

ōmkaṛā

A Hindu Centre Publication
Vol 15 No 1 Nov 2023



Theme:
Birth, Death
and Rebirth :
the Hindu View



Hindu Centre
Jnana • Bhakti • Seva

MCI (P) 072/12.2022



Hindu Centre

Jnana • Bhakti • Seva

Hindu Centre Singapore (HCS) is an independent non-governmental and non-profit organisation dedicated to the spiritual progress of Singapore Hindus through the three pillars of Jnana, Bhakti and Seva. It aspires to be a trusted voice on Hinduism and a focal point for Hindus in Singapore, through its teaching, learning and practice of vedic scriptures and values. Hinduism teaches man to follow the three paths to Godhead, namely karma marga (service), jnana marga (knowledge) and bhakti marga (devotion). Almost 40 years on, these three paths continue to form the Centre's foundation for its programmes and activities. Today, the Centre continues to offer a range of educational programmes encompassing the teachings of Hindu vedantic philosophy, and opportunities to engage in devotional and service activities to guide the Hindu in his or her obligations to society.

Educational Programmes

HCS believes that learning is key to achieving Jnana, Bhakti and Seva. To this end, the Centre conducts courses that help individuals understand the basic tenets of the Hindu faith and prepare them for leading purposeful and righteous lives. Balagurukulam classes are offered for children aged between 4 and 16 years. Courses for adults include Basic Hinduism, Worship, Home Puja, Prayers and Shloka chanting, Samskaras or rites of passage, and ethics like Dharmashastras. Hindu Centre has been appointed as the Purna Vidya Centre for Learning for the region and has access to the curriculum, resources and teaching methods developed by Shri Dhira Chaitanya and Swamini Pramananda and used successfully all over the world. HCS also organises, together with the Hindu Endowment Board (HEB) the only marriage preparation course for Hindu couples. HCS also hosts regular satsangs and talks by visiting spiritual leaders from different parts of the world. It also publishes booklets as well as a magazine, Omkara, and a bi-monthly e-newsletter, Patrika. From time to time, it organises a major conference in Singapore on relevant and current topics of interest.

Bhakti Programmes

HCS holds monthly bhajans. The bhajan group also performs on special occasions like Ramanavami, Krishna Jayanthi and Vinayaka Chaturti as well as Navarathri. These events are held at the Centre's premises. HCS also takes the lead in organising

broader community events such as Rakshabandhan and Krishna Jayanti.

Seva Activities

The main service programme is called Mitra, or friend. This programme reaches out to Hindu inmates in various detention centres and provides rehabilitative counselling, as well as after-care. It also reaches juveniles in boys' and girls' homes. Through these, the Centre provides an array of guidance and counselling sessions for those who find themselves in need of guidance through their difficulties in life, using eternal Hindu values as the basis. Currently HCS is the largest provider of such services in Singapore for Hindu inmates. The Centre also runs the Bandhu programme for visiting Hindus in elder care homes and Chakra for juveniles. All counsellors are trained in both Hindu and secular counselling before deployment through a structured curriculum using the panchakosha as the basis. HCS also provides financial support for children of inmates who require assistance to see that they remain in school and do not fall into the drop-out trap.

Youth

Hindu youth are an important aspect of HCS's activities, through Youth Inc. Special workshops are organised for youth to understand Hinduism as well as to prepare for a successful and purposeful life.

Funding and Volunteering

Hindu Centre is a volunteer-run organisation, overseen by an elected management committee. We welcome you to volunteer your time, experience and expertise to the Centre. HCS principally depends on members' contributions and donations to provide and support all its activities. We would appreciate your support through a monthly GIRO deduction to Hindu Centre to support and grow these activities. You can also support specific projects which are closer to your heart or in honour of a loved one.

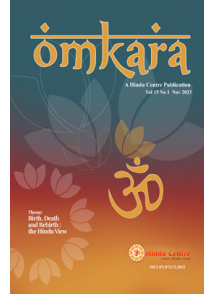
Further information

For more information on the Hindu Centre and its activities, please visit www.hinducentre.org.sg, call (65) 62918540 or email to hinducentre@singnet.com.sg or presidenthinducentre@gmail.com.

Your continued support will benefit all Hindus in Singapore, including those who need a helping hand to get through their lives. Please help us to help them.

CONTENTS:

1. Shloka with Meaning	2
2. Editorial	3
3. Purpose of Life in Hinduism	5
4. Birth, Death and Rebirth	12
5. Birth and Death Rituals	20
6. Interview with Anandji & Ushaji	24
7. Preparing for Death	29
8. A second chance - Rebirth in Hinduism	36
9. Hinduism - A Celebration of Life	42
10. மறுபிறவிக் கோயில்	46
11. Temple of Moksha	51
12. Crossword Puzzle	55
13. Children's Section	
Nachiketa and Yama	56
Pralhad and Hiranyakashyapa	58
Garuda and the little bird	60
Markandeya: The boy who defied death	62
14. Crossword Puzzle - Answer	64



Copyright © 2013
The Hindu Centre

All rights reserved.
No part of this book
may be reproduced in
any form without the
written permission
of the copyright
owners. All images in

this book have been reproduced with the knowledge and prior consent of the owners concerned and no responsibility is accepted by the publisher or printer for any infringement of copyright or otherwise, arising from the contents of this publication.

Editorial Committee

Advisor: Dr. N Varaprasad
Chief Editor: Dr. Medha Kudaisya
Members: Dr. Chitra Varaprasad
Dr. Chitra Sankaran
Dr. Kripa Sridharan
Dr. Neelam Aggarwal
Ms. Rajalakshmi Sundar
Ms. Vandana Aggarwal
Dr. Uma Jayaraman
Ms. Anuradha S.

Publishing Consultant:

Jhivajothe Prints, Singapore
jhivajotheprints@gmail.com
Contact No: +65 8118 3430

Published by:

The Hindu Centre
132 Owen Road, Singapore 218935
Tel: 62918540, Fax: 62990414

Website:

<http://www.hinducentre.org.sg>
Email: hinducentre@singnet.com.sg
Facebook: www.facebook.com/hinducentresg

ISSN 0217-3905

Shloka with Meanings

न जायते म्रियते वा विपश्चिन्
नायं कुतश्चिन्न बभूव कश्चित् ।
अजो नित्यः शाश्वतोऽयं पुराणो
न हन्यते हन्यमाने शरीरे ॥ १८ ॥

na jāyate mriyate vā vipaścīn
nāyaṃ kutaścīna babhūva kaścit .
ajo nityaḥ śāśvato'yaṃ purāṇo
na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre .. 18.

*The Self is not born, nor does It die.
It has not come into being from anything,
nor does anything come into being from It.
This, unborn, eternal, everlasting and
ancient one suffers no destruction
with the destruction of the body.'*

Kathopanishad, II, 18

‘The self is never born, nor does it die. It is not that not having been, it comes into being. It is unborn, eternal, changeless, ever itself. It is not killed when the body is killed’ (*Bhagavad-Gita*, II, 22)

The above verse from the *Bhagavad Gita*, told to the warrior Arjuna in the battlefield at Kurukshetra by Lord Krishna constitutes a fundamental tenet of Hinduism, giving an insight into the essence of spiritual life and practice. Its purpose was to help Arjuna overcome his doubt and hesitation in fighting his own kinsmen for a righteous cause.

वासांसि जीर्णानि यथा विहाय
नवानि गृह्णाति नरोऽपराणि ।
तथा शरीराणि विहाय जीर्णा
न्यन्यानि संयाति नवानि देही ॥ २२॥

*vāsānsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya
navāni gṛhṇāti naro 'parāṇi
tathā śharīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇānya
nyāni sanyāti navāni dehī*

Within the vast corpus of philosophical, moral and social themes explored by the Hindu scriptures, there has been, from the earliest texts, an abiding belief that the self is eternal and indestructible. While different schools of Hindu philosophy may differ on the true nature of the individual self, there is unity in the core belief that it is a pure, conscious and spiritual entity which is different from the mind, sense and body which form the instruments of knowledge and action. It is thus a quintessential Hindu belief that the Atman is eternally existent, imperishable and timeless. Further, it is distinct from the body, mind or consciousness.

In the *Rig Veda* the term Atman means breath, or vital essence. The *Upanishads* develop the concept further by considering it to be identical with Brahman and thus testifies to the unity of Atman and Brahman. The liberation of the self or Moksha is achieved only through the realisation of the unity of Atman and Brahman.

The spiritual seeker or the aspirant thus regards himself/herself as a soul -the spiritual entity - indwelling the body but different from it. By contrast, the worldly minded identify with the body and care only for the enjoyments of the world. In keeping with this understanding, death is not an event to be mourned by the true spiritual seeker. At death, the soul merely assumes a new body. As Lord Krishna proclaims, ‘even as a man casts off worn-out clothes and puts on others which are new, so does the embodied soul cast off worn-out bodies and enter into others which are new.’ (*Bhagavad Gita* II, 22).

The soul undergoes repeated births until the dawn of the highest knowledge ends ignorance which is the root cause of man's attachment to the body and its relationships, to the world of senses and material enjoyment. The spiritual aspirant thus strives to attain the highest knowledge of the self.

'The self is worth knowing and realizing – the ultimate aim,
Arise, awake, realize the self, having approached the excellent teachers,
Do ye meditate upon the self alone.
Godspeed you in your journey beyond the darkness of ignorance.'

Upanishads.

This self-realization the scriptures teach us may take several births, but it is possible through regulated self-effort, moral practice, performance of duty and worship, prayer and meditation alongside divine Grace. Once achieved the Upanishads declare: 'The knots of the heart are loosened, all doubts are cut asunder, and Karma and its effects cease to exist when the self is realized.' (*Mundaka*, II, 2, 9).

This issue of Omkara attempts to examine Hinduism's understanding of death and rebirth. As spiritual seekers themselves, the authors dwell on topics such as the purpose of life in Hinduism, how to understand and prepare for death and Hinduism's understanding of death and rebirth as part of the longer journey of the soul.

We hope that this issue will be a permanent reference guide for all Sanatanis seeking eternal truths. Hindu Centre, which is dedicated to the spiritual progress of Singapore Hindus through the three pillars of Jnana, Bhakti and Seva, is pleased to help you on your truth-journey.

Medha Kudaisya

*Smaller than the smallest and greater than the greatest,
the Self dwells in the hearts of all creatures. Those who are
without worldly desires realise the glory of the Self, free from
grief, through the purification of the senses and the mind*

Kathopanishad, II, 20.

The Purpose of Life in Hinduism

N. Krishnamurthy

Mature minds will ask: “Why am I here, what is the purpose of my life?”. Hinduism has a multi-faceted response to this question. This article will explore the important answers.

Although in ancient texts like Manusmruthi, consistent with the culture of the times, duties were tougher and privileges were fewer for women, we will consider women to be equally capable and empowered as men, although the male pronoun may be used for brevity.

1. PURUSHARTHA-S

Our scriptures say human life must be governed by the four-fold Purusharth-s, purposes or goals namely: Dharma, Artha, Kaama, and Moksha, loosely translated as ethical living, fair pursuit of wealth, socially correct fulfilment of desires, and attainment of salvation.

1.1.Dharma

‘Dharma’, commonly interpreted as charity, by definition means ‘to hold’. It is the principle and practice that hold our world together. It is the norm, the blueprint, for a Hindu’s life

in consonance with the society and culture in which he lives. Dharma may be referred to as situational ethics. Our resources here are rich with guidelines for a full, happy life.

There are various types of Dharma, applicable to different situations.

(a) Sanaathana Dharma:

Although this is the alternative Sanskrit name for Hinduism itself, it means ‘Eternal Religious Law’, and strictly speaking, applies to the spiritual side of the Hindu way of life. Being based on the Veda-s, our religion provides the means of attaining salvation. In usage, it encompasses the various sub-divisions and forms of secular human behaviour also.

(b) Saamaanya Dharma:

Meaning ‘everyday ethics’ or ‘general ethics’, it urges Hindus to adopt the virtues of mercy, truth, self-discipline, purity, offerings, non-violence, service unto the Guru, pilgrimage, compassion, honesty, absence of greed, honouring deities and Brahmins, and not criticising anyone.

(c) Varna Dharma:

This refers to ethics appropriate to one's 'Varna', that is, the class, or broadly the community, he is born into. Thus, a 'Brahmana' must be a role model for a good priest or teacher. So should a 'Kshathriya' be for a good soldier or policeman, a 'Vaishya' for a good farmer or merchant, and a 'Sudra' for a good worker or servant.

Be the best in what you are born to do, enabled to do, trained to do, honestly, whole-heartedly, for the benefit of whom you are doing it for. Don't aspire or vie for another class's tasks (– with their privileges), unless, in today's context, you can do better than those already doing them.

(d) Ashrama Dharma:

Act appropriate to your 'ashrama', that is stage, in life. As a student ('Brahmachari') be the best student you can be. As a married householder ('Grihastha') be the best provider and protector, the best husband and father, the best brother or guardian, you can be; work hard, earn well, share and serve fully, and enjoy the healthy life.

When you retire and hand over the reins to the next generation ('Vaanaprastha') simplify your life to the basics, immerse yourself into contemplation and meditation on the afterlife. If you are privileged to enter the last state of renunciation ('Sannyaasa') give up all attachments, move away from the trappings and distractions of society, and focus on the end of your journey in the present life.

In short, act your age, befitting your capabilities and commitments.

(e) Guna Dharma:

Every one of us is born with a certain combination of the three Guna-s, Sattva (goodness, calmness, harmonious), Rajas (passion, activity, movement), and Thamas (ignorance, inertia, laziness). Our opportunity and duty as we grow into adulthood and become responsible to society is to examine ourselves for our strong and weak points, nurture the former and reduce if not eliminate the latter, so that we transform ourselves into better human beings, and transform those around us by our serving as role-models. It is not a course one undergoes, but a continuing process of self-improvement.

(f) Raashtriya Dharma:

This refers to what we owe the nation, in the broader sense, our duty to our community. The obligations will range from contributing our full share of taxes and services, supporting and protecting the weak and the downtrodden in society, and defending the citizenry and the nation when needed.

(g) Aapadh Dharma:

In its wisdom, Hinduism permits, and even advocates, not only relaxation of any of the previous Dharma-s but even going against them temporarily, in times of crisis, emergency or adversity, survival or necessity. On such occasions, one may omit one's proper duty and even adopt some other Varna's or Ashrama's duties. Examples

are when a Brahmana becomes a soldier or a mechanic; when one has to lie to save a life; and so on.

There are a few more special Dharma-s like Guru Dharma, Kula Dharma etc., but most of their features are already covered in the preceding.

Needless to say, the common meaning of charity, is implied if not specifically stated in most of the Dharma-s.

1.2. Artha

The pragmatic vision of our forebears recognised the critical need for man's creature comforts before he can be wooed into spiritual pursuits, especially during the householder ('Grihasthasrama') stage. So, we are urged to seek 'artha', meaning wealth and property, and enjoy the fruits of our efforts by any and every means possible, the only stipulation being that all our actions should fall under the umbrella of the relevant Dharma-s.

Simply put, whatever occupation you take, whatever business you do, get and enjoy your fair share, but let there be no unfair advantage taken, no fraud, and no needless harm to others.

A common view of property in Hinduism is that all of us are stewards of what we gain and own, trustees to use our property for the benefit of all mankind, in the sense of 'VasudhaivaKutumbakam', the world as one family.

1.3. Kaama

'Kaama' is often unfairly interpreted as lust, contrasted with 'Prema' meaning love, while in reality the desire referred to here is the normal seeking of satisfaction and pleasure in our life and work – which arguably not only could be passively accepted but also should be actively sought.

Such normal desires may cover all aspects of life, and not just religious or spiritual. Hinduism urges us to live to the fullest in all its aspects, appropriate to every stage.

In Grihasthasrama in particular, one may relish good food, clothing, material comforts, living style, entertainment, even sexual fulfilment.

So, one need not feel guilty for deriving pleasure from any personal or professional act, as long as such enjoyment has been derived by righteous means and does not place anybody else at disadvantage or deprivation.

For a greater sense of purpose, the desire should transcend self-satisfaction and broaden to sharing or promoting similar benefits to others as well.

1.4. Moksha

Moksha, salvation, liberation from the eternal cycle of birth and death, is, or should be, the ultimate aim and purpose of every Hindu. This final goal involves enlightenment received from the right Guru(s), and self-realisation

by Thapas, roughly meaning ascetism, not necessarily isolating oneself in a forest, but living a mentally detached and morally pure existence with full focus on the Supreme Spirit, the Brahman, wherever he may be and whatever he may do.

Unlike many other religions, Hinduism allows us many births to evolve to this high state taking our time to correct ourselves when we fall short. Hence, regardless of one's current status in life, every Hindu can purposefully exert himself to do better.

One may hope to be liberated only when it is time for the ripened soul to be liberated. There are many guidelines, but it will come when one's soul is ready. This being the final purpose in one's life, one need not be, cannot be, in a hurry.

Meanwhile, every Hindu must act within the guidelines of Dharma-Artha-Kaama, improving himself in each life, advancing ever so slowly, towards the goal of merging with or in the Supreme Spirit.

2. KARMA AS REACTION

In practice, more Hindus are driven in life by an awareness and belief in the Karma theory of Hinduism rather than by the esoteric concept of Purushartha. Even the least knowledgeable Hindu would know about Karma working on the principle of every action begetting an appropriate reaction, in our future lives, if not in this life.

Hope of improvement, and fear against deterioration is every Hindu's motivation in life. This may be observed in the many religious chants that people recite, the many expiatory rituals they undertake, and the overarching basic yearning for divine grace, as well as real fear of divine retribution.

There are three types of karma, as follows:

2.1.Sanchitha Karma

Sanchitha is the accumulated karma. It would be impossible to experience and expiate all karma in one lifetime, and so the residues add up.

Once we realise this situation, we will be quite careful to minimise our ethical mistakes and Dharmic Transgressions so that the residual bad Karma will gradually diminish, which in turn will raise us higher in the spiritual scale, reaching closer to our ultimate salvation.

This then becomes the biggest motivator for right action.

2.2.Praarabdha Karma

From the stock of sanchitha karma, a small portion is served out during our current life. This portion which has begun to bear fruit currently and which will be exhausted only on their fruit being enjoyed or suffered and not otherwise, is PraarabdhaKarma.

PraarabdhaKarma is thus a collection of selected past sanchita karmas that are to be experienced through the present body.

This little chunk of karma we experience during the current life is all we know about our status in the journey towards moksha. We must learn our lessons from the bitter fruits and modify our behaviour to avoid building up bad Sanchitha Karma.

Even if we experience consistently good Praarabdha Karma, we must always remember that we must not take our continued advancement for granted, but act to stave off any deterioration in our standards, by falling into the all-too-tempting easier but less pure paths.

2.3.Aagami Karma

Aagami (or Kriyamaana) Karma comprises the good or bad reactions we produce in our current life. What it means is that in our attempts to live out our Praarabdha Karma we should not unwittingly create fresh bad Karma!

For instance, the scion of a rich family should realise that his high status is because of his current parcel of good Sanchitha Karma, and not license to do as he pleases in arrogance or over-confidence.

All Aagami Karmas get directed into Sanchitha Karma and consequently will shape our future lives. If we have done well, we will continue in human life, which is the only life form in which we can change our future destiny. By acting properly, we minimise Aagami Karma and reduce Sanchitha Karma, thus hastening our spiritual progress.

3. KARMA AS DUTY

In the other common meaning of the word Karma, namely 'Duty', Hindus are enjoined to strictly follow certain observances, for various specific situations depending on their class and stage of life, as follows:

3.1. Nithya Karma

The three-fold obligatory daily observances are primarily our worship of our parents and ancestors, our teachers, and our family and community deities (including the Sun and other natural forces), in that order, emphasising the hierarchy of debts of gratitude owed to them for our current station in life. Likewise, those who are expected to carry out other periodic rituals, like ancestral worship ('Tharpanam') on New Moon days, should not miss them. As these are mandatory –like debts to be repaid –, their performance may not add merit, but their non-performance would beget demerit.

3.2. Naimitthika Karma

These obligatory duties of a Hindu are the rites to be performed on special occasions. In particular, there is a list of 'Samskaras' or rituals for landmark events spanning one's entire lifetime, starting from Garbadhaana, the intent to have a child by married couples, up to Anthyeshti, the last rites upon a person's demise. The number of common currently followed Samskara-s are sixteen, as expounded in the author's paper on the subject in an earlier issue of this journal.

Religious observances like birth or death anniversaries fall into this category, and require priests for their proper conduct according to the scriptures. Their performance will attract merit and non-performance will bring demerit.

3.3. Kaamyā Karma

Rituals done for fulfilment of personal desires are called Kaamyā Karma-s. These are optional, and their non-performance does not bring demerits. Examples are ritualistic prayers to beget a child, or (collectively performed) to bring rains to parched land. They have to be performed in conformance with the code of conduct laid by Dharma. As there is passion and self-interest behind this Karma, the outcome of this Karma may be positive or negative resulting in strong reactions. By its nature, evolved souls will not resort to this.

3.4. Praayaschitha Karma

Hinduism wisely has many expiatory rites to compensate for our errors of omission or commission. These may be special prayers, service, or charity; or by some specific self-disciplinary action, such as fasting or pilgrimage. True atonement is achieved only by going through the rite whole-heartedly and with faith. This expiatory process is optional and not compulsory, as it depends on the individual's assessment of his guilt and his determination to cleanse himself of his sins.

3.5. Nishkaama Karma

These are actions performed without

any self-interest and expectation of any reward or benefit, adhering to the highest principle of Karma Yoga towards liberation. Reflecting as it does the doer's non-attachment and deep dedication to the Almighty, this releases him from bondage and puts him firmly on the path to liberation.

4. WHAT IS THE RIGHT ACTION?

This is the difficult question to address, because it entirely depends on the individual and the stage of his development in this life and evolution in previous lives.

Right action for a king may not be the right action for a citizen, a priest's not a merchant's, a youth's not an old man's, and so on.

It is a sign of a Jeevaathma's maturity to even be curious about, more so to seek, a purpose in life. If and when that happens, Hinduism offers various options for his decisions and actions. Acceptance and adoption of any of these as sincerely as possible and to the extent feasible would implement the purpose for the individual's life. The average Hindu does best by following as much as possible of freely available guidelines distilled from the wisdom accumulated over thousands of years.

Such guidance may be acquired from three sources:

- (i) From sacred texts such as Purana-s (– encyclopaedic sources of origin of the universe and divine

dynasties) and Ithihaasa-s (– mythological tales like the Ramayana);

(ii) From the teachings of personal Guru-s and the examples of great personages; and

(iii) From introspection, deep thinking and divine inspiration.

Naturally, as many of us would have noticed and accepted as inevitable and even necessary, times will come when some age-old traditional practice will become difficult if not impossible thus needing to be changed, because life styles and mores, and changing social needs and resources require modification of time-honoured practices.

Then, more and more people will find ways to constructively analyse the changed circumstances and devise or propose ways and means of addressing the changes without violating the basics of our Dharma, as far as possible.

Seniors in the community, guided and endorsed by religious leaders, will arrive at a pragmatic compromise between those zealously insisting on anachronistic practices on the one hand, and those impulsively jumping to full-scale hedonistic rebellion on the other.

Collective wisdom shall decide on what need to be changed and how much and how they should be changed.

5. CONCLUSION

If we believe we have been placed on earth for a purpose, it is for us to discover and act on that purpose based on the ample guidance given in our Dharmic laws and Karmic injunctions for individual behaviour, remembering all the while to pay our dues to the community and nation we live in.

The easiest purposeful practice may be to emulate what others of age group and status similar to ours do, particularly those who are widely respected in our community as good role models, as well as to avoid what those that are castigated or looked down upon do.

A closing thought: In today's life, many professionals at all levels have no time or passion for God as their ultimate saviour and goal. No matter, Hinduism is so liberal and inclusive that it can even accept agnostics: As long as you serve humanity well and sincerely, you serve God.

With these flexible guidelines, peace and harmony can prevail in a purposeful Hindu's life.

1 Krishnamurthy, N., "Samskaara and Bhakthi (The Hindu Way to Moksha)", Omkara – A Hindu Centre Publication, Singapore, Vol. 8, No. 1, October 2016, ISSN-0217-3905, Pages 37-43.

Birth, Death and Rebirth

Vanamali Mataji

Human beings find both birth and death to be very mysterious. How did this little creature come into the womb of the mother? Where was it before it came? How did it exist in the narrow confines of that frail body? These are questions which tantalise us about the birth of a baby but after the little creature comes out of the womb, we can see it and have some association with it. But when someone dies the story is a little different. The person whom we had been seeing and having contact with for many years, is suddenly cut off from us and no longer occupies the body which we are familiar with. This is indeed a strange phenomenon. The phenomenon of birth is the same, but in the reverse order. It does not make us unhappy since we can experience the little creature with our five senses. In death, however, life leaves the body. The body disintegrates and one cannot grapple with it since our five senses are useless. Even though the phenomenon of death is something we see very often, we still have not

learnt how to tackle it. Just as the love of life is the greatest of all loves, so the fear of death is the greatest of all fears. We are always inclined to think that death is a punishment meted out by an unfair Law. We do not see that death is only the other side of the coin of Life. In Hinduism, "life and death" are not opposites. "Birth and Death" are opposites, but Life includes both and goes on forever!

Fear of the Unknown

The unknown is always feared. Ignorance is the source of all our fears. Nobody has returned after leaving the body and told us what is on the other side. We are ignorant of what happens to this life energy when it quits the body which it has inhabited for so many years. If we had some idea of what happens when the life leaves the body, we would not be so terrified at this natural process. Hindu scriptures, especially the Garuda Purana, give a clear account of the process of death. As such, death is something everyone should understand. They will then

know what to expect and will not be devastated by this natural event.

Hinduism and Death

In Hinduism, death is not the end of the journey of the embodied soul which is known as the '*jivatma*.' This *jivatma* is actually a reflection of the "Paramatma" or the Supreme Soul. It has all the qualifications of the Paramatma. It was never born and thus it can never die. It is beyond duality and the three functions of the mind – "*desa, kala and nimitta*" – space, time and causation. By a special process it has chosen to limit itself into the confined space of a body. When the time for its stay in this prison comes to an end, it takes off for other realms! So, at the outset we are made aware of the fact that death is not a punishment, but it is truly a release from punishment. But like the proverbial bird which has been caged for a long time, the *jivatma* is loathe to let go of its cage and fly into the unknown.

Hinduism and Birth

When the *jivatma* enters the embryo, it connects with the embryo through an astral cord just like it connects to

the person into whose womb it enters through an umbilical cord. The astral cord cannot be seen by us since it is a subtle object, but of course the second cord is a physical object and can be seen by us when the baby comes out of the uterus. You will notice that the first thing the doctor does after birth is to cut this umbilical cord. This severs the connection with the womb which had been nourishing it for ten months. Thus the physical connection with the mother ends at birth and a new life begins for the baby. Of course, in a human being the emotional connection may last for years! However, the embodied Self which we call the *jivatma* still has the astral cord which connects it with the body which it is occupying. This cord remains with the *jivatma* all through its sojourn in the body which takes on many shapes from babyhood to adult hood.

Death: What Happens?

At the time of death when the *jivatma* leaves its body, this astral cord is severed since it has no more use for this cord which had been imprisoning it to the physical body for so many



years. The *jivatma* then can easily move out of the confining limits of the body. However, for a person who does not know the mechanics of death, this cutting of the astral cord is very traumatic just as it must be for the baby when the umbilical cord is cut. At this stage the unprepared *jivatma* does not know it is dead and tries its best to re-enter the body it has just left, which it can see lying below. It will try to re-enter through any of the nine orifices of the body. That is why the Hindus say that you must immediately tie the two big toes of the body as soon as it is dead.

Apparently, this cuts off the entrance through the two lower orifices. The ears are plugged, the nostrils and the mouth closed by tying a ribbon or cloth round the chin and over the head. This stops the *jivatma's* attempts to re-enter the body through one of the various orifices.

The Five Vital Energies

According to Hinduism there are five vital energies which govern the functions of the various parts of the body. These control all the automatic responses of the body like breathing in and breathing out, digestion, functioning of the various organs like the heart, stomach, nerves etc. We have absolutely no control over these. When the astral cord is disconnected, these five will slowly start to leave the body. Since these vital energies control everything they will know about the time of departure long before it

is known to the person or even the doctor or the people in attendance.

The human being knows a lot about the external world but knows hardly anything about the mechanism of his inner self. Of course, modern medicine has done a lot of research on the gross organs, but nothing has been done which explains how the internal machine is run. The rishis, as has been mentioned before, were more interested in the internal Being and they discovered that the whole of the internal mechanism is under the control of 5 *vayus* or winds called the "*panchapranas*." These are the five vital energies which control the entire running of our inner system over which we have absolutely no control. They are known as "*prana vayu, apana vayu, vyana vayu, udana vayu and samana vayu*."

The Journey of Death

Approximately 4-5 hours before death, the *chakras* situated below the feet get detached, symbolizing disconnection from the earth plane!! This is why the feet of the person start to get cold. At the actual time of death, the *jivatma* will be pushed out of the body through one of the orifices. Apparently, there is no choice in this matter. The cosmic energies will decide on the gate of egress. This depends on the type of life which the person has lead during his sojourn on earth. Enlightened souls who have no more attachments or bonds with the body, will choose to leave through the *Sahasrarachakra* on

top of the head which is also known as the *Brahmarandra*. This apparently is the place through which the *jivatma* originally enters the foetus which will make up his body in the future. One will be able to see a small drop of blood on top of the head showing the site of exit. This is very rare and it is believed that such a person will have no rebirth and will go to Satya Loka which is the highest of the *lokas*. Those who have led a life of debauchery, with no control over their lower animal instincts will naturally exit through the two lower orifices. People who have led a noble life helping people, resorting to spiritual practices and other good deeds will exit through the higher orifices governed by the upper *chakras*.

Within 21 minutes of the *jivatma* leaving the body, the *Samanavayu* (naval area) will exit. It is the one which is in overall charge of the breath. Within 48 to 64 minutes, the *Pranavayu* (life force within) will exit. The doctor will normally declare the person to be dead when the *pranavayu* exits. Even now there is a small chance of reviving the patient. If the body is left as it is, the *udanavayu* will exit only between 6 to 12 hours. After the *udanavayu* (located between head and heart) leaves there is hardly any hope of reviving the patient. The *apanavayu* (intestine and genital area) will leave after 8 to 18 hours. Finally, if it is a normal death through old age the *Vyanavayu* (location centre of the body) can take as much as 14 days

before it leaves. But if death was by an accident or suicide, the *vyana* may continue up to 90 days so that efforts made to revive the body during this period have a good chance of success.

The discriminating and calculating mind filled with memories and ability to discern between different emotions will also die with the death of the body. That portion of the mind which exits with the *jivatma* is just a bundle of *vasanas* or tendencies acquired over a lifetime. This does not have the ability to discriminate, so any pleasant thing which goes on around the body of the corpse will be multiplied hundred-fold. Similarly, any unpleasant thing will also be multiplied. Hence it is very important that all the people who are hanging around the body should think good thoughts and chant from the scriptures and sing *bhajans* (hymns) instead of weeping and wailing.

Last Thought and Final Hours

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna tells his friend Arjuna of the importance of the last thought at the time of death. Hence in many religions, a priest or some holy man is brought to give final injunction to the dying person. Amongst the Hindus the relations or friends will sit around and repeat the names of God and chant passages from the scriptures and the *Bhagavad Gita* so that the last thought will be an elevating one. Lord Krishna says that this is not enough because at the very last moment, the mind will naturally jump to that which has been

a primary concern for him during his life. Therefore, Krishna says that if we want our last moment to be sweet, we should practice having noble thoughts all our lives. This way the mind will naturally go to that thought which has been prominent in our mind during our life.

Once the astral cord has been severed, the *jivatma* cannot continue to occupy the body to which it has been attached. It is pushed upwards out of the body and pulled from above - a magnetic pull to go up, which is the opposite of the force of gravity which pulls the baby down at the time of birth. It tries to re-enter the body through one of the orifices, that is why we are told to close all the nine orifices.

The Jivatma after Death

The *jivatma* continues to hear the voices of the loved ones who are sitting below. It even hears the thoughts of those who are standing below. It tries to talk to them and tell them that it is still there, but of course nobody hears it. This is the time for its relatives to ask for forgiveness for all the negative things they may have done during its time on earth. It will be able to hear their thoughts. This ensures that it does not carry negative emotions like hurt, hatred, anger and greed on its onward journey.

At this point, it will be floating along the ceiling, seeing and hearing everything that is happening in the room. It will keep floating around the body until the

body is cremated. It will accompany the body in the funeral procession all the way to the crematorium or burial ground, observing everything. Hence the Hindu tradition insists that cremation should be done within four hours of death if possible.

Only after the cremation does it become convinced that the very basis of its survival on this planet is no more. The body to which it had been attached for such a long time has merged into the five elements. Now the *jivatma* experiences complete freedom. The boundaries of the body which had been holding it down for so long has been broken. It can travel anywhere just by the power of its thought. However, the attachment to its body and environment is so strong that for 11 to 16 days it moves about, around the places which it had occupied during its sojourn on earth. If it is attached to its children, it will stay in their room. If attachment was to money, it would stay around the safe or it would wander around its favourite haunts like the garden, its normal walks etc.

The Death Rituals

This is why Hinduism insists on doing the *śraddha* ceremony for 12 days at least. These are the important rites and rituals to be done after a person dies. It is incumbent on the eldest son and/or relatives to do these rites. However pressing the job, he should make it his priority to do these last rites for his mother or father since

this will be the best and last thing he can ever do for them in this life. Only these rites done for the *jivatma* by its closest relatives can convince it of the fact that it is indeed dead. These rites enable it to turn its thoughts to the path it needs to take. Finally it decides

to conduct it along the right path. Depending on the intensity of its devotion, the deity or guru might even be waiting for it at the very moment of departure from the body.

Importance of Rituals



Prayers and rituals for the dead are most important because this is the only thing which will help to free the *jivatma* from its earthly ties. Without this, it will be stuck on the earth plane and unable to leave. The reasons why they get stuck on this plane are many, like excessive grief, trauma or sudden death by accident,

to go to the periphery of the earth plane and make the attempt to cross over to the other side. It is said that there is a kind of tunnel here which it must cross. The first 12 days after death are thus crucial. That is why the Hindus insist on doing *kriyas* (rites) for the first 11 days ending with the 12th day on which poor feeding, giving of charity etc. is to be done. Some people extend it for 15 days, ending on the 16th day.

some unfinished business on earth, guilt and perhaps fear of moving on to an astral plane and of course not doing the proper rites and prayers. All this keeps it hovering over the earth plane. It does not realize that time is important since it must cross over within 12 to 16 days as the entry to the astral world may close after that.

All these rituals and prayers are really food for the *jivatma* which will help it on its onward journey. They aid in its journey through the tunnel.

At the end of the tunnel there is a bright light signifying the entrance into the astral world. If it had been worshipping some deity or guru, that deity or guru would be waiting there

Earthbound spirits lead a miserable existence since they are neither in their actual plane nor in a body which is conducive to leading an earthly life. They may not be negative or harmful though some of them may also be malicious depending on how they have lived their earthly lives. However, they are all miserable since they are stuck in this plane. The prayers of the whole family are thus vital to help the dead cross over. It is the duty of all those

who know these esoteric secrets to pray not just for their own ancestors, but also for all those who have no one to pray for them. In this Age there are many *jivatmas* who are stuck on the earth plane due to lack of belief, family neglect and due to violent deaths, happening all over the world because of religious hatred and ignorance of the cosmic laws.

The Yajnas

On the 11th, 12th or 16th day Hindus conduct *yajnas* (fire ceremonies), prayers and rituals for the *jivatma* to



be united with its ancestors, friends, relatives, and guides. All these spirits who are already there and who have not been reborn are happy to see it and welcome it to its new abode. The *jivatma* is then taken to the "Great Karmic Board" to review its life on the earth plane. The whole of its past life is played like a movie in this pure light. There is neither God nor judge here. The *jivatma* must judge itself in the same way as it judged others in its lifetime. It might ask for revenge against the people who troubled it, or for forgiveness. It also experiences guilt

for all the wrongs it has done to others and is ready to accept self-punishment in order to end the *karmic* bond. Since it is no longer bound by the body and the ego, its own final judgment becomes the basis for its next life.

In other words, the *jivatma* makes out a complete blueprint for its future life in which all the problems it must face, all the punishments it must undergo and all the challenges it must overcome are made clear. It chooses every detail of the type of person it wants to become.

It chooses its own punishments and rewards. The amount of guilt it experiences decides the severity of the punishment. Hence, we see that forgiveness is a great virtue. We must learn to forgive and get forgiveness in this life itself. Once this blueprint has been made there is a kind of cooling period in which the *jivatma* is taken to various realms depending on its *karmas* (actions) on the earth plane.

Rebirth

Rebirth takes place according to the blueprint we have made for ourselves. The time taken before another birth also depends on our desire to evolve further. We choose our parents and enter the mother's womb at different times. It might be at the very moment of the egg formation or during the 3rd or 4th month and sometimes

even at the last moment before birth. The laws that govern our lives are so beautifully designed that the time and place of birth, the planets that are in ascendancy are already there and constitute our horoscope! Many of us think that our stars are good or bad and that we are lucky or unlucky. All this is due to the blueprint you yourself have made for your future life.

For about 40 days after birth, the baby remembers its past life and laughs and cries sometimes. After this the memory is completely cut off. It continues with its life as if it had never existed before. The contract he had made with the "Great Karmic Court" comes to play on the earth plane when he is born again. Most people curse God or their karma for the bad times they must pass through on the earth plane. It is most important that all of us realize that the life we must pass through now, whether good or bad is the chance that a compassionate law gives us in order to help us to honour our agreement. This had been totally drawn up by us. Whatever we have got now is exactly what we had asked for.

No one else is to be blamed. We are truly the makers of our own destiny. The law allows us to make reparations for the wrongs we had committed in a previous life. If I am cursed with frequent and unbearable headaches now, it is due to my having hit someone on the head in my previous life (this is a simplification). It is one's choice to endure these headaches now to get a reprieve from one's previous actions and thus enable one to continue forward on the evolutionary journey. All the people we come into contact with in this life have been selected by us! They are just actors in the play of our lives for which we have already selected the script. This has been produced and is being directed by us!!

As can be seen, even the greatest criminal gets another chance to save himself. In Hinduism nobody is condemned to eternal punishment. The cosmic laws are totally just. There is nothing to be frightened of death. It is only one side of the coin of Life.

Hari Aum Tat Sat

Source of Information: Garuda Purana.

As from a blazing fire there shoot out, thousands of sparks of the same appearance, so do the various beings originate from the Imperishable, and into It they go back. From the imperishable are also born vital energy, the mind, the senses, ether, air, fire, water and the earth

Mundaka Upanishad, I, 3, I

Hindu Birth and Death Rituals

S Anuradha

Birth-death-rebirth is the order of the universe according to Hinduism. Not surprising then that for Hindus, both birth and death involve many prayers and rituals to ensure a smooth passage. The performance of rituals gets a person merit or punya and helps him/her lead a comfortable life in this and other births.

BIRTH-RELATED RITUALS

A human birth is the highest birth according to Hinduism so all efforts are taken to ensure that a healthy baby is born.

PRE-NATAL RITUALS

Garbhadana

The birth rituals start at the time of conception itself. Just after the wedding ceremony, a ritual is performed for the couple to fulfill their parental obligations and the continuation of the human race. Hindu scriptures prescribe auspicious times for sex between a married couple so that a healthy child is born.

Simantonayana

The literal meaning of this ritual, also

called Siimanta, is the parting of the hair.

In this ritual, prayers are conducted to ward off evil forces who will disturb the mother and the unborn baby. These rituals and the social gathering also cheer up the pregnant woman who may face anxiety at the time of the first pregnancy. A healthy cheerful mother produces a healthy-cheerful baby. This ritual is done in the sixth or eighth month. A special medicinal herb is given to the pregnant woman to ensure a healthy baby.

BIRTH RITUALS

Once the baby is born, a set of rituals are performed to ensure the survival and healthy life of the new born baby.

Jatakarma

This ritual is done at birth. The newborn is welcomed into the world by placing a small drop of honey in the mouth and whispering the name of Ishwara in the ear of the infant.

Namakarana

The ritual of naming the child is done

at about 11 to 30 days after birth. Usually children are named after gods or ancestors. Care is taken to ensure that the name is meaningful and is a source of inspiration.

Nishkramana

This ritual is done at about 12th day to the fourth month when the child is taken outside the home for the first time. The child is made to look at the sun and get blessings from the sun god.

Annaprashana

This ritual is performed anytime between the sixth and the 10th months when the child is given the first solid food. Food is the basis of life and prayers are offered for the child to be able to consume healthy food and grow well.

Choodakarana

This ritual is performed when the child is one to three years old and involves the shaving of the original hair.

Karnavedha

The ears of a child are pierced when it is one to three years. These days both Choodakarana and Karnavedha are performed together and are among the most popular birth related rituals.

DEATH RITUALS

For Hindus, death is not the end but a beginning and hence one is prepared through prayers and rituals.

A death affects two sets of people. One is the deceased and the other is

the family and the near and dear ones. Hinduism prescribes a set of elaborate post-death rituals. These rituals have a two-fold effect. For the family, grieving together helps them cope with the situation while praying for the dead person brings merit to them.

For the dead person the prayers also bring merit and help ease the onward journey of the soul.

Death rituals and prayers have been mentioned in the Vedas, Gruhyasutras, Dharmasutras and Antyesthi Paddhatis.

Preparing for death

Except in the case of sudden deaths, the family is usually aware that a person is dying. During such last moments Hinduism recommends that we chant prayers or repeat any name of Ishwara for the person so that the fear of death is removed and the person is ready to leave the current body. The remembrance of God in the last moments helps the dying person get a better birth.

In the Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 8, Verse 5) Lord Krishna tells Arjuna, "The one who gives up his body remembering me (Bhagavan) during his final moments reaches me. Of this there is no doubt."

Usually, people chant verses from the Vedas, Bhagavad Gita, Ramayana, Vishnu Sahasranama and other scriptures during the final moments of a person. Some people also perform charity on behalf of the dying person to make amends for any

mistakes committed in the past. Such prayers also help in the family members cope with the impending departure of a dear one.

What happens after death

After death a person (jivaa) gets a transient status as preta before he/she gets the status of an ancestor/pitru and subsequently takes another birth. Prayers are offered to this preta for 13/16/30 days as per the traditions in different communities.

Although various Hindu communities have different ways of prayers for the deceased, there are some common rituals like cremating the body, dissolving the ashes in a water body, special prayers for the preta on the 8th or 10th day, offering prayers such that the Preta gets the status of an ancestor or Pitru and finally the end of the death rituals with a homa/temple prayer signifying the end of the current mourning period.

In the article we will examine the prayers that are offered in the 13-day mourning period.

Dahanasamskara/Cremation

The majority of Hindus cremate the dead as fire is seen as a great purifier. Before the cremation, the body is ritualistically purified through water and Mantras. Chandana, Kumkuma and Vibhuti are applied on the forehead. The body is covered with new clothes and fresh flowers. A few drops of Ganga water and a Tulasi leaf are placed in the mouth.

The body is placed on a wooden bier with the head facing south. Mantras are chanting into the person's ears. The ritual fire is kindled and this is the fire with which the body is set alight. (symbolic when electric cremation is followed). Some rituals and charity are performed to atone for the mistakes that may have been committed by the person.

Verses from the Yama Suktam or chants like Om Namah Shivaya or Ram Nam Satya Hai are chanted on the way to the crematorium. The body is consigned to the fire symbolizing that the current physical form has merged with one of the five elements. Usually the eldest son lights the pyre but nowadays daughters are also allowed to cremate their parents.

Special mantras are chanted to propitiate Lord Agni so that the dead person can be carried to higher lokas and better births.

Once home the family and friends take a bath and offer more prayers to the dead person. No fire is lite in the kitchen on that day as a mark of respect to Agni.

Asthisanchayana/Collection of ashes

Usually on the day after the cremation the ashes and some remains are collected from the cremation ground. The ashes and remains are immersed in a water body. Some people immerse these in any holy river or ocean in a place of pilgrimage.

There is a saying that the person whose ashes have been immersed in the Ganga has no rebirth.

A fire ritual is conducted requesting the dead person to take on a new form.

Prayers from Day 2-9

Just as the human embryo takes nine months to become a fully formed child, a preta takes nine days to be fully formed. During these nine days the preta is invoked in a rice ball/pinda and offerings of water and black sesame seeds are made for it. The prayers during these nine days ensure a smooth transition from a jiva to preta.

Tenth Day Ritual

It is assumed that on the tenth day the preta body is fully formed. It is supposed to experience great hunger and food liked by the deceased person is offered to it. In some communities, survivors shave their head or facial hair on this day.

Eleventh Day Ritual

On this day offerings are made to other ancestors and charity is done to atone for the misdeeds of the dead person. Special prayers are offered to Lord Vishnu for the salvation of the preta.

Twelfth Day Ritual

On the penultimate day of the mourning period, rituals are performed to indicate the end of the

preta status for the dead person and the assumption of the pitru or ancestor status.

Thirteenth Day Ritual

Purificatory rituals are performed on this day to signify the end of this mourning period. Ishvara is invoked in the form of the nine planets and prayers are offered. The family members wear new clothes, go to a temple, light a lamp in the home altar and resume their daily worship (which is usually suspended during the mourning period).

One Year Rituals

Monthly prayers are offered to the dead person on the tithi (the day according to the Hindu calendar) on which the person died. At the end of one year a prayer is held to signify the end of the mourning period. During this one-year period, the immediate family refrains from celebrating any festivals and keeps a low social profile as a mark of respect to the dead person.

Annual Shradha

The family's connection with the dead person is not over. Every year on the day the person died (as per the Hindu calendar) special prayers are offered for the well-being of the person in any birth that he/she may have acquired.

To summarise, both the birth and death rituals ensure that the person and his family get enough merit to enjoy a comfortable life and after life.

Interview with Anandji and Ushaji

Uma Jayaraman

In this issue, we have shared our conversation with Anandji and Ushaji, two students of Vedanta in Singapore, regarding their thoughts on birth, death, and rebirth. They spoke to us of their experiences as seekers of Santana dharma. We deeply appreciate their time and effort in answering our questions in relation to the theme of the issue.

Please tell us about how birth is viewed by our scriptures.

Let us take an example, when a potter creates a pot out of clay, he is giving a new form to what used to be the clay. We give this form a name. Similarly, when a child arrives in this world, we give a name to the child at the birth, to give an identity to the form. We are happy at the birth of the child, because we feel we have received a gift, “a bundle of joy”.

In all this, we are looking at the event of birth as something that is happening to us.

However, the scriptures tell us that there is no such event, that is, there is no birth at all! THINK! Is pot real,

or clay is real? The clay the potter used was always there. Once it takes the form of the pot, it is seen as something new. When the pot is not useful anymore, we throw it away. It returns to earth and still exists as clay. Similarly, Sat-Chit-Ananda alone IS. As Consciousness or Chaitanya or Brahman or Atman or Awareness or Sat-Chit-Ananda (all are synonymous), the child was there, child is there and child will be there. Only form comes and goes. Birth is essentially a change of form that we become aware of.

There are several rituals associated with initiating newborns into life once they turn one year of age. What is the significance of this first year? Do scriptures say anything about this?

We hear of the journey of Jiva (life form) in the Smritis (scriptures as remembered—they speak of several themes including social values). A newborn’s journey starts in the womb of the mother and the rituals such as the Naamakaranam (naming ceremony), Anna prashanam (first feeding of cooked rice), Choodakaranam (hair shaving ceremony), Akshara Abhyaasam (learning to write), Upanayanam

(Initiation into Brahminhood) are some of the rituals that are performed to remind the jiva that the values it has to adhere to in its journey through this world. People from different regions follow different timelines.

We hear that some people have memories of their previous birth. Does the newborn come into life as a clean slate or with memories of an earlier birth?

Just as we have memories of dream after we wake from sleep, we carry memories of the previous birth. Scriptures describe death as long sleep from which we wake up with a new body. This body is described in The Bhagavad Gita (2.22) as a new cloth.

The mind travels with the jiva (the subtle body) from birth to birth. We can say that though we have a different body in every birth, we carry the same mind. All of us are believed to have memories from our past lives. These memories are manifested as vasanas (desires) or tendencies.

Most people are afraid of death, though we know everything that is born must die one day. Please speak to us about this puzzle.

When we are attached to something, we are afraid of losing it. For example, we are afraid of losing our job, car, house, family, relatives etc. Above all, we are attached to our body. We think that we are the body. When we see a light bulb giving out light, we think it is the bulb giving out light; in reality, it is the electricity that ignites the

tungsten filament inside the bulb. So, a correct understanding of “Who am I” will remove the ignorance, and along with it, the fear of death.

There are many rituals associated with the departed soul. What do scriptures tell us about the significance of these rituals?

Soul or subtle body or astral body travels from one gross body to another. We understand the moving of soul from one body to another as people moving from one house to another.

The subtle body, comprises of five Jnana Indriyas, five karma Indriyas, five Pranas, Manas (mind), Buddhi (intellect), Chitta (memory) and Ahamkara (ego or individuality) and vasanas or tendencies, which determine the formation of the next life. Rituals performed for the departed soul is a form of expressing our gratitude to them. Similar to how we show gratitude to living people, we do the same to departed souls.

Does the journey of transmigration exist?

We, as jiva exist in three states and move between these states daily. These are the states of waking, dream, and deep-sleep. The life form in us or jiva, moves back and forth in these three states. The journey of the jiva (the life form) from body to body continues until it realizes its true nature is Consciousness or Sat-Chit-Ananda. Transmigration is for the jiva or soul, not for the Consciousness. Consciousness or Awareness does

not go anywhere. It is all pervading, witness to the various states that the body experiences.

Hinduism believes in rebirth. How can we be convinced that we go through many cycles of birth? If we do, why?

A human being can be compared to a plant. A plant grows, blossoms, ripens with fruits and dries up. However, the plant leaves behind seeds, which grow into new plants [Katho Up 1.1.6]. Similarly, human beings are also reborn as per the impressions accumulated over many births. This means though the body perishes, the actions and their consequences of the past one cannot avoid.

‘Samsara’, is cyclic in nature without beginning and an end. Here, we must note that a realized person, who abides in his true nature is liberated from the ‘Samsara’, or the cycle of birth and death. He is a “jivanamukta”.

Sometimes, we see a man who has done no wrong terribly suffer and an evil person live a happy life. Is this also related to our karma?

If a new-born child who has not done any wrong action in this birth undergoes great suffering, this is the fruit of some evil deed done in the previous birth. If you ask, how the person was induced to do a wrong action in this former birth, the answer is that it was the result of some wrong action done in a birth before that and so on.

For example, creatures are born, they naturally can feed from their mother’s

breast. They also show signs of fear. They laugh and cry. This shows that they carry abilities from a previous birth. Actions from this birth could not have triggered all of this. The Dharma Adharma Samskaras of this birth cannot be the cause of these. From this we can clearly infer the existence of jiva in the previous birth, and the jiva is anadi, meaning has no beginning.

If we do not think of jiva as anadi or beginningless, what will happen?

If you do not accept that the Jiva is anadi, the two defects, pleasure and pain which are the fruits of virtuous and vicious actions done previously will pass away without being experienced. Then we cannot explain, the cause for the current enjoyment or suffering of a jiva. That is, one may be enjoying the fruits of good deeds not done in the past. Similarly, one may have to go thru pain, for actions which were not done previously. To get rid of these two defects, we will have to accept that jiva is anadi, else karma theory will fail.

How do good actions from a previous birth help us in the next birth?

Just as the fruit corresponds to the seed that has been sown, so also the fruit of the actions that are performed by us correspond to the nature of the actions that we perform. This is the infallible law of nature.

In simple terms, human beings perform actions with the expectation of getting something in return, and so they are reborn to experience the fruits of their actions. In the following birth, they

perform more actions, and are reborn to experience the consequence of these actions.

In this manner, the Samsaric wheel revolves till one comes to the knowledge of Self, ones own true nature. With the knowledge of Self, human beings are liberated from the cycle of births and deaths.

Example: Guru Nanak, Jnana Dev, Vama Deva, Ashtavakra etc, are all evolved souls.

It seems that destiny plays a big role in human lives. Some of us may think that we can't do anything to change it. Is this a correct attitude?

What one meets in life is destiny (Prarabdha); how well one meets it is self-effort (freewill).

Destiny is the manifestation of the self-effort of the past, and while free-will is the self-effort that one applies in the present. Both are "karmas or actions" only! There is only one thing, not two!

Yesterday's self effort is today's prarabdha or destiny.

To shape our destiny, we must resort to self effort at all cost.

All human achievements in science, medicine, engineering etc are based on human effort.

Ex: If I am an engineer, it is because of my self-effort, I put in.

So, it is wrong to say, God decides everything, or we cannot do anything to change our destination, so what is the use in putting self -effort.

We have to understand, HIS grace is required, in our Self-effort or our actions also. Unless Consciousness or Awareness is there we cannot think and do anything. He is the common cause. What we do in a given situation is our self effort.

Ex: Petrol is the common cause for the car to move. Where it should go, how fast etc is not determined by petrol.

God's grace and God are not separate just like sun and sunshine are not separate. He is there in every thought as awareness.

Many of us struggle with health issues and handicaps. Do scriptures help us to understand why we go through bodily challenges?

Have you ever wondered why we do not physically experience the pain of others? This is because their bodies are not part of us. Scriptures tell us to see our own bodies in this way, with detached outlook. We learn from the scriptures that we are not the body, mind or intellect. Just as we feel only sympathy and do not experience other people's pain, we should look at our own suffering in the same manner. We have to detach ourselves from our body. We should, instead, become witness to the body. Ramana Maharshi's last days are a great example of how one should look at pain. He suffered from

cancer but did not let his followers know his pain or empathize with him. According to him, pain is real and everyone who is hurt will feel it. But what differentiates one human being from another is their responses to their pain. To detach ourselves from our pain and become witness to it, is the right attitude.

Many who are struggling in life wish to end their life. Should death be perceived as an end of life's struggles?

When someone takes their own life, say by committing suicide, one must eventually return to pay off one's debts and obligations. As a human, one is bound to face difficulties, but that does not mean that suicide is the solution to sufferings. The consequences of committing suicide are extremely serious.

One should do everything in ones power not to ruin the inner intent or let any negativethoughts of suicidearise. Instead, one should focus on looking for solutions to the problems and remain positive.

As the mind continues from one birth to another, it brings along all memories. The struggle continues in the next birth also. Jiva continues. Suicide is only a temporary relief.

One way of becoming positive is to become witness to the thought rather than be lost in the thought. All struggle is at the mind level. Once we understand this, we are able to address any challenge. Only proper understanding of "who am I" enlightens the person.

Is there really a way to stop or control negative thoughts?

Due to the ignorance of our real Self, we take on the problems of the mind as my problem. We become engrossed with the mind and feel, 'Why it is happening to me?', 'I am feeling sad', "I am rich", or 'I don't like that person'. Mind is nothing but flow of thoughts. It is a mere tool, one should not be affected!

With the correct understanding of 'Who am I?' one can easily remain unaffected when good or bad thoughts cross our mind. It is the nature of the mind , just like a mirror's nature is to reflect whatever there in the front.

When we have different thoughts, good, bad or ugly, we should not become engrossed in them. Instead, just we need to learn to watch the thoughts go by like a movie, as an observer. If one remains in one's true Self, as an observer, then nothing can trouble that person.

References:

1. *A Manual of Self Unfoldment – Swami Chinmayananda, Chinmaya Mission PublicaCons*
2. *May I Answer That? - Swami Shivananda, Divine Life Society PublicaCon*
3. *Hinduism Frequently Asked QuesCons, Chinmaya Mission PublicaCons*
4. *Hinduism That is Sanatana Dharma, Swami Nityananda, Chinmaya Mission PublicaCons*
5. *Conflicts and Confusions in Indian Culture, Swamini Vimalananda, Chinmaya Mission PublicaCons*
6. *In Indian Culture Why Do We? Swamini Vimalananda, Chinmaya Mission PublicaCons*

Preparing for Death

V. Prabhakar Rao

*“Jaatasyahydruvomrtyuh” Bhagavad Gita (Ch 2 V 27).
“For one who is born, death is certain”*

The key verse from the *Bhagavad Gita* tells us that for all those who are born, death is a certainty. There is no prolonging of life forever. The Gita goes on to elaborate further that a wise man will not unduly worry about death since this law of nature is inevitable and unchangeable.

If a wise man should not worry about death, then what should he do about it? Death is not something to be afraid of. As *Bhagavad Gita* has rightly pointed out, death is an inevitable phenomenon. Instead of being afraid of it, should not one accept it as a given and embrace it joyfully? So, a wise person would prepare meticulously for it. In life, one is used to preparing for the future, all the time, such as our children's education, marriage, a home for the family, for our retirement from our job or profession, and so on. We are indeed very committed to preparing for all these things well in advance. Then why not prepare for death too?

The preparation for death needs to take place on three different planes:

1. Material Level
2. Emotional Level
3. Spiritual Level

1. Material Level

At a Material Level, issues such as the proper management of financial assets, bequeathing of assets to family members, writing a will, proper nominations to be made for all accounts and insurance policies, lasting power of attorney (LPA), organ donations, and so on will have to be considered. For these, many experts such as accountants, lawyers and other financial advisors should be able to give excellent advice. This aspect will not be elaborated further as it is not the purpose of this article.

2. Emotional Level

Death is a highly emotional event for everyone concerned. Here are a few lines of a poem under the heading “பிரிவு” (parting due to death) that the author had penned about ten years ago. It brings out the emotions one feels while confronting death of a loved one.

பாலிலிருந்து வெண்மை பிரியுமோ

(Does the whiteness part with from milk?)

ஆதவனைவிட்டு கிரணம்தான் பிரியுமோ

(Will the rays part from the Sun?)

மலரினின்று மணம் பிரியுமோ

(Does the fragrance part from the flower?)

உடலினின்று உயிர்மட்டும் பிரியுதே

(But life parts from the body, why!)

அது இரவல் இடம் என்று தானோ?

(Is it because it is a temporary place?)

தாயின் வலியில் பிறப்பது ஒரு மழலை

(From the pain of a mother is born a child)

கவியின் வலியில் பிறப்பது ஒரு கவிதை

(From the pain of a poet is born a poetry)

தாயும் சேயும் உணர்வினால் என்றும் பிணைந்தது அன்றோ

(Aren't the mother and child bonded forever with emotions!)

கவிதைக்கும் அதில் துடிக்கும் வலிக்கும் பிரிவுதான் உண்டோ?

(Does the pain and the poetry ever part from each other!)

ஆனால் (But)

உயிர் மட்டும் உடலை விட்டு பிரியுதே

(life alone parts from the body, why!)

உயிருக்கும் உடலுக்கும் அன்பின் பிணைப்பு இல்லையோ?

(Is it because life and the body do not have a bonding of love?)

பிரிவின் வலி உடலை பிரிந்துசெல்லும் உயிருக்கு இல்லையோ?

(May be the life which leaves the body does not feel the pain of parting!)

Death can be an anguishing experience for all including the one who is realizing that she is gradually slipping away. The one who passes away, if he/she is conscious till that final moment, is usually filled with fears about what may happen to his family after his death. He/she will be filled with remorse for many painful episodes in his/her life. The person will go through a shower of regrets for what he/she had intended to do and missed doing so. He/she will be awash with waves of emotion

after emotion as he/she thinks of each family member. Have I done justice to my spouse? To my daughter? To my son? and so on. But, in fact, if one is prepared for death, the moment of final parting, can be very peaceful. The one who is about to pass away can do so with total contentment and with a smile on the face. It needs careful and conscious preparation over many years.

The most important preparation one should take care of at an emotional level is to reach a stage of emotional contentment in one's silver years. One should be able to convince oneself honestly that:

a) I have done my best for everyone around me.

b) I must accept that only performing duties were in my hands. He, the Creator, controlled the outcomes as He had deemed fit. There is no point worrying about the end results of one's efforts. Here Bhagavad Gita plays a very big role. The "Karmanyevadhikaraste" verse in Gita is a gem. It can provide a strong peace of mind if understood and internalized. One should take the help of this verse of Lord Krishna to develop a sense of equanimity of mind. Let me elaborate further. Remember the scene here is that the human being who is in his final moments regrets the actions he had taken at various times of his life and the unfortunate outcomes he had experienced. This certainly will immerse him in a web of regrets and will leave him wondering whether he made mistakes in taking those actions. It will, in fact, leave him depressed and despondent. This should be avoided at any cost. This is where Bhagavad Gita offers the best medicine. Lord Krishna clearly tells us that only the action is in our hands. Not the outcome. He implies that He will take care of the outcome, with His own parameters guiding it. And hence, He advises, act without worrying about the outcome or act without desiring a particular outcome. And He emphasizes, "Do act. Do not stay away from action." He implies that performing action is a duty one cannot stay away from. Hence the human being at the moment of death, if he looks back at his past actions, he should do so with a satisfaction that he had indeed acted as he had deemed best at that point in time. And he should not unnecessarily ponder over the outcomes. They had been decided by the sweet Lord. This is the essence of the verse I have referred to a few lines earlier. This great verse provides us a way to accept our past with a sense of equanimity and embrace death without any regret.

c) Gradually one should come to terms with one's unfulfilled ambitions, unquenched desires and accept the fact that there is only so much one can do, should be that you have played your part as well as you could with the cards dealt to you.

d) Over the years, watching the children growing up and spreading their wings, one should feel contented that one has done one's part in their growth. And now it is their life which they should be free to lead on their own terms. One should learn to distance oneself from concerns about them and enjoy taking a back seat.

e) The bond with the spouse will be the strongest and long-lasting for any human being, not without good reasons. This soul has shared the best and worst of your life and steadfastly stood by you. Hence, even the very thought of leaving this partner and passing away will be most painful. This is a universal truth. However, the preparation for the final departure must certainly include the process of conditioning each other for the departure of either of them. In this regard, I have seen around me many women who had prepared themselves well mentally for the eventuality of their spouse's passing away. Instead of crumbling upon such a happening, I have seen them withstanding it courageously and handling things with composure. Unfortunately, I cannot say the same thing about men. Men seem to be easily succumbing to despair and loneliness. Consequently, it is the men who need to be better prepared.

3. At a Spiritual Level

One who desires to prepare for his/her death should gradually detach himself/herself from worldly desires, pleasures, anger, enmity, jealousy, and so on and focus on spiritual elevation. It is spiritual elevation which will help in the gradual building up of detachment and equanimity. It will then lead to serenity and tranquility necessary to accept death with open arms.

Here are a few gems from the *Ramayana* and the *Bhagavad Gita* which provide very deep insights into these aspects.

In *Ramayana*, a complete Dharma shastra, can be found some rare gems of Vedanta in Lord Rama's words. They prove to be very useful for our preparation of death. In Ayodhya Kandam, the episode where Bharata comes in search of Rama to request him to take back the kingdom is full of profound philosophy. Bharata informs Rama of the demise of their father Dasaratha. Spontaneously Rama's reaction is intensely human, just as any son would grieve his dear father's demise. However, moving on, Rama quickly shifts to a higher plane and looks at his father's death in a very philosophical manner.

Rama states – "Man is not able to do what he wills. He is not the Master(puruShoayamaniishvaraH). Fate drives him hither and thither". Rama goes on with his philosophical musings:

sarvekShayaantaanicayaaHpatanaantaaHsamucchrayaaH |
samyogaaviprayogaantaamaraNaantam ca jiivitam ||
- Valmiki Ramayanam2-105-16

(Whatever has been accumulated will vanish one day. Whatever goes up will have to come down. Whatever joins together will end in parting. The entire life lasts only till death.)



Lord Rama further elaborates: “As pieces of driftwood floating in the ocean come together for a span of time (yathaakaaShTham ca kaaShTham ca sameyaataammahaaarNave), so do spouse, children, relatives, wealth, and property come together for a while and then part from us. Their parting is indeed inevitable”. Rama insists, “hence human beings should be employing themselves in earning “Aatma Sukham (“joy for the soul”).

Being born as a human being is a great blessing. Only in this type of birth does the soul get an opportunity to think and choose a path of spiritual elevation (application of viveka or power of discrimination) and invest great efforts towards it. In any other type of birth this opportunity does not exist. Hence, it

is mandatory that a person who prepares for his/her death should focus heavily on the elevation of his/her spiritual level. *Bhagavad Gita* and *Upanishads* keep reminding us that ultimately, our goal in life is to achieve liberation from this cycle of birth and death (mukti). And spiritual elevation is the means to achieve this end.

Lord Krishna trumpets in His *Bhagavad Gita*:

uddharedAtmanaatmaanamnaatmaanamavasaadayet |
Atmaivahyaatmanobandhuraatmaivaripuraatmanah || B.G. 6.05

He advises one to keep elevating one's life through one's efforts and that one should never stagnate. He goes on to caution that only oneself can be one's friend in this journey or only oneself can be one's enemy too. This is one of the most important preparations one must undergo. Krishna assures in *Bhagavad Gita* that whatever efforts one puts in for one's spiritual upliftment will never go to waste. He assures that it will carry over to the next birth. And the compassionate Lord even mentions the type of birth he assures for one who has put in some effort in this direction. Please see slokas 6:41 and 6:42 in *Bhagavad Gita*. In these slokas, Lord Krishna Indicates that a jivatma's efforts in the direction of spiritual elevation will assure him a Birth. He will assure a birth in the family of pious affluent people or in the family of spiritually wise people. The idea is that this jivatma can continue to pursue its spiritual efforts, in the next birth, in a very conducive atmosphere.



There is yet another very important factor one should keep in mind. Chapter 8 "Akshara Brahma Yogah" of *Bhagavad Gita*, includes some key slokas. At the end of chapter 7 Lord Krishna praises those who think of God at the time of their death. Arjuna's curiosity is piqued. At the beginning of chapter 8 we find Arjuna directing many questions towards Krishna. One of them is about the significance of the dying person thinking of God at the dying moment. Krishna gives a very revealing answer to this query of Arjuna. Let us have a look at that important verse:

anta-kaale cha maammevasmaranmuktvaakalevaram |
yahprayaatisa mad-bhaavamyaatinaastyatrasanshayah ||

- B.G. 8:05

It says, “Whoever thinks of Me at the time of death, on leaving his/her body, reaches Me. There is no doubt about it.” This is a huge tip from the Lord of Gita. But then, one can have a question “How do I achieve that perfect timing?”. Krishna Himself goes on to advise that one should keep on thinking about Him always (tasmaatsarveshukaaleshumaamanusmara). In this manner, when death happens, automatically one will exit thinking of him.

This is a very important spiritual lesson for ensuring one’s smooth and meaningful death. In thinking of Iswara all the time in our daily actions, our thoughts will also be on Him when the end comes.

Here are a few haunting lines of a very profound poem that I came across on “Death”. You may also enjoy these lines and find them thought provoking:

கடல்தொடு ஆறுகள் கலங்குவதில்லை
தரைதொடு தாரைகள் அழுவதும் இல்லை
நதிமழை போன்றதே விதிஎன்று கண்டும்
மதிகொண்ட மானுடர் மயங்குவதென்ன
பூமிக்கு நாம்ஒரு யாத்திரை வந்தோம்
யாத்திரை தீரும்முன் நித்திரை கண்டோம்
நித்திரை போவது நியதி என்றாலும்
யாத்திரை என்பது தொடர்கதையாகும்

(Rivers which end up in the ocean do not get disturbed
Rain drops that eventually touch the earth do not cry
But why does the human being get deluded
even after observing that fate is like river and rain!
We came on a pilgrimage to the earth,
Before the pilgrimage has ended, we have gone to sleep
Even if going to sleep is (in the middle of the pilgrimage) is stipulated,
Nevertheless, the pilgrimage is an ongoing episode only!)

In summary, in addition to making adequate preparations for the material aspects of life, one should work on achieving emotional equanimity and contentment. One should also exercise tremendous efforts towards one’s spiritual elevation and upliftment. This multi-pronged approach will provide a holistic approach in preparing oneself for death in an exemplary manner.

A Second Chance – Rebirth in Hinduism

Laxmi R Iyer

A man is lying on his death bed. The man, who was once an incredibly successful and highly respected person in his society, has now been reduced to a skeletal frame. He is ghastly to look at, and his every moment passes by in anguish. He is highly dependent on his relatives and well-wishers for every movement of his, which is filled with intense pain. He expresses great horror at what is yet to come and calls out to the Lord in earnest prayer. His relatives are greatly pained by what has become of him and taking care of him has become emotionally and physically strenuous for them as well. They reminisce about the person he once was. Finally, his anguish ends – with death. The relatives wail in great agony.

Unfortunately, this very painful incident is not the story of just one person. Death comes in various faces to every one of us. If this were the way our existence would end, if this is the way we would all cease to be, then everybody's life would be a tragedy. Fortunately, that is not the case. Our Vedic philosophy assures us that death is a passage, and not the end.

Lord Krishna even goes so far as to say in Bhagavad Gita 2.11 that the wise lament neither for the living nor for the dead. Why? Because according to Vedic philosophy, our life is eternal. A person does not cease to exist with his or her death. Instead, as Vedic philosophy informs us, only the body ceases to exist, and the soul is transferred to a different body. A renowned Hindu Guru and scholar, Bhakti Charu Swami even goes so far as to put a positive spin on death. He states that when this body is no longer serving us well, and no longer functioning



as it should, the soul leaves the body, and accepts a fresh body, to start our activities and sadhana all over again. Here is a fresh chance at everything in life.

There are several natural questions that arise from the above – what is the soul? How is it different from the body? Who are we – are we the body or the soul? The answers to these questions are thoroughly addressed in Chapter 2 of the Bhagavad Gita.

The nature of the body and the soul

In Chapter 2, after Arjuna expressed his despondence at fighting his own kinsmen, Krishna began to speak. Krishna argued that since the soul never dies, one should not lament. He then elaborated on the nature of the body and the soul.

In BG 2.13 he said *dehino 'sminyathadehe, kaumaramyauvanamjara, tathadehantharapraptih, dhirastathranamuhyate* – as a person goes through childhood, youth and old age, similarly, he goes through different bodies. A wise man is not bewildered by such change.

Lord Krishna reiterated this point in BG 2.22 with a different analogy: *vasamsjirṇaniyathavihaya, navanigrhṇatinaro 'paraṇi, tathaśariraṇivihayajirṇany, anyanisaṃyatinavanidehi*- As a person puts on new garments, giving up old ones, the soul similarly accepts new material bodies, giving up the old and useless ones.

He started off in BG 2.12 by saying that never was there a time when everyone in the battlefield including Krishna and Arjuna did not exist, and never will there be a time in the future where they will cease to exist. In verses BG 2.17 and 18, Lord Krishna discussed the nature of the body and the soul. He mentioned in BG 2.17 that the body is sure to come to an end, while the soul is indestructible, imperishable, and eternal. He said that of the body, there is no endurance and of the soul, there is no change.

Krishna went on to describe that the soul cannot be cut into pieces, burnt in fire, moistened by water, or withered by the wind. The soul is further unbreakable, insoluble, and cannot be dried. The soul is invisible and immutable.



Krishna used this as his first argument to convince Arjuna to carry out his duty of fighting the Kurukshetra battle.

Rebirth and Karma

When the body dies, the soul takes up the next body based on the past karma. Karma gives rise to an important question that atheists (and others) often ask - why do bad things happen to good people? How can terrible events like the Holocaust and the World Wars be explained if there was a benevolent God? Rabbi Harold Kushner, whose son had progeria, a rare disease that causes very premature ageing, helplessly watched the innocent boy suffer miserably, and die two days after his 14th birthday. He then concluded in his bestseller that God is either omnipotent or all-loving, as an all-loving God will not allow such events to befall people.

In Indian scriptures we learn that every misfortune (or fortune) one faces is due to their karma or past actions. One can ask – as Rabbi Kushner does – when one has been a good person all his life why does he (or she) face misfortune? Why do innocent children face traumatic situations? Rebirth provides an elegant solution to this question. We go through many births, and it may take a future birth to face the results of the current actions.

A beautiful verse in Srimad Bhagavatam (SB 10.14.8) goes as follows:

*tat te 'nukampāṁsu-samīkṣamāṇo
bhuñjānaevātma-kṛtāṁvipākam
hṛd-vāg-vapurbbhirvidadhannamaste
jīvetayomukti-padesadāya-bhāk*

The verse translates as follows - My dear Lord, one who earnestly waits for You to bestow Your causeless mercy upon him, all the while patiently suffering the reactions of his past misdeeds and offering You respectful obeisances with his heart, words, and body, is surely eligible for liberation, for it has become his rightful claim.

One only has to be alive to inherit a father's wealth, in the same way, one only has to tolerate the effects of his past misdeeds, in order to achieve liberation. The key to this verse is acceptance. One has passed many, many, lifetimes before this one, and has a large store of karma to be extinguished. The Lord gives us our karma based on our circumstances. Therefore, it is impossible to compare our situation to anyone else. The best we can do, although very difficult, is to accept.

The human life – A rare opportunity

While acceptance of our circumstances is necessary, we should go beyond this. We must recognize the rare opportunity of human birth that we have been given and utilize our time effectively. The scriptures say that there are 8.4 million species of life, and these are detailed in the *Padma Purana* –

*jalajānava-lakṣāṇisthāvarālakṣa-vimśati
kr̥mayorudra-saṅkhyakāḥpakṣiṇāṁdaśa-lakṣaṇam
trimśal-lakṣāṇipaśavaḥcatur-lakṣāṇimānuṣāḥ*

The verse says there are 900,000 aquatic species, 2 million species of plants and trees, 1.1 million species of insects and reptiles, 1 million species of birds, 3 million species of quadrupeds and 400,000 species of humans. Note that what is translated as species in the scriptures is different from the modern science definition of species.

Out of these, the human life is rarely obtained. The basic functions of life, mainly, eating, sleeping, mating and defending are possible by animals as well. What sets humans apart from other species of life is our unique ability to question our purpose of existence and explore higher reality. The Srimad Bhagavatam verse 11.9.29 mentions that after many, many births one obtains the human form of life. Although this birth is temporary as all else, it allows one to attain the highest perfection. Therefore, the verse encourages everyone to immediately take to spiritual life and start making spiritual endeavor. But the question arises – what will happen to us if we fail?

Rebirth is a second chance - King Bharat's story

In Bhagavad Gita 6.37, Arjuna asks Lord Krishna - what is the fate of that spiritualist who in the beginning takes to the path of self-realization, but then fails due to his attachment to the material world? Does he not fail in both spiritual and material spheres? Lord Krishna, in the following verses dispels this doubt by assuring Arjuna that the unsuccessful yogi will be born in a family or circumstance that will quickly enable him to return to his previous position. In the Srimad Bhagavatam, this point is illustrated with an example.

The Srimad Bhagavatam tells us the story of Bharat Maharaj. Bharat Maharaj was an excellent king and ruled his citizens expertly. During his reign, he was very pious and performed many religious sacrifices. During those times, it was customary for a religious man to renounce his family, leaving the wife with the grown up sons. Such a man would then go to the forest to concentrate on meditation and prayer in preparation for death. In accordance with this, when

Bharat Maharaj grew older, he retired, renounced his family and kingdom, and went to the very auspicious Pulaha Ashrama to meditate on and worship the Lord. There he performed various prayers and austerities, and derived great joy from fixing his mind on the Lord.

One day, after finishing his morning duties, King Bharat sat on the banks of a river. A pregnant doe was drinking water from the river. Suddenly a lion roared, and the doe frightfully leapt into the river. Due to fear, the doe gave birth immediately to a baby deer, and soon died. King Bharat, who was witnessing all this, lifted the baby deer from the river, and brought it to his Ashrama.



Out of great compassion, King Bharat started taking care of the deer, and tending to its needs. In doing so, slowly he started neglecting his religious duties. The irony was that he had left his kingdom and family to concentrate on the Lord. Now, he adopted the deer as a new family member, and was consumed by its care. The Srimad Bhagavatam informs us that this misplaced attachment to the deer was also the result of his past karma.

Finally, when King Bharat died, the deer faithfully stood by him. At death, his mind was fixed on the deer. In Bhagavad Gita 8.6 we are informed that whatever state of mind one has at the time of death, that he will attain in his next life. King Bharat indubitably was reborn as a deer.

Another aspect of the Lord that one must always remember is His compassion. The Lord was not going to let King Bharat's efforts go completely in vain. As a deer, King Bharat had complete memory of his previous life! The deer was very repentant. It left its mother and went to an ashrama. It lived there and ate only dry grass as an austerity, till it died.

The deer was then reborn as the great devotee, Jada Bharat. Jada Bharat's mind was already fixed on the Lord, and he was very determined not to get distracted. So, Jada Bharat pretended to be mad, deaf and dumb in order to avoid any

companionship. This time, when Jada Bharat died, he was liberated forever - his mission was finally successful.

Conclusion

If our existence were to end in death, life would be a tragedy. On the other hand, as we see in the above story, rebirth is an opportunity. An opportunity to be better versions of ourselves, to correct any mistakes we made, and to try and achieve far greater goals than we were able to in our previous lives. While we cannot carry any material possessions with us to our next body, we do carry our spiritual merits as described in BG 6.37, and our karma. It is therefore recommended that we strive for and desire the correct things.

Bhakti Charu Swami remarked “You have lived many, many lifetimes and have fulfilled every desire that you could possibly imagine. Therefore, dedicate this one life to spirituality.” Different religions concur that we are in this world because we sinned and turned our eyes away from God. Rebirth affords us an opportunity to get rid of our accumulated karmas — where every painful experience is seen as expelling the toxins of our bad deeds. Human life affords us an opportunity to devote ourselves to spiritual perfection. And if we fail, in our next life, we will start where we left off.

This world is described as *dukhalayam-ashashvatam* (BG 8.15) - temporary and filled with miseries. However, we can start viewing ourselves as the eternal, imperishable spirit souls who are on a journey to spiritual perfection. And by viewing every incident as a hand of the Lord for progression in this journey, we put a very positive spin on the seemingly bleak and temporary nature of our lives.

I have known the infinite being, who is self-effulgent and beyond all darkness and delusion; knowing Him alone can one be saved from death. There is no other way to immortality.
Svetasvataropanisad, III, 8

‘Reaching the highest perfection and having attained Me – the. Divine – the great-souled ones are no more subject to rebirth, painful. and ephemeral. All the world is subject to return, but after attaining Me, there is no. re-birth.’
(Bhagvada Gita, VIII, 15,16)

Hinduism: A Celebration of Life

Kripa Sridharan

Veneration is Celebration

The Hindu scriptures declare unequivocally that all that is perceived in this universe is the creation of Ishvara. Therefore, it is not surprising that in Hindu culture all forms of life are celebrated. Such a perspective or viewpoint is quite unique to Hinduism and understandably puzzling to non-Hindus.

Celebration implies a deep love and respect for the entity that we want to celebrate. This essentially means that whatever we cherish and want to preserve becomes an object of our veneration. The Hindu thought regards the whole creation as falling into this category. Even though the world or jagat is considered transient and unreal, nevertheless it is given its due place in the Hindu thought process. This is mainly because of the firm belief that every form of existence, animate and inanimate, owes its presence to Ishvara or God or Brahman who is described as stayam, gyanam and anantham or simply put truth, knowledge and bliss.

The idea that everything in this world is nothing but Ishvara is both profound and inspirational. What is the source of this idea and secondly, what are its implications? This article will briefly touch upon these two questions. The answer will help us understand why life is seen as a celebration. The large number of Hindu festivals, pilgrimages and rituals bear ample testimony to the idea of Ishvara's omnipresence. There is no place where He is not.

Pervasive Divine Presence

In a sense, the best way to perceive everything around us is to place it in a spiritual or divine context. This inevitably lends sanctity to all beings and objects and makes us more sensitive to people, situations and objects around us. By way of illustration let me narrate an incident which made a deep impression on me. It exemplified the celebratory aspect writ large in Hindu culture, at least for me.

Once I spent a week in an ashram while attending an introductory course in Vedanta. This was the first time I attended a spiritual camp of

this nature. Other than what I tried to learn about our scriptures that week, what intrigued me was a seemingly unrelated experience. The ashram, which sits on the banks of the Ganges, had two trees, one neem and the other peepal, close to each other. I noticed that very morning the local ladies lovingly worshipped the two trees by placing some flowers near the trees, a little pot of water and some fruits. They concluded their worship with an aarati. This in itself was not that remarkable since tree worship is a fairly common practice in India. What astounded me was when I heard from one of the ashram inmates that a few years back the two trees were married to each other since they seemed so inseparable! A nice wedding ceremony for the trees was arranged with the usual wedding rituals followed by music, dancing and prasād! Such celebration is not possible if people did not instinctively feel that all forms of life ought to be respected and glorified. An average person may not always express it in such terms, but his/her everyday practice certainly epitomizes this fact. It is an indirect acknowledgement of Ishvara's presence all around us. Little wonder that Hindus automatically worship mountains, rivers oceans, animals, trees and so on.

Our scriptures and sages have made it amply clear that whatever we see in this world is nothing but Ishvara. To the people of other faiths who say that they worship only one God, the thoughtful Hindu response is we only

worship God! Everything is Ishvara's manifestation therefore worthy of reverence. This can be said with conviction only if one has full faith in the words of our scriptures. The scriptures can be quoted at length to prove this point but here I will just mention a few.

Scriptural Sources

One of the celebrated texts, the Brahma Sutra which is also regarded as one of the three key foundational books of our philosophy, the other two being the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita (together they are referred to it as Prasthanathraya), at the outset states that Brahman is the only cause of this world (Sutra 2: Janmadasya Yatah). This roughly means that it is from Brahman alone that the origin, sustenance and dissolution of this world takes place. This is, no doubt, a cryptic statement but then aphorisms are usually so. The elaboration of this sutra can be found in the Upanishads. The Brahma Sutra is essentially a distillation of the Upanishadic wisdom and difficult to fathom without the commentaries provided by eminent teachers or acharyas.

The Ishvasya Upanishad loftily proclaims that the entire universe is pervaded by Ishvasya or Bhagavan. The opening mantra proclaims:

Ishvasyamidamsarvam
Yatkim cha jagatyamjagat
Tena tyaktenabhunjitha
Ma grdhahkasyasviddhanam

This verse states that everything in

this jagat is covered by Ishvara. Be it sentient or insentient, subtle or gross, all that we perceive is permeated by Ishvara. This makes everything sacred, and nothing is considered profane. Our scriptures are replete with such references.

All that is perceived, seen or encountered by our sense organs are enveloped by God. Ishvara is said to exist in everything. The whole creation that is manifest before us is clothed in Bhagavan's glory. This also means that everything in this jagat emanates from one complete whole. Ishvara not only created the universe He is also inseparable from it. Therefore, it is also naïve to claim ownership of anything on this earth including our own body. To think otherwise is sheer folly. Of course, we can enjoy what is God-given and celebrate it but we should not treat any object or form of life as belonging to us exclusively. Everything should be used in a spirit of "reverent renunciation" without any greed or covetousness.

Similarly, the Chhandogya Upanishad has a famous passage in the third chapter that says 'sarvamkhalvidam brahma', all is Brahman, and everything has emanated from that source. Everything that is cognized by us in this material world is verily just that and we should meditate upon that with a calm and serene mind.

Although very profound this may sometimes sound a bit abstract. In order to make it more comprehensible we can look at the Vibhuti Yoga or

Chapter Ten of the Bhagavad Gita where in Lord Krishna elaborates His majestic glory in all its manifest and unmanifest forms to Arjuna:

AhamatmaGudakeshasarva-
bhutashayas-thithah,
Ahamadischamadhyamcha bhutanam
antaevacha.

"I am the origin of all, and everything evolves from me"... I am the self or the divine life spark existent in the hearts of all beings and I also happen to be the beginning, middle and end of all beings".

Furthermore, Lord Krishna provides a representative sample of the particulars of His divine manifestation to Arjuna in following terms: He says among the Vedas He is the Sama Veda, among the immovable things Himalayas, among the rivers the Ganges, among the alphabets the letter A, among the metres the Gayatri, among the seasons Spring and even adds for good measure, that He is the gambling of the fraudulent! In short, He is the seed of all beings, and nothing can exist without Him. Further, in Chapter Eleven of the Gita, Lord Krishna provides a vision of his universal form or Vishvarupa Darshanam to Arjuna. Nothing is left out of this all-inclusive vision of Ishvara.

We can also glimpse the same in Sri Rudram which not only describes Ishvara as the lord of all virtuous things but also of very many negative things as well! This is understandable since He

is the absolute master of everything in this universe, so nothing falls outside His purview.

Implications:

Once we embrace the idea that all that is here is Ishvara in one form or another then it becomes easy for us not to despise anything or anybody. We are in the presence of visible form of Bhagavan, and one way of appreciating this is by celebrating life as well as fulfilling certain obligations. Our scriptures lay down certain duties for us in the form of panchamahayagyas that we should perform. It is a kind of thanksgiving to all the presiding deities, our ancestors, fellow human beings, animals and nature and to our rich scriptural knowledge which has been so lovingly handed down to us by the sages. Living in conformity with nature and respecting all forms of life is emphasized and valued in our tradition. This finds overt expression in the number of festivals we celebrate. The celebrations are a way of honouring everything around us.

There is yet another value of importance that finds repeated mention in our scriptures. It is ahimsa or non-violence or even non-injury to others in thought, speech or action. The Hindu view of life holds non-violence as the ultimate dharma - ahimsa paramo dharmah. Since Ishvara pervades everything, we cannot be callous in our treatment of any life form. Such an attitude is not only good for others but is equally a benefit to us since we are all highly

interdependent in Ishvara's order. So not merely altruism but enlightened self-interest should tell us to be gentle to all creatures big and small. That said, despite what our scriptures and sages prescribe there is unfortunately a fair amount of violence in Hindu society. Dharma or righteousness is transgressed many a times with impunity. Although this is not the norm, we should acknowledge and address the issue of violence before it does get out of control. Since one of the foundational principles of Hinduism is ahimsa, along with truth and peace, we would do well to remind people that if they firmly believe that Ishvara permeates everything subtle or gross, sentient or insentient then our behaviour should reflect this understanding. It should not be at variance with it.

Conclusion:

The Hindu world view which considers everything as Ishvara's manifestation is essentially shaped both by our instinct and upbringing which bear the stamp of our glorious scriptural legacy. Most elders overtly or covertly impart this message to their children. This finds expression in the numerous festivals and rituals that we celebrate. The symbolism behind the celebrations may not be evident to everyone, but the underlying message is always to respect every form of life. Our scriptures exhort us to recognize the divinity and the presence of the infinite in and through life. It is up to us to feel the splendour of Ishvara all around us and revel in it.

மறுபிறவிக் கோவில்

திருமதி ராஜலக்ஷ்மி சுந்தர்

மறுபிறவி இல்லாதவர்கள் மட்டுமே சென்று வழிபடமுடியும் என்ற தலப்பெருமையைக் கொண்ட அபூர்வ சிறப்புடைய கோவில்தான் தேப்பெருமாநல்லூர் விஸ்வநாத சுவாமி திருக்கோவில். அக்கோவிலின் தல புராணத்தைப் பற்றியும் தனிச்சிறப்புகளைப் பற்றியும் இக்கட்டுரையில் காண்போம்.

மறுபிறவி அற்ற மோக்ஷ நிலையை அடைவதே ஒவ்வொரு உயிரின் குறிக்கோளாகவும் கருதப்படுகிறது. அத்தகைய உயரிய நிலையை அருளும் தலமாக புராணக்காலத் தொடர்புடைய தேப்பெருமாநல்லூர் கோவில் விளங்குவதாகக் கூறப்படுகிறது. மறுபிறவி என்று ஒன்று இல்லாதோர் மட்டுமே இக்கோவிலுக்குள் செல்லமுடியும். மற்ற யாராக இருந்தாலும் இக்கோவிலுக்கு செல்ல முடியாத அளவிற்கு பெருந்தடைகள் வரும் என நம்பப்படுகிறது. ஆகவே இக்கோவிலுக்குள் சென்று ஒருவரால் தரிசிக்க முடிந்தால் அவருக்கு மறுபிறப்பில்லை என்பது ஐதீகமாக உள்ளது.

இந்தக் கோவில், தஞ்சைமாவட்டம் கும்பகோணத்தில் இருந்து திருநாகேஸ்வரம் வழியாக சுமார் 7 கிமீ தொலைவில் உள்ளது. இக்கோவிலில் விஸ்வநாத சுவாமி வேதாந்தநாயகி சமேதராக அருள்புரிகிறார். இக்கோவில் ராஜராஜ சோழனால் கட்டப்பட்டதாகக் கூறப்படுகிறது.

இக்கோவிலுக்கு அவ்வளவு எளிதாக சென்றுவிட முடியாது, ஒருவரின் விதிப்பயனே இக்கோவிலுக்கு சென்று தரிசனம் செய்யமுடியுமா முடியாதா என்பதை நிர்ணயிக்கும் என்பது நம்பிக்கை. பிறவாமையை தரும் ஐதீகம் எவ்வாறு வந்தது என்பதற்கான பின்புலத்தை கீழ்வரும் பத்திகளில் காண்போம்.

இக்கோவிலின் தனித்தன்மையான அமைப்பு
மிகவும் தொன்மை வாய்ந்த இந்தக் கோவில் மற்ற கோவில்களிலிருந்து பலவிதங்களில் மாறுபடுகிறது



என்கின்றனர். இங்குள்ள தெய்வங்களும் சன்னிதிகளும் மாறுபட்ட கோலத்தில் காட்சியளிக்கின்றன.

இங்குள்ள சிவலிங்கத்தின் மீது வருடத்தின் 365 நாட்களும் அதிகாலை சூரிய ஒளி படர்கிறது. அதற்கு ஏற்ப கிழக்கு வாசலில் சாளரம் அமைக்கப்பட்டுள்ளது. சிவலிங்கத்தை மரகதக் கல்லால் ஆன ஆபரணம் அலங்கரிப்பதால் சூரிய ஒளியும் தீபாராதனை ஒளியும் சேர்ந்து கர்பக்கிரகமே தகதகவென ஜொலிக்கிறது என்கிறார்கள்.



பிரதானக் கோவிலின் உள்ளே சிவலிங்கம் 22,000 ருத்திராட்சங்களை கொண்ட கவசத்தால் அலங்கரிக்கப்பட்டுள்ளது. இங்கு லிங்கத்திற்கு அர்ச்சனையும் ஏகமுக ருத்திராட்சத்தில் தொடங்கி பன்னிரண்டுமுக ருத்திராட்சத்துடன் முடிகிறது. பிரசாதமாக சிவனுக்கு அணிவிக்கப்பட்ட ஆபரணத்திலிருந்து எடுக்கப்படும் ருத்திராட்சமே அளிக்கப்படுகிறது. இவையெல்லாம் இக்கோவிலுக்கே உண்டான தனிச்சிறப்பாக சொல்லப்படுகிறது.

ருத்திராட்ச அர்ச்சனை எவ்வாறு வழக்கில் வந்தது என்பதற்கான பின்கதையை பின்னர் காண்போம்.

கோவிலின் மகா மண்டபத்தில் ஒரு தனிசன்னிதியில் தெற்குதிசை நோக்கி அமர்ந்து அருள்புரிகிறாள் அம்பாள் வேதாந்தநாயகி. அவள் தன் வலது காலை முன்னோக்கி எடுத்துவைத்து வருவதுபோலவும், நம்முடன் ஏதோ பேச முற்படுவதுபோல குவிந்த அதரங்களுடனான தோற்றத்தில் எழுந்தருளியுள்ளாள். வேதநாயகியான அவள் நமக்கு வேதத்தின் உட்பொருளை போதிக்கும் பாவனையில் அவ்வாறு இருப்பதாக சொல்லப்படுகிறது. இத்தகைய தோற்றத்தில் அம்பாளை வேறு எந்தக் கோவிலிலும் காணமுடியாது என்கிறார்கள்.

இக்கோவிலில் உள்ள நவக்கிரகங்கள் கூட தங்களின் வழக்கமான திசைகளை மாற்றி வெவ்வேறு திசைகளில் அமர்ந்துள்ளனராம். கோவிலின் கன்னி மூலையில் அமைந்துள்ள கபால விநாயகர் சன்னிதியில் விநாயகரின் கண்கள் யானையின் கண்கள் போல பக்கவாட்டில் இல்லாமல் மனிதக்கண்கள்போல முகத்தின் முன்னே இருக்கின்றன. மேலும் இடுப்பில் கபால மாலையையும் அணிந்த நிலையில் காட்சியளிக்கிறார். இதுவும் வேறெங்குமில்லாத தனிச் சிறப்புதான்.

இப்படி அனைத்து தெய்வங்களும் ஆகமவிதிக்கு அப்பாற்பட்டு வெவ்வேறு விதத்தில் அமைந்துள்ளது இக்கோவிலின் சிறப்பம்சம் ஆகும்.

மேலும், இக்கோவிலின் கர்ப்பக்கிரகம் தேன்கலந்த சுண்ணாம்பால் கட்டப்பட்டது என்றும் வரலாறு கூறுகிறது.

இங்கு தரிசனம் செய்யும் பக்தர்களுக்கு பிரசாதமாக வில்வ இலையும் ருத்திராட்சமும் தருகிறார்கள் என்பது இக்கோவிலின் மற்றுமொரு சிறப்பம்சம் எனலாம்.

இக்கோவிலைச் சார்ந்த அதிசய நிகழ்வுகள்

நாகம் ஒன்று வருடத்திற்கு ஒருமுறை இக்கோவிலுக்கு வந்து சிவனுக்கு வில்வ இலைகளைச் சொரிந்து, உரித்த தனது தோலை மாலையாக அணிவித்து அர்ச்சனை செய்து செல்வதாக சொல்கிறார்கள். இச்செய்தி ஊடகங்களிலும் பகரப்பட்டுள்ளதாம். குறிப்பாக 2010 ஆம் ஆண்டு சூரிய கிரகணம் அன்று, நாகம் ஒன்று தலவிருக்ஷமான வில்வமரத்தில் இருந்து வில்வ இலைகளை மீண்டும் மீண்டும் எடுத்து சென்று சிவன் மீது சொரிந்ததை கோவிலுக்கு வந்த பக்தர்கள் பலரும் பார்த்திருக்கின்றனர். இந்த நிகழ்வு காணொளியாகவும் புகைப்படங்களாகவும் அப்போது பல நாளிதழ்களில் வெளியானது எனச் சொல்கிறார்கள். இது உலகில் வேறெங்கும் நடக்காத அதிசயமாக கருதப்படுகிறது.

மேலும், இங்குள்ள அம்பாள் சன்னிதியில் சில வருடங்களுக்கு முன், ஏற்றி வைத்த தீபம் காலை முதல் மாலை வரை அணைவதும் பின் தானாக எரிவதுமாக இருந்த அதிசய நிகழ்வையும் அங்குள்ள பொதுமக்கள் திரண்டு சென்று கண்டு வழிபட்டு மெய்சிலிர்த்ததாக சொல்கிறார்கள்.

மறு பிறப்பறுக்கும் தலமாக மாறிய கதை

இக்கோவிலில் சனிபகவான் காக்கை வாகனத்துடன் இடக்கையை இடுப்பில் வைத்து ஓய்யாரமாக மேற்கு நோக்கி சிவனை பார்ப்பதுபோல் அமைக்கப்பட்டுள்ளார். இதன் பின்கதை பின்வருமாறு.

ஒருமுறை சிவனை சனிபகவான் பிடிப்பதற்கான நாழிகை நெருங்கிவிட்டது. தன் கடமையை செய்ய சனிபகவான் சிவனை நோக்கி வருவதாக அம்பாளிடம் சொன்னார். அவள் ஈஸ்வரனை சனியிடம் இருந்து மறைக்க முற்பட்டு அவரிடம் ஒரு மரத்தின் பின் நிற்க சொன்னாள். ஈஸ்வரனும் அவ்வாறே செய்தார். அங்கு வந்த சனிபகவான் சிவன் மரத்தின் பின் நிற்பதை அறிந்து அங்கேயே மௌனமாக நின்றார். அவர் சிவனை பிடிக்க வேண்டிய காலம் கழிந்ததும் அங்கிருந்து நகர முற்பட்டார். அம்பாள் அப்போது அவரிடம் சிவனை பிடிக்காமல் அவர் கடமையில் தோல்வியடைந்ததாகச் சொன்னாள். அதைக்கேட்ட சனீஸ்வரன் ,உலகையே ஆட்டுவிக்கும் அந்த ஈஸ்வரனையே மரத்தின்பின் ஒளிந்து கொள்ள செய்த அந்த நேரமே தான் அவரை ஆட்கொண்ட நேரம் என்று ஆணவத்துடன் சொன்னார். அதைக்கேட்டு கோபத்துடன் வெளிப்பட்ட சிவபெருமான் மகாமந்திர பைரவர் தோற்றம் எடுத்து சனிபகவானை இரண்டாகக் கிழித்தார். அப்போது சனிபகவான் ஈஸ்வரனைப் பார்த்து தாங்கள் வகுத்துக் கொடுத்த விதிகளின்படியே நான் இயங்குகிறேன். நான் இல்லயென்றால் பூலோகத்தில் அக்கிரமமும் ஆணவமும் அநியாயமும் பெருகிவிடும் என்று கூறினார். தான் ஆணவத்துடன் பேசியதற்காக மன்னிப்பும் வேண்டினார். அதை ஏற்ற சிவபெருமான்

இருகூறான சனீஸ்வரநின் உடலை இணைத்து ஒன்றாக்கி அருள்புரிந்தார். உக்கிரமாக காட்சியளித்த சிவனை நான்கு வேதங்களையும் சொல்லி சாந்தப்படுத்தினாள் அம்பாள். அதனாலேயே அவள் இங்கு வேதாந்தநாயகி என்று பெயர் பெற்றாள்.

அவ்வேளையில் அங்கு வந்த நாரத முனிவர், சனிபகவானை இரண்டாகக் கிழித்த பாவச்செயலால் இனி சிவனால் விஸ்வரூபம் எடுக்கமுடியாது எனக் கூறினார். ஈஸ்வரன் பன்னிரண்டு ஜோதிர் லிங்கங்களையும் ஒரு சேர தரிசித்தால் மட்டுமே அப்பாவம் நீங்கும் எனவும் கூறினார். உடனே பன்னிரண்டு ஜோதிர் லிங்கங்களையும் இத்தலத்திற்கு வரவழைத்தார் சிவன். ஒரு ஜோதிர் லிங்கத்தை தரிசித்தாலே எத்தகைய பாவமும் சாபமும் நீங்கக் கூடிய சிறப்பு உண்டு. அப்படியிருக்க பன்னிரண்டு ஜோதிர் லிங்கங்களும் ஒருசேர எழுந்தருளிய இத்தலம் மிகவும் சக்திவாய்ந்த அதிசயதலம் என்றார் நாரதர். அத்தகைய பேறுபெற்ற புண்ணிய தலமானதால், பல பிறவிகளாக புண்ணியம் செய்தவர்களும் மறுபிறவி இல்லாதவர்களும் மட்டுமே இங்கு வந்து தரிசிக்க முடியும் என்றார்.

இப்படியாகத்தான் இத்திருத்தலம் மறுபிறப்பை நீக்கும்தலம் என பெயர் பெற்றது.

அகத்திய முனிவராலேயே நுழைய முடியாத அருங்கோவில் இக்கோவிலின் சிறப்பை அறிந்த அகத்திய முனிவர் விஸ்வநாத சுவாமியை தரிசிக்க விரும்பினார். ஆனால் அவருக்கு மறுபிறப்பு உண்டு என்பதை அறிந்த சிவபெருமான் அவரை கோவிலுக்கு வரவிடாமல் தடுக்க முற்பட்டார். அகத்தியரை வரவிடாமல் தடுக்குமாறு மகரந்த மகரிஷிக்கு ஆணையிட்டார். அவரும் அகத்தியர் நடந்துவரும் பாதையில் அவரை நடக்கவிடாமல் பாதை முழுவதும் மகரந்த மலர்களாக மாறி பாதையை அடைத்துவிட்டார். அது மகரந்த மகரிஷியின் செயல்தான் என உணர்ந்த அகத்தியர் கடுங்கோபம் கொண்டு அவர் முகம் யாளிமுகமாக மாறிவிட சாபமிட்டார். யாளி முகத்துடன் மகரந்த மகரிஷி சிவபெருமானின் கட்டளைப்படியே தான் நடந்து கொண்டதாக சொல்லி சாப விமோசனம் கேட்டார். மனமிரங்கிய அகத்தியர் அவரிடம், இவ்வுலகில் யாருமே இதுவரை பூஜை செய்யாத ஒரு பொருளைக் கொண்டு சிவனுக்கு பூஜை செய்தால் சாபம் நீங்கும் எனச்சொல்லி திரும்பி சென்று விட்டார்.

ஆனானப்பட்ட மாமுனிவரான அகத்திய மஹரிஷியால் கூட தன் வினைப் பயனை மீறி இக்கோவிலுக்குள் வரமுடியவில்லை என்பதே புராணம். ஆகவே, யாராக இருந்தாலும் மறுபிறப்பு இருக்குமானால் இக்கோவிலுக்கு வர இயலாது என்பது நம்பிக்கை.

மகரந்த ரிஷியால் வழக்கில் வந்த ருத்ராட்ச பூஜை

அகத்திய முனிவரின் சாபத்தில் இருந்து விடுபட மகரந்த மகரிஷி தேப்பெருமானல்லூர் ஸ்ரீ விஸ்வநாத சுவாமி ஆலயத்திற்கு வந்து யாளிமுகத்துடன் ஒவ்வொரு நாளும் ஒவ்வொருவகை மலரால் சிவனுக்கு பூஜை செய்தார். இவ்வாறு ஐம்பது ஆண்டுகள் செய்ததாக சொல்கிறது தலப் புராணம். ஒருநாள் அவர் கழுத்தில் அணிந்திருந்த ருத்திராட்சமாலை அறுந்து சிவலிங்கத்தின் மேல் விழுந்தது. உடனே லிங்கம் ஜோதியாக ஒளிர்ந்ததைக் கண்ட மகரந்த மகரிஷி, ஒரு முக ருத்ராட்சத்திலிருந்து

பதினான்கு முகம் கொண்ட ருத்ராட்சம் வரை லிங்கத்தின் மேல் சொரிந்து அர்ச்சனை செய்தார். அவர்முன் இறைவன் எழுந்தருள் மகரிஷி சாப விமோசனமும் பெற்றார் என்பது தான் பின்கதை.

அதனால்தான் இத்தல ஈஸ்வரனுக்கு தினமும் ருத்திராட்ச பூஜை செய்து, பிரதோஷம் மகாசிவராத்திரி போன்ற சிவனுக்குரிய சிறப்புநாட்களில் ருத்ராட்ச கவசமும் சாற்றப்படுவதாக சொல்கிறார்கள்.

மறு பிறவியை போக்கும் விஸ்வநாதர்
ஈசன் அடிபோற்றி! எந்தை அடிபோற்றி!
தேசன் அடி போற்றி! சிவன் சேவடி போற்றி!
நேயத்தே நின்ற நிமலன் அடிபோற்றி!
மாயப் பிறப்பு அறுக்கும் மன்னன் அடி போற்றி!
சீர் ஆர் பெருந்துறை நம் தேவன் அடி போற்றி!

என்று மாணிக்க வாசகர் பாடியதற்கு ஏற்ப சிவபெருமான் இந்தத் தேப்பெருமாநல்லூர் திருக்கோவிலில் விஸ்வநாத சுவாமியாய் வேதாந்தநாயகி சமேதராய் எழுந்தருளி, இந்த மாயப்பிறவியில் இருந்து மோட்சம்பெற்று மீண்டும் பிறவா நிலையை அடைய நமக்கு அருள்புரிகிறார்.

மேலும், மறுபிறப்பற்றவர் மட்டுமே இத்தல இறைவனை தரிசிக்க இயலும் என்பதால் நாம் அனைவரும் புண்ணிய காரியங்கள் பல செய்து இதுவரை அறிