questions on karma and rebirth were being asked of a young brahmin student. They were:-

"Do you know how people here on departing [from this life] separate in different directions?"

"Do you know how they come back again into this world?"

"Do you know why yonder world is not filled up with the many who again and again go there?"

"Do you know by which oblation that is offered the water becomes the voice of a person, rises up and speaks?"

"Do you know the means of access to the path leading to the gods or of the one leading to the fathers?"

For we have heard even the saying of the seer: "I have heard of two paths for man, the one that leads to fathers and the one that leads to gods. By these two all that lives moves on, whatever there is between, father [heaven] and mother [earth]".

The young student, Śvetaketu, having been well instructed in the Vedas, returned to discuss with his father why it was that he was unable to answer the questions that had been put to him. Gautama, the father, recognised that he too was in ignorance on these matters and set off to seek the teaching from the king who was his son's instructor.

The king, Pravāhaṇa Jaivali, explained to Gautama that the knowledge he was about to receive had never before been given to one of the brāhmaṇa caste. (Bṛhad Up. VI. 2. 8.) No other caste is mentioned in this part of the Upaniṣad, but the same story is told in Chāndogya Upaniṣad where it is pointed out that hitherto only the ksatriyas had had the knowledge. (Chānd Up. V. 3. 7.) This raises two interesting points. Firstly, it is an intimation that the knowledge was in existence. Secondly, it can be deduced that this is an example of the ksatriyas developing a corpus of knowledge and passing it back to the brāhmaṇas. This leads one to ask why it was expressed that the knowledge had been only with the ksatriyas. The answer to this possibly lies in the difference in background between the two castes which has been discussed above.

### The Two Ways

In Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad VI. 2. verses 9 to 13, the teaching is set out in mythological and sacrificial terms with which brāhmaṇas would be well familiar. It would be well understood that fire brings about a change of state and that once something has been burnt it is qualitatively different. The teaching which is expressed in these verses, and is the the answer to the questions posed by the king, is that one is born again and again to experience the results of past work. This is the way known as the path that leads to the world of the fathers, pitr-lokam. The process continues until such time that the person understands the truth and acquires the knowledge which releases the being from repeated rebirths. This way is the path that leads to the world of the gods,

deva-lokam, from which the Upaniṣads say there is no return. Those who know neither of these two ways are fated to return as, "insects, moths and whatever there is that bites." The symbols used to express this are cosmic ones; the sun, the moon, the wind, water and earth. The idea expressed is that the essential being of the individual belongs to the universe at large. The teachers were seeking to rationalise this belief, so they identified centres in the universe with which attributes of the personality could be associated. It followed naturally from this that when an individual's life ceased all the elements returned to the universal pools. Reabsorption followed a series of processes which accorded with the natural phenomena associated with those parts of the universe to which parts of the personality were attributed.

#### The Process of Birth

In Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad, the question

"Do you know in which oblation that is offered the water becomes the voice of a person rises up and speaks?"

(Bṛhad Up. VI. 22.)

does not seem to be answered. One is left to infer that it is the fifth oblation. This question is dealt with much more adequately in Chândogya Upaniṣad V. 3. 3. The question is differently presented.

"Do you know how in the fifth libation water comes to be called a person?"

The answer is that the sacrifices rise through their offerings to heaven and attain there, as their reward, a nature like that of soma. Further on, in verses 8 and 9, conception, development and finally the birth of man are described. The description is highly symbolic and is set out in the form of a linking-pin model. The first oblation is when gods acting in maintenance of the universe prepare those destined for rebirth to return to this world. The moon is seen as the place from whence these return, and they leave the moon as soma. The second oblation is the rain-cloud which the gods create from soma and from which descent to earth is possible. The third oblation is in this world when that which has descended is offered in sacrifice by the gods and the result is described as food. The fourth oblation is the sacrificing of this food in man to produce semen. Arguably a better understanding of this can be achieved by pausing to consider briefly the contribution which biology can make to our knowledge of these processes. The production of semen in a fertile male is a continuing process, unlike the once and for all production of ova in a female. Spermatogenesis is dependent on a group of cells which are constantly renewed, making the analogy of food particularly apposite. The fifth oblation is the crux of the teaching. Enough is now known about the function of water at a vital stage in the creation of a human being to suggest that the fifth oblation is more than the mere creation of a zygote. Radhakrishnan's translation could be regarded as a suggestion that the oblation is based upon the fetus's being surrounded by water, but this water is external to the being. One

can postulate that the water being referred to in the fifth libation is the cerebro-spinal fluid, which is 98.5% water and is most certainly not external to the being. This verse could be seen as describing the manifestation of life, which involves bio-energies requiring water. The production of cerebro-spinal fluid in the choroid plexus and ventricles of the brain represents this life-giving process. The fertilised ovum develops a fold whose walls are pushed up to meet one another. This fold develops to become the neural groove, precursor to the neural tube. The forward end of the groove thickens, enlarges, and later develops into the brain. As development proceeds, the neural groove deepens, like a channel for a fast flowing river. Its walls rise higher. They move towards one another, touch and seal over; the channel has become a tunnel. This central cavity becomes the central canal of the spinal cord and, at the head end, the ventricular system of the brain where cerebro-spinal fluid is produced. (Open University [1973]) Prior to this, the embryo is just a loose arrangement of branched cells.

### The Operation of Karma

In addressing the question

"do you know the parting of the two ways, one leading to the gods [devayāna] and one leading to the fathers [pitryāna]?"

the Chândogya Upaniṣad presents the description of what happens to the person in the same way as the Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad, but it is

amplified and more explicit. It is declared that those who seek merit through making sacrifices and giving alms to the poor or otherwise follow observances, thinking it will reflect well on them, will go only so far in their journey through the different stages of knowledge. They will suffer from residual karmic effects making it difficult for them to incarnate as human beings again. Since the human condition is seen as offering the greatest opportunity for that journey, their progress to the ultimate is hindered. The human condition contains implicitly knowledge, volition and purpose, which provide the background for doing something about one's spiritual development.

The doctrine of karma and rebirth expressed in the Upaniṣads is in agreement with the operation of the Vedic law of ṛta in human life. In post-vedic times the term ṛta was replaced by dharma which has an almost identical meaning. The meaning of dharma is to hold or to carry, and the idea is that it is the essential nature of a being that determines its mode of behaviour. Dharma is similar in meaning to virtue, duty, law, righteousness, morality or, perhaps better, ethics. None of these words conveys its precise meaning. Dharma is the whole system, the universal law of balance operating according to the way in which God created the universe. It is that which is right and ought to be - the path of right action. Karma is the instance as reflected in the lives of human beings. It is the individual moral sphere of dharma. Given the time, place, and a particular personality, a person's behaviour should be what seems to be right in accordance with the demands of the situation. Backed up by knowledge, volition and previous experience, how one acts or does not act, as the case might be, is what determines the outcome. This is the

mechanism of karma. On death, one whose conduct has been good [as defined by the degree to which one has acted in accordance with one's dharma], will quickly attain a good birth,

".....the birth of a brāhmin, the birth of a ksatriya, or the birth of a vaiśya. But those whose conduct here has been evil, will quickly attain an evil birth, the birth of a dog, the birth of a hog, or the birth of a candāla." (Chând Up. V. 10. 7.)

The following verse repeats that which was said in Bṛhad-âraṇyaka Upaniṣad VI. 2. 16., that is, that there is a third state, which is of small creatures who, according to Chândogya Upaniṣad V. 10. 8., are

".....continually revolving [those of whom it is said], be born and die....."

If we pursue wisdom, we travel by the path of the gods, devayāna; if we perform good works, we travel by the path of the fathers, pitryāna. If we do neither, we will continually revolve like little creatures. (Radhakrishnan [1953]) In a word of good and evil forces, contact with the latter is perhaps inevitable at some time or another, but it is the internalising of evil values and the practice of evil behaviours which are what have to be avoided. So long as one knows the five actions which lead to a lesser existence and avoids adopting them, communication with others who get up to these tricks will not sour one's own life. (Chând Up. V. 10. 9 and 10)

In presenting the same story, the Kausitaki Brâhmana Upaniṣad, verses 1 to 7, makes use of a rich symbolic language with the emphasis placed on teaching rather than on setting the scene of the story. Kausitaki Upaniṣad concentrates on the fact that there are two paths, and most effort is put into description and ways of attaining the path of the gods, devayâna. All who depart this world are declared to go on the first stage of the soul on its journey and go through a catechismic filter. Success allows one to pass further.

"Whoever answer it [properly], him it sets free [to go to higher worlds]. But whoever answer it not.....is born again according to his deeds, according to his knowledge." (Kaus Up. I. 2.)

#### The Naciketas Story. Morality, Rituals and Sacrifices

The story of Naciketas is an old one, first occurring in the R̥g Veda (X. 135). It differs from the stories of the Bṛhad-âranyaka and Chândogya Upaniṣads, but carries the same teaching. In the Kaṭha Upaniṣad where the story appears, the language used is still mythological, but it is not as flowery. It is less fantastic than the earlier accounts and does not use the same symbolism. The story comes straight to the point. Naciketas observes his father making a useless sacrificial gift and, which is more, that it is grudgingly given. It is obvious that his father is motivated by the desire for earthly and heavenly gain.

"Their water drunk, their grass eaten, their milk milked, their strength spent, joyless, verily, are those worlds, to which he who presents such [cows] goes." (Kāṭha Up. I. 1. 3.)

Naciketas, who seeks spiritual wisdom, realises the futility of such behaviour and recognises that it will surely lead to rebirth in this world. He offers himself up as the sacrifice. This he does three times, after which his then irritated father declares, "Unto death shall I give thee".

By using yama as the personification of death, the teacher has presented a scenario in which the person, yama, who must hold the secrets of what lies the other side of death from this world, is able to divulge those secrets, in the right circumstances, to a devotee. The doctrine of rebirth is assumed here and one must pause to reflect on its antiquity, since this is an old Vedic story. Kāṭha Upaniṣad I. 1. 6. tells us to

"Consider how it was with the forefathers; behold how it is with the later [men]; a mortal ripens like corn and like corn is born again."

Humans are like all other life-forms. That is to say, they are born, they die, and they are born again. Human life is as transitory as any other form of life.

The description of the way in which Naciketas came to the house of death is suggestive of his having meditated on death. Through this meditation he became aware of the impermanence of the world. It is

indicated that he went through a period of fasting, which would have increased his state of receptivity for understanding. We are also told that it is three days before he becomes intuited; a period of time which experience suggests would have been suitable preparation for detachment from the psycho-physical world.

