

Death & Life

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"The self-existent Brahma created the senses with outgoing tendencies; therefore man beholds the external universe and not the internal Self. But some wise men with their senses turned away from the objects, desirous of immortality, turn their gaze inwards and behold the Self within"

- Katha Upanisad IV. 1

"And (the individual soul is) only a reflection (of the Supreme Lord)"

- Brahma-Sutras, 50.

"An eternal portion of Myself having become a living soul in the world of life, draws to itself the five senses with the mind for the sixth, abiding in Nature"

-The Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 15, Verse 7

"The deluded do not see Him Who departs, stays and enjoys; but they who possess the eye of knowledge behold Him"

-The Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 15, Verse 10

"The Yogis, striving (for perfection) behold Him dwelling in the Self; but the unrefined and the unintelligent, even though striving, see Him not"

- The Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 15, Verse 11

"The dream (experience) is unreal in waking, whereas the waking (experience) is absent in dream. Both, however, are non-existent in deep sleep which, again, is not experienced in either. Thus all the three states are unreal inasmuch as they are the creation of the three Gunas (Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas); but their Witness (the Reality behind them) is beyond all Gunas, Eternal, One and is Consciousness itself."

- Aparokshanubhuti of Sri Sankaracharya V.57 & 58

The Process of Death

From The Brahadaranyaka Upanishad, IV,iii

[Note: In describing the rebirth of the soul, an example is given in earlier verses to show that just as the self-wanders from the dream state to the waking state, so it passes from the present body to the next body].

Yajnavalkya said:

Just as a heavily loaded cart moves along, creaking, even so the self-identified

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with the body, being presided over by the Self, which is all consciousness (the Supreme Self), moves along, groaning, when breathing becomes difficult (at the approach of death). 35.

When this body becomes thin - is emaciated through old age or disease- then, as a mango or a fig or a fruit of the peepul tree becomes detached from its stalk, so does this infinite being (the self), completely detaching himself from the parts of the body, again move on, in the same way that he came, to another body for the re-manifestation (unfoldment) of his vital force. 36.

[Note: 'Parts of the body ', Such as the eye, nose etc. In deep sleep, the gross body and organs, though left by the subtle body, are preserved by the prana (vital force). But this does not happen at the time of death, when the subtle body, together with the prana, leaves the gross body.]

Now when that self becomes weak and unconscious, as it were, the organs gather around it. Having wholly seized these particles of light, the self comes to the heart. When the presiding deity of the eye turns back from all sides, the dying man fails to notice colour. IV,1.

[Note: ' Presiding Deity ' The sun in its microcosmic aspect is the presiding or controlling deity of the eye. This deity helps the eye to function as long as a person lives, as determined by his past actions. At the time of death the deity stops his help and goes back to the sun. He again returns to the eye when the man takes another body.]

The eye becomes united with the subtle body; then people say: 'He does not see'. The nose becomes united with the subtle body; then they say: 'He does not smell'. The tongue becomes united with the subtle body; then they say: 'He does not taste'. The vocal organ becomes united with the subtle body; then they say: 'He does not speak'. The ear becomes united with the subtle body; then they say: 'He does not hear'. The skin becomes united with the subtle body; then they say: 'He does not touch (feel)'. The mind becomes united with the subtle body; then they say: 'He does not think'.

The intellect becomes united with the subtle body; then they say: 'He does not know '.

The upper end of the heart lights up, and by that light, the self-departs, either through the eye, or through the head or through any other part (aperture) of the body.

And when the self-departs, the vital force follows, and when the vital force departs, all the organs follow.

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Then the self becomes endowed with a particular consciousness and passes on to the body to be attained by that consciousness.

It is followed by Knowledge, work and past experience. IV,2.

[Note: Compare Bhagavad Gita, Ch.8, Verse 6. "Whosoever at the end leaves the body, thinking of any being, that alone does he attain (become), because of his constant thought of that being." Comments: The last thought determines the next birth. The most prominent thought of one's life occupies the mind at the time of death.]

From Chandogya Upanishad:

Relatives sit around an ailing person, saying, "Do you recognise me, do you recognise me?" He recognises so long as his speech does not become merged in the mind, mind in the vital force, vital force in the warmth, and warmth into the supreme deity. VI,15,1.

Then when his speech merges into the mind, mind into the vital force, vital force into the warmth, and warmth into the supreme deity, he ceases to recognise. VI,15,2.

From Prashna Upanishad:

The year verily is Prajapati, and there are two paths thereof; the Southern and the Northern. Those who perform sacrifices and engage in pious actions, as duties to be done, win only the world of the Moon; verily they return here again. Therefore, the rishis who desire offspring travel by the Southern Path. This Path of the Fathers is Rayi, food. I.9

But those who seek the Self through austerity, chastity, faith and knowledge, travel by the Northern Path and win the Sun. The Sun, verily, is the support of all lives. He is immortal and fearless. He is the final goal. Thence they do not return. This path is blocked (for the ignorant). I.10

The sun is, indeed, Prana (vital force); moon is Rayi, food. Food is, indeed, all this- what has form and what is formless. Therefore, everything having forms, indeed, food. I.5

Prajapati, the Creator, was desirous of progeny. He performed austerities, created the pair, the moon (Rayi) and the sun (prana). He said to Himself: "These two should produce creatures for Me in manifold ways." I.4

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From The Bhagavad Gita: The blessed Lord said:

Gita- Ch 8, Verse 23:

Now I will tell thee the times departing at which the Yogis will return or not return.

Gita- Ch.8, Verse 24:

Fire, light, day-time, the bright fortnight, the six months of the northern path of the sun (the northern solstice)- departing then (by these) men who know Brahman go to Brahman.

[Note By Swami Shivananda, Divine Life Society, Rishikesh: This is the northern path or the path of light by which the Yogis go to Brahman. This path leads to salvation. The six months of the northern solstice is from the middle of January to the middle of July. It is regarded as the better period for death. Refer also to . Brahma-Sutras 4.2.18 and 19].

Gita- Ch.8, Verse 25:

Attaining to the lunar light by smoke, night time, the dark fortnight, also the six months of the southern path of the sun (the southern solstice), the Yogi returns.

[Note: This is the pitryana or the path of the ancestors, the path of darkness which leads to rebirth. Those who do sacrifices to the gods and do other charitable works with expectation of reward go to the Chandraloka through this path and come back to this world when the fruits of the karmas are exhausted. 'Smoke', 'night time', 'the dark fortnight', and 'the six months of the southern solstice' are all deities who preside over them. They may denote the degree of ignorance, attachment and passion. There are smoke and dark coloured objects throughout the course. There is no illumination when one passes along this path. It is reached by ignorance. Hence it is called the path of darkness or smoke.]

Gita- Ch.8, Verse 26:

The bright and the dark paths of the world are verily thought to be eternal; by the one (the bright path) a man goes not to return and by the other (the dark path) he returns.

[Note: The bright path is the path to the gods taken by the devotees. The dark path is of the manes taken by those who perform sacrifices and charitable acts with the expectation of rewards. These two paths are not open to the whole world. The bright path is open to the devotee and the dark one to those who are devoted to the rituals.]

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Gita- Ch.8, Verse 27:

knowing these paths, O Arjuna, no Yogi is deluded; therefore at all times be steadfast in Yoga.

Gita- Ch.8, Verse 28:

Whatever fruit of merit is declared (in the scriptures) to accrue from the study of the Vedas, the performance of sacrifices, the practice of austerities and gifts; beyond all these goes the Yogi, having known this; and he attains to the Supreme Primeval Abode.

From Isa Upanishad:

[Note: Translations and comments by Swami Nikhilananda. The last four verses of The Isa Upanishad deal with prayer of the aspirant on his death-bed. He prays to the sun, a vivid symbol of Brahman (Supreme Reality), to withdraw the outer physical light so that the inner effulgence of Truth may be revealed. As the hour of death approaches, he fills his mind with the memories of his good deeds; the thought at the final moment determines the course of the soul hereafter. And lastly, he prays to Fire (Agni), which will soon consume his physical body, to lead his soul through the way of the Gods to Brahmaloaka, from which he will attain final Liberation.]

Isa Upanishad, Mantra 15:

The door of the Truth is covered by a golden disc. Open it, O Nourisher! Remove it so that I who have been worshipping the Truth may behold It.

[Note: The worship prescribed in this and the following verses is the symbolic worship of Brahman through the sun. 'golden' = luminous]

Isa Upanishad, Mantra 16:

O Nourisher, lone Traveller of the sky! Controller! O Sun, Offspring of Prajapati! Gather your rays; withdraw your light. I would see through Your grace, that form of Yours which is the fairest. I am indeed He, that Purusha, who dwells there.

[Note: Purusha: Literally means Person. It also refers to the Godhead, who resides in the hearts of all, or who fills the whole universe with life and consciousness.]

Isa Upanishad, Mantra 17:

Now may my breath return to the all-pervading, immortal Prana! May this body be burnt to ashes! Om. O mind, remember, remember all that I have done.

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[Note: 'May this body...' That is to say, may the subtle body (linga sharira) come out of the gross body. According to the Vedic seers, a subtle body dwells inside and pervades the gross body. The impressions of a man's good and evil deeds and thoughts remain embedded in this subtle body. The individual soul dwelling in this body experiences, after death, the happy or unhappy results of its actions. The gross body is destroyed after death, but the subtle body remains unimpaired till the attainment of Liberation through Knowledge.]

Isa Upanishad, Mantra 18:

[Note: The dying man again prays for a higher course after death]:

O Fire (Agni), lead us by the good path for the enjoyment of the fruit of our action. You know, O god, all our deeds. Destroy our sin of deceit. We offer, by words, our salutations to you.

[Note: 'by words': At the time of death the devotee cannot offer any other worship to the god. As his limbs become inert, he cannot prostrate himself; hence the salutations through words alone.]

[General notes: The path of Brahmaloaka (the highest heaven from which one does not return to earth) lies through what has been described in the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita as the Devayana or Way of the Gods, which is characterised by various luminous stages, such as flame, day, the bright fortnight of the moon, the bright half of the year (when the sun travels northward), the sun, and lightning. It is also called the Northern Path. There is another path, called the Pitriyana, the Way of the fathers, or the Southern Path, which leads to Chandraloka, the Plane of the Moon.

To it go, after death, those householders who have performed their obligatory duties and worshipped the gods, following the scriptural rules, with a view to enjoying the results of their meritorious actions in this lower heaven. The path leading to Chandraloka is characterised by dark stages, such as smoke and not flame, night and not day, the dark fortnight of the moon and not the bright, and the months of winter and not of summer. After enjoying the results of their meritorious actions in the lower heaven, souls come back to earth and are born as ordinary mortals.]

From Brahma-Sutras 4.2.17.

Commentary by Swami Vireswarananda, Adwaita Ashram, Mayavati:

This Sutra says that though the illumining of the top of the heart is common to both, yet the knower of the Saguna Brahman, through the grace of the Lord who

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abides in the heart, departs through the skull only, while others depart through other parts.

From Chandogya Upanishad:8.6.6.

There are a hundred and one nerves of the heart; one of them penetrates the head; going up along that, one attains immortality; the others serving for departure in various directions.

From The Mahabharata, Santi Parva, Section CCXCVIII

Parsara said: That man is regarded as righteous who meets with dissolution when the Sun is in the northern declension, and at a time and under a constellation both of which are sacred and auspicious

From The Bhagavad Gita, Ch.8

Verses 5, 6,10,13,15 & 16

Translations and comments by Swami Shivananda
The Divine Life Society, Rishikesh

And whosoever, leaving the body, goes forth remembering Me alone, at the time of death, he attains My Being: there is no doubt about this. 5

Whosoever at the end leaves the body, thinking of any being, to that being only does he go, because of his constant thought of that being. Verse 6

At the time of death with unshaken mind, endowed with devotion, by the power of Yoga, fixing the whole life-breath in the middle of the two eyebrows, he reaches that resplendent Supreme Person. 10

[Note: The Yogi gets immense inner strength and power of concentration. His mind becomes quite steady through constant practice of concentration and meditation. He practises concentration first on the lower Chakras, Viz., Muladhara, Svadhisthana, and Manipura. He then concentrates on the lotus of the heart (Anahata Chakra). Then he takes the life-breath (Prana) through the Susumna and fixes it in the middle of the two eyebrows. He eventually attains the resplendent Supreme Purusha (Person) by the above Yogic practice. This is possible for one who has devoted his whole life to the practice of Yoga.]

Uttering the one-syllabled Om (AUM, the Brahman or the Supreme Reality), and remembering Me, he who departs, leaving the body, attains to the Supreme Goal.

Having attained Me these great souls do not again take birth (here) which is the place of pain and is non-eternal; they have reached the highest perfection

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(liberation). 15

(All) the worlds, including the world of Brahma are subject to return again, but he who reaches Me has no rebirth. 16

From other sources:

Your wealth will remain on earth; your cattle will remain in the stables, Your wife will come till the entrance door, your relatives and friends will come till the cremation ground, your body will accompany you till the funeral pyre, but on the way beyond this life only your Karmas will accompany you.

Dhanaani Bhoomau Pashvascha Goshthe
Bharyaa Gruh Dwaare Swajan Smashaane
Dehschitaayaam Parlokmaarge
Karmaanu Go Gacchati Jeev Ek

From The Mahabharata
Aswamedha Parva, Section XVII
Translated by Sri Kisari Mohan Ganguli

How does the body dissolve away
and how is another body acquired?

Enjoying Prakriti for some time, how does Jiva (embodied soul) cast off the particular body (which Prakriti or Nature gives)? Urged by Kasyapa, the emancipated sage answered those questions one after another.

The emancipated sage said: Upon the exhaustion of those acts capable of prolonging life and bringing on fame which are done in a particular body that Jiva (embodied soul) assumes, the embodied Jiva, with the span of his life shortened, begins to do acts hostile to life and health. On the approach of destruction, his understanding turns away from the proper course. The man of uncleansed soul, after even a correct apprehension of his constitution and strength and of the season of both his own life and of the year, begins to eat at irregular intervals and to eat such food as is hostile to him.

[Note: Food that is beneficial in summer is not so in winter or that which is beneficial in youth is otherwise in old age, or food that does not suit his constitution (prakriti).]

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At such a time he indulges in practices that are exceedingly harmful. He sometimes eats excessively and sometimes abstains altogether from food. He eats bad food or bad meat or takes bad drinks, or food that has been made up of ingredients incompatible with one another. He eats food that is heavy in excess of the measure that is beneficial, or before the food previously taken has been digested.

He indulges in physical exercises and sexual pleasure in excess of the due measure, or through avidity for work, suppresses the urgings of his corporeal organism even when they become pronounced. Or, he takes food that is very juicy, or indulges in sleep during daytime. Food that is not properly digested, of itself excites the faults, when the time comes. [Note: The faults are three, viz., Wind, Bile and Phlegm (Vata, Pitta and Kapha). When existing in a state of harmony they produce health. When one of these faults is excited, or two, or all three, then indisposition sets in. They are called Dosha or faults, because of their liability to be excited and produce disease. For more details refer to Page 'Food' -Topic Ayurveda.. See column on the left.] From such excitement of the faults in his body, he gets disease ending in death itself.

Sometimes the person engages in perverse or unnatural acts like hanging (for bringing about his death). Urged on by the Wind which becomes violent, the heat in the body, becoming excited and reaching every part of the body one after another, restrains all the (movements of the) vital breaths. Know truly that excited all over the body, the heat becomes very strong, and pierces every vital part where life may be said to reside. In consequence of this, Jiva, feeling great pain, quickly takes leave of its mortal casement. Know, O foremost of regenerate persons, that when the vital parts of the physical organism become thus afflicted, Jiva (embodied soul) slips away from the body, overwhelmed with great pain.

All living creatures are repeatedly afflicted with birth and death. It is seen, O chief of Brahmanas, that the pain which is felt by a person when casting off his bodies is like what is felt by him when first entering the womb or when issuing out of it. His joints become almost dislocated and he derives much distress from the waters (of the womb). Urged on by another violent wind, the wind that is in the body becomes excited through cold and dissolves away the union of matter (called the body) into its respective elements numbering five.

The wind that resides in the vital breaths called Prana and Apana occurring within this compound of the five primal elements, rushes upwards, from a situation of distress, leaving the embodied creature. It is even thus that the wind leaves the body. Then is seen breathlessness. The man then becomes destitute of heat, of

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breath, of beauty, and consciousness. Deserted by Brahman (for jiva is Brahman), the person is said to be dead.

By those ducts through which he perceives all sensuous objects, the bearer of the body no longer perceives them. It is the eternal Jiva who creates in the body in those very ducts the life-breaths that are generated by food. The elements gathered together become in certain parts firmly united. Know that those parts are called the vitals of the body. It is said so in the Sastras (scriptures). When those vital parts are pierced, Jiva, rising up, enters the heart of the living creature and restrains the principle of animation without any delay.

The creature then, though still endued with the principle of consciousness, fails to know anything. The vital parts being all overwhelmed, the knowledge of the living creature becomes overwhelmed by darkness. Jiva then, who has been deprived of everything upon which to stay, is then agitated by the wind. He then, deeply breathing a long and painful breath, goes out quickly, causing the inanimate body to tremble.

Dissociated from the body, Jiva, however, is surrounded by his acts. He becomes equipped on every side with all his auspicious acts of merit and with all his sins. Brahmanas endued with knowledge and equipped with the certain conclusions of the scriptures, know him, from indications, as to whether he is possessed of merit or with its reverse. Even as men possessed of eyes behold the fire-fly appearing and disappearing amid darkness, men possessed of the eye of knowledge and crowned with success of penances, behold, with spiritual vision, Jiva (individual soul) as he leaves the body, as he is reborn, and as he enters the womb.

It is seen that Jiva has three regions assigned to him eternally.

This world where creatures dwell is called the field of action. Accomplishing acts good or bad, all embodied creatures attain to the fruits thereof. In consequence of their own acts, creatures acquire even here superior or inferior enjoyments. Doers of evil deeds here, in consequence of those acts of theirs, attain to Hell. This condition of sinking with head downwards, in which creatures are cooked, is one of great misery. It is such that a rescue therefrom is exceedingly difficult. Indeed, one should strive hard for saving oneself from this misery.

Those regions where creatures dwell when they ascend from this world I shall now declare truly. Do thou listen to me with attention. By listening to what I say, thou shalt attain to firmness of understanding and a clear apprehension of (good and bad) acts. Know that even those are the regions of all creatures of righteous deeds, viz., the stellar worlds that shine in the firmament, the lunar disc, and the solar disc as well that shines in the universe in its own light. Upon the exhaustion, again, of

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their merits, they fall away from those regions repeatedly. There, in heaven itself, is distinction of inferior, superior, and middling felicity. There, in Heaven itself, is discontent at sight of prosperity more blazing than one's own. Even these are the goals which I have mentioned in detail.

How did Bhishma cast off his body?
From The Mahabharata
Anusasana Parva, Section CLXVI
Translated by Sri Kisari Mohan Ganguli

Addressing Yudhishtira, Bhishma said:

"When the hour comes for my departure from this world, do thou come here, O King. The time when I shall take leave of my body is that period when the sun, stopping in his southward course, will begin to return northwards."

Yudhishtira answered, "So be it." And saluted his grandsire (Bhishma) with reverence and then set out, with all his relatives and followers, for the city called after the elephant. The blessed monarch (Yudhishtira) having passed fifty nights in the capital recollected the time indicated by his grandsire as the hour of his departure from this world. Accompanied by a number of priests he then set out of the city named after the elephant, having seen that the sun ceasing to go southwards had begun to proceed in his northward course. Yudhishtira, the son of Kunti took with him a large quantity of ghee (clarified butter) and floral garlands and scents and silken cloths and excellent sandalwood and Aquilaria Agallocha and dark aloe wood, for cremating the body of Bhishma. Diverse kinds of costly garlands and gems also were among those stores.

Placing Dhritarashtra ahead and queen Gandhari celebrated for her virtues, and his own mother Kunti and all his brothers also, Yudhishtira of great intelligence, accompanied by Krishna and Vidura of great wisdom, as also by Yuyutsu and Yuyudhana, and by his other relatives and followers forming a large train, proceeded, his praise hymned the while by eulogists and bards. The sacrificial fires of Bhishma were also borne in the procession.

Soon he came upon the spot where the son of Santanu (Bhishma) was still lying on his bed of arrows. Alighting from his car, King Yudhishtira with his brothers saluted his grandsire, the chastiser of all foes. Yudhishtira of unfading glory then approached that spot whereon Bhishma lay on his bed of arrows surrounded by these reverend Rishis. Then king Yudhishtira the just, addressed that foremost of Kuru's race (Bhishma) as he lay on that bed of his saying, 'I am Yudhishtira, O king! Salutations to thee. If you hearest me still, tell me what I am to do for thee!

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Bearing with me thy sacrificial fires, I have come here, O king, and wait upon thee at the hour indicated! ... Whatever should be done on this occasion has all been arranged and provided for by me. Indeed, at this hour which thou hadst indicated, all things have been kept ready'.

Bhishma opened his eyes and saw all the Bharatas assembled there and standing around him. The mighty Bhishma then, taking the strong hand of Yuthishthira, addressed him in a voice deep as that of the clouds. That thorough master of words said, "By good luck, O son of Kunti, thou hast come here with all thy counsellors, O Yudhishtira! The thousand-rayed maker of day, the holy surya (sun) has begun his northward course. I have been lying on my bed here for eight and fifty nights. Stretched on these sharp-pointed arrows I have felt this period to be as long as if it was a century. O Yudhishtira, the lunar month of Magha has come. This is again, the lighted fortnight and a fourth part of it ought by this (according to my calculations) be over".

Having said so unto Yudhishtira the son of Dharma (righteousness), Ganga's son Bhishma then saluted Dhritarashtra and said unto him as follows, "O king, thou art well conversant with duties. All thy doubts again, relating to the science of wealth have been well solved. Thou has waited upon many Brahmanas (priests) of great learning. The subtle sciences connected with the Vedas, all the duties of religion, O king, and the whole of the four Vedas, are well known to thee! Thou shouldst not grieve, therefore, O son of Kuru! That which was preordained has happened. It could not be otherwise.

The Mahabharata
Santi Parva, Section XLVIII
Translated by Sri Kisari Mohan Ganguli

Vaisampayana said: Stretched on his bed of arrows, that tiger among men, Bhishma, with pure heart and joined palms, thought of Krishna in mind, word and act. With a cheerful and strong voice he hymned the praise of the slayer of Madhu, that master of Yoga with the lotus in his navel, the Lord of the universe, called Vishnu and Jishnu.

O Janardana (Krishna), thus worshipped by me in the Sacrifice constituted by speech (alone), be gratified with me! The Vedas are devoted to Narayana (the Supreme Lord). Penances are devoted to Narayana. The gods are devoted to Narayana. Everything is always Narayana!

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Having uttered these words, Bhishma, with mind concentrated upon Krishna, said: Salutations to Krishna! and bowed unto him. Learning by his Yoga prowess of the devotion of Bhishma, Madhava, otherwise called Hari, (entering his body) bestowed upon him heavenly knowledge encompassing the past, the present, and the future, and went away.

From The Mahabharata
Anusasana Parva, Section CLXVIII:
Translated by Sri Kisari Mohan Ganguli

Vaisampayana said: Bhishma, the son of Santanu, remained silent for some time. He then held forth his life-breaths successively in those parts of his body which are indicated in Yoga. The life-breaths of that high-souled one, restrained duly, then rose up. Those parts of the body of Santanu's son, in consequence of the adoption of Yoga, from which the life-breaths went up, became soreless one after another. In the midst of those high-souled persons, including those great Rishis with Vyasa at their head, the sight seemed to be strange one, O king. Within a short time, the entire body of Bhishma became shaftless and soreless. Beholding it, all those distinguished personages with Vasudeva (Krishna) at their head, and all the ascetics with Vyasa, became filled with wonder. The life-breaths restrained and unable to escape through any of the outlets, at last pierced through the crown of the head and proceeded upwards to heaven.

The celestial kettledrums began to play, and floral showers were rained down. The Siddhas and regenerate Rishis, filled with delight, exclaimed, 'Excellent, Excellent!' The life-breaths of Bhishma, piercing through the crown of his head, shot up through the welkin like a large meteor and soon became invisible. Even thus, O great king, did Santanu's son, that pillar of Bharata's race, united himself with eternity.

[Note: Re: 'Bed of arrows' The following extract is taken from the writings of Prof. K Subrahmanyam, Vivekananda college. "In order to save the world, Siva consumed poison. Likewise, Bhishma willingly accepted the bed of arrows for having served the world. Bed of roses was always at his disposal. But he denied himself of it for the welfare of others. He is Siva, embodied as the human in the act of self-sacrifice, which is for the good of the world".]

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The signs of approaching death

From Shree Shiva Mahapurana, Uma Samhita:

Sanatkumar said:

"Ishwar spoke: When a person fails to notice the light emanating from the sun, the moon or the fire; what he sees is only black, then know it that his life expectancy is about six months or less. When terrific uproar or noises are not heard immediately, then know that the person's death can occur within six months. When the body suddenly becomes pale and the face turns red; death can occur within six months. The mouth, ear, eye or the tongue suddenly freeze-up; death can occur within six months.

When a man's left hand continuously keeps shaking for seven days; death can occur within one month. When the organs of the body cease functioning and start pulling, when the upper part of the mouth feels dry all the time; death can occur within one month. When the tongue thickens, and the teeth all become and remain coated with greasy substance; death can occur within six months.

When a person cannot see his or her reflection in water, oil, ghee (clarified melted butter), or in the mirror; otherwise sees the reflection in the mirror in a distorted form or sees only flesh; death can occur within six months. He who sees his own shadow without the head, or he cannot see at all his own shadow; death can occur within one month. When the eyes see the sun without rays, sees only red blob; death can occur within fifteen days. When the rainbow is being seen at night, when falling stars are being seen at midday; when vultures and crows seem to surround the person; death can occur within six months."

Signs of approaching death

The Mahabharata

Santi Parva, Section CCCXVIII

Translated by Sri Kisari Mohan Ganguli

Addressing King Janaka

Yajnavalkya said: I shall now tell thee the premonitory indication, as laid down by the wise of those who have but one year to live. One, who having previously seen the fixed star called Arundhati, fails to see it, or that other star called Dhruva (the pole star), or one that sees the full moon or the flame of a burning lamp to be broken towards the south, has but one year to live. Those men, O king, who can no longer see images of themselves reflected in the eyes of others, have but one year to live. One who, being endued with lustre loses it, or being endued with wisdom

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loses it, indeed, one whose inward and outward nature is thus changed, has but six months more to live.

He, who disregards the deities, or quarrels with the Brahmanas, or one, who, being naturally of a dark complexion becomes pale of hue, has but six months more to live. One, who sees the lunar disc to have many holes like a spider's web, who sees the solar disc to have similar holes, has but one week more to live. One, who, when smelling fragrant scents in place of worship, perceives them to be as offensive as the scent of corpses, has but one week more to live. The depression of the nose or of the ear, the discolouring of the teeth or of the eye, the loss of all consciousness, and the loss also of all animal heat, are symptoms indicating death that very day. If, without any perceptible cause a stream of tears suddenly flows from one's left eye, and if vapours be seen to issue from one's head, that is a sure indication that the man will die before that day expires.

Knowing all these premonitory symptoms, the man of cleansed soul should day and night unite his soul with the Supreme Soul (in Samadhi or deep meditation). Thus should he go on till the day comes for his dissolution. If, however, instead of wishing to die he desires to live in this world, he casts off all enjoyments- all scents and tastes- O king and lives on in abstinence. He thus conquers death by fixing his soul on the Supreme Soul. Indeed, the man who is blessed with knowledge of the Soul, O monarch, practices the course of life recommended by the Sankhyas and conquers death by uniting his soul with the Supreme Soul. At last, he attains to what is entirely indestructible, which is without birth, which is auspicious, and immutable, and eternal, and stable, and which is incapable of being attained to by men of uncleansed souls.

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From The Mahabharata

Santi Parva, Section CLXXXVII

Translated by Sri Kisari Mohan Ganguli

Brigu said: The creature that dies only goes into another form. The body alone dissolves away. The living creature, though depending upon the body, does not meet with destruction when the body is destroyed. There is no destruction of the living creature, or of what is given, or of our other acts.

The living creature is not seen after the destruction of the physical frame just as fire is not seen after the consumption of the fuel with which it was ignited.

Bharadwaja said: If there is no destruction of the living creature like that of fire, I

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submit, fire itself is not seen after consumption of the fuel (that ignited it). When the supply of fuel is stopped, the fire becomes extinguished, and, as far as I know, becomes annihilated. This should surely be regarded to have met with destruction which has no longer any action, which furnishes no proof of its existence, and which no longer occupies any space.

Brigu said: It is true that upon the consumption of fuel fire is no longer seen. It mingles with space because there is no longer any visible object in which to inhere, and hence it becomes incapable of perception by us. Similarly, upon leaving the body, the creature lives in space, and cannot be seen in consequence of its extreme subtlety as is doubtless the case with fire. It is fire or heat that sustains the breaths called Prana and the others. Know that that heat (thus existing) is called life or the living agent. That heat which is the sustainer of the breaths, becomes extinguished in consequence of the suppression of breath. Upon that heat in the physical frame being extinguished, the frame itself loses animation. Falling down, it is transformed into earth, for that is its ultimate destination.

The breath that is in all mobile and immobile objects mingles with space, and the heat that is in them follows that breath. These three (viz., space, air and fire), mingle together. The other two (viz., water and earth) exist together in the form of earth. There is air where space is, and there is fire where air is. They are formless, it should be known, and become endued with form only in respect of embodied creatures.

Bharadwaja said: If in the physical frames of all living creatures there are heat, air, earth, space and water, what then, are the indications of living agent? Tell me these, O sinless one! I desire to know the nature of the life that is in the bodies of living beings; bodies made up of the five primal elements, engaged in the five acts, endued with the five senses and possessed of animation. Upon the dissolution of the body which is a union of flesh and blood, and a mass of fat, sinews and bones, that which is a living agent cannot be seen. If this body, composed of the five elements, be destitute of what is called life, who or what then is that which feels misery upon the appearance of either bodily or mental pain?

The living agent hears what is said, with the aid of the ears. It, however, happens again, O great Rishi, that the same agent hears not when the mind is otherwise engaged. It seems, therefore, that that which is called the living agent serves no purpose. The whole scene that the living agent sees with eyes acting in concert with the mind, the eye beholds not, even when lying before it, if the mind is otherwise engaged. Then again, when it is under the influence of sleep, that agent neither sees nor smells, nor hears, nor speaks, nor experiences the perceptions of touch and taste. Who or what then is that which feels joy, becomes angry, gives

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way to sorrow, and experiences tribulation? What is that which wishes, thinks, feels aversion, and utters words?

Brigu said: The mind is also made of the five elements in common with the body. For this reason it is of no consequence with respects to the acts mentioned by thee. Only the one internal Soul sustains the body. It is he that perceives smell, taste, sound, touch and form and other properties (that exist in external nature). That Soul, pervading all the limbs, is the witness (of the acts) of the mind endued with five attributes and residing within the body composed of the five elements. It is he who feels pleasure and pain, and when separated from him the body no longer experiences them. When there is no longer any perception of form or of touch, when there is no heat in the fire that resides within the body; indeed, when that animal heat becomes extinguished,- the body in consequence of its abandonment by the Soul, meets with destruction.

Water is the form of all embodied creatures. In that water is the Soul which is displayed in the mind. That Soul is the Creator Brahman who exists in all things. When the Soul becomes endued with vulgar attributes, it comes to be called Kshetrajna. When freed from those attributes, it comes to be called Parmatman or Supreme Soul. Know that Soul. He is inspired with universal benevolence. He resides in the body like a drop of water in a lotus. Know well that which is called Kshetrajna and which has universal benevolence. Darkness, Passion and Goodness (Tamas, Rajas and Sattwa respectively), are the attributes of the living agent. The learned say that the Soul has consciousness and exists with the attributes of life.

The Soul exerts and causes everything to exert. Persons that have a knowledge of the Soul say that the Soul is different from life. It is the Supreme Soul that has created the seven worlds and sets them agoing. There is no destruction of the living agent when the dissolution of the body takes place. Men destitute of intelligence say that it dies. That is certainly untrue. All that the living agent does is to go from one unto another body. That which is called death is only the dissolution of the body. It is thus that the Soul, wrapped in diverse forms, migrates from form to form, unseen and unnoticed by others.

Persons possessed of true Knowledge behold the Soul by their keen and subtile intelligence. The man of wisdom, living on frugal fare, and with heart cleansed of all sins, devoting himself to Yoga meditation, succeeds every night, before sleep and after sleep, in beholding his Soul by the aid of his Soul. In consequence of a contented heart, and by abandoning all acts good and bad, one can obtain infinite happiness by depending upon one's own Soul. The king of fiery effulgence, residing within the mind is called the living agent. It is from that Lord of everything that this creation has sprung. Even this is the conclusion to be arrived at

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in the enquiry into the origin of creatures and the soul.

From Amritabindupanishad, Mantras 13 & 14:

Just as it is the jar which being removed from one place to other changes places and not the Akasha (the all-pervading space) enclosed in the jar, so is the Jiva (the embodied soul) which resembles the Akasha (space). 13

[Note: Just as the all-pervading Akasha (space) does not perish when the jars which held it are broken, so it is with the all-pervading Self at the repeated destruction of the body. The resemblance is only thus far, but not as regards consciousness where there is a difference between the two, as the next shloka shows.]

When the various forms like the jar are broken again and again the Akasha does not know them to be broken, but He knows perfectly.14

From Sarvopanishad, Mantra 2:

When the soul, confirming itself to good and bad actions, has made a link of the present body with its past body, and is seen to be effecting a union, a connection as it were, with the body not yet received, then it is called the Jiva, individual soul, on account of its being limited by Upadhis.

From The Mahabharata
Santi Parva, Section CLXXV
Translated by Sri Kisari Mohan Ganguli

Addressing Yudhishtira, Bhishma relates the conversation between a Brahmana and his son.

The Son said:

What should a wise man do, seeing that the period of human life is passing away so very quickly?

Death is that by which the world is assailed. Decrepitude encompasses it. Those irresistible things that come and go away are the nights that are continually lessening the period of human life. When I know that Death tarries for none (but approaches steadily towards every creature), how can I pass my time without covering myself with the garb of knowledge?

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When each succeeding night, passing away lessens the allotted period of one's existence, the man of wisdom should regard the day to be fruitless. When death is approaching steadily who is there that would, like a fish in a shallow water, feel happy? Death comes to a man before his desires have been gratified. Death snatches away a person when he is engaged in plucking flowers and when his heart is otherwise set, like a tigress bearing away a ram. Do thou, this very day, accomplish that which is for thy good. Let not this Death come to thee.

Death drags its victims before their acts are accomplished. The acts of tomorrow should be done today, those of the afternoon in the forenoon. Death does not wait to see whether the acts of its victim have all been accomplished or not. Who knows that Death will not come to him even today? In prime of age one should betake oneself to the practice of virtue. Life is transitory. If virtue be practised, fame here and felicity hereafter will be the consequences.

Overwhelmed by ignorance, one is ready to exert oneself for sons and wives. Achieving virtuous or vicious acts, one brings them up and aggrandises them. Like a tiger bearing away a sleeping deer, Death snatches away a man addicted to the gratification of desires and engaged in the enjoyment of sons and animals. Before he has been able to pluck the flowers upon which he has set his heart, before he has been gratified by the acquisition of the objects of his desire, Death bears him away like a tiger bearing away its prey. Death overpowers a man while the latter is still in the midst of the happiness that accrues from the gratification of desire, and while still thinking 'This has been done; this is to be done; this has been half-done.' Death bears away the man, however designed according to his profession, attached to his field, his shop, or his home, before he has obtained the fruit of his acts.

Death bears away the weak, the strong, the brave, the timid, the idiotic and the learned, before any of these obtains the fruits of his acts. When death, decrepitude, disease, and sorrow arising from diverse causes, are all residing in thy body, how is it that thou livest as if thou art perfectly hale? As soon as a creature is born, Decrepitude and Death pursue him for (effecting) his destruction. All living things, mobile and immobile, are affected by these two. The attachment that one feels for dwelling in villages and towns (in the midst of fellow men) is said to be the very mouth of Death. The forest, on the other hand, is regarded as the fold within which the senses may be penned. This is declared by the Srutis (scriptures). The attachment a person feels for dwelling in a village or town (in the midst of men) is like a cord that binds him effectually. They that are good break that cord and attain to emancipation, while they that are wicked do not succeed in breaking them. He who never injures living creatures by thought, word or deed, is never injured by such agencies as are destructive of life and property. Nothing can resist the

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messengers (Disease and Decrepitude) of Death when they advance except Truth which devour Untruth. In Truth is immortality.

For these reasons one should practise the vow of Truth; one should devote oneself to a union with Truth; one should accept Truth for one's Veda; and restraining one's senses, one should vanquish the Destroyer by Truth. Both immortality and Death are planted in the body. One comes to Death through ignorance and loss of judgment; while Immortality is achieved through Truth. I shall therefore, abstain from injury and seek to achieve Truth, and transgressing the sway of desire and wrath, regard pleasure and pain with an equal eye, and attaining tranquillity, avoid Death like an immortal. Upon the advent of that season when the sun will progress towards the north, I shall restrain my senses, set to the performance of the anti-sacrifice, the Brahma-sacrifice, the Mind-sacrifice and the Work-sacrifice. How can one like me worship his Maker in animal-sacrifices involving cruelty, or sacrifices of the body, such as Pisachas only can perform and such as produce fruits that are transitory?

[Note: Santi is tranquillity. The Santi-sacrifice is the endeavour to practise self-denial in everything; in other words, to restrain all sorts of propensities or inclinations. The Brahma-sacrifice is reflection on truths laid down in the Upanishads. The Word-sacrifice consists in the silent recitation (japa) of the Pranava or Om (AUM), the initial mantra. The Mind-sacrifice is contemplation of the Supreme Soul. The Work-sacrifice consists in baths, cleanliness, and waiting upon preceptor.]

That person whose words, thoughts, penances, renunciation, and yoga meditation, all rest on Brahma, succeeds in earning the highest good. There is no eye that is equal to the eye of knowledge. There is no penance like that involved in Truth. There is no sorrow equal to (that involved in) attachment. There is no happiness (that which is obtainable from) renunciation.

The soul does not take birth in a different body immediately

From The Mahabharata
Santi Parva, Section CCXCVIII
Translated by Sri Kisari Mohan Ganguli

Parsara said: Learned men, conversant with Adhyatma (knowledge of the soul), say that the body is a conglomeration of arteries and sinews and bones and much repulsive and impure matter and a compound of primal essences, and the senses and objects of the senses born of desire, all having outer cover of skin close to

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them. Destitute (in reality) of beauty and other accomplishments, this conglomeration, through force of the desires of a previous life, assumes a human form. Abandoned by the owner, the body becomes inanimate and motionless. Indeed, when the primal ingredients return to their respective natures (merge into the five elements), the body mingles with the dust. Caused by its union with acts, this body reappears under circumstances determined by its acts. Indeed, under whatever circumstances this body meets with dissolution, its next birth, determined by those circumstances, is seen to enjoy and endure the fruits of all its past acts.

Jiva (the embodied soul), after dissolution of the body it inhabited, does not take birth in a different body immediately. It roves through the sky for some time like a spacious cloud. Obtaining a new receptacle, it then takes birth again.

Death follows birth in respect of all men. This is settled. Creatures, influenced by the attributes of Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas, pursue acts which have an end. [Note: Acts are all perishable in respect of their consequences.]

He is righteous who, having cleansed himself of all sins and accomplished all his acts according to the best of his power and having abstained from giving pain to any man, meets with death when it comes.

The death that one meets with by taking poison, by hanging, by burning, at the hands of robbers, and at the teeth of animals, is said to be an apamrityu (inglorious one.)

[Note: It is difficult to give in English an idea of what is called Apamrityu. All deaths that are caused by such accidents as involve ingnominy are called Apamrityu. Death from snake-bite, from a fall, by drowning, at the horns of an animal etc., are instances of Apamrityu.]

Those men that are righteous never incur such or similar deaths even if they are afflicted with mental and physical diseases of the most agonising kind. The lives of the righteous, piercing through the Sun, ascend into the regions of Brahma. The lives of those that are both righteous and sinful rove in the middle regions. The lives of those that are sinful sink into the lowest depths.

There is only one foe (of man) and not another. That foe is identifiable with ignorance. Overwhelmed by it, one is led to perpetrate acts that are frightful and exceedingly cruel. That foe, for resisting which one should put forth one's power by waiting upon the aged according to the duties laid down in the Srutis (Vedas). That foe which cannot be overcome except by steady endeavours, meets with destruction only when it is crushed by the shafts of wisdom.

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From The Mahabharata
Santi Parva, Section CCXVII
Translated by Sri Kisari Mohan Ganguli

Bhishma said: The embodied soul, when divested of Rajas (does not immediately attain to Emancipation but) assumes a subtle form with all the senses of perception and moves about in space. When his mind becomes unaffected by acts, he, in consequence of such renunciation (loses that subtle form and) becomes merged in Prakriti (without however yet attaining to Brahman or Emancipation which transcends Prakriti). After the destruction of this gross body, one who through absence of heedlessness escapes from all the three bodies (viz., the gross, the subtle and the Karana) succeeds in attaining to Emancipation.

Rites of cremation

Those men who meet with death within their houses should have the rites of cremation performed upon their persons. Their bodies should be taken to the crematorium on vehicles and there they should be burnt according to the rites of purification that have been laid down in the scriptures. Religious rites, beneficial ceremonies, the performance of sacrifices, officiation at the sacrifices of others, gifts, the doing of other meritorious acts, the performance according to the best of one's power, of all that has been ordained in the case of one's deceased ancestors; all these one does for the benefiting one's own self. The Vedas with their six branches, and the other scriptures, have been created for the good of him who is of stainless acts.

The cremation of Bhishma

From The Mahabharata
Anusasana Parva, Section CLXVIII
Translated by Sri Kisari Mohan Ganguli

Vaisampayaya said:

Then the high-souled Pandavas and Vidura, taking a large quantity of wood and diverse kinds of fragrant scents, made a funeral pyre. Yuyutsu and others stood as spectators of the preparations. Then Yudhishtira and the high-souled Vidura wrapped Bhishma's body with silken cloth and floral garlands. Yuyutsu held an excellent umbrella over it. Bhimsena and Arjuna both held in their hands a couple of yak-tails of pure white. The two sons of Madri held two head-gears in their hands. Yudhishtira and Dhritarashtra stood at the feet of the lord of the Kurus, taking up palmyra fans, stood around the body and began to fan it softly.

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The Pitri sacrifice of the high-souled Bhishma was then performed. Many libations were poured upon the sacred fire. The singers of Samans sang many Samans. Then covering the body of Ganga's son (Bhishma) with sandal wood and black aloe and the bark wood, other fragrant fuel, and setting fire to the same, the Kurus with Dhritarashtra and others, stood on the right side of the funeral pyre. Those foremost ones of Kuru's race, having thus cremated the body of the son of Ganga, proceeded to the sacred Bhagirathi, accompanied by the Rishis. They were followed by Vyasa, by Narada, by Asita, by Krishna, by the ladies of the Bharata race, as also by such of the citizens of Hastinapore as had come to the place. All of them arrived at the sacred river, duly offered oblation of water unto the high souled son of Ganga.

The advantages of Cremation
By Swami Shivananda
Divine Life Society, Rishikesh

Cremation is the best way of destroying a dead body. This is highly beneficial for the departed soul. If the body is not burnt, the Jiva (the individual soul) is linked to the earth. The soul hovers round or hangs about the dead body on account of Moha or attachment to the physical body. Its journey to the celestial regions is interfered with. The vibrations set up by the recitation of Mantras and the offerings and oblations of water, bring solace and comfort to the departed soul.

The Sapindikarana ceremony helps the Jiva (soul) to pass from the Preta Loka to the Pitri Loka. (See page 'Rituals' - topic Shraddha Pitri Paksha). He is then enrolled among the Pitris or the ancestors. The son walks three times round the dead body of his father before fire is set to the pyre and sprinkles water once, reciting the Mantra: "Go away. Withdraw and depart from here".

The bones are collected on the next day and thrown into a river. Those who can afford take them to Benares or Haridwar and throw them into the Ganga (Ganges) river. It is believed that the soul whose mortal remains are consigned to the sacred Ganga river attains to the highest regions of spiritual light and splendour and, in the end, salvation.

Life

From Chandogya Upanishad, V, Section 7, 8 and 9
Translated by Swami Gambhirananda, Adwaita Ashram>

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Man is indeed the fire, his speech is verily the fuel, outgoing breath is the smoke, the tongue is the flame, the eye is the ember, the ear is the spark.

In that fire, which is such, the gods offer food as oblation. From that oblation originates semen.

Woman is indeed the fire. In that fire which is such, the gods offer semen as the oblation. From that oblation the foetus comes into being.

Thus indeed, after the fifth oblation, waters come to be called a person. Covered by a membrane, that foetus having slept inside for ten or nine months, or the time needed, takes birth thereafter.

After he is born, he lives as long as he is destined to live. When he dies for going to his merited world, then, they carry him verily to the fire, from which indeed he had come and from which he takes birth.

Among them those who were performers of meritorious deeds here, they will attain good births indeed in a quick manner- birth as a Brahmin, or birth as a Kshatriya, or birth as a Vaisya. On the other hand, those who were performers of bad deeds here, they will attain bad births indeed in a quick manner- birth as a dog, or birth as a pig, or birth as a Chandala. V.10.7

Those individual souls are born here as paddy, barley, herbs, sesamum, black pulse, etc. It is certainly more difficult to come out of these. He takes birth in the very form of him whosoever eats food, whoever ejects semen. V.10.6

[The preceding verses from The Chandogya Upanishad, V Sections 4,5 and 6 are reproduced below]

The yonder world is indeed the fire. Of that the sun indeed is the fuel, the rays are the smoke, the day is the flame, the moon is the ember, the stars are the sparks.

In that fire which is such, the gods offer faith as an oblation. From that oblation springs up the bright moon.

The deity of cloud is indeed the fire; of it, air is verily the fuel, cloud is the smoke, lightning is the flame, thunder is the ember, the rumblings of clouds are the sparks.

In that fire which is such, the gods offer the bright moon as an oblation. Rain originates from that oblation.

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The earth indeed is the fire; of that the year is verily the fuel, the sky is the smoke, night is the flame, the quarters are the embers, the intermediate directions are the sparks.

In that fire which is such, the gods offer rainfall as an oblation, from that oblation grows food.

Man is indeed the fire...

From Prasna Upanishad:

After a year Kabandhi approached the teacher and asked:
Sir, how did the creatures come into being?

Sage Pippalada (the teacher) said: The Lord of beings meditated and produced Prana, the primal energy, and Rayi, the giver of form, desiring that they, male and female, should in manifold ways produce creatures for Him.

Prana, the primal energy (vital force), is the sun; and Rayi, the form-giving substance, is the moon.

[Note: Energy and matter are the first two manifestations of the Cosmic Mind. The sun, being the centre of energy, is identified with prana, or the cosmic energy. The moon, devoid of heat and light, is identified with inert matter.]

Prajapati, the Creator, is the cause of all things. He pervades everything. He is both food and eater. Therefore food (Rayi) and eater (prana) refer to the same substance. The division is made according to the gross or subtle nature of the substance. The gross is called food, and the subtle, eater. Again, the subtle (e.g. air), becomes the food of the subtler (e.g. akasha or space). Therefore the gross and the subtle (i.e. what has form and what is formless) can both be designated as food (Rayi). From the standpoint of the division mentioned above, all objects having form become the food of the incorporeal prana: the gross is the food, or effect, of the subtle.]

Be it known that all this universe, that which is gross and that which is subtle, is one with Rayi. Therefore, is Rayi omnipresent.

In like manner is the universe one with Prana. The rising sun pervades the east and fills with energy all beings that there inhabit; and likewise when his rays fall on the south, the west, the north, the zenith, the nadir, and the intermediate regions, to all beings that there inhabit he gives life.

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Prana is the soul of the universe, assuming all forms, he is the light that animates and illumines all.

Prana and Rayi, uniting, divide the year. Prana and Rayi, uniting, form the month. Its dark fortnight is Rayi, and its bright fortnight is Prana. Sages perform their devotional rites in the light, with knowledge; fools, in the dark, with ignorance.

Food is Prana and Rayi. From food is produced seed, and from seed, in turn, are born all creatures.

Those who worship the world of creation produce children; but those alone attain the world of Brahman (Supreme Reality) who are steadfast in continence, meditation, and truthfulness.

The pure world of Brahman is attainable by those only who are neither deceitful, nor wicked, nor false.

From Katha Upanishad

[Note: Explanations by Swami Nikhilananda. If the Atman leaves the body after the attainment of Knowledge, it obtains Liberation and is not born again in the relative world. The question as to what happens after death does not apply to the liberated soul. The doctrine of karma and rebirth is laid down for those who die without the Knowledge of Brahman.]

Katha Upanishad, II,ii,7

Some jivas (individual souls) enter the womb to be embodied as organic beings, and some go into non-organic matter- according to their work and according to their knowledge.

[Note: 'Organic being' : Living creatures endowed with physical organs. 'Non-organic matter' : Such as trees, plants and so on.]

[General notes: According to the doctrine of karma and rebirth, the future of the embodied soul is determined by its present action and knowledge. By good action it becomes good, and by evil action it becomes evil. One can assume any body in the universe, from that of a god to that of a plant. If sattwa preponderates at the time of death, one obtains a god's body; if rajasa, a human body; and if tamasa, a subhuman body. But it must be remembered that the nature of Atman (Soul) is not altered by the fact of Its assuming a body. Atman uses the body to serve Its purpose. All will ultimately attain Liberation.]

From Aitareya Upanishad
Part 2, Chapter 1

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Translations and commentaries

by Swami Nikhilananda

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The Three Births of the Self

This (Person) is, at first, the germ in a man. That which is the semen is here called the germ. This semen is the vigour (tejas) drawn from all the limbs. The man bears the self (i.e. the semen) in the self (i.e. the body). When he pours the semen into a woman, he gives it a birth. This indeed, is the first birth of the embodied soul.

[Note: "This Person": Refers to the individual self who is about to assume a human body "Semen": Which is the essence of food and is extracted from all parts of the body.]

The semen becomes one with the woman - just like a limb of her own. That is why it does not hurt her. She nourishes this self of his that has come into her.

She being the nourisher, should be nourished (by her husband). The woman nourishes the embryo. Immediately after its birth he (the father) nourishes (with natal ceremonies) the child, which in the beginning was already born (as the embryo). Nourishing the child from birth onward, he thus nourishes himself for the continuation of these worlds. For thus alone are these worlds perpetuated. This is one's second birth.

[Note: "should be nourished by her husband": With proper food, drink, clothes etc. No good relation in this world between two persons is possible without reciprocity of benefits.]

He (the son) who is the one self (body) of his (father's) is made his father's substitute for (performing) virtuous deeds. Then the other self (body) of his (father's), having accomplished his duties and reached his age departs (from this world). So departing hence, he is born again. This is his third birth.

[Note: "Substitute": Because the father cannot actively worship in old age. "Virtuous deeds": As enjoined by the scriptures. "Duties": They consist mainly of the debts one owes to the gods, the Rishis (seers of truth), and the Manes. The first debt is discharged through the performance of sacrifices, the second through the study of the scriptures and the third through the procreation of offspring. In this way the solidarity and the complete well-being of society are maintained. "Third birth": The first birth takes place when the father injects the semen, which is the essence of his body, into his wife. The second birth takes place when the child,

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who is the father in another form, is born from the mother's womb. The third birth is his reincarnation in a new body. Father and son are regarded as identical.]

From The Mahabharata
Aswamedha Parva Section XVII
Translated by Sri Kisari Mohan Ganguli

How does a human being enjoy and endure the fruits of the good and bad acts done by him?

The Brahmana said:

I shall discourse to you on the attainment by Jiva (embodied soul) of the condition of residence in the womb. Do you hear me, with concentrated attention, O regenerate one, as I speak to thee!

The acts, good and bad, that a Jiva (embodied soul) does are not subject to destruction. Upon attainment of body after body, those acts produce fruits corresponding with them. As a fruit-bearing tree, when the season comes of productivity, yields a large quantity of fruit, similarly merit, achieved with a pure heart, yields a large crop (of felicity). After the same fashion, sin, done with a sinful heart, produces a large crop of misery. The soul (or Jiva) placing the mind ahead, addresses himself to action. Hear then how Jiva, equipped with all his acts and overwhelmed with lust and wrath, enters the womb.

The vital seed mixed with blood, enters the womb of females and becomes the field (of Jiva), good or bad, born of his acts. In consequence of his subtlety and the condition of being unmanifest, Jiva does not become attached to anything even after attaining to a body. Therefore, he is called Eternal Brahman. That (viz., Jiva or Brahman) is the seed of all creatures. It is in consequence of Him that living creatures live. That Jiva, entering all the limbs of the foetus part by part, accepting the attribute of mind, and residing within all the regions that belong to Prana (vital energy), supports (life). In consequence of this, the foetus becomes endued with mind, begins to move its limbs. As liquefied iron, poured into a mould, takes the form of the mould, know that the entrance of Jiva into the foetus is even such. As fire, entering a mass of iron, heats it greatly, do thou know that the manifestation of Jiva in the foetus is such. As a lamp, burning in a room, discovers (all things within it), after the same manner mind discovers the different limbs of the body.

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How to overcome grief
Mahabharata

Santi Parva, Section CCCXXXII
Translated by Sri Kisari Mohan Ganguli

Narad Muni said: The Supreme Soul is without beginning and without end. It resides as a witness in the Jiva-soul as the embodied soul. It is inactive and without form.

Those people who, beholding the course of life and death in the world with the aid of their intelligence, do not shed tears, are said to behold properly. Such persons have never to shed tears. When any such calamity comes, productive of either physical or mental grief, as is incapable of being warded off by even one's best efforts, one should cease to reflect on it with sorrow. This is the medicine for sorrow, viz., not to think of it. By thinking of it, one can never dispel it; on the other hand, by thinking upon sorrow, one only enhances it.

Mental grief should be killed by wisdom, while physical grief should be dispelled by medicines. This is the power of knowledge.

Youth, beauty, life, stored wealth, health, association with those that are loved—these are all exceedingly transitory.

One should not lament individually for a sorrowful occurrence that concerns an entire community.

All combinations are destined to end in dissolution. Union is sure to end in disunion, and life is certain to end in death.

One's allotted period of life is running continually. It stops not in its course for even a single moment. Days and nights are ceaselessly running bearing away in their current the periods of life of all human beings.

Upon the dissolution of the body, another body, which is as much destructible as the one that is destroyed, is kept ready for the burnt or destroyed creature (to migrate into) even as one boat goes to another for transferring to itself the passengers of the other boat. When the allotted period of a person's life is at its close, the five primal elements of the body attain to the seventh and the ninth stages and then cease to be. The soul however undergoes no change. The ten stages of a person's life are:

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1. Residence within the womb. 2. Birth. 3. Infancy up to five years. 4. Childhood up to 12 years. 5. Pauganda (teen years) up to 16 years. 6. Youth up to 48 years. 7. Old age. 8. Decrepitude. 9. Suspension of breath. 10. Destruction of body.

From The Mahabharata
Stree Parva, Section I, II & III
Translated by Sri Kisari Mohan Ganguli

While King Dhritarashtra was indulging in such lamentations, (with grief on account of the death of his son), Sanjaya addressed him in the following words for dispelling his grief:

"Cast off your grief, O monarch! You have heard the conclusions of the Vedas and the contents of diverse scriptures and holy writ, from the lips of the old, O King! You are possessed of learning and intelligence and are always truthful. They that are so righteous and possessed of such intelligence as you are never stupefied by grief. The man who indulges in grief never wins wealth. By grieving one loses the fruits one desires. Grief is again an obstacle to the acquisition of objects dear to us. The man who gives way to grief loses even his salvation. The man, who shrouds a burning coal within the folds of his attire and is burnt by the fire that is kindled by it, would be pronounced a fool if he grieves for his injuries. The tear-stained face, O King, which you bear now is not approved by the scriptures or praised by the wise. These tears, like sparks of fire, burn the dead for whom they are shed. Kill your grief with your intelligence and bear yourself up with the strength of your own self!"

Thus was the King comforted by the high-souled Sanjaya. Vidura then once again addressed the King, displaying great intelligence.

Vidura said: Rise, O king! Why are you stretched on the earth? Bear thyself up with thy own self. O King, even this is the final end of all living creatures. Everything massed together ends in destruction; everything that gets high is sure to fall down. Union is certain to end in separation; life is sure to end in death. The Destroyer drags both the hero and the coward. When one's time comes, O King, one cannot escape.

As regards living creatures, they are non-existent at first. They exist in the period that intervenes. In the end they once more become non-existent. What matter of grief then is there in this?

The man that indulges in grief succeeds not in meeting with the dead. By indulging in grief, one does not himself die. When the course of the world is such,

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why do you indulge in sorrow? Death drags all creatures, even the gods. There is none dear or hateful to death. As the wind tears off the top of all blades of grass, even so, O bull of Bharata's race, Death overmasters all creatures. All creatures are like members of a caravan bound for the same destination. (When death will encounter all) it matters very little whom he meets with first.

It behoveth thee, O King, not to grieve for those that have been slain in battle. Invisible they had been (before birth). Having come from that unknown region, they have once more become invisible. They are not thine, nor art thou theirs. What grief then is there in such disappearance?

Comforting thyself with thy own self cease to grieve. It behoveth thee not to suffer thyself to be overwhelmed with sorrow and to abandon all actions. There are thousands of mothers and fathers and sons and wives in this world. Whose are they, and whose are we? From day to day thousands of causes spring up for sorrow and thousands of causes for fear. These, however, affect the ignorant but are nothing to him that is wise. There is none dear or hateful to Time. Time is indifferent to none. All are equally dragged by Time. Time causes all creatures to grow and it is Time that destroys everything. When all else is asleep, Time is awake.

Time is irresistible. Youth, beauty, life, possessions, health and the companionship of friends, all are unstable. He that is wise will never covet any of these. It behoveth thee not to grieve for what is universal. A person may, by indulging in grief, himself perish, but grief itself, by being indulged in, never becomes light. If you feel your grief to be heavy, it should be counteracted by not indulging in it. Even this is the medicine for grief, that one should not indulge in it. By dwelling on it one cannot lessen it. On the other hand, it grows with indulgence. Upon the advent of evil or upon the bereavement of something that is dear, only they that are of little intelligence suffer their minds to be afflicted with grief. This is neither Profit nor Religion, nor Happiness, on which thy heart is dwelling.

The indulgence of grief is the certain means of one's losing one's objects. Through grief, one falls away from the three great ends of life (Virtue, Wealth and Pleasure). [See page "Virtue, Wealth and Pleasure" – See the column on the left]. They that are destitute of contentment, are stupefied on the accession of vicissitudes dependent upon the possession of wealth. They, however, that are wise, are on the other hand, unaffected by such vicissitudes.

One should kill mental grief by wisdom, just as physical grief should be killed by medicine. Wisdom has this power. They, however, that are foolish, can never obtain tranquillity of soul. The acts of a former life closely follow a man,

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insomuch that they lie by him when he lies down, stay by him when he stays, and run with him when he runs. In those conditions of life in which one acts well or ill, one enjoys or suffers the fruit thereof in similar conditions. In those forms (of physical organisation) in which one performs particular acts, one enjoys or suffers the fruits thereof in similar forms. One's own self is one's own friend, as, indeed, one's own self is one's own enemy. [Note: Refer also to Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 6, Verses 5 & 6]. One's own self is the witness of one's acts, good and evil. From good acts springs a state of happiness, from sinful deeds springs woe. One always obtains the fruit of one's acts. One never enjoys or suffers weal or woe that is not the fruit of one's own acts.

He that is wise obtains tranquillity by subduing both grief and joy through means by which one may escape from grief and joy. All those things about which we are anxious are ephemeral. The world is like a plantain tree, without enduring strength. Since the wise and the foolish, the rich and the poor, all, divested of their anxieties, sleep on the crematorium, with bodies reft of flesh and full of bare bones and shrivelled sinews, whom amongst them will the survivors look upon as possessed of distinguishing marks by which the attributes of birth and beauty may be ascertained? (When all are equal in death) why should human beings, whose understandings are always deceived (by the things of this world) cover one another's rank and position?

The learned say that the bodies of men are like houses. In time these are destroyed. As a person casting off one attire, whether old or new, wears another, even such is the case with the bodies of all embodied beings. [Note: Refer also to Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 2, Verse 22]. Creatures obtain weal or woe as the fruit of their own acts. Through their acts they obtain heaven, or bliss, or woe. Whether able or unable, they have to bear their burdens which are the result of their own acts.

As amongst earthen pots some break while still on the potter's wheel, some while partially shaped, some as soon as brought into shape, some after removal from the wheel, some while in the course of being removed, some after removal, some while wet, some while dry, some while being burnt, some while being removed from the kiln, some after removed therefrom, and some while being used, even such is the case with the bodies of embodied creatures. Some are destroyed while yet in the womb, some after coming out of the womb, some on the day after, some on the expiration of a fortnight or of a month, some on the expiration of a year or of two years, some in youth, some in middle age, and some when in old age.

Creatures are born or destroyed according to their acts in previous lives. When such is the course of the world, why do you then indulge in grief? As men, while swimming in sport on the water, sometimes dive and sometimes emerge, O King,

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even so creatures sink and emerge in life's stream. They that are of little wisdom suffer or meet with destruction as the result of their own acts. They, however, that are wise, observant of virtue, and desirous of doing good unto all living creatures, they, acquainted with the real nature of the appearance of creatures in this world, attain at last to the highest end.

The wise have said that the Atman (Self) is immortal and that the phenomenon of death is merely the separation of the astral body from the physical body.

[Note: Refer also to Katha Upanisad, I,ii,22 where the text shows how from the knowledge of the Self comes the elimination of grief:

"Having meditated on the Self, as bodyless in the midst of bodies, as permanent in the midst of the impermanent, and as great and pervasive, the wise man does not grieve."]

The five elements of which the body is composed return to their source. Just as pilgrims unite and separate at a public inn, so also fathers, mothers, sons, brothers, wives, relations unite and separate in this world. He who thus understands the nature of the body and all human relationships based upon it will derive strength to bear the loss of our dear ones.

In the Divine plan, one day each union must end with separation.

In the Mahabharata, Bhishma said:
Develop this attitude based on wisdom:

I am alone. There is no one who is mine; nor do I belong to anyone. Even this body does not belong to me. These objects of the world are not mine; nor do they belong to others. Or, all things belong equally to all beings. Therefore there is no need for any mind to grieve over these.

From The Mahabharata
Santi Parva, Section CCV
Translated by Sri Kisari Mohan Ganguli

Manu said: Upon the appearance of the physical and mental sorrow, one does not become able to practise yoga. It is advisable, therefore, for one not to brood over such sorrow. The remedy for sorrow is abstention from brooding over. When sorrow is brooded over, it comes aggressively and increases in violence. One

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should relieve mental sorrow by wisdom, while physical sorrow should be cured by medicaments. Wisdom teaches this.

One should not, while under sorrow, behave like a child. The man of wisdom should never cherish a desire for youth, beauty, length of life, accumulation of wealth, health, and the companionship of those that are dear, all of which are transitory. One should not grieve singly for a sorrow that affects a whole community. Without grieving, one should, if one sees an opportunity, seek to apply a remedy. Without doubt, the measure of sorrow is much greater than that of happiness in life. To one who is content with the objects of the senses, death that is disagreeable comes in consequence of his stupefaction. That man who avoids both sorrow and happiness succeeds verily in attaining to Brahman (Supreme Reality). Such persons, who are possessed of wisdom, have never to grieve.

Worldly possessions bring about sorrow. In protecting them you cannot have any happiness. They are again earned with misery. One should not therefore, regard their loss.

From The Mahabharata
Santi Parva, Section CLXXIV
Translated by Sri Kisari Mohan Ganguli

Senajit said: What is that knowledge, and what is that learning, by acquiring which thou dost not yield to sorrow?

The Brahmana said: Behold all creatures, - the superior, the middling, and the inferior, - in consequence of their respective acts, are entangled in grief. I do not regard even my own self to be mine. On the other hand, I regard the whole world to be mine. I again think that all this (which I see) is as much mine as it belongs to others. Grief cannot approach me in consequence of this thought. Having acquired such an understanding, I do not yield either to joy or to grief.

As two pieces of wood floating on the ocean come together at one time and are again separated, even such is the union of (living) creatures in this world. Sons, grandsons, kinsmen, relatives are all of this kind. One should never feel affection for them, for separation with them is certain. Thy son came from an invisible region. He has departed and become invisible. He did not know thee. Thou didst not know him. Who art thou and for whom dost thou grieve? Grief arises from the disease constituted by desire. Happiness again results from the disease of desire being cured. From joy also springs sorrow, and hence sorrow arises repeatedly. Sorrow comes after joy, and joy after sorrow, The joys and sorrows of human

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beings are revolving on a wheel. After happiness sorrow has come to thee. Thou shalt again have happiness. No one suffers sorrow for ever, and no one enjoys happiness for ever.

The body is the refuge of both sorrow and happiness. Whatever acts an embodied creature does with the aid of his body, the consequence thereof he has to suffer in that body. Life springs with the springing of the body into existence. The two exist together, and the two perish together. Men of uncleansed souls, wedded to worldly things by various bonds, meet with destruction like embankments of sand in water. Woes of diverse kinds, born of ignorance, act like pressers of oil-seeds, for assailing all creatures in consequence of their attachments. These press them like oil-seeds in the oil-making machine represented by the round of rebirths (to which they are subject).

Man, for the sake of his wife (and others), commits numerous evil acts, but suffers singly diverse kinds of misery both in this and the next world. All men, attached to children and wives and kinsmen and relatives, sink in the miry sea of grief like wild elephants, when destitute of strength, sinking in a miry slough. Indeed, O lord, upon loss of wealth or son or kinsmen or relatives, man suffers great distress, which resembles as regards its power of burning, a forest conflagration. All this, viz., joy and grief, existence and non-existence, is dependent upon destiny.

One having friends as one destitute of friends, one having foes as one destitute of foes, one having wisdom as one destitute of wisdom, each and every one amongst these, obtains happiness through destiny. Friends are not the cause of one's happiness. Foes are not the cause of one's misery. Wisdom is not competent to bring an accession of wealth; nor is wealth competent to bring an accession of happiness. Intelligence is not the cause of wealth, nor is stupidity the cause of penury. He only that is possessed of wisdom and none else understands the order of the world. Amongst the intelligent, the heroic, the foolish, the cowardly, the idiotic, the learned, the weak, or the strong, happiness comes to him for whom it is ordained.

Among the calf, the cowherd that owns her, and the thief, the cow indeed belongs to him who drinks her milk. They whose understanding is absolutely dormant, and they, who have attained to that state of the mind which lies beyond the sphere of the intellect, succeed in enjoying happiness. Only they that are between the two classes, suffer misery.

Happiness must end in misery. Idleness is misery; while cleverness (in action) is the cause of happiness. Affluence and prosperity dwell in one possessed of cleverness, but not in one that is idle. Be it happiness or be it misery, be it

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agreeable or be it disagreeable, what comes to one should be enjoyed or endured with an unconquered heart. Every day a thousand occasions for sorrow, and hundred occasions for fear assail the man of ignorance and folly but not the man that is possessed of wisdom. Sorrow can never touch the man that is possessed of intelligence, that has acquired wisdom, that is mindful of listening to the instructions of his betters, that is destitute of envy, and that is self-restrained.

From The Mahabharata
Santi Parva, Section XXVIII
Translated by Sri Kisari Mohan Ganguli

Vyasa related Asma's discourse:

Asma said:

The cause of all mental sorrow is two, viz., delusion of the mind and the accession of distress. No third cause exists.

The cause of all mental sorrow is two, viz., delusion of the mind and the accession of distress. No third cause exists. All these diverse kinds of woe as also those arising from attachment to earthly enjoyments, that overtake man, are even such. Decrepitude and Death, like a pair of wolves, devour all creatures, strong or weak, short or tall. No man can escape decrepitude and death, not even the subjugator of the whole earth girts by sea. Be it happiness or be it sorrow that comes upon creatures, it should be enjoyed or borne without elation or depression. There is no method of escape from them. The evils of life overtake one in early or middle or old age. They can never be avoided, while those (sources of bliss) that are coveted never come. The absence of what is agreeable, the presence of what is disagreeable, good and evil, bliss and woe, follow Destiny. Similarly, the birth of creatures and their death, and the accessions of gain and loss, are all pre-ordained.

Cold and heat and rain come one after another in consequence of Time's course. It is even so with the happiness and the misery of mankind. Neither medicines, nor incantations, can rescue the man assailed by decrepitude or overtaken by death.

As two logs of wood floating on the great ocean, come together and are again (when the time comes) separated, even so creatures come together and are again (when the time comes) separated. In this world a thousand kinds of relationships are contracted, such as mother and father and son and wife. In reality, however, whose are they and whose are we? No one can become anyone's own, nor can anyone become anybody else's own. Our union here with wives and kinsfolk and well-wishers is like that of travellers at a road-side inn. Where am I? Where shall I go? Who am I? How come I here? What for and whom I grieve? Reflecting on

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these questions one obtains tranquillity. Life and its environments are constantly revolving like a wheel, and the companionship of those that are dear is transitory.

As regards all creatures that have taken birth, neither years, nor months, nor fortnights, nor days, nor nights, that have once passed, do ever return. Man, whose existence is so transitory, is forced, in course of Time, whether he will or not, to come upon this inevitable and broad path that has to be trodden by every creature. Whether the body springs from the creature or the creature springs from the body, one's union however, with wives and other friends is like that of travellers in an inn. One cannot obtain a lasting companionship with anyone. One cannot obtain such companionship with one's own body. How then it can be had with anyone else?

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From Brhadaranyaka Upanisad
Translated from the original Sanskrit by
Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester

Addressing King Janaka,

Yagnavalkya said: When man, the individual soul, is born, and assumes relationship with the body and sense organs, he becomes associated with the evils of the world. When at death he gives up the body, he leaves all evil behind.

There are two states for man- the state of this world, and the state in the next; there is also a third state, the state intermediate between these two, which can be likened to dream. While in the intermediate state, a man experiences both the other states, that in this world and that in the next; and the manner thereof is as follows :

When he dies, he lives only in the subtle body, on which are left the impressions of his past deeds, and of these impressions he is aware, illumined as they are by the pure light of the Self. Thus it is that in the intermediate state he experiences the first state, or that of life in the world. Again, while in the intermediate state, he foresees both the evil and the blessings that will yet come to him, as these are determined by his conduct, good and bad, upon the earth, and by the character in which this conduct has resulted. Thus it is that in the intermediate state he experiences the second state, or that of life in the world to come.

In the intermediate state, there are no real chariots, nor horses nor roads; but by the light of the Self he creates chariots and horses and roads. There are no real

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blessings nor joys nor pleasures; but he creates blessings and joys and pleasures. There are no real ponds nor lakes nor rivers; but he creates ponds and lakes and rivers. He is the creator of all these out of the impressions left by his past deeds.

As a man passes from dream to wakefulness, so does he pass at death from this life to the next.

When a man is about to die, the subtle body, mounted by the intelligent Self, groans- as a heavily laden cart groans under its burden.

When his body becomes thin through old age or disease, the dying man separates himself from his limbs, even as a mango or a fig or a banyan fruit separates itself from its stalk, and by the same way that he came he hastens to his new abode, and there assumes another body, in which to begin a new life.

When his body grows weak and he becomes apparently unconscious, the dying man gathers his senses about him and completely withdrawing their powers, descends into his heart. No more does he see form or colour without.

He neither sees, nor smells, nor tastes. He does not speak, he does not hear. He does not think, he does not know. For all the organs, detaching themselves from his physical body, unite with his subtle body. Then the point of his heart, where the nerves join, is lighted by the light of the Self, and by that light he departs either through the eye, or through the gate of the skull, or through some other aperture of the body. When he thus departs, life departs; and when life departs, all the functions of the vital principle depart. The Self remains conscious, and conscious, the dying man goes to his abode. The deeds of this life, and the impressions they leave behind, follow him.

As a leech, having reached the end of a blade of grass, takes hold of another blade and draws itself to it, so the Self, having left this body behind it unconscious, takes hold of another body and draws himself to it.

As a goldsmith, taking an old gold ornament, moulds it into another, newer and more beautiful, so the Self, having given up the body and left it unconscious, takes on a newer and better form, either that of the fathers, or that of the celestial singers, or that of the gods, or that of other beings, heavenly or earthly.

The Self is verily Brahman (The Supreme Self). Through ignorance it identifies itself with what is alien to it, and appears to consist of intellect, understanding, life, sight, hearing, earth, water, air, space, fire, desire and the absence of desire,

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anger and the absence of anger, righteousness and the absence of righteousness. It appears to be all things- now one, now another.

As a man acts, so does he become. A man of good deeds becomes good, a man of evil deeds becomes evil. A man becomes pure through pure deeds, impure through impure deeds.

As a man's desire is, so is his destiny. For as his desire is, so is his will; as his will is, so is his deed; and as his deed is, so is his reward, whether good or bad.

A man acts according to the desires to which he clings. After death he goes to the next world bearing in his mind the subtle impressions of his deeds; and after reaping there the harvest of his deeds, he returns again to this world of action. Thus he who has desires continues subject to rebirth.

But he in whom desire is stilled suffers no rebirth. After death, having attained to the highest, desiring only the Self, he goes to no other world. Realising Brahman (the Supreme Self), he becomes Brahman.

When all the desires which once entered into his heart have been driven out by divine knowledge, the mortal, attaining to Brahman, becomes immortal.

As the slough of a snake lies cast off on an anthill, so lies the body of a man at death; while he, freed from the body, becomes one with the immortal spirit, Brahman, the Light Eternal.

Other worlds there are, joyless, enveloped in darkness. To these worlds, after death, go those who are unwise, who know not the Self.

When a man has realised the Self, the pure, the immortal, the blissful, what craving can be left in him that he should take to himself another body, full of suffering, to satisfy it?

He that has once known the glory of the Self within the ephemeral body- that stumbling block to enlightenment- knows that the Self is one with Brahman, Lord and Creator of all. Brahman may be realised while yet one dwells in the ephemeral body. To fail to realise Him is to live in ignorance, and therefore to be subject to birth and death. The knowers of Brahman are immortal; others, knowing him not, continue in the bonds of grief.

He who with spiritual eye directly perceives the self-effulgent Being, the Lord of all that was, is, and shall be- he indeed is without fear, and causes fear in none.

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He who knows Brahman to be the life of life, the eye of the eye, the ear of the ear, the mind of the mind- he indeed comprehends fully the cause of all causes. By the purified mind alone is Brahman perceived.

In Brahman there is no diversity. He who sees diversity goes from death to death.

Brahman can be apprehended only as knowledge itself- knowledge that is one with Reality, inseparable from it. For He is beyond all proof, beyond all instruments of thought. The eternal Brahman is pure, unborn, subtler than the subtlest, greater than the greatest.

Let therefore the wise aspirant, knowing Brahman to be the supreme goal, so shape his life and his conduct that he may attain to Him. Let him not seek to know Him by arguments, for arguments are idle and vain.

Verily is Brahman the great unborn that dwells within the lotus of the heart, surrounded by the senses. He is the Intellect of the intellect, Protector of all, King of all, Lord of all. Good works do not make Him more, nor do evil works make Him less. Lord, King, Protector of all, He transcends the three worlds.

Devotees seek to know Him by study, by sacrifice, by continence, by austerity, by detachment. To know Him is to become a seer (Rishi). Desiring to know Him alone, monks renounce the world. Realising the glory of the Self, the sages of old craved neither sons nor daughters. "What have we to do with sons and daughters," they asked, "we who have known the Self, we who have achieved the supreme goal of existence?" No longer desiring progeny, nor wealth, nor life in other worlds, they entered upon the path of complete renunciation.

Craving for progeny leads to craving for wealth, and craving for wealth leads to craving for life in other worlds. Two cravings there are: the craving for a life of pleasure in this world, and the craving for a life of greater pleasure in other worlds.

The Self is to be described as not this, not that (neti,neti). It is incomprehensible, for it cannot be comprehended; undecaying, for it never decays; unattached, for it never attaches itself; unfettered, for it is never bound. He who knows the Self is unaffected, whether by good or by evil. Never do such thoughts come to him as "I have done an evil thing," or "I have done a good thing." Both good and evil he has transcended, and he is therefore troubled no more by what he may or may not have done.

The eternal glory of the knower of Brahman, beginningless and endless, revealed by divine knowledge is neither increased nor decreased by deeds. Let a man

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therefore seek to obtain it, since having obtained it he can never be touched by evil. Self-controlled is he who knows the Self, tranquil, poised, free from desire. Absorbed in meditating upon it, he sees it within his own soul, and he sees all beings in it. Evil touches him not, troubles him not, for in the fire of his divine knowledge all evil is burnt away. Freed from evil, freed from desire, freed from doubt, he becomes a knower of Brahman.

This O King, is the truth of Brahman. Do thou attain to it.

From the Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 14, Verse :18

Those who are seated in Sattwa (purity) go upwards; the Rajasic (Passionate) dwell in the middle; and the Tamasic, abiding in the function of the lowest guna, go downwards.

[Note: Those who abide in Sattwa become the lords of heaven after giving up the physical body. The Rajas are reborn on this earth as human beings. The Tamasic go downward, i.e., they will be born in the wombs of cattle or beasts. They may take their births amongst the lowest grades of human beings. The lowest grades of human beings are only brutes though they have assumed human form. Their actions are brutal. Commentary by Swami Shivananda, Divine Life Society, Rishikesh.]

The Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 14, Verse 20 :

The embodied one having crossed beyond these three gunas out of which the body is evolved, is freed from birth, death, decay and pain, and attains to immortality.

From The Chandogya Upanishad, VI. Sections 8 to14
Translated by Swami Gambhirananda

All these beings have Existence as their root. Existence is their abode. Existence is their place of merger. .

That which is this subtle essence, all this has got That as the Self. That is Truth. That is the Self. Thou art That, O Svetaketu. .

As bees make honey by collecting the essence of trees standing in different quarters, (and) reduce the juice into a homogeneous whole;

And as they do not have such distinctive ideas there as, "I am the juice of this tree", :I am the juice of this tree", so also, all these creatures, after merging in

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Existence, do not understand this: "We have merged in Existence."

Whichever creatures they might have been here (in this world)- whether tiger, lion, wolf, pig, insect, grass-hopper, gad-fly or mosquito, they become that.

[Note: Commentary by Sri Sankaracharya: "The idea implied is that, the tendencies which the transmigrating beings had before, do not get eliminated. This idea follows from another Upanishadic text which says, 'They are born in accordance with their mental impressions.']

These eastward rivers flow to the east, and westward rivers flow to the west, (they rise) from the sea and merge in the sea itself. They become one with the sea. As they do not realise there, "I am this river", "I am this river" in this very way, indeed, all these creatures having come from Existence, do not realise. "We have come from Existence". Whichever creatures they were here in this world, whether tiger, lion, wolf, pig, insect, grass-hopper, gad-fly or mosquito, they become that.

If anyone strikes at the root of this big tree it exudes juice while living. If one should strike at the middle, it exudes juice while living. If one should strike at the top it exudes juice while living. This one, as such, pervaded by the individual soul, continues happily while drinking the sap.

If the individual soul discards anyone of the branches of this tree, then that dries up. If he discards a second branch, then that one dries up. If he discards a third, then that one dries up. When he leaves the whole, the whole dries up.

Know this verily as such. This surely dies when separated from the individual soul, but the soul does not die. That which is this subtle essence, all this has got That as the Self. That is Truth. That is the Self. Thou art That, O Svetaketu.

[Note: Commentary by Sri Shankaracharya: As it has been shown in this illustration of the tree, a tree is said to be living when it remains associated with a soul and continues unwithered, drinking sap etc. And when bereft of that it is said to be dead. Know verily as such, when separated from the soul, surely, this body dies, but the soul does not die. For it is seen that a man, who still has some works unfinished, completes it after having woken up from deep-sleep, remembering, 'This residual work of mine remains unfinished'. And from the fact that no sooner are creatures born than they hanker after breast-feeding, and have fear etc., it is understood that they possess memory of the experiences of breast-feeding and suffering in past lives. Moreover, since rites like Agnihotra etc. have some purpose to serve, it follows that the soul does not die.]

Svetaketu said to his father: May the venerable sir explain this to me again, with the help of an illustration.

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The father said: Let it be so, O good-looking one.
Fetch a fruit from this Banyan tree.
It is this one venerable sir.
Break it.
It is broken venerable sir.
What do you see in it?
Venerable sir, these are the seeds.
Dear son, break one of them (Seed).
It is broken venerable sir.
What do you see here?
Nothing whatsoever, O venerable sir.

To him he said: O good-looking one, this subtleness which you cannot perceive, of this very subtleness of the size of an atom, stands this huge banyan tree. Have faith O good-looking one.

That which is this subtle essence, all this has got That as the Self. That is truth.
That is the Self. Thou art That. Thou art That, O Svetaketu.

If that Existence is the root of the world, why is it not perceived? O venerable sir, please explain this to me again with the help of an illustration.

Let it be so O good-looking one.
After keeping this salt (overnight) in the water, then come to me in the morning.
Svetaketu did accordingly. To him the father said: O dear one, fetch that salt which you kept in the water at night. Svetaketu could not find it after searching for it.

O dear one, (you do not perceive it), remaining dissolved as it does. (Now, if you want to perceive it) sip from its top. How does it taste?

It is salty.
Sip from the middle. How does it taste?
It is salty.
Sip from the bottom. How does it taste?
It is salty.
Throwing this away come to me.
With regard to that, he acted in that way (and said): That (salt) exists always.
To him the father said: O good-looking one, you cannot perceive Existence though it is verily present here itself. Surely, it is here.

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That which is this subtle essence, all this has got That as the Self. That is the Truth. That is the Self. Thou art That, O Svetaketu.

said: If in this way, although Existence which is the root of the world is not perceived through the organs, like the subtleness of salt, It can be experienced through some other means, then what is the means for realising That by realising which I shall become fulfilled, and by not realising which I shall remain unfulfilled? Please explain this to me over again, venerable sir, with the help of an illustration.

The father said: Let be so, O good looking one.

Just as having brought a person with his eyes bound, from the country of the Gandharas, he is left in a more solitary place, and he then goes on shouting eastward or northward, or southward, or westward saying "I have been brought blindfolded and left blindfolded".

As somebody having removed the bandage from the eyes may say, "The country of Gandhara lies this way. Walk in this direction", (and) that intelligent man who has received instruction reaches the country of the Gandharas indeed, by asking his way from village to village, in this way indeed, a man having a teacher acquires knowledge in this world. For him the delay is for that long only, as long as he does not become freed. Then he becomes merged in Existence.

Valmiki Ramayana on death

All ripe fruits must drop down from the tree. Even so a man has to wait the inevitable hour of death.- 105-17

Even as a mansion with firm and massive pillars dilapidates, so do mortal men, decayed and withered by efflux of time, fall a prey to ruthless death withered by old age and eventually die. 105-18

A night that flies returns no more even as the waters of the Yamuna river flowing into the sea do not roll back from the same. - 105-19

Death closely follows a man wherever he goes and wherever he sits, and returns with him until his journey ends, however long may be the distance travelled. 105-23

Wrinkles begin to appear all over the body and the hairs turn gray. Man's mortal

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frame is crumbled by old age. What can mortal power avail? -105-28

There is not one who can live as he intends to. What power then has he over the death of those for which he grieves? -105-28

As a by-stander on a road coming across a batch of travellers says he will also follow them, even so do we follow the footsteps of our grandfathers. How can a person grieve when he is in that track from which he cannot swerve? - 105-29/30.

Like a torrent which cannot flow back, past life cannot be retraced. Life should therefore be directed towards happiness, as bliss is the heritage of man. -105-31

Just as a tidal-wave brings together two logs in a boundless ocean and another wave separates them, even so wives and children, relatives and wealth hold us and separate themselves to meet no more. Not one can avoid the common lot of all. The separation of these is certain. -105-27.

At the dawn men are delighted with their acquisitions and at sunset they revel in nocturnal pleasures. But they never reflect to see that their life is shortened by each sunrise and sunset.
105-24.

Men rejoice at the advent of every new season that comes afresh. But few realise their lives' decay as the seasons smile. 105-26.

Just as the sun's rays evaporate quickly all water during summer, even so the rolling days and nights steal our moments as they fly. 105-20.

Why do you lament for others? Grieve for yourself as every moment of yours is gradually taking away your life whether you remain stationary or move about.
105-21.

All accumulated treasures perish. Every climax has an anti-climax. All unions end in separation and all life must come to an end. 105-16.

It is an old saying that all beings lose their sense when they are near their end of life. 106-13.

A courageous and intelligent man shall avoid in all moods and states, these various forms of grief, lamentations and cries.

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The Atman is a self-cognised entity because It is cognised by Itself. Hence the individual soul is itself and directly the Supreme Brahman, and nothing else."

- Sri Sankaracharya, Vivekachudamani, Verse 216

Some verses from Aparokshanubhuti of Sri Sankaracharya
Translated by Swami Vimuktananda, Belur Math

Just as clay is described as a jar, just as gold is described as an ear-ring and a nacre (mother of pearl) as silver, so is Brahman (the Supreme Reality) described as jiva (individual embodied soul). 60

Just as blueness in the sky, water in the mirage and a human figure in the wooden stump of a tree are but illusory, so in the universe in Atman (Self). 61

[Note: Not only jiva (the embodied soul), but the whole universe is an illusion in Atman.]

Just as the appearance of a ghost in an empty place; of a castle in the air; and a second moon in the sky (is illusory), so is the appearance of the universe in Brahman. 63

Just as it is water that appears as ripples and waves, or again it is copper that appears in the form of a vessel (a pot), so it is Atman that appears as the whole universe. 64

Just as a jar is all clay, so also is the body all consciousness. The division, therefore, into the Self and non-self is made by the ignorant to no purpose. 69

Just as a rope is imagined to be a snake and a nacre (mother of pearl) to be a piece of silver, so is the Atman determined (imagined) to be the body by an ignorant person. 70

Just as earth (clay) is thought of as a jar (made of it) and threads as a cloth, gold as ear-ring and water as waves, so is Atman. 71-72

Some explanations from the writings of Swami Shivananda,
Divine Life Society, Rishikesh

Just as the space that is inside of a pot becomes one (merges) with the universal space when the pot is broken (when the limiting adjunct is removed), so also the individual soul becomes one with Brahman, when the limiting adjunct, ignorance,

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is annihilated (removed). Just as there is no return of the 'pot-space' (space that was within the pot) after it has become one with the universal space when the pot is destroyed, so also there is no return of the individual soul after the limiting adjunct (the antahkarana, i.e., mind and the other inner instruments) is destroyed. He becomes with Brahman (the Supreme Soul).

Reflection (pratibimba) is only a portion of the object (bimba). The reflected sun is only a portion of the real sun (the rays of the sun). When the water is removed the reflected sun goes back to the original sun, as it were. It does not return to the water again. Even so, when ignorance or the mind is annihilated, the jiva (individual soul) which is a reflection of Brahman is absorbed in Brahman. He does not return to this world of birth and death.

The Individual soul is only an imaginary or fictitious portion of Brahman. He is a portion, as it were. For the Supreme Being is indivisible. He has no parts. He would be liable to destruction when the parts are disjointed or removed.

In essence the jiva is identical with Brahman. The difference is on account of delusion or imagination or superimposition.

The Indwelling Soul

The indwelling Soul or the embodied Self is described in the Bhagavad Gita as being:

Eternal, indestructible, and immeasurable.
Gita, Ch.2. verse 18.

Unborn and inexhaustible.
Gita, Ch.2 Verse 21.

Stable, immovable, ancient.
Gita Ch.2 verse 24.

Unmanifested, unthinkable, unchangeable
Gita Ch.2. verse 25.

The Soul passes unchanged from the baby into childhood, from childhood to youth to middle age to old age. Thereafter the Soul passes unchanged from one body and enters into another body.
Gita Ch.2, Verse 13.

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The embodied Self or the Soul is not killed when the physical body is killed.
Gita Ch.2. verse 20.

Just as a man replaces worn out clothes and acquires new garments or clothes, in the same way the embodied Self separates from the worn-out body and enters into another body which is new.
Gita Ch.2 verse 22.

An eternal law taught in the Vedas is:
That which has a beginning must have an end; the one who is born must die.

Gita, Ch.2, verse 27 explains:
It is an absolute certainty that the one who is born must die, and birth for the dead is also an absolute certainty.
Therefore, one should not grieve over what is unavoidable or inevitable.

The body is said to have an end.
Gita Ch.2 verse 18.

