Chapter III

THE WAY OF REBIRTH

Before starting on rebirth I would like to say something about the methodology by which I am exploring rebirth. A doctrine as per vedic view is acceptable only if it had the concurrence of three tests namely 1. Scriptural evidence (sruti) 2. Reasonableness (yuktि) 3. Actual experience (Anubhava).

These 3 tests are necessary for the acceptance of any doctrine. Therefore in my illustration on rebirth, I am presenting the arguments in the above manner except in the case of actual experience where I have presented a case study described in the book *Talks with Sri. Ramana Maharshi.*

The quest of man to study what is beyond death is time immemorial. Vedic literature is one among the source material for the findings of rebirth. Historians have excavated evidences of the belief in life after death, even in the pre-vedic period. At that time, there was a practice of encasing the dead body of infants in womb like earthen pots and of burying them inside their home or very near to it. According to the assumption of the historians their practice had the belief that the dead children would come back in a new body in the same family.
The problem of immortality has been mentioned from the early *Vedic* period onwards. *Rg Veda* says: "Do not Agni, burn up or consume him (the deceased). do not dissolve his skin, or his body."\(^1\) The Doctrine of *Karma* and *Punarjanma* has been described in the *Upaṇisads*. In the *Katha Upanisad* the question is raised in a very instructive fashion. Nachiketa, sent by his father to the God of Death, questioning Yama, "of the man who has gone forward who has passed away from us, some say that he is and others 'this he is not'. Which then is right? What is the truth of the great passage?"\(^2\) The knowledge Nachiketa asks for involves the deeper finer problem of which Yama affirms that, even the Gods debated this of old and it is not easy to know, for subtle is the law of it: something survives that appears to be the same person, that descends into hell that ascends into heaven, that returns upon the earth with a new body, but is it really the same person that thus survives? Yama too in his answer speaks not at all of the survival of death.\(^3\) He only gives a verse or two to a bare description of

\(^1\) *Rg Veda*, X.10.1

\(^2\) *Katha Upanisad*, 11.14

\(^3\) The story of Yama and Nachiketa is not told for the first time in this *Upaṇisad*. The story first occurs in the *Rg Veda*, in its tenth *mandala*, which speaks of a boy who went to the heaven of Yama at the express desire of his royal father. The story appears in a more developed form in the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* of a later period where Nachiketa is granted three boons by Yama. The story in the *Katha Upanisad* corresponds in all the essential particulars with that in the *Brāhmaṇa*. The single point of difference lies in Yama's answer to the third boon by which Nachiketa asked Yama to tell him how to conquer death. In the *Brāhmaṇa* the answer to this boon referred to the performance of a certain sacrifice. This was but a repetition of the answer to the second boon. But the answer to this question given in the *Katha Upanisad* lifts the subject from sacrifices and rituals to the high level of moral striving and spiritual realisation.
that constant rebirth which admitted as a universally acknowledged truth. What he speaks of is the self, the real man, the Lord of all these changing appearances, without the knowledge of that self the survival of the personality is not immortal life, but a constant passing from death to death. He only who goes beyond personality to the real person becomes immortal.

According to Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad there are two states for man—the state in this world, and the state in the next. There is also a third state, the state intermediate between these two, which is similar to dream. While in the intermediate state, a man experiences both the other states, that in this world and in the next. When a person dies, he leaves only the gross body. The subtle body still remains, on which left the impressions of his past deeds. Again while in the intermediate state, he foresees both the evils 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. The ‘intermediate state’, according to this definition, is a sort of lucid post-mortem interval during which an individual takes stock of himself and is compelled to review his past deeds, together with the consequences they must hour inevitably produce in his next birth upon this earth or elsewhere.

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¹ Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, 1. 2, 18,19.

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The Upanisads has mentioned the utility of Yajñakarma and lay stress on the nature of actions, good and evil, and emphasize reincarnation or punarjanma in accordance with the quality of a person’s deeds and thoughts. Katha Upanisad says: “Some souls enter into a womb for embodiment, other enter stationery objects according to their deeds and according to their thoughts.” The Kaśitaki Upanisad expands the idea of rebirth with great clarity: “Either as a worm, or as an insect, or as a fish, or as a bird, or as a lion, or as a bear, or as a snake, or as a tiger, or as a person, or as some other in this or that conditions, he is born again according to his deeds, according to his knowledge.” The Maitri Upanisad also reiterates that “white (Sukla) or dark (Kṛṣṇa) fruits of action determine the good or evil womb”. Thus the Upanisads established a Doctrine of Karma and Punarjanma.

The Buddhist maintains that there is no escape from the consequences of karma under any circumstances. The Dhammapada asserts, “--- not in the sky, not on the midst of the sea, nor anywhere else on earth is there a spot where a man may be freed from the consequences of an evil deed.”

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1 Yajñakarmas are a means of purification and expiration.
2 Katha Upanisad, III.2.
3 Kaśitaki Upanisad, 1.2.
4 MaitriUpanisad, III.
5 Dhammapada, 138.
Further, the Buddhists say that an individual is personally responsible for
bearing the consequences of his actions. The Dhammapada tells, "By oneself
evil is done, by oneself one suffers, by oneself evil is undone, by oneself one is
purified".

Thus the Doctrine of Karma became an inescapable law of personal
responsibility and retributive justice. Early Buddhism completed the edifice of
the Doctrine of Karma and rebirth formulated by the Upanisads.

The above textual evidences show that the theory of rebirth is very ancient
as thought itself and its origin is unknown. In former times this doctrine is known
in the name of transmigration. Now reincarnation is the popular term. For the
modern mind, rebirth is nothing more than a speculation and a theory. It has
never been proved by the methods of modern science. Neither has it been
disproved. Modern science knows nothing indeed about a soul at all; its province
stops with flesh, brain and nerve.

At present the greater part of the human race believe in it. Hinduism and
Buddhism are based on it. Although Buddhism does not believe in anything,
which is infinite, it believes in its continuity. For them, soul is nothing but a
combination of Skandhas, which is a stream of consciousness.

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11Ibid., 165.
Even though Hinduism and Buddhism accept the doctrine of reincarnation there are subtle differences between them. Here I would like to explicate on the subject from the Hindu point of view, especially based on the view stated in the Bhagavad Gita. Almost all philosophical schools and thought accept the doctrine of reincarnation in one way or another manner. Clear evidences of this belief are to be found in Greek thought, in the Zoroastrian Scriptures, Primitive and tribal races in different regions of the world, etc. From this we can understand that from the very beginning the human race has been unfrosted with the mysteries of birth as well as of death; where does man come from? Where does he go? These questions lead us to the enquiry into the relationship between Karma and Rebirth.

3.1 Karma and Rebirth

The Buddhist and the Vedantist perceived that there is a continuity and what determines this continuity is their search. The Buddhist denied any real identity. There is, according to them, no self, no person, there is simply a continuous stream of energy in action, like the continuous flow of a river or the continuous burning of a flame. It is this continuity, which creates in the mind, the false sense of identity. We are perceiving only a false appearance of identity. Obviously, then there is no soul that reincarnates, but karma that is flowing continuously down the same apparently uninterrupted channel. It is karma that
reincarnates. *Karma* creates the form of a constantly changing mentality and physical bodies that are, we may presume, the result of that changing composite of ideas and sensations, which Sri Aurobindo calls myself.\(^{11}\)

For Sri Aurobindo the ancient idea of *karma* is inseparably connected with a belief in the soul's continual rebirth in new bodies and this close association was not a mere accident, but a perfectly intelligible and inevitable union of two related truths which are needed for each others completeness and can with difficulty exist in separation.\(^{12}\) These two things are the soul side and the nature side of one and the same cosmic sequence. Rebirth is meaningless without *karma*. *Karma* has no relevance if it is not in connection with rebirth. If we believe that the soul is repeatedly reborn in the body, we must believe also that there is some link between the lines that preceded and the lines that follow and that the past of the soul has an effect on its future and that is the spiritual essence of the Law of *Karma*. Here we can see that the Law of *Karma* is ultimately based upon the doctrine of rebirth is one of the basic tenets of Hindu philosophy and religion. Actually it is the presumption of all oriental philosophies.


In Hinduism, rebirth is more or less a metaphysical doctrine, a belief postulated for explaining mysteries of life prior to birth and after death. A belief in rebirth goes side by side with a belief in *karma*. Hindu thought has given tremendous importance to the Doctrine of *Karma*. It is taken to be both a metaphysical and as a moral law. Metaphysically speaking, this law explains birth and formation of bodies; our present life and our body are based on our past *karmas*. It is believed that our *karmas* create tendencies in accordance with which our subsequent bodies and capacities are built. The Law of *Karma* is also conceived as a moral law. It is considered to be another name of the moral maxim “as you sow so you reap”. The ancient Indian seers have suggested that man’s bondage and suffering are due to his own wrong actions done in the past and that right and good deeds performed in this life will bear fruit in future and will enable man to make himself free and liberated.

As far as an individual is concerned he is unique because of his peculiar physical and mental inheritance. According to the Law of *Karma*, what an individual now is, is the effect of his actions, his habit of thinking, feeling, speaking and acting in the past. Man makes himself through all these diverse activities, internal and external. Though they appear to be so insignificant separately, taken together they create the tremendous forces that shape his health, character, and his entire destiny.
The moral significance of the law is more important because it is consistent with his moral convictions and also with his kind of faith in rebirth. The realisation that one's own karmas determine the future nature and status of an individual creates the further realisation that it is man himself who is the maker of his own destiny. Now, it is for an individual to consider whether by his own acts he is going to make himself a good man or an immoral man. Such a realisation will create a sense of responsibility in man. He will now know that it is almost obligatory for him "to raise himself by himself" so that he can fully express and realise the Divinity latent in him.

From this we can understand one thing. As far as philosophy is concerned the problem of ourselves is a very fundamental question. In which our enquiry is "why we are here and what we are and what is behind and before and around us and what we are to do with ourselves, our inner significance and our outer environment."

But the concept of rebirth is not without objection. The main problem with regard to it is the loss of memory. Nobody remembers the event of his past lives. But this objection has been aptly answered by the argument that how many of us can recall even the past incidents of our present life. We know that an event of the past, which has entirely slipped out of our normal consciousness, is yet

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present in some dark corners of our memory and can be brought in delirium or under the influence of some drugs or directly by hypnotism. Therefore nothing is lost or forgotten. On the contrary, everything is preserved very carefully. According to Patanjali: "By making samyama on previous thought-waves (samskārās) one obtains knowledge of one's past lives." Here the samskārās means the impressions of the past experiences which lie dormant in our subliminal self, and are never lost. Memory is nothing but the awakening and rising of latent. Here we can see that one who accepts the doctrine of rebirth must necessarily believe in the Law of Karma, since one is complimentary to the other. Then it may be asked that if human nature and character are formed by the karmas of the man, then, what is the meaning of saying that the soul is free?

The above question compels us to study the different faces of action. The two features of Nature are 1. Connection with the past. 2. Creation with the future - which are present in human level also. The connection with the past is denoted by the word 'karma'. Human life is an organic whole where each successive phase grows out of what has grown before. All acts produce their effects, which are recorded both in the organism and the environment. Their physical effects may be short-lived but their moral effects (samskārās) are worked into the character of the self. Every single thought and deed enter into the chain of cause,
which makes us what we are. In other words an action brings effects on the organism. Its effects on the organism are retained as *samskārās* or tendencies of thought, which form the character of the being. The Law of *Karma* recognises the rule not only in outward nature, but also in the world of mind and morals. We are making our characters and shaping our destinies every moment.

While putting forward the doctrine of rebirth, our main argument is that the birth of a being must be determined by some cause. The cause may be termed as the *karma* of that being. The Universe can’t be ruled partly by laws and partly by a blind unreasonable chance. It can only be grasped from a spiritual point of view. The Law of *Karma*, therefore, is a law, which dominates all other natural laws.

According to the Law of *Karma* every act or deed must be followed by its consequences, which are not merely of a physical character but also a mental and moral character. The word *samskārās* meant for the physical, moral and mental traits with which a person is born. They form part of his personality and are born by him in his lifetime and carried into a future existence. The consequences of a person’s acts not being fully worked out in this life need a future life for their consumption. The doctrine of immortality of the soul, which justifies the belief in a future existence of the individual, equally justifies the pre-existence of the Law of *Karma*.
But, the implication of the *karma* theory has been much misunderstood; therefore needs proper perspectives. Overlooking the distinction between actively pursued human action and passively received fate, some people mistake it as a theory of complete determinism. But fate is different from the actual situation. While advocating human situation this theory views man as a free agent who is the sole determiner of his action and is therefore morally responsible for that.¹⁵

Further the theory of *karma* maintains that the whole world is subjected to some kind of uniform law. It recognises the rule of law within and outside, in inner life as well as in outward nature. The present placement of an individual in a particular type of psycho-physical complex is due to the past *karmas* of that individual. The past actions determine our present state of existence and our present actions would in turn determine our future state of existence.¹⁶

Even though man is determined by his own past *karmas*, he is free to create prospective *karmas*. So there are two aspects of *karmas* - retrospective, which has a connection with the past, and a progressive aspect, which has its influence on the future. The soul has to pass through various embodied stages and that the tendencies of each stage are determined by the *karmas* performed in the past. From this it follows that the *karmas* performed in this life will determine

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¹⁵ K.K. Mittal. *Perspectives on Karma and Rebirth* (Delhi University, Delhi, 1990), p.34.

the future life Dr. Radhakrishnan stresses on the necessity of karma. Man, according to him, is determined by his past but he is free to create his progressive karma also. For this purpose he emphasis on the choice. There are so many alternatives left for man. It depends on man how to use it. This is the real freedom. But he is aware of the fact that man can't consume all the potentialities in one life. So he has to take birth after till the actualisation of all the actions performed by an individual. Hence rebirth is necessary for the soul's emancipation. That is why he says that the future of the man depends to a very great extent on man himself.  

3.2 Prakrti and Rebirth

Birth and death are relevant only in the realm of the perishable. Absolute reality is not perishable, it is the imperishable Brahman. According to Muni Narayanaprasad 3rd verse of chapter VIII in Bhagavad Gita gives a precise definition of karma. From this we can understand that karma belongs to the imperishable reality and not to any particular individual. "It is prakrti (Nature) according to its gunas (modalities) that does all karmas (actions)".  

Prakrti has been defined as the effect or power of Brahman, the ultimate reality. In other words, this illusion or maya of an objective, spatio-temporal

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18 Bhagavad Gita, 3.27.
universe is projected by the Reality itself. Therefore, it follows that Prakṛti and Brahman must be co-existent, and that Prakṛti like Brahman, had no beginning and will have no end.

At the same time, within the universe, another process is at work. It is in the nature of the individual ego sense to struggle slowly upward towards self-realization, from the manimate to the animate, from the vegetable to the animal, from the animal to the human, through thousands and even millions of births, deaths and rebirths.

The Atman is within the stone, no less than within the man. But the stone can never know itself as the Atman so long as it remains as stone. It must evolve through higher forms until, at last, it reaches humanity. It is only within the human mind-body that the individual ego can know its real nature, and thus be liberated from the cycle of reincarnation.

Throughout his enormous journey toward total consciousness, the individual is subjected to the Law of Karma. His desires and acts regulate the speed of his progress. His present state is continuously being conditioned by the karmas of his past and continually productive of future karmas. Death does not interrupt this process. Neither does rebirth. The individual is merely reborn with a body, mind, a character and social surroundings, which express, as it were, the sum total of his karmic balance at that particular movement in time.
A study of the Vedic concept of the state of souls after death and the role of *karma* in it has been made by A.B. Keith in "The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanisads." But Muni Narayanaprasad does not consider the above book as a serious work. According to Muni, which do not bring clarity. For him direct references to transmigration of souls are found in the *Brhadaranyaka* and *Chandogya Upanisads.*

### 3.3 Karma - Vipaka

*Karma-Vipaka* means maturation of *karma*, which constitutes the mechanism linking *karma* and rebirth. *Karma* determines the type of birth, human or non-human, length of life, happiness and suffering experienced as being the consequence of good or bad acts done in previous births. *Karma Vipaka* exposes the serious limitations of the Doctrine of *Karma*. It reduces the Doctrine of *Karma* from the status of law of moral causation to a theorem. That is why the *Bhagavad Gita* says, *Gahana Karmano Gaath*. *Karma* is truly described as *adrsta*. Here there is no rule by which peoples previous *karma* produces particular effects under the influence of place and time. What indeed is the relation between those two things, which are not immediately connected. Death is an occurrence by which all the specific attributes of an individual

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disappear. It is not a process of becoming nothing. The Gīṭa is the only Indian Scripture, which defines \textit{karma} precisely and scientifically which definition read as follows: “That creative urge which causes the emergence of all existent beings is designated \textit{karma}”. ²¹

The \textit{Upaniṣads} emphasize reincarnation in accordance with the quality of a person’s deeds and thoughts.²² \textit{Maitri Upaniṣad} also pointed out that white or dark fruit of action determine the good or evil womb.²³ Thus the \textit{Upaniṣads} established a Doctrine of \textit{Karma} and \textit{Punarjanna}. This in turn gave rise to the concept of \textit{Samsāra kacra} of the \textit{Maitri Upaniṣad} and \textit{Brahmacakra} of the Śvetāśvatara \textit{Upaniṣad}. Rebirth is an aspect of \textit{Samsāra}, which is perpetually fed and renewed by \textit{karmas}, good and bad.

The \textit{Upaniṣads} while formulating the Doctrine of \textit{Karma} and Rebirth, also put forward the ideal of \textit{mokṣa} or liberation from \textit{Samsāra}. Since \textit{karma} is the force, which leads to rebirth and suffering, and \textit{karmas} are born of desire, the \textit{Upaniṣads} also teach the goal of desirelessness, detachment from or renunciation of the \textit{karmas}. The \textit{Bhagavad Gīṭa} developed it into the philosophy of \textit{niskāma karma}.

²¹ \textit{Bhagavad Gīṭa}, 3.17
²² \textit{Katha Upaniṣad}, II. 2 7
²³ \textit{Maitri Upaniṣad}, III.
The Buddhist and the Jainas also come to the same point while they put forward the idea of nirvāṇa. The only qualification that was recognised was that in case of prāratndha karmas, that is those karmas, which have begun to bear fruits mokṣa is necessarily deferred till those karmas are exhausted. The Buddhist maintains that there is no escape from the consequences of karma under any circumstances. Further, the Buddhist makes an individual personally responsible for bearing the consequences of his actions. Early Buddhism completed the edifice of the Doctrine of Karma and rebirth formulated by the Upanisads.

According to Jainas, karma is atomic matter. When a person acts, there is an inflow of karmic matter into the soul, which binds the soul. It is the accumulated karmas in a soul that constitute the karma śārīra, the subtle karmic body that transmigrates after death into a new birth.

Garudapurāṇa explains the soul of the deceased in various ways with respect to the karma conducted by each person. Which explains that after death the soul of the deceased acquires a vāyuja śārīra – an air born body.

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25 Garuda Purāṇa, II. 1. 31-32.
26 ibid., II.10.75-77.
The ancient Ayur-veda text like Caraka-samhita, Susruta Samhita, Astanga hridaya, all accept the Doctrine of Karma and rebirth. Caraka in Ārya sarīra sūtra says that the soul transmigrates from one body to another guided by its past actions. Ayurveda classifies diseases as karmaja, born of past karmas, and dosaja, born of imbalance of the 3 humours, vata, pitta and kapha. The karmaja diseases are not amenable to therapeutic measures.

It is possible to escape from rebirth first by arresting the production and influx of fresh karmic matter by reducing a man’s activities practising restraint (Yama) and renunciation and secondly by liquidating or purging of the accumulated karmic matter through ascetic practices involving self-mortification.

The soul transmigrates at the death of a creature to a new birth and the transmigration is regulated by the accumulated karmas, which have yet to mature and fructify. The belief that a soul reincarnates after death by getting another body is common to all the religion of Eastern origin. The nature of the next birth, according to this belief, depends on the merits and demerits of one’s actions in the present life.

21 Caraka Samhita, II.21-23.
28 K.K. Mittal, op. cit. p.38.
Every soul in its pure state is omniscient. Though many men after physical death remain in an article world for 500 or 1000 years, there is no invariable rule about the length of time between reincarnations. A man’s allotted span in physical or an astral embodiment is kārmically pre-determined. The kārmic law requires that every human wish find ultimate fulfilment. Desire is thus the chain that binds man to the reincarnational wheel.

3.4 A Case Study on Rebirth

Evidences show that there are some cases of rebirth. We have read many a time in newspapers and magazines about the cases where child comes to remember with his past life and recognizes the persons, places and things related with the past life. The scientific instruments available now show that when an arm is cut off from the body and photographed, then we can see an aura of the whole of the body within that arm. Now this aura cannot be explained in purely gross material terms. The study indicates that this gross body develops some sort of subtle body, which in Indian Philosophical systems has been termed as linga sarīra or suksma sarīra. It is possible that this subtle body, in some cases, gets separated from the gross body and either roams in the form of ghosts or enters...
some other body. It is said that this separation often occurs when the mind of a man is very much disturbed or dissatisfied or an accident occurs.\(^3\)

In the book *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* a case of rebirth is pointed out.\(^4\) The incident illustrates in the following manner. In a certain occasion Sri Ramana Maharshi was reading *Trilinga* in Telugu on the reincarnation of a boy. The boy is now thirteen years old. When he was 3 years old he used to dig here and there. When asked he would say that he was trying to recover something which he had hidden in the earth. When he was 4 years old, a marriage function was celebrated in his home. When leaving, the guests honourably remarked that they would return for this boy’s marriage. But he turned round and said, “I am already married and have two wives.” When asked to point them out, he requested to be taken to a certain village. There he pointed two women as his wives. It is now learnt that a period of ten months elapsed between the death of their husband and the birth of the boy. According to Ramana Maharshi, some are born immediately after, others after some lapse of time, a few are not reborn on this earth but eventually get salvation in some higher region and a very few get absolved here and now.

\(^3\) K.K. Mittal, op. cit., pp 107-108.

According to Ramana Maharshi, "when complete self surrender comes, the thought of 'I' also will disappear. Then all your predispositions (sanskāras) are washed off and you are free." For Ramana Maharshi the question about reincarnation arises due to the thinking of yourself - you think yourself as the body. This body has birth and death and when this body falls another body arises which is called reincarnation. If you find that you are not this body but the spirit, you will be free from gross or subtle bodies and then there will be no limitations.

3.5 Kirlian

In the Soviet Union, a great scientist and philosopher, Kirlian, developed a special camera and specially sensitive films, so sensitive that they can see things which our eyes cannot see. His first experience was of tremendous wonder because his photographs showed auras around everybody, not only around human beings but around animals and trees. Now this method of photography is popularly known as Kirlian photography.35

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35 Kirlian photography is a means of taking pictures of the non-material world without a camera. It provides a way of viewing the unseen patterns of energy and force fields that probably permeate all substances. It offers us a tool with which to view both art and science. The technique can serve as a medical diagnostic instrument, too. The Kirlian effect is useful for recording energy balances and harmonies in all forms of life. The equipment produces the Kirlian photographic effect uses no light but only the radiation spark discharging from an object being photographed on a film emulsion. The
Kirlian was surprised to know that the more silent, peaceful a man was the bigger was the aura. And the more angry anxiety-ridden, sad or miserable, full of anguish a man was, the smaller was the aura. And before a man was going to die, six months before, the aura completely disappeared, then his photographs came without any aura, just like ordinary, photographs. 

Discussing the Kirlian effect in their book, *The Dark Side of the Brain*, Drs. Harry Oldfield and Roger Coghill suggest that the Kirlian effect results from a high voltage corona discharge caused by pulsed high-frequency waves. Through the action of high frequency fields, electrons are emitted from the body of an organism and this energy gets dissipated in a photographic emulsion in the same way as light. Depending on the strength of the emitted electrons an image will be formed in the emulsion so that a picture appears. 

William A. Tiller, Ph.D., of Stanford University has expressed deep interest in the Kirlian effect. He says that each individual organism or materials radiates and absorbs energy via a unique wave field which exhibits certain equipment consists of a metal plate and a generator or oscillator that produces a high voltage field of variable pulse and frequency. Film put in contact with the plate and with the object on top of it causes a photograph to be produced. Depending upon the type of film used – instant colour film, 35-mm black and white film, or something else with an emulsion that records images – different colours or shading appear in a brilliant corona surrounding the object.


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geometrical frequency and radiation-type characteristics. Whether animate or inanimate, there is an extended force field that exists around all forms of matter.38

This aura has been by sensitive people, just as Kirlian’s sensitive films photograph it. It is said that the sensitive disciples of Jesus and Gautama Buddha will see something which others will not be able to see. The more they become receptive, the more they become sensitive. We have seen pictures of Jesus, Krishna or Buddha with a surrounding aura. That is an actual phenomenon and now it has a scientific basis to support it.

Scientists have been trying to prove that there is no soul on the grounds that when they weigh a living man just a moment before he dies, and when they weigh him a moment after, his weight is the same—absolutely the same. Naturally their conclusion is that nothing has gone out and hence that there is no soul. If something goes out, then the weight will be less. But now it can be told to scientists that light has no weight that is why if a point of light transmigrates it won’t make any difference on your weighing scales.

Light is absolutely weightless and the transmigration body is nothing but pure light. This is experienced by people even of shallow understanding. Those who don’t understand much, but still have a little consciousness, can see this light.

38 Ibid.
From this we can understand that there is some sort of subtle body developed with the gross body, which in some special circumstances gets separated from the gross body at the event of its death. The separated subtle body may take up another gross body, which amounts to rebirth, or it may roam without a gross body. Rebirth takes place when a person is mentally agitated. If the person is mentally satisfied the subtle body is destroyed with the destruction of the gross body, which amounts to the liberation or mokṣa of the person. 39

3.6 Modern Biology and Rebirth

Now, the question is where does the self of a human offspring come from? Self is eternal. Modern biology recognises the mind but not the self. But without the recognition of the self, an unvarying spiritual principle in the psychophysical organism, the integration of the ever shifting physical and psychical factors and their process and also the direction of the whole towards a definite end remain unexplained. As observed by Edmund Sinnott: “What pulls together the separate parts and process of a plant or an animal and knits them into an organism, and what draws this organism towards a developmental goal prefigured in its living stuff – these are the problems where the confident progress of biology has made but little headway.” 40

39 Ibid., p.108.

This leads us to the conclusion that there is a constant factor in human personality that integrates all the physical and the psychical factors into a coherent whole which co-ordinates the diverse functions of the mind, the organs, and the body. Further, it maintains the identity of man despite all changes, external and internal, which is responsible for the livingness of the psychophysical organism.

Let us consider the birth of a child. In explaining the origin and development of an individual, the biologists have had recourse to both assumption and chance. Says Dobzhansky: "A child receives one-half of the genes of his father and one-half of the maternal ones; which particular maternal and paternal genes are transmitted to a given child is a matter of chance; which mutations occur and when and where, is also a matter of chance."41

It is equally impossible for the child to inherit the mind from either parents. An individual's mind is distinct from the self and the body as well, although closely associated with both. These three constituents cannot be identified with one another. None of the organ can function unless the mind joins with it. But the mind can function even when the organs and the body are inoperative. It is the identity of the mind that maintains one's individuality

beyond death and rebirth. Hence the child’s mind cannot be a fragment of the parental mind. What the offspring actually receives from the parents are the rudiments of its physical body. This can serve as the medium for the transmission of the parent’s physical characteristics to the offspring more or less. Can the child’s mind and the self as well develop from this physical source? If not, where do they come from?

From this we can conclude that modern biology gives no satisfactory explanation of the birth of a genius or a moron. More over the prime factor in the origination and development of an individual is the individual himself, all else is subsidiary to him. This is particularly evident in the case of young prodigies. For instance, Sankaracharya, the greatest exponent of Advaita Vedanta, lived only thirty-two years (AD 686-718). At the age of seven he mastered the Vedic literature. His Guru was astounded by the pupil’s genius.

The profound scholarship and wisdom of young Sankara won the admiration of one and all. His fame extended far and wide. At the age of nine he embraced monasticism. And he attained nirvikalpa samadhi, the apex of spiritual realization, before he was twelve. Most of his literary works, the masterpieces of Advaita Vedanta, were composed by the time he was sixteen. His great achievement within a short span of thirty-two years are the marvels of the world.
Evidently, this extraordinary powers are not due to heredity, or environment or the interaction of the two. There must have been cultivated by the individuals themselves in their former lives. The doctrine of reincarnation maintains the identity of the individual throughout the succession of births and deaths.

In short, the central principle in human personality is the luminous self, the knower within, whose radiance sustains the psycho-physical constitutions and becomes manifest through it. There is neither evolution nor involution, neither expansion nor contraction, neither growth nor decay, in the ever shining changeless self. All these variations characterise the psycho-physical constitution alone. Man's spiritual self is not actually born or does it die, but transmigrates for the time being under the Law of Karma. 'He is the life of life' says the Upanisad with regard to the real man.42

3.7 Gross, Subtle and Causal Bodies

We know that to every effect there is a cause. The effect is visible while the cause is invisible. These invisible agents or forces together with the micro particles of matter make up the subtle states of the phenomenal universe. The manifestation of an object totally depend upon its subtle form.
If we extend this theory to human being we can see that the gross human body is closely related to its subtle body. Then, as far as human body is concerned what exactly we mean by a subtle body? According to Vedanta, the subtle body consists of Antahkarana, that is, the internal organ or the mind substance with its various modifications, mind, intellect, egoism, memory, the five instruments of perception, the five instruments of action and the five pranas.

_Prasna_ is a Sanskrit word, which means vital energy or the life sustaining power in us. Although *prāna* is one it takes 5 different names on account of the five different functions it performs. This word *prāna* includes the five manifestations of the vital force. First, that power which moves the lungs and draws the atmospheric air from outside into the system. This is also called *prāna._

Second, that power which throws out of the system such things as are not wanted. It is called _apāna._ Third, it takes _samāna_ as performing digestive functions and carrying the extract of food to energy part of the body. It is called _udāna_ when it is the cause of bringing down food from the mouth through the alimentary canal to the stomach, and also when it is the cause of the power of speech. The fifth power of _prāna_ is that which works in every part of the nervous system from head to foot, through every canal, which keeps the shape of the body and given health and life to every cell and organ.
The subtle powers together with the non-composite elements of the gross body and also with the potentialities of all the impressions, ideas and tendencies that each individual gathers in one life, make up his subtle body.

It is well known that mere physical body will not move, grow, or act unless the life principle presides over it. This life principle, the divine spark of life or the spiritual centre-called the \textit{Atman} in \textit{Vedanta}-is considered to have been enveloped by various sheaths or layers of matter of varying degrees\textsuperscript{11}, which are:

1) \textit{Annamaya kośa} or Food-sheath

2) \textit{Pranamaya kośa} or Vital-Air Sheath

3) \textit{Manomaya kośa} or Mental sheath

4) \textit{Vijnanamaya kośa} or Intellectual sheath

5) \textit{Anandamaya kośa} or Bliss sheath.

Before we go into the minute study of the composition and nature of various sheaths, we have to understand the philosophical implications of the term

'interior'. When we say that one sheath is interior to the other, we only mean that the inner one is subtler than the outer.

Here, physical body is the grossest. The vital-air that we take in is represented by vital-air sheath as subtler than the gross-food sheath. Our mind can certainly reach a distant place where our breath cannot reach, and our intellect can, its visions, certainly reach places where the mind had never put light. Finally, the subtlest, is the Ātman. It envelops all, and none envelops it. It is all pervading.

The Food Sheath is so called because it has come up from the essence of the food and it exists because of the food taken in and ultimately after death, it must go back become food again. The organ of knowledge and the organ of action exist in this sheath.

The Mental-sheath, which is the seat of mind, entertains our doubts, joys and the like emotions. Mind is the doubting element while intellect is the determining factor in each of us.

The Vital-Air-Sheath consists of air that we breath in, get mixed up with the blood and reaches every cell of the physical body. Further, which controls all the organs of action and the science of vedanta has classified it as ten in number, five prānas and five upa-prānas.
The Intellectual-sheath is considered subtler than the mind because it adventures forth into realms farther than what it had heard or seen before.

The Bliss-Sheath is considered blissful because, whatever be the condition in which individuals are, waking or dream states, once they reach the hall of sleep, be they rich or poor, successful or disappointed, healthy or sick, young or old, all of them experience the same undisturbed peace and bliss.  

The subtlest of all is the life centre in us, which is represented by ‘Aum’ in the figure as shown below. From the following figure we can understand that which sheaths constitute the gross, subtle and causal body.

\[ \text{[Refer to figure]} \]

\[ ^{16} \text{ibid., pp. 22-25.} \]
3. 7.1 Suksma Sarira

Buddhi with the cognitive senses is called the sheath of knowledge or viṣṇunāma-kośa. Manas with the cognitive senses is called the sheath of manas or manomaya-kośa. The five vāyus are called Prāna or the breathing activity. There are some who add another five vāyus such as Nāga, Kurma, ...
Krkala, Devadatta, Dhananijaya which are called upavāyu. These 10 vāyu together with the cognitive senses form the active sheath of prāna or pranamaya-kosa. Of these three sheaths, the vijnānamaya sheath plays the part of the active agent; the manomaya is the source of all desires and volition, and is therefore regarded as having an instrumental function; the pranamaya sheath represents the motor functions. These three sheaths make up together the subtle body or the sukṣma-varīṇa. These three sheaths represent the subconscious impressions from which our conscious experience is derived.

Every action and thought which we perform is stored up in the form of samskaras in our mind. It remains latent for some time. This will be reproduced later. Vedānta calls it as vāsanās. Vāsanās are the deciding factor of a new birth.

According to scriptures, every action, voluntary or involuntary, is stored up in the subtle body. When a man dies the individual ego or jīva, which means the germ of life is not destroyed. It continues to exist in an invisible form. It remains like a permanent thread stringing together the separate lives by the Law of Karma. This idea is clearly expressed in Vedānta. According to Vedānta, “the thought, will or desire which is extremely strong during lifetime will become predominant at the time of death and will mould the inner nature of the dying

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45 Bhairavananda Yogi, Humayoga Chandrika (Dathatraya Pootham, Thiruvananthapuram, 1925), p. 31
person. The newly moulded inner nature will express the new form according to his past karman. Here, Brahman is considered as the ultimate cause of this unfathomable world. Then we can ask a question at this juncture. Why did such an eternal spirit indulge in the activity of creating this ephemeral universe? How do soteriological extricate themselves from this impasse? The same has been dealt with in a detailed manner in Upanishads, Brahmi sūtras, and Bhagavad Gītā.

3.8 Rebirth and Bhagavad Gītā

The Ādī Gītā is probably the earliest document where a definite statement is made regarding the imperishable nature of existent things and the impossibility of that which is non-existent coming into being. It says that what is non-existent cannot come into being and that what exists cannot cease to be. This is similar in all aspects to the law of conservation of energy and also of mass.

According to Bhagavad Gītā, there are two things in the world, the real (the soul) and the unreal (the body) and both of them are not to be grieved for, because the soul never ceases to be and the body is perishable. Here Krishna has talked about the past and the future by saying that there was never a time when they were non-existent, nor they will cease to be. In future the bodies will not

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47 *Ibid.* 8.6

48 *Bhagavad Gītā*, 2.16.
continue to be the same, but we (soul) will never cease to be because the real is eternal. It was neither non-existent in the past nor will be in the future.\(^9\)

The body does not remain the same, it always changes. It passes by stages through babyhood, youth and old age. So Krishna says: “Just as boyhood, youth and old age are attributed to the soul through this body, even so it attains another body. The wise men (enlightened one) does not get deluded about this.”\(^10\)

When a man wakes up after a sound sleep, he says that he slept soundly and he was not aware of anything. It means that he was not aware of anything during sound sleep. This knowledge of nothingness by the self proves that the self existed even during the sound sleep. Thus his own self existed before his sleep, during his sleep and after his sleep. None feels his non-existence at any time, rather he feels his existence incessantly.

But the problem arises in the following manner. All the bodies which are perceptible are perishable while the soul is imperishable and eternal. The immortal soul, though different from the body, has identified itself with the body and has developed an ‘ego’ or ‘I’ ness with it and thus regards its death as self’s (soul’s) death. Therefore Krishna says: “These bodies of the imperishable,

\(^9\) Ibid., 2.12.
\(^10\) Ibid., 2.13.
indefinable and eternal soul are spoken of as perishable. Therefore O’ Arjuna, fight”. 51

In the 13th verse of second chapter it has been mentioned in brief that the wise men do not get deluded when the soul transmigrates from one body to another. Now Krishna by giving an illustration explains that “as a man by casting off worn out clothes is not grieved, a man casting of worn-out bodies should not grieve.” 52

Even though the above said is the position of Gita, it does not try to prove this properly but takes it as a self-evident principle which is taken for granted. It seems to apply the principle only to the nature of the Self (Aman). Thus it says, “O’ Arjuna, that principle by which everything is pervaded is to be regarded as deathless: no one can destroy this imperishable one. The bodies that perish belong to the deathless eternal and unknowable self, therefore you should fight. He who thinks the self to be destructible, and he who thinks it to be the destroyed, do not know that it can neither destroy nor be destroyed. It is neither born nor does it die, nor, being once what it is, would it ever be again …….. Weapons can’t cut it, fire can’t burn it, water can’t dissolve it and air can’t dry

51 Ibid., 2 18.

52 Ibid., 2 22.
it. The immortality of self, preached in the Gīṇa seems to have been directly borrowed from the Upanisads. The passages that describe it seems to breathe the spirit of the Upanisads not only in idea, but also in the modes and expressions.

The first argument urged by Krishna to persuade Arjuna to fight was that the self was immortal and that it was the body only that could be injured or killed and therefore Arjuna need not feel troubled because he was going to kill his kinsmen in the battle of Kurukshetra. Upon the death of one body the self only changed to another, in which it was reform, just as a man changed his old clothes for new ones. The body is always changing and even in youth, middle age and old age, does not remain the same. The change at death is also a change of body, and so there is no intrinsic difference between the changes of body at different stages of life and the ultimate change that is effected at death.

In reply to Arjuna’s questions as to what becomes of the man who, after proceeding a long way on the way of yoga, is somehow through his failure dislodged from it and dies, Krishna replies that no good work can be lost and a man who has been once on the path of yoga is snatched away by the hand of death, he is born again in a family of pure and prosperous people or in a family of wise Yogins. In this new birth he is associated with his achievements in his last

53 Ibid., 2, 23-24
54 Ibid., 6, 40-44
birth and begins the course of advancement and the old practice of the precious
birth carries him onward, without any effort on his part, in his new line of
progress. By the continual efforts through many lives and the cumulative effects
of the right endeavours of each life, the Yogi attains his final realization.

Ordinarily, the life of a man in each new birth depends upon the desires
and ideas that he fixes upon at the time of his death\(^5\). But those that think of
God, the upholder of all, shining like the sun beyond all darkness, and fix their
life-forces between their eyebrows, and control all the gates of their senses and
their mind in their hearts, ultimately attain their highest realization in God\(^56\).
From the great Lord, the great unmanifested from which come out all the
manifested things and in time again return to it and again evolve out of it\(^57\). Thus
there are two forms of the unmanifested, the unmanifested out of which all the
manifested things come, and the unmanifested which is the nature of the eternal
Lord from whom the former come\(^58\).

The ideas of *deva-yāna* and *pitr-yāna, daksināyana* and *uttarāyana*, the
black and the white courses as mentioned in the *Upanisads* are also referred to in

\(^{55}\) *Ibid.*. 8.6


\(^{57}\) *Ibid.*

the Gīta. Those who go through smoke in the new-moon fortnight and the later six months (when the sun is on the south of the equator), and thus take the black course, return again; but those would take the white course of fire in the full-moon fortnight and the former six months (when the sun is on the north of the equator) do not return again\(^5^9\). These ideas are very similar to the ideas stated in the Chandogya Upanisads\(^6^0\).

Above study of \textit{karma} and rebirth lead us to the following conclusions. The doctrine of reincarnation is a complement to the Doctrine of \textit{Karma}. Man is reborn for the fulfilment of his \textit{karma}. As he sows, so he reaps. The Law of \textit{Karma} is the chain that ties man to the wheel of birth and rebirth. It is through \textit{karma} that man is bound. And it is through \textit{karma} that he can get free. \textit{Karma} proves to be the cause of his bondage as long as man clings to the temporal, but when he turns to the eternal, \textit{karma} opens the way to freedom. The two fold doctrine is based on a comprehensive and consistent view of human personality comprising its present, past, and future.

Even though human beings in general are oblivious of their previous lives, yet there have been exceptional cases of individuals in ancient and modern

\(^{59}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 8, 24-26.

\(^{60}\) Chandogya Upanishad, V, 19.
times who had memories of their past incarnation or incarnations. In many instances their recollections of past lives have been verified.

According to Patanjali by a special method of meditation a person can awaken the memories of his past lives. Patanjali says: “As a result of the perception of subliminal impressions one gains the knowledge of former lives.”

The Sanskrit term for such recollection is called Jatismara. The Buddha is said to have remembered all his past lives. Sri Krishna speaks of the past incarnations: “O’ Arjuna, many are the lives I have passed through and thou too. But I know them all, whilst you knowest not, O’ Scorcher of foes.”

Thus a careful study of human being points out to the truth that man is not just a physical, or a bio physical, or a psycho physical being. The real man is the knowing self, the central principle of consciousness, to which we have to raise through the Way of Freedom.

61 Yoga Sutras, III. 18
62 Bhagavad Gita, 4. 5