"Since thou a venerable guest, hast stayed in my house without food for three nights, I make obeisance to thee O Brāhmaṇa. May it be well with me. Therefore, in return choose, thou three gifts." (Kāṭha Up. I. 1. 9.)

Naciketas through his meditation understands that even those who are destined for a heavenly world must go through death first. (Kāṭha Up. I. 1. 12.)

There are two ways open to man, the good and the pleasant. It is the way of moral goodness which is the highest goodness of man. It is useless to follow the way of the Sybarite. It is necessary for man to discriminate and reject the pleasant in favour of the good; the choice is his. Naciketas had not been lured by the pleasant way of worldly well-being. He had come through the period of temptation and had realised that the only true desire is for the eternal. There is a great gap between ignorance, avidyā, and knowledge, vidyā, and there are those who think they know, and make their choices in relation to their comforts. They may not be any less sincere in their belief that they follow a true path, yet these people, in their ignorance, think they know and arrive at death quite confident that they are going to whatever they conceive of as

heaven, but also find themselves reborn and not in heaven. (Kāṭha Up. I. 2. 1 to 5) Those who do not see beyond the pleasures of this world will surely be reborn time after time.

"What lies beyond shines not to the simple-minded, careless, [who is] deluded by the glamour of wealth. Thinking this world exists, there is no other, falls again and again into my power." (Kāṭha Up. I. 2. 6.)

One has to understand fully that no matter how noble and right-thinking one may be, if one is attached to the performance of rites and sacrifices, then one is tied to the endless round of rebirth, samsāra. It has to be realised that it is basically fear which causes people to be enslaved in this way. This fear is bred through attachment to the objects of desire. Sacrifice and meditation are no less such objects. (Kāṭha Up. I. 2. 10 and 11) Both Hume and Müller attribute verse 10 to Naciketas, but Śankara and Radhakrishnan disagree, since up to that point Naciketas had not performed the sacrifice which was to become associated with his name.

Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad I. 2. pursues this theme. The performance of rites and sacrifices will indeed bring release from rebirth and a place in the world of Brahmā, brahma-lokaḥ, but only if the performer understands fully what he is about. He must know and understand why he performs the rites and offers the sacrifices. It must not be as a ritual, for those who believe ritual sacrifices are the means of obtaining liberation will pile up bad karma for themselves. Those who think they know are blindly gathering karma.

"Abiding in the midst of ignorance, wise in their own esteem, thinking themselves to be learned, fools, afflicted with troubles, go about like blind men led by one who is himself blind." (Muṇḍ Up. I. 2. 8.)

Someone could well be on a good plane of existence, but simply perform rituals, and when the time comes that his good karma has exhausted itself, he merely sinks to a lower level. He does not understand the truth because of attachment. (Muṇḍ Up. I. 9 and 10)

Symbolism is used in Praśna Upaniṣad to describe the two paths, the way to rebirth, samsāra, and the way to liberation, mokṣa.

"This year verily is the lord of creation; of it there are two paths, the southern and the northern. Now those verily who worship, thinking "sacrifice and pious acts are our work", they win only the human world. They certainly return again. Therefore, the sages, desirous of offspring, take the southern route. This which is called the path of the ancestors, is verily matter [rayi]." (Praś Up. I. 9.)

Clearly the southern route leads only to rebirth. There are two kinds of acts, iṣṭa and pūrta, the former being the acts of ceremonial piety, observances of Vedic ritual, and the latter being acts of social service and public good. (Radhakrishnan [1953]) No matter which of these acts is performed, if the motivation of the performer is one of selfish desire, rebirth in the world can be the only outcome. Desire is also the tie to

samsâra in Buddhism. When it is relinquished, the universal life-force is allowed to manifest through us. If people think that the self-righteous performance of ritual sacrifice is the way to God, they are surely mistaken. Those whose motivation is righteous and pure will choose the northern route which leads to the ultimate.

"But those who seek for the Self by austerity, chastity, faith and knowledge, they, by the northern route, gain the sun. That verily is the support of life breaths that is eternal, the fearless. That is the final goal. From that they do not return. That is the stopping [of rebirth]." (Praš Up. I. 10.)

One has to understand the differences between piety and altruism, and between ethical and spiritual development. Those who truly comprehend the difference know that it is no use going through the motions; that one has to practise austerity, chastity, faith and knowledge to reach the final goal of immortality. They will not be born again. Unless the person works to develop the spiritual aspects of his nature, then he will surely be reborn in a lower world.

"Demonic, verily, are those worlds enveloped in blinding darkness, and to them go after death, those people who are slayers of the self." (Īśā Up. III; Brhad Up. IV. 4. 11.)

A forbidding future awaits those who deny, stifle or suppress the self.

### What Becomes of this Person?

In the second Brāhmaṇa of Chapter Three of Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad, an enquiring and persistent student, Ārtabhāga, questions Yājñavalkya about what happens to the person after death. He is not satisfied with the mythological description and seeks a rational explanation of how a person comes to be reborn, asking, ".....what then becomes of this person?" Yājñavalkya realises that this student is not to be deflected from his line of enquiry, so he suggests that they should talk of this alone.

"Ārtabhāga, my dear, take my hand. We two alone shall know of this, this is not for us two [to speak of] in public." The two went away and deliberated. What they said was karman, what they praised was karman. Verily one becomes good by good action, bad by bad action. Therefore, Ārtabhāga of the line of Jaratkāru kept silent." (Bṛhad Up. III. 2. 13.)

It would seem that Yājñavalkya had the knowledge of karma, but for some reason did not feel he could discuss it publicly. It would not be because the knowledge was new, since one can find a reference to it in the Ṛg Veda (X. 16. 3.). Furthermore, rebirth was commonly accepted, although the mechanism was not properly understood, which goes some way to explaining why the student was admonished to keep silent on the subject. The fear of re-death, punar-mṛtya, became prominent in the Brāhmaṇas and belief in rebirth has persisted since the time of the Upaniṣads.

It is important to realise that the mechanism of rebirth is not in any way similar to mundane methods of reproduction and continuance of the species. That is, it is not achieved by a shedding of seed in a prior existence or by some grafting or regenerative process from the dead. A person is not reborn as a repetition of some former earthly being. (Bṛhad Up. III. 9. 25.) The transition from one life to another is illustrated with the use of concrete analogies. After a description of what happens at the time of death, the withdrawing of the senses and the departing of the vital breaths (Bṛhad Up. IV. 4. 2.), two such analogies are used which illustrate the nature of the transition.

The way in which a caterpillar moves from one blade of grass, which has ceased to support it, and seeks another blade of grass, which offers succour and support, is likened to the progress the person makes from one life to another. When the caterpillar comes to the end of a blade of grass, which has previously occupied its sole attention, its awareness is expanded beyond the boundaries of life on that blade. It concentrates its energies, desires and predispositions in its search for a future existence. Arguably, once on the new blade of grass, it rapidly forgets all that has gone before, its new existence on the new blade of grass becoming subjectively its only existence. As the caterpillar has eaten up a leaf, enjoying the fruit of it, and has moved on to another new leaf, so the person who has enjoyed the fruits of deeds of previous lives transmigrates again to the world of action. At the end of a life, awareness becomes increased beyond carnate limitations and the intrinsic energies and character of the person become concentrated within. Before leaving the old body, the new body has been determined, or alternatively

the manner or state of the being at the time of its departure determines its destination. (Bṛhad Up. IV. 4. 3.)

Again, as a goldsmith reshapes a piece of gold, making it more beautiful in form than the original object, so the self, Ātman, discards an old body and produces for itself a newer and more beautiful shape. (Bṛhad Up. IV. 4. 4.) In the following verse, a rational explanation of karma is given.

".....According as one acts, according as one behaves, so does one become. The doer of good becomes good, the doer of evil becomes evil. One becomes virtuous by virtuous action, bad by bad action. Others however say, that a person consists of his desires. As is his desire so is his will, as is his will so is the deed he does, whatever deed he does that he attains."

(Bṛhad Up. IV. 4. 5.)

The latter part of this verse, which demonstrates that the outer personality may lie in the inner volitional processes, is in accordance with the teaching of Schopenhauer, that the will, and not the intellect, is the centre of man's nature. As is a man's will, so will he become.

### Control of the Mind

It is explicit that the order of approach to the termination of one's life is a powerful determinant of the order of commencement of the next. Consequently it is not surprising that an additional piece of teaching, based on a question from a person with an awareness of the direction of mind through meditation, should be incorporated. (Praś Up. V.) From time immemorial, AUM has been an object of meditation and it is upon this meditation that the Praśna teaches. Satya-kāma, desirer of the truth, asks Pippalada what a man wins through meditation on AUM. It is explained that the element of the syllable, AUM, with which one is most naturally in harmony at the close of one's life is a determinant of the nature of one's rebirth. Mishra elaborates on the levels of identification implicate in the elements of AUM in Fundamentals of Yoga. (Mishra [1972])

"If he meditates on one element [a] he enlightened even by that, comes quickly to the earth [after death]....." (Praś Up. V. 3.)

The element A identifies with matter and physical body, annamaya-kośa, (Mishra [1972], p202) which would explain rapid return to human form.

"Then, [if he meditates on this] as of two elements [a, u] he attains the mind. He is led by the jajus, formulas to the intermediate space, the world of the moon; having experienced greatness there, he returns hither again." (Praś Up. V. 4.)

The element U identifies with the higher, mental elements, manomaya-, prāṇamaya- and viññānamaya-kośa. (Mishra [1972], p 202) Consciousness has been raised above simple identification with the body and it becomes possible to earn time in another world before return to human form.

"But if he meditates on the highest person with the three elements of the syllable AUM [a, u, m], he becomes one with the light, the sun.....freed from sins. He is led by sāma, chants, to the world of Brahmā....." (Pras Up. V. 5.)

The addition of the element M brings identification with the anandamaya-kośa, a state of bliss, and transcends the effects of the lower levels. (Mishra [1972], p 202) There is no rebirth.

There is further teaching on the benefits of controlling one's mind, in Kaṭha Upaniṣad I. 3. 3 to 9, where the parable of the chariot is presented. The Self, Ātman, rides in the chariot which is the psycho-physical vehicle. The embodied self, ātman, is spoken of as carted, rothita, in Maitrī Upaniṣad IV. 4., and is thus subject to the conditions of mortality. The horses are the senses and the mind holds the reins, being therefore either controlled or in control. Souls who have not acquired the Vedic knowledge and are therefore not in control of their senses, go on to reincarnate. Those who have acquired it go on to the ultimate and are not reborn in any other world. He who has learned control of the higher senses and is able to direct his mind goes to a place even higher than this - Vishnu. [Śankara uses this for the Supreme Self]

The image of the chariot is used as an analogy in a cosmic rather than in an individual sense in Kausîtaki-brâmaṇa Upaniṣad III. 8.

".....For as in a chariot the felly is fixed on the spokes and the spokes are fixed on the hub, even so these elements of existence are fixed on the elements of intelligence and the elements of intelligence are fixed in the breathing spirit. This same breathing spirit is truly, the intelligent self, bliss, ageless, immortal. He does not become great by good action nor small by evil action. This one, truly, indeed causes him whom he wishes to lead up from these worlds to perform good action. This one, indeed, also causes him whom he wishes to lead downward to perform bad action....."

#### Transmigration

In Praśna Upaniṣad III., Kausalya, the son of Aśvala, questions the teacher, Pippalada, about the doctrine of karma and rebirth.

".....Venerable Sir whence is this life born?

How does it come into this body?

And how does it distribute itself and establish itself?

In what way does it depart?

How does it support what is eternal?

How does it support what relates to the self?" (Praś Up. III. 1.)

Pippalada points out to Kausalya that the questions are of a highly transcendental nature, but, because he regards Kausalya as a devoted brâhman, he will give him the answers. Verse 3 uses the word shadow, châya, to communicate about that which transmigrates and talks about life entering into the body by "the activity of the mind". So there is this idea that a person is according to activities in previous existences. The use of the word shadow, châya, is an interesting one, since one's shadow is a reflected image of oneself. It is always there, it needs the self in order to be there, but it is not the same as the self; it is qualitatively different. Châya is used in the R̥g Veda to describe that which is left and exists on its own, except for its link with the unborn, aja, for a very brief time after the death of the body. This shadow is quickly filled again by cosmic mental elements. Later speculations were that, if one had made careful preparations before death, enlightenment was possible during the brief existence of this empty shadow-like structure or châya. (The Heritage of the Vedas, Werner [1982])

#### The Intelligential and Elemental Self

The intelligential self, which is the breathing spirit, ordains that which is happening in the universe. There are those beings which are ordained to be on the path upwards, and those which are ordained to be on the path downwards. It is the path which one is on which determines the actions, not the actions which determine the path. In other words, you do what you do because of where you are.

The elemental self, bhūtātman, is affected by nature's qualities, prākṛtaguṇa, unlike the immortal self, Ātman, which remains unaffected. Because the elemental self is confused through attachment, it is

".....borne along and defiled by the stream of qualities, guṇas.....full of desire, distracted he gets into a state of self-love. Thinking, "I am he", "This is mine", he binds himself with his self like a bird in a snare....." (Maitrī Up. III. 2.)

This is a form of ignorance and the elemental self fails to recognise the perfect self within it. Amidst all the confusion, the only anchor point it has is itself and, as long as it is self-centred in its search for stability, it is bound to the fruits of its action. It incarnates time and again, moving upwards or downwards in the different worlds at the mercy of the pairs of opposites, action and reaction. The elemental self can be beaten into shape to suit any of the different worlds without the real Self being altered, in the same way that one could heat a ball of iron in the fire and form it into any required shape, without in any way changing the iron. (Maitrī Up. III. 1 to 4) If one takes all the qualities listed in Maitrī Upaniṣad III. 5., they can be permuted to produce many different forms. He who is in a state of self-love is bound into the round of rebirth, samsāra.

## Spirituality and Will

As befits the subject, the teaching of the Upaniṣads on Vedic knowledge has an essentially timeless quality. It is seen by a reader today to be just as rational and logical as when it was first taught. Chândogya Upaniṣad I. 9. 1 to 3 seems to be teaching that space is the mother of form; that all things emanate from space and return to it. Space is the ultimate goal. Those who have this knowledge, revere it (Hume), and meditate on it (Radhakrishnan), will enjoy spiritual development and a good life. The emphasis in these three verses is on one's spirituality as opposed to one's pragmatism.

The role of purpose in what one becomes must not be underestimated. Since what one does is a determinant of what one becomes, one should be aware of the purpose within oneself. Given the knowledge, and by formulating the right sense of purpose or will (Schopenhauer), one determines what one becomes.

".....according to the purpose a person has in this world, so does he become on departing hence. So let him frame for himself a purpose." (Chând Up. III. 14. 1.)

Knowledge of oneself is an important aspect of the teaching on karma and rebirth. Self-contemplation, adhyâtma-yoga, and meditation on "What am I?" lead to the detection of one's inner being; one may come to know one's essential self. For those who attain such knowledge, life is no longer troubled, and at death the trauma of rebirth is left behind. (Kâtha Up.

I. 2. 12.) However, those who do not understand that, "that which is beyond this world is without form and without suffering" (Śvetâ Up. III. 10.) are bound to the round of birth, death and rebirth, samsâra.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE REFERENCES TO KARMA AND REBIRTH  
IN EARLY BUDDHIST SOURCES

Siddhartha Gautama, His Early Life and the Four Signs

Siddhartha Gautama was born into the Śākya clan in Kapilabastu on the Nepalese borderland. He lived for a period of eighty years, from around 563-483 BC. At the time of his birth it was prophesied that he had the potential to occupy the highest office that life had to offer. He would become a cakravartin, or universal monarch, and if he chose to renounce worldly life, he would accomplish his task by becoming enlightened and a leader of mankind, turning the wheel of law by becoming the perfect and universal teacher. Cherishing the hope that his son would not become a homeless wanderer, his father ensured that he led a cloistered life within the confines of the court. As the story goes, the future Buddha was out riding in the park with his charioteer on four separate occasions when he saw a person who was old; one who was sick; a corpse; and a religious wanderer. Through this accumulated experience he recognised the transience of life and that knowledge was the determinant in the boddisattva's resolve to undertake the supreme quest.

The Supreme Quest and the Enlightenment. The First Sermon

Siddhartha was twenty-nine years old when he left his marital home to study meditation. Subsequently, he entered upon his great fast and,

having finally decided that this was not the way, he became a wandering mendicant, a way of life he followed for six years. During this time he pondered on the sorrow inherent in the human condition. At Gaya he had the experience he was seeking and became the perfectly wise, the Bhagavat, the Arhat, the King of the Law, the Tathagata. He made the decision to embark on his mission, and preached his first sermon on the four-fold truth and the eight-fold path in the Deer Park of the holy city of Benares.

#### The Teaching of the Buddha

The teaching of the Buddha begins with the Three Signs of Being, namely, impermanence, sorrow and impersonality. The Four Noble Truths, which summarise the teaching about the great force of desire, its working, and its overcoming, begin with sorrow; the second noble truth is the cause of sorrow; the third is sorrow's ceasing; and the fourth is the way by which this may be done. This latter truth is the Noble Eight-fold Path, originally described as Truth and Discipline. It is as follows:-

1. Right understanding or right views
2. Right resolution or right motives
3. Right speech
4. Right action
5. Right occupation
6. Right endeavour
7. Right mindfulness
8. Right concentration

The objective was to achieve freedom from sorrow, nirvāna, that is release from the binding cycle of samsāra. The eight-fold path contains a series of psychological stages not exactly parallel to any other way set forth in India, but which contains elements of both yoga discipline and philosophical quest for mystical insight. By following the path, people eradicated egoism and were precluded from involving themselves over-zealously in extreme ascetic practices which the Buddha himself had tried and abandoned. Conscious acceptance of the idea of samsāra probably began sometime before the sixth century BC. In Upaniṣadic and early Buddhist texts there are hints that man should resign himself to his fate, niyati. Buddhism took the idea of samsāra very seriously. Life is characterised by instability with its all-pervading presence of old-age, disease and death. Samsāra confronted man as an experience of pain, dukkha, and karma, the law of moral causality with its cumulative effects of one's actions in former lives, was a central point of the Buddha's teaching.

The Buddha's second sermon was called anattalakkhana sutta and its object was to teach that there was no lasting principle in individuality. The inner essence of man was not discussed. A pragmatic attitude was maintained which totally conformed to the Buddha's belief that discussions about the metaphysical nature of man were not helpful to the attainment of salvation. The human personality was analysed in a way which fell entirely within man's knowledge of his experience. The sermon describes man as consisting of five groups, khandhas, of constituents.

### The Five Khandhas

The rûpa khandha consists of the four great inter-related elements - the supporting or solid; the binding or cohesive; the heating or temperature; and the motion or movement. Symbolically speaking, these are earth, water, heat and wind. The word rûpa means shape or form.

The vedanâ khandha pertains to sensation. It is the experience of pleasure, pain, or indifference, usually described as feelings and constantly changing according to the psycho-physical circumstances of the individual.

Sanñhâ khandha is the six-fold constituent perception, namely the five senses plus cognition in the wider sense, that is, thoughts, memories and imagery.

Samkhâra khandha is the sum total of mental forces or tendencies and could be regarded as individual character comprised of all the volitional activities which operate on a continuum from total consciousness to total unconsciousness. These are instincts, drives, inclinations, urges, wishes, desires, motivation, decisions, and aspirations. The duration of any of these activities can range widely from the merest passing fancy, through the well-formed habit, to those instincts and talents which may span many lifetimes. There is therefore a dynamic, kaleidoscopic pattern of change or development taking place.

In Buddhism this is not seen as having any beginning. It is an endless, ceaseless round. Beings have been roaming in samsāra as far back as infinity. In this sense the Buddha would seem to have regarded space/time as circular in the same way that Einstein did in modern times.

One of the distinctive features of human-kind is that we have the capacity to act consciously and use our knowledge, and it is on this attribute that the Buddha concentrated. The possibility that one does not have to be blown about like a blade of grass in the wind, but that we can become masters of our own destiny, is clearly spelt out in the Buddhist teaching on the way to nirvāna, liberation. The change in the personality of a liberated one occurs in the samkhāra khandha, the fourth constituent, the volitional processes, or what one would probably describe as character. By concentrating on this one attribute, the Buddha sought to amplify the ability of any living organism to direct outcomes - an ability which is seen as especially opportune in human form. The Buddha taught that if all human effort were to be directed into moral and ethical behaviour, one could attain liberation in one lifetime.

Finally, there is the viññāna khandha, which is consciousness. Indetectable in itself and only able to be experienced through the effects it has in activating the other khandhas, it is an energising force - the sine qua non of all life-forms.

Consciousness can be raised or lowered during a lifetime, but when it falls below a certain threshold clinical death occurs. Nowhere in the Pali Canon is anything said which could be construed as meaning that

consciousness can have a separate existence, but it is indicated in Samyutta-Nikāya [ii 65], that it is consciousness which finds a new foothold or support for itself on the death of the body and "enters a new womb to issue forth with a new set of khandha". (Buddhism: The Theravāda. Horner [1983]) Rūpa, the body, is abandoned and the other three sets of mental constituents, and all that they contain, are dragged with consciousness into the new life determined by karma.

The word nāma is usually translated simply as name, but it is important to remember that for the people of bygone ages the word nāma meant far more than name does for people of today. The Sanskrit word nāma denotes all that is felt to constitute personality and encompasses the four khandhas, vedanā, saññā, samkhāra and viññānam. It forms the non-material aspect of a being and could therefore be translated as character. The term nāma-rūpa means the aggregate of all the psycho-physical attributes of the individual. In the same way that there is no chariot apart from its constituents and their right arrangement, so it can be said that there is no being without the five khandhas or aggregates. (Samyutta-Nikāya ii 355) It is in the untying of these five khandhas that we discover the psycho-physical stuff of which a being is made.

If it seems from the above that something is missing, that liberation means annihilation, then it can only be emphasised that the Buddha, each time this opinion was voiced, denied that that was his teaching. He did however teach that there was no unchangeable, permanently existing something within the personality.

### Birth Stories. Is there a Permanent Self?

The Jâtaka book of birth stories is reputedly the oldest portion of the Sutta-Pitaka. These moral tales have their origins in antiquity, some being illustrated in the Maurayan Stûpas which were erected about the end of the third century BC at Bharut and Sânci. Some of the stories are mentioned briefly in the Canon, but most are non-canonical, much influenced by the thinking of the monks of later times, and were probably adapted in order to help transmit ideas. In the stories the development of the Buddha through successive lives is being described. The Buddha is always depicted as being one of the characters, along with the statement that it was himself during a former life, thus illustrating the idea of the continuity of the individual from life to life. Since the stories are neither all Canonical nor even orthodox, they are not to be taken literally, but they are an impressive way of implanting ideas.

Jennings maintains that the Buddha taught that there was no permanent self, attan. By this he takes it to be that the individual has no permanent ego. Since the ego is seen as transient, the pursuit of the apparent interests of the temporary self are said to be delusory. If there is no continuity, then by definition any idea of samsâra, transmigration, and personal karma is denied. However, the teaching of the Buddha demonstrated the notion of a personality structure that was subject to changes not only during one lifetime as the individual matured from child to adult, but also from life to life, with possibly the greatest opportunity for change being during the period of transition from one life

to the next, when the structure was free from the constraints of corporate form.

The Fire Story. The Pot of Milk Story

Further stories are told which support the idea that it is not the same person who is re-formed. In the Fire Story a man lights a fire which spreads and destroys a field. The owner of the field feels, quite rightly, that the man is guilty of setting fire to his field, but the fire-raiser protests his innocence, declaring the fire he lit not to be the same fire which destroyed the farmer's field. He was right. It was not the same fire, but the second fire derived from the first. In the story about the pot of milk, a man purchases a pot of milk from a cow-keeper, but leaves it and arranges to collect it the next day. If when he returns to collect the milk, it has soured and formed curds, would the man be justified in saying that it was not the same pot of milk which he had purchased the previous day? Obviously, he would not be justified, because again, although not the same, the one was derived from the other.

"Although the separate being, nâma-rûpam ending in death, mâran-antikam is other than the separate being in the reformation, pati-sandhismin yet the one was produced from the other....."

(The Vedantic Buddhism of the Buddha, Jennings [1947]

Ap. Bb. § 1, p462)

### The Story of the Mangoes

The question being put by the Raj to Nagâsena is in respect of the re-formation of the being. To illustrate the reality of what happens, Nagâsena tells the story of the mangoes. In this story a man carries off another man's mangoes. The mango-owner siezes the thief and declares,

"My mangoes, lord, deva, were carried off by this man," and the other were to say thus, "I did not carry off this man's mangoes; the mangoes which were planted by this man were other than the mangoes which were carried off by me; I am not guilty, danda-patto." (Jennings [1947], Ap. Bb. § 1, p462)

The question was, "Was the man guilty?" The answer of course is that he was, because the fruit which he took derived from, and was not disconnected from, that planted by the farmer. For the transmigrating individual it is as Nagâsena says,

".....with this separate being, iminâ nâmarûpena, one does action, whether good or evil, and by the action another separate being aññam-nâma-rûpam is formed hereafter....." (Ap. Bb. § 1 p462)

### Jennings's Treatment of Karma and Rebirth

Jennings is totally against any idea of transmigration, and particularly the persistence of an individual from life to life. (§ 7,

p xxix.) He has not remained objective in his treatment of the subject and evidence of this lack of objectivity lies in his relegation of all the work on karma and rebirth to appendices. In Appendix Bb [Notel], Jennings declares that extracts from the Milinda-pañha, which although post-canonical are orthodox, are definitely saying that there is no transmigration at death, although the influence passes on. Whilst the writer feels that the Milinda-pañha must be quoted with care since it is a later work and inclined to be too intellectual and sectarian in its approach, going far beyond anything that the Buddha said, all that paragraphs 1 and 2 seem to be trying to communicate is the fact that it is not the person you know who is born again.

#### The Queen who wished to obtain Wealth, Beauty and Social Order

Warren has set out the work on karma and rebirth mainly under one chapter in his book, Buddhism in Translations, namely Chapter III. He has included many stories, some of which have been mentioned already. With regard to the question of continuity from life to life, the first story we come across is that of a conversation between the Buddha and Mallikā, the queen. The title is, "How to obtain wealth, beauty and social position". It is translated from the Añguttara-Nikāya, IV 197. (Warren [1900], § 43, p228) The queen proceeds to question the Buddha as to why it is that a woman is,

".....ugly, of a bad figure, and horrible to look at, and indigent, poor, needy and low in the social scale? .....when a

woman is ugly, of bad figure, and horrible to look at, and rich and wealthy, affluent and high in the social scale? .....when a woman is beautiful, attractive, pleasing and possessed of surpassing loveliness, and indigent, poor, needy and low in the social scale? .....when a woman is beautiful, attractive, pleasing, and possessed of surpassing loveliness, and rich, wealthy, affluent and high in the social scale? ....."

As One Is, So Will One Become

The Buddha replies that one is as one has been; behaviour in a previous existence shapes and determines the way one will be in the present existence. Every passing thought will have left its trace. If a woman has been,

".....irascible and violent and at every little thing said against her has felt spiteful, angry, enraged and sulky, and manifested anger, hatred and heart-burning; when she has given no alms to monk or brahman, of food, drink, building sites, carriages or garlands, etc. etc.....whenever she may be born, she is ugly, of a bad figure, and horrible to look at, and indigent, poor, needy and low in the social scale. Similarly if a woman's behaviour has been of an exemplary nature then she will be blessed with beauty of nature and form and will be in a high position in society."

In *The Round of Existence*, translated from the *Milinda-pañha* 77<sup>e</sup>, Warren sets out the story of the planting of the mango seeds as a demonstration that the round of existence is very much the same. (Warren [1900] § 44 p 232) As one plants the seeds after eating a mango and subsequently a new tree springs up, from which one can eventually pick a mango and once more plant a tree elsewhere, so a person is born, lives, dies and is born again elsewhere; lives, dies and is born again elsewhere. Warren also cites the story of the teaching of the poem, which most explicitly shows what was in the Buddha's mind, because the example of the teacher's not having lost anything whatsoever of the poem, even though a pupil has learned it, is one robust enough to have stood the passage of time between its first being used and the present time without any distraction of meaning, either linguistic or cultural. The feeling of continuity is beautifully expressed, but the strong assertion that rebirth occurs without anything transmigrating is misleading. This is not what the Buddha taught. It goes far beyond his words, which is what might be expected from this particular source, which is a much later work and probably has suffered much alteration.

#### A Comparison with the Ideas Expressed in the Vedas and the Upanisads

We are all aware of the need to examine the past in order to understand the present. What pertains at a particular time is usually the modification of something which has been well established in some previous era. Early Buddhism does not differ in this respect. In his paper, Personal Identity in the Upanisads and Buddhism, Werner has shown

how the teaching of the Buddha on the question of the nature of the individual was similar to the teaching of the Upaniṣads, which owed their understanding to the hymns of the Vedas, particularly the R̥g Veda and to some extent the Atharva Veda. The idea that the death of the body is not the end and that something intrinsic survives to take up a continued existence on some other plane has been an integral part of man's belief system over many thousands of years. The complexity of the nature of the idea has varied in time with the culture holding the belief. Possibly, at some time in the distant past, contemplation of death may have led the observer to reason that something shadowy and ethereal and probably associated with breath, which was noticeably absent, had left. Furthermore, it is not unreasonable to suggest that that which was believed to have departed would have been felt to have had a greater association with the character and personality of the erstwhile individual than did the remaining cadaver, which at best would have been seen to have borne a superficial likeness only. Some of the observers can be expected to have drawn the inference that at the beginning of life some thing must have entered the individual. If we look back to the Vedas we do not find any clear answers as to what these shadowy substances were thought to be, but Werner identifies some interesting hints which have stood the test of time. The term used in the Vedas to describe the elemental and dynamic forces, including intelligence, which make up the person, is devatas. These constituents do not belong to the individual, but have their respective abodes within the universe and return there on the death of the body. It appears that they work on two separate levels, one subtle and one gross. In the background, maintaining the activity, is a mysterious transcendental force. It is this mysterious force, and that part which is

the subtle tier, which will be examined more closely. The gross tier equates with rûpa and is not relevant to this part of the discussion.

#### The Transcendental Force or Causal Tier

One is able to deduce from passages of the Vedic hymns that the personality structure can be seen as having three tiers. Aja, the unborn, is the transcendental or causal tier which is beyond sensory experience and corresponds to the later Upaniṣadic concept of brahman. This force is the supporting force of the universe and reality as a whole and therefore supports individual things and beings and, as such, is the inner essence of man, like the Upaniṣadic concept âtman. (Werner [1985] p 3)

In Buddhism however we have a question-mark. This tier is not named and is never referred to directly. Buddhism went to great lengths to tell us what it was not, but never ever pin-pointed what it was, as did the Vedas and the Upaniṣads. The Buddha would not give explanations to his questioners, whom he judged not capable of understanding truly and therefore likely to echo his words meaninglessly. However, inferences can be drawn from this. By differentiating from his given empirical model of mankind, the Buddha was demonstrating that there was an absolute, a background mysterious force, which, as befits transcendence, was not a part of that known model. It can be argued that these were the actions of a teacher highlighting the presence of some thing as opposed to teaching nihilism. Support for this deduction can be found in the Pali Canon.

"Monks, there is an unborn, a not-become, a not-made, a not-compounded. Monks, if that unborn, not-become, not-made, not-compounded were not, there would be apparent no escape from that here is born, become, made, compounded. But, monks, since there is an unborn.....therefore the escape from this that here is born.....compounded is apparent."

(Sacred Books of the Buddhists Vol. V333, Woodward [1948])

#### The Subtle Tier

Representing the subtle tier in the Vedas is tanû. Whilst this can be translated as body, a more adequate rendering would be "likeness". It corresponds more to the idea of rûpa, shape/form, than it does to śarîra, embodiment, in a sense which is readily appreciated when one considers that tanû is possessed by gods as well as deceased humans. It could be said that tanû is what one would call character, a man's phenomenal self, that specific collection of attributes, including manas, mentality; asu, animating power; prâna, life-force; and other mental faculties which together with the universal forces give being to the person. It is said in the Vedas that, after the death of the person, tanû exists for an infinitesimal moment on its own, without body, soul or mental capacities - an empty framework which is promptly revitalised. Tanû is the structure which is imposed upon the revitalising, functional constituents and by which the continuity of the distinctive marks of an individual's identity are preserved. It is this peculiarity of structuring, called tanû in the

Vedas, which is referred to in the Upanisads as sarvīñāma, with-  
consciousness.

Again in Buddhism the situation is not clear, but Werner has carefully examined the terminology of the Sutta Piṭaka and suggests that citta is the term which in early Buddhism was the equivalent of tanû. Although the language of the Sutta Piṭaka is not systematic and consistent and, although citta is often found in the same sense as viññāna and manas, its greatest frequency of occurrence is in reference to man's inner makeup and in connection with his heart, hadaya. The best clue to this figurative usage, Werner suggests, is

"whatever one ponders and reflects on much, that way turns the inclination of his heart [M19 = PTS ed. I, 115]"

(Werner [1985] p 14)

Werner's suggestion is not without support from other sources. This same teaching has survived to this very day through both the Old Testament and the New Testament of the Holy Bible. (Authorised King James Version)

"Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom."

(Proverbs, 23, 4)

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal:

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

(St. Matthew, 6, 19-21)

Present-day understanding of the influence of positive and negative reflection on experiences is that this is a powerful means by which developmental learning within the individual best comes about. Habits are formed or changed, some to become firmly rooted and retained, others are more temporary. The person's disposition towards his environment will never again be what it was. There can be no doubt that in this sense citta means, in the same sense as tanû, the part of a person one would call character or personality, which is constantly evolving and continues beyond a life.

#### The Transitional Stage

Further evidence that a belief in something passing on from one life to another existed in early Buddhist thought is to be found in the idea of there being three conditions for conception.

"Yes; if there is coitus of the parents and if it is the mother's period; and if the tutelary deity of generation be present, then this triple conjunction brings about conception."

(Majjhima-Nakâya, Lord Chalmers [1926], Sutta XCII)

Criticism must be made of Chalmer's translation of gandhabba as tutelary deity. It is too clearly a projection of the Christian philosophy of his time to be reliably empathetic with the sentiment of the original work. A less value-laden interpretation of gandhabba is Werner's "discarnate spirit", nāma awaiting opportunity to inhabit a rūpa. (Werner [1985] p 15) Niceties of interpretation aside, the fact that the people of the time identified an idea with a specific name is evidence that they believed in the intrinsic properties of some thing which survived the death of the body. The idea of gandhabba was already in existence, being mentioned in the Upanisads.

#### The Buddhist Doctrine of Karma

The apparent contradiction of the other tenets of Buddhism by the doctrine of karma makes it an extremely difficult doctrine to understand. The person is resolved into a number of dhammas, elements, which have no permanent existence and no one of which could be regarded as the individual, the ego or self. Given this state of affairs, there can be no thing which can be said to transmigrate. However, karma remains and appears to have the faculty of being reborn interminably. Warren defines karma as deeds, performance or action, and he questions whether any deed could be said to be immortal except in a purely figurative sense. He feels that if the word is translated more freely it might be called character. (Warren [1900] p 210) Since our knowledge of people could be described as being what we know of their body and their character and on death their body patently does not survive, it may be said that it is

their character which does. One question remains, that is, how is something which is no entity in itself reborn? Here it is necessary to understand that karma relates to two distinct ideas, the deed itself and the effects of that deed in bringing about change in the character of the doer. One must add to this the idea that this effect continues after death into the next life. Karma is what a person inherits from himself in a previous state of existence. It is however fruitful only where there is attachment. If acts are carried out in a state of pure passionlessness we have a situation in which karma is inefficient, that is, it does not come to fruition. The deeds performed must be appropriate to the situation at hand. For example, if a person were a king he would behave in a way which was suitable to the situation regardless of how it affected his situation as a monarch. He would seek the best possible outcome for the case, even if that were to do nothing. Action must be correct in context as far as the person can see: the wise man is often described as inactive. One who has attained such a state ceases to be driven into a future predetermined by past and present actions.

#### The New Existence Springs from the Old

Warren has translated all the stories which, by analogy, show how the name and form born into the new existence are not the same name and form as that of the old existence, and how the next existence comes about by virtue of the effects of the deeds committed in the previous existence. They are,

1. The theft of the mangoes

2. The neglected fire which burns a field
3. The burning village from a lighted match
4. The young girl who turns into a beautiful woman
5. The pot of milk

Some of these stories have already been discussed and seem to be quite straightforward. The teacher is trying to illustrate that, although the new existence is different from the old, the new one has sprung from the old. The essence of the message is that there is a qualitative difference between the existences.

Chapter XVII of the Visuddhi-Magga begins with a reminder that its content is about a process within samsāra, a dynamic maintained by desire and attachment. (Warren [1900] § 47c p 238) It goes on to emphasise that in the sense that nāma is subject to a dynamic process of evolution it can be said that it is never the same from one moment to another. When confronted with death, either from natural causes or through violence, the body submits by degrees. There is withdrawal of the senses, the eyesight fails, and the other senses. Consciousness, that is, the power of feeling, thinking and vitality makes its last stand in the heart. Here it continues to exist by virtue of karma, predispositions or volition. Karma is the name of the principle which causes consciousness to exist. It is dependent on the existence of desire and ignorance, avidya. Cessation of desire ends karma and by definition rebirth. Without karma there is no future. At the time of death, karma contains desire. It consists of former deeds which were important, weighty, for example, murder or noble deeds. The karma remembered at the time of death is that which is described as "close at hand". This residual consciousness

is not the individual, but has been shaped by his existence and acquired characteristics only he could have given it. If all this sounds familiar, it is hardly surprising, since it falls entirely within Upanisadic teaching. To explain that rebirth is not cloning and replication, but cause and effect, examples are given. These are echoes, light, the impressions of a seal and reflections in a mirror, each of which exists without coming from elsewhere, as does this mental character. The text goes on to point out that if, for example, the milk in the pot of milk story had been the same, then sour cream would not have arisen from it. If there was absolute diversity one would not come from the other. Neither is there absolute sameness.

#### The Causes and Dependence of Name and Form

The "Reflections of Existence", Chapter XIX of the Visuddhi-Magga, seeks to show that the important thing is the knowledge of the dependence of the mental and physical constituents, nāma and rūpa, and the consequent removal of doubt in the three divisions of time, that is, past, present and future. (Warren [1900] § 48 p 242) If a follower of the Buddha wishes to have this knowledge, he searches for the causes and dependence of the mental and physical constituents, that is, for the reason for the existence, the previous actions and attachments which have brought it about. He seeks this as a doctor seeks the reason for a disease or as a compassionate person seeks the parents of an abandoned child. He reflects that the mental and physical constituents have a cause because they are neither the same for all at all times, nor are they brought about

by personal power. Karma is an impersonal law of cause and effect. He examines the physical conditions of a body when it comes into being and decides that the womb is a disgusting place, resting as it does in viscera.

".....ignorance, desire, attachment and karma are the cause of it in as much as they produce it; food is its dependence in as much as it supports it." (Warren [1900] p 242)

Ignorance, desire and attachment are the basis for the continuence in samsâra; karma, which embraces these three and the mental structure, is the principle by which the nature of the next existence is determined; food is the sustainer in the self-evident way that it is. As the being develops and begins to realise that it has mental and physical constituents and a dependent manner of existence, questions concerning the three divisions of time arise.

"Did I exist in past time?"

"Did I not exist in past time?"

"What was I in past time?"

"How was I in past time?"

"Did I in past time change from one existence to another?"

These are the five questions concerning the past. The five questions concerning the future are,

"Shall I exist in future time?"

"Shall I not exist in future time?"

"What shall I be in future time?"

"How shall I be in future time?"

"Shall I in future time change from one existence to another?"

Finally, there are six questions concerning the present which throw doubt on the present existence.

"Am I?"

"Am I not?"

"What am I?"

"How am I?"

"Whence came this existing body?"

"Whither is it to go?"

(Warren [1900] p 243)

When one is able to understand the dependent nature of existence of mental and physical constituents, one realises that this situation ever obtained and ever will obtain. At this moment one ceases to question, because there is realisation that things are dependent on one another.

"old age and death of the constituents exist when birth exists..... consciousness when karma exists, karma when ignorance exists."

(Warren [1900] p 244)

The present existence is dependent on the previous existence, and the future existence is dependent on the present existence. The process is evolutionary rather than a series of discrete events. At any given time

one is creating one's future. How one behaves and conducts oneself, in fact every passing thought, is setting the mould for a future life.

#### The Four-fold Divisions of Karma

The text goes on to describe that different people come to understanding by different paths according to the composition of their personalities. Although one may be brought to understanding by asking the above questions, another may look at the divisions of karma, which can be said to be four-fold.

1. That which bears fruit in the present existence which would be meritorious or demeritorious thoughts constituting the first swiftens in the seven thoughts of a stream of swiftens. This is that karma which comes with the being from a previous existence. This will bring forth fruit in this existence. If it does not do so, it is by-gone karma, that is, its time for bringing forth fruit has gone by. There was no fruit, there is no fruit, nor will there be any fruit.

2. That which bears fruit in rebirth. This karma stems from the thoughts at the point of death and is thus able to influence the nature of the rebirth. Naturally this comes to fruition in that rebirth. That which is most recent before that rebirth has arguably the greatest impact on it.

3. That which bears fruit at no fixed time. Whatever you are doing in the course of your life may present the opportunity for this karma to bear fruit. This means that some is repaid quickly, some later, and some is carried over because no opportunity presented itself. As long as the round of rebirth continues there is no by-gone karma.

4. By-gone karma. (Warren [1900] p 245)

Another four-fold division of karma is,

1. The weighty, which whether good or bad bears fruit before other kinds, for example, lofty deeds and serious immoral acts.

2. The abundant, which bears fruit before that which is not abundant. Here we have an accumulative pressure for redress.

3. The close-at-hand, which is the karma remembered at the time of death. This "springs up with him in rebirth".

4. The habitual: that which is habitual brings about rebirth when the other three are absent. (Warren [1900] p 246)

Then there is a further four-fold division of karma.

1. Productive, which may be good or bad. This produces both form and other fruition groups, not just at the time of conception, but as long as they continue.

2. Supportive: as the name suggests, this supports that which is already there and ensures that it continues.

3. Counteractive: again, as the name suggests, this counteracts and suppresses the ensuing happiness or misery, not allowing it to continue. This has a balancing effect. A good, and a bad, do not cancel one another out; they both have to come to fruition, but the effect is mediated.

4. Destructive: whether good or bad, this destroys other, weak karma, preventing it from bearing fruit and so making room for its own fruition. The fruit arising from destructive karma is called apparitional. It is as if a court, having someone before it charged with drunken driving and a myriad other minor, inconsequential summary offences, sets aside the latter in order to deal specifically and appropriately with the former, major offence. (Warren [1900] p 246)

When someone has achieved insight into the twelve different karmas and their fruits as being distinct from each other, doubts concerning past, present and future disappear. It becomes evident that it is merely name and form that passes through

"modes, classes, stages, grades and forms of existence by means of a cause and effect principle." (Warren [1900] p 247)

One sees that behind the actions there is no actor and that, although actions bear fruit, no-one experiences that fruit. There is no ego.

No-one can tell when things began or when in future they will cease. The fruit is not found in the deed, or the deed in the fruit, yet without the one there is not the other. Deeds and fruit are separate, yet dependent on one another.

"A round of karma and of fruit;  
The fruit from karma doth arise;  
From karma then rebirth doth spring  
and thus the world rolls on and on." (Warren [1900] p 247)

#### Past, Present and Future

Once there is a comprehension of the dependence of name and form, through studying the round of karma and rebirth, and questioning of the three divisions of time has ceased, then one understands the past, present and future elements of being, at death and at conception, and that no single element of being comes into a present existence from a past existence. That which came into being in a past existence perished with it, but, in dependence on karma of that existence, other groups have come into being in the present existence. These will perish with this existence, others coming into being with the next existence, but not a single element of being will pass over from this existence to the next. Illustrations of this idea are that the words of a teacher do not pass over into the mouth of a pupil, although the pupil repeats them; that holy water drunk by the messenger sent for the purpose does not pass into the belly of the sick man, nevertheless the curing of the sickness depends on

the water; that the features of a face do not pass to the reflection in a mirror, but the appearance of the image is dependent on it; that the flame does not pass from the wick of one lamp to another, but the flame of the second lamp comes into existence in dependence on the flame of the former. So, in the same way, no element of being passes from one existence to the next, but the groups of the present existence depend on the groups of the last existence and the future existence will depend on the groups of the present existence. In other words, one is as a result of what one has been in the past and one will be in the future as a result of what one is in the present.

#### Death - Natural and Untimely

In discussing death in "Different Kinds of Death" in Chapter VIII of the Visuddhi-Magga, a distinction is made. (Warren [1900] § 49 p 252) It is not biological death which is being discussed, or death as a part of the ceaseless round of samsâra, or indeed death which is the liberation from rebirth. What is being discussed is the two kinds, natural death and untimely death. In this context natural death is brought about by the exhaustion of merit or by the natural term of life or by both. Death by the exhaustion of merit is that which comes closely after the time that the karma which brought about conception has ripened to a termination, although it might be that the physical body has not worn out. Death by the exhaustion of the natural term of life comes about when the span of life, nutritive powers and other biological systems are exhausted. In the

present race of mankind, all things being equal and other factors permitting, life expectancy in purely physical terms would be 100 years.

Untimely death is brought about by karma cutting off karma. This comes about at a time when other circumstances do not appear to be pointing to death or impending death. There is a conjunction of factors which permit the realisation of what is probably a weighty karma for which death is the fruition and which needed that opportunity to be able to come to fruition.

#### Fruitful and Inefficient Karma

The difference between fruitful and inefficient karma is explained in the story, "Fruitful and Barren Karma" from Añguttara-Nikâya. (Warren [1900] § 40 p 215) That which is required for karma to be is described. There are three conditions for deeds that produce karma.

1. Covetousness
2. Hatred
3. Infatuation

When deeds are performed in any one of these conditions, wherever the personality may be, the deeds will ripen and, whenever they ripen, the person will experience the fruition of those deeds. It may be in the present life or in some subsequent life. It may be compared to a seed, which, when sown on fertile soil and watered, will grow, increase and

develop. It is only when actions are carried out without personal interest that one does not create karma. The crux of this story is that the operation of karma is not mechanistic in the sense that whatever one does leads directly to one's award irrespective of the thoughts, attitudes and other circumstances surrounding those deeds. If that were the case, there would be no logical reason for religious beliefs. Buddhism regards thought as instrumental in producing karma. Indeed thoughts, words and deeds are all seen as modalities, activity in which can lead to the creation of karma. Furthermore, a hierarchical relationship is implied, with thought being seen as more determinant of karma than deed. If a person can raise his morality in terms of his thoughts to a point at which his thoughts alone will not determine any future karma for him, that state in that modality may or may not, dependent on other variables, negate or reduce the degree of the creation of karma as a result of action in the other modalities. The state of morality which, when attained, means that no further karma is created, does not mean automatically that the karmic slate is cleaned. Karma from the past that is sufficiently burdensome may still come to fruition given the opportunity.

#### The Death of Mogallāna

Frequently in life one hears of people suffering terrible ends, which do not seem to be justified by the lives they have led. One feels that they have experienced an unjust retribution. The story of "The Death of Mogallāna" attempts to explain one such tragic happening in the terms of this doctrine. (Warren [1900] § 41 p 221) The story is about the

elder, Mogallâna, who had led an exemplary life which was terminated by his being murdered at the hands of paid highwaymen. News of the nature of his untimely death soon spread all over India and the malefactors were brought quickly to justice, together with those who had authorised the murder. The priests then discussed the untimely and seemingly unjust end of Mogallâna. The teacher explained that while Mogallâna's death may not have seemed fitting with his present life, it was perfectly just in respect of a previous existence. It would seem that, in that existence, he had slain personally his aged and ailing parents at the whim of his young wife. The story-teller is at pains to tell us that Mogallâna had had no wish for a wife in the previous existence and had only taken one as a result of his parents' insistence that he should do so. (Warren p 221)

The force for the fountain of karma is within oneself, it is part of one's own package. It is the appropriate conjunction of many individuals which can create a situation for this potential to be realised [mutually] within each individual.

#### Good and Bad Karma

"Good and Bad Karma" from the Saṃyutta-Nikāya gives an explanation of how you cannot take wealth with you when you die, but what you do take are the fruits of your actions and/or the ripening seeds. (Warren [1900] § 42 p 226) Therefore one should perform only noble deeds, so storing up a treasure-house of future wealth. Any merit gained from good works

performed in this life goes with one into future existence. So it is with bad works.

### Desire and Attachment

An important determinant of rebirth is, of course, the dual concept of desire and attachment. In "Cause of Rebirth" from the Milindapañha, we find the king questioning the teacher, Nāgasena, about whether beings are reborn into another existence and what it is that brings about rebirth. (Warren [1900] § 45 p 232) Nāgasena replies that all who have attachment will be reborn into another existence. This is followed by the explanation of the cessation of rebirth in paragraph 46, "Is this to be my last existence?" To the person who becomes enlightened, it will be clear that he will not be reborn again; as clear as it is to the farmer who decides not to fill his granary, that it will remain empty. Again from the Milindapañha, paragraph 50, there is an explanation of "how existence in hell is possible". Being born into an environment will mean that your physical constituents are of that environment and that the viability of existence in that environment is implicit. Karmic desires for continued existence will maintain that existence and if need be further existences within the same type of environment until that karma is exhausted. Paragraph 51, "Death's Messengers", from Añguttara-Nikāya (iii. 3. 5'), points out that signs of one's fate and old age are ever around, but the warnings tend to be ignored. Thoughts of old age, disease and death are too uncomfortable for most people to contemplate. People fail to recognise the futility of attachment to something as impermanent as a

body. Whatever else, karma has to ripen to a termination and, until that time arrives, the life of the individual will continue no matter what sort of hell-hole he has created for himself by failing to recognise the need for right-living according to the natural order of things.

### The Buddha's Belief in Moral Responsibility

Werner seeks to bring a sense of perspective to our understanding of the teaching of the Buddha. In his book, Yoga and Indian Philosophy, he points out that, subsequent to the Upaniṣadic teaching, religious philosophical thought in India was almost totally dominated by the teachings of rebirth and that this gives to Indian doctrines their specific character. One exception to this was the teaching of the Cārvākas, who were materialists, teaching that man was a product of four material elements like everything else. It was Buddhism which reached the next stage of the formulation of the teaching of rebirth in concentrating on and elaborating the ethical aspects. The Buddha confirmed the importance of moral responsibility and the consequences of all acts, words and deeds, and endorsed the doctrine of karma in the sense that it implied the transmission of the effects of actions. The character of man evolves according to his integral moral standard, his quality of consciousness, and his level of knowledge or ignorance. These are determinants of the nature of existence for better or worse. One is reborn into an environment with all its opportunities and limitations as a direct consequence of one's actions in former lives. Development in the current life is partly the unfolding of these consequences and partly as a

result of one's current behaviour. An understanding of existence being in a variety of spheres was commonly understood and expressed in Vedic times and, for the Buddhist, rebirth on this earth is seen as only one of many possibilities. (Werner [1977] p 50) Life in human form is seen as the most important because it offers the best opportunity for self-development. Once in sub-human form, the being has to wait passively for the exhaustion of the karma responsible for that level of existence, with little or no opportunity to influence its development, until it eventually returns to a human or possibly super-human state. Such a cycle of existences can have no conceivable beginning or end.

"A world without end, is this round of birth and death. No beginning can be seen of those beings hindered by ignorance, bound by craving running through the round of birth and death."

(Some Sayings of the Buddha, Woodward [1973], pp 121-2)

AN EXAMINATION OF THE REFERENCES TO KARMA AND REBIRTH IN THE  
BHAGAVADGĪTĀ AS TRANSLATED BY RADHAKRISHNAN.

The Origins of the Gītā

The date of the Bhagavadgītā is uncertain, but it can be assumed that it is pre-Christian. It was probably composed close to the time of Patangali, but not earlier than 300BC. It may be surmised that it has been altered from time to time. Because most early Indian literature is anonymous, it is not surprising that the author of the Gītā is unknown, although it has been attributed to Vyāsa, whom legend tells us was responsible for the compilation of the Mahābhārata. It is said that the Gītā is actually Chapters XXIII to XL of the Bhiṣmaparvan of the Mahābhārata. The idea presented by Garbe that the Gītā was originally a Sāṅkhya-yoga treatise, which was formulated into its present form by a follower of Vedānta in the second century AD, has largely been rejected. Holtzmann sees the Gītā as a pantheistic poem remodelled by the Viṣṇuites, while Keith sees it as an Upaniṣad similar in type to the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad. Others such as Otto and Jacobi believe that the doctrinal treatises are interpolated and that the original nucleus has been elaborated by the annotators into its present form. (Radhakrishnan [1971] pp 14 and 15)

Radhakrishnan has adopted the text followed by Śāṅkara in his commentary because it is the oldest extant commentary on the Gītā. The

acceptance of karmic law operating in a sense of retribution was so widespread that the Gîtâ takes it as a starting point. Since the background to the poem is one of war, one can infer that it was an era generating unfavourable karma. The Gîtâ advises one to detach oneself, since salvation lies beyond anything which may be here now. The Gîtâ is evidence that both Upaniṣadic teaching and the teaching of Buddhism had become popularised.

### The Style

The word gîtâ means "song" and the Bhagavadgîtâ is written in the style of a song. It is an epic poem purportedly sung by the adorable one, Kriṣṇa. The author uses the dramaturgical model which employs the principles of the theatre. So we have a story, which has a plot, there is a beginning, a middle and, although inconclusive, an ending. This style of teaching, in which there are identifiable characters, scene setting and dialogue, sets out to involve the reader emotionally. In the Gîtâ there are two main characters, the Supreme [Kriṣṇa] and Arjuna [a reluctant warrior-leader], and there are many other shadowy figures in the background, often referred to, but never "seen". Kriṣṇa cannot actually do anything; he is the observer, but he can and does advise and direct. His role is that of the ideal teacher. Arjuna is the archetypical student asking all the right questions and expressing all the right doubts so that Kriṣṇa is able to put all the teaching points across. The author chooses to put into the hands of Kriṣṇa two methods of instruction, rational and

mythological. Upaniṣadic teaching was popularised through the telling of the Gītā to groups of people by wandering bards.

Although a number of aspects of Upaniṣadic teaching are covered, one particular point is specifically highlighted, which is that of desireless action. Indeed it is its coverage of action, and in particular desireless action, that is the keystone of the teaching of the Gītā. It is this particular emphasis on action which brings to the Gītā a slightly different perspective from that of the Upaniṣads.

#### Renunciation of Desire

Needless to say the concepts of desire and attachment figure prominently in the Gītā. In Chapter I, Arjuna finds himself on the eve of battle totally unprepared to act in a detached manner.

"Alas, what a great sin have we resolved to commit in striving to slay our own people through our greed for the pleasures of the kingdom." (verse 45)

and

"Far better would it be for me if the sons of Dhṛtarâṣṭra, with weapons in hand, should slay me in the battle, while I remain unresisting and unarmed." (verse 46)

He realises that he is fighting his own people and he really does not wish to be involved in such behaviour. What he does not understand is that, although human love and affection are not wrong, one cannot make the main end in life the pursuit of happiness. If we did we would be doomed to failure. Inevitably old age brings physical deterioration, infirmity and death, so one has to get on and do that which is right. One cannot judge the rightness or wrongness of an action by the degree of pleasure or misery it brings to the doer. If one does that which is right and should be done, neither counting the cost nor seeking reward, one's action is desireless action [niskāma karma].

The teacher directs us along the path of desireless action in Chapter IV verses 18 to 22. It is clear that total inaction is impossible, since, even when we simply sit, our bodily processes will continue. True non-activity is described as being when the inner composure is preserved and one is free from attachment. If one's work is free from desire for reward, then one is truly a person of learning. Although he works, it is as if he does nothing, since work done without attachment makes it seem to an outsider that what the person does is effortless. Where the person is happy to do that which presents itself as being in need of being done and no longer experiences the agonies produced by desire, or the up-and-down feelings produced by success or failure, he is able to act and is not bound by the fruits of his actions. He no longer generates personal karma. Chapter V discusses True Renunciation and in verse 1 the fact that it is selfish work which has to be abandoned is reiterated. It is selfish work which binds us to the chain of karma and rebirth. In verse 5 it is stressed that the true

renouncer is not one who is inactive, but one who does his work in a spirit of detachment. The Gitâ makes it quite clear that not acting is not the way to avoid karma; it insists on renunciation of desire, not renunciation of action. The Gitâ does not subscribe to the view that he who acts is in bondage and he who is free cannot act. The liberated soul is able to remain in service. (Chapter XVIII verses 1 and 2) It is inner renunciation and relinquishment of attachment which count. Verses 37 to 39 of Chapter III aptly describe the insatiable nature of desire and the way in which it feeds upon itself.

#### The Nature and Mechanism of Karma

The Gitâ introduces the reader to the theme of the nature and mechanism of karma and rebirth in verse 12 of Chapter II.

"Never was there a time when I was not, nor thou, nor these lords of men, nor will there ever be a time hereafter when we shall cease to be."

This seems to be telling us that all beings exist over all time in one form or another. Ignorance coexists with enlightenment in exactly the same way as pain and suffering coexist with ease and enjoyment. Whilst it might be argued that they balance each other in the universe they do not cancel each other out to produce some sort of homogenous average. Verse 13 goes on to give an explanation of the evolutionary process. As you live your life, you are creating your next life and body. The way you

live, act and think prepares what will be in the future. As you think now, so you are and will be. Going from one life to the next is not the big jump it appears to be, because, from the time of conception to the time of death, change in the direction of that step has been inexorably taking place.

It is stated clearly in verse 22 that a person takes on a new body when the old body dies. The comparison is made between worn-out clothing which one casts off and a worn-out body which one treats in similar fashion. The uselessness of just following the letter of the Veda and carrying out ritualistic practices is the subject of verses 42 to 44. Certain ritual life may well earn you time in heaven, but you will be back in the mortal world when the karma from the ritual practices, which earned you that time, has been exhausted. The Vedic sacrifices were made for reward, whereas the Gitâ teaches that you should renounce all selfish desire and work, making all life a sacrifice offered with true devotion. It is no good following a set of rules laid down as appropriate by someone else, because, by so doing, you are neglecting to use the powers of discrimination with which you have been endowed.

#### Individual Differences

The theme of the nature and mechanism of karma and rebirth is continued in Chapter III. Verse 3 suggests the idea of there being different ways or paths a man may take.

"O blameless One, in this world a two-fold way of life has been taught of yore by Me, the path of knowledge for men of contemplation and that of works for men of action."

This idea is reminiscent of the teaching of the Upaniṣads, but here the teacher is differentiating between people of different temperaments as we do today in the teaching of psychology. The way of knowledge would be compatible for those with a tendency towards introversion and the wish to explore the inner spiritual life by way of contemplation. The way of work is more suitable for those who tend towards extroversion and naturally orient themselves towards physical action. It could be argued that there are not truly two distinct paths, but rather a range of choices along a single continuum. The Gītā does not see the way of action as being any less efficient than the way of knowledge, it is simply a different method.

Verse 4 goes on to stress the causal relationships between the actions and the results produced by them. We are again reminded that desireless action is the state to be attained. Until that state is attained one is bound to the world of becoming.

#### The Natural Laws of the Universe: Appropriate Behaviour

The method by which one can consciously determine how things shall be is aptly described in verses 30 to 33 of Chapter III. One should always have one's consciousness fixed on the Self whatever one is doing. Thy

will be done not my will should be the maxim. It is volition which makes people behave according to what we often call their basic natures or predispositions. One's predisposition will determine one's propensity to behave in a certain way given a particular situation. The basic nature of an individual will be formed over time and will consist of existing values interacting with one's construction of every situation. Values consist of that which one brings to one's present life, together with any modification and addition brought about by experiences in this life. Any given situation will be construed by an individual as a result of an interaction between what is and that person's previous experience. Experience is accumulated over time by things which simply happen to one or as a result of deliberate actions, with or without any conscious thought of personal development. Any work that you do on yourself consciously has an effect on your subconscious. Thought is as much a causative agent with a subsequent effect on the future as is deed and much mental work on one's development can be undertaken in this knowledge. All experience becomes part of unconscious memory (Penfield [1952]). Memory is the result of development in one's lifetime from the inborn intelligence [pûrvaprajñâ] imbued at conception. Used in this sense the word memory must not be confused with recall; we are considering accumulated experience irrespective of whether a person can remember it [re-experience it]. After mental developmental work, reaction to events will still be according to one's nature, but this nature will have been modified by the previous conscious effort. Arguably it is only the right thing done as a result of this process that can be called truly selfless action.

As can be seen from verse 32, such development is not seen as accidental. In verse 33 attention is drawn to repression. The most strong-willed efforts to repress one's nature may well result in a lessening of action in accordance with that nature, but the resultant karma will in time produce a levelling of the balance. One should play out one's role as one finds oneself, but exercising the process towards the enhancement of selfless action. As Radhakrishnan says, "We cannot if we will suppress it. Violated nature will take its revenge." Verse 34 continues to entreat us to realise that our intelligence and reasoning ability, which is experienced as being superior to those of other embodied life forms on the planet, will not and cannot over-rule our nature. The use of these faculties can only be to modify that nature, and then only when applied through the medium of understanding [buddhi].

To act in a way which is right for oneself is the message of verse 35. Actions and deeds other than in accordance with one's own law are wasted. It is up to the individual himself to develop that part of his destiny within his potential influence. Karma is personal, what one needs to do is not necessarily what another needs to do. Right thinking and principle are more important than following the herd, as long as principle is not adhered to out of pig-headedness. You should follow that which is right for you even if it means death, since you would be at even greater risk in a subsequent life if you followed the herd and avoided death at that time. If work is done for any cause it will produce karma.

Such a cause could be that of motivation towards personal purification, unless the individual has renounced internally. If the total behaviour of

a person is towards self-purification, this is a form of desire unless he has renounced internally and externally. It is only when a person renounces all the benefits that he is free of such desire. One can either be in society and accept duties as well as benefits, or one can be out and have neither. What the Gītā tells us is to do our duty and renounce internally, when there will be no karmic results. Shrinking back from one's duty is selfish action. It is a refusal to accept responsibility for one's actions. One has to eliminate self-interest and act consciously in a selfless way to eliminate the pursuit of personal satisfaction to become exempt from karmic law. People who act in ignorance of these principles and devote themselves to working for self-purification are suffering from an illusion if they think they are on the path towards enlightenment. In the Gītā, Arjuna is admonished to carry out his work according to his duty as a warrior - because that is, for the purpose of the teaching, what he is. (Chapter IV verses 14 & 15)

#### Passage through Different Worlds

An explanation is given in Chapter VI verses 41 to 45 of how one goes up and down, incarnating in different worlds according to the fruits of one's actions. One can fall from a world of the righteous and be reborn on Earth, usually into the house of good and prosperous people, where there are advantages, or occasionally into the house of yogins, although this is rare. Whatever world one has lived in, one takes into the next world the "mental character" of previous incarnations - nothing is lost, no

effort is wasted. Former work pushes one onwards. Persistent application will bring one ultimately to redemption.

#### What is it that passes on?

When we are examining the nature and mechanism of karma and rebirth, we are looking for what it is that goes on from one life to another. The question is, "Is there anything in the Gîtâ which will enlighten us on this matter?" The following references seem to give the best hints: Chapter VII verses 4, 5 and 6; Chapter VIII verse 3; Chapter XIII verse 16; and Chapter XV verses 7 and 8. The key word from these verses would seem to be jivabhûtah. The first verse in which it occurs is verse 5 of Chapter VII. It must not be confused with jivâtman. Jivabhûtah is the manifestation of the Supreme in and through an individual living being. Jiva refers to this samsâric existence and bhûtah is "that which has become". Jivâtman is subtly different in that it refers to that effect of cosmic energy imbuing the living being with that energy which defines it as alive. Verse 5 of Chapter VII reminds us that the physical and psychological material of the living being is a manifestation of the lower nature of the Supreme, but it exhorts that there is also manifestation of a higher nature, jivabhûtâm, to be known, and "by which this world is upheld". Verse 6 tells us that there is no birth in this world other than through a manifestation afresh of the true nature of the Supreme in living form, jivabhûtah. It is the withdrawal of this nature from this world that is the end of the individual we know. This occurrence is not random, but is determined by the creative force of karma.

(Chapter VIII verse 3) More evidence for the above is to be found in verse 16 of Chapter XIII.

"He is undivided [indivisible] and yet he seems to be divided among beings. He is to be known as supporting creatures, destroying them and creating them afresh."

Verse 7 of Chapter XV summarises what has been said in verses 4, 5 and 6 of Chapter VII. Verse 8 goes further, it is pretty strongly suggestive that there is more to the process than simply a start and cessation of life. Accompanying the manifestations of the Supreme, jivabhūta, is a subtleness of individual character which is the product of previous, and the foundation of future, existences. Radhakrishnan's commentary on this verse is

"The subtle body accompanies the soul in its wanderings through cosmic existence."

and in this context it is clear from the preceding verse that soul refers to the essential nature of the Supreme which is eternal and immutable. It cannot be regarded as being an individual soul.

#### The Determinants which Prescribe the Future

In Chapter VIII verses 5 and 6, attention is drawn to the importance of the state of mind at the time of death. There is also a passing mention

on the same subject in Chapter VII verse 30. Two points seem to be being made. The one is that,

"it is not the causal fancy of the last moment but the persistent endeavour of the whole life that determines the future".

The other is that,

"The soul goes to that on which its mind is set during the last moments. What we think, we become. Our past thoughts determine our present birth and our present ones will determine the future."

If the mind is on the Self at the time of death then one will remain with the Self. Verse 16 tells us that, although from this world of Brahmâ downwards all are subject to rebirth, on reaching the supreme there is no more rebirth. The symbolic description of "The Two Ways" in Chapter VIII verses 23 to 28 is reminiscent of a very similar description in the Bṛhad-ârunyaka Upaniṣad [VI. 2] and the Chândogya Upaniṣad [V. 3]. Similar words and phrases are used to describe the process, such as fire, light, day, the bright half of the moon, smoke, northern- and southern-parts.

Radhakrishnan suggests that

"Life is a conflict between light and darkness. The former makes for release and the latter for rebirth."

He goes on to say that the author was illustrating a great spiritual truth, namely, that beings that are bound up in the night of ignorance will be reborn, while those who manifest in the day of illumination and seek after knowledge become released from the round of rebirth. The last two verses of Chapter VIII exhort us to aspire higher than the study of the Vedas, austerities, and so on, and attain to the "supreme and primal status".

### A Creative Force Bound by Ignorance

In Chapter IX verses 1 to 10, Kriṣṇa is explaining to Arjuna that the knowledge he seeks is quite simple, in that it is failure to see the Supreme as it is which keeps returning beings to mortal life. As Radhakrishnan says,

"The faith demanded is the faith in the reality of saving wisdom and man's capacity to attain it." (footnote to verse 3)

At the end of their times, all beings return to the nature of the Supreme to reissue at the commencement of their next times. (verse 7) By the force of the ego or self-sense, ahamkāra, the embodied self clings by desire to the body and its maintenance and hence to a return to mortal existence. It is through the ego, which is subject to the law of karma, that the humans are not masters of their actions. They are subject to nature, driven helplessly through their ignorance. All creations are through māyā and the human creation is through avidyā māyā, a creative force limited by ignorance. (verses 5 & 8; cf Chapter XIII verse 21)

The practice of ritual sacrifice will keep us bound by the law of karma because in this practice we are still bound by the desire for reward. (verses 20 & 21) No matter how much karma one has heaped up for oneself, absolution remains attainable. There are no unforgiveable sins. (verse 30)

### The Maintenance of the Universe

Through the medium of the story the author, of the Gitâ reinforces that which is said to be and takes every opportunity to remind the reader of that which is not. In Chapter III verses 13 to 17, much is made of sacrifice, which is not surprising since the theme of the Gitâ, which is selfless action, is based on the Vedic idea of the maintenance of the universe through action for the Self. A world is a constant state of transitional action. The individual in an embodied form is integral with that system. Selfless action is action in furtherance of a corporate benefit rather than that of any individual. When using the word Self in this context it is the universal Self as opposed to any individual member which is being referred to. The idea of individualism is in itself illusory. The nature of the human perspective of the cosmos is to see discontinuity rather than wholeness, giving rise to the illusion of discrete entities, in much the same that we think of the world as a number of islands and continents separated by oceans. However, if one were able to drain all the oceans, these islands and continents would be revealed to be outstanding features of a unitary world, little different, other than in scale from an orange, the wholeness of which is readily acceptable. The

objective detachment, on which we so often pride ourselves, is in fact illusory.

The basic physiological action in a living being is unavoidable, but when a man voluntarily abdicates situational responsibilities, he is working against the order of the universe and is thus immoral. The ideal is ceaseless work in accordance with, rather than against, the natural order of things. Kriṣṇa tells Arjuna, in verse 22, that there is no work in any of the three worlds which he, Kriṣṇa, has to do, and yet he works. What one does in life, how one works, should fulfil the needs of the individual in the sense that each individual will be required to act in accordance with what is right and proper for him at any one particular time. There is no one single universal action for all beings at all times. Work done with an end in mind, however noble, is not work without attachment, but absence of ambition is neither necessary nor sufficient evidence of desireless action. For example, if a person has ambition, but has renounced and is personally aloof, his will be work without attachment. However, if one has to think about something being right before doing it, the appropriate conditions are not met. One's character has to have developed such that one's volitional tendencies are to do that which is right according to the natural order of things. Rightness of action will be one's nature, not one's premeditation. (verse 25) Those who are acting unconsciously according to their own inner drives consistently gather karma because of the attachment entailed and they will continue in this way until, by questioning their own activities, they discover the nature of their own personalities. It is important that the individual works out his or her own karma and does not concern himself in

the development or attainment of others. Whether or not others are developing or deteriorating is all part of the universal whole. It is for each person to be playing out his role in relation to his position in time and space rather than to be striving for perfection.

### Human Embodiment is Involuntary

Kriṣṇa declares to Arjuna about rebirth in Chapter IV.

"I proclaimed this imperishable yoga to Vivasvân; Vivasvân told it to Manu and Manu spoke it to Ikṣvâku." (verse 1)

When Arjuna queries his understanding that Kriṣṇa's birth was in a later time than that of Vivasvat (verse 4), Kriṣṇa answers him:-

"Many are My lives that are past, and thine also, O Arjuna; all of them I know, but thou knowest not, O scourge of the foe [Arjuna]." (verse 5)

Radhakrishnan compares this with the parallels in the teachings of the Buddha, who claimed to have been the teacher of countless Bodhisattvas in bygone ages (Saddharmapundarika, XV, 1), and the teachings of Jesus Christ, who said, "Before Abraham was, I am." (St. John 8, 58).

Kriṣṇa explains about the difference between avatârs, who are in control of their own life force, taking on embodiment at will, and human

beings whose embodiments are not voluntary. The latter are born again and again as a result of their ignorance and do not even know of their former births. The Self, Ātman, never incarnates as any result of karma, but nevertheless from time to time manifests in human form outside the rules of karma. They become by their own power, ātmamāyā.



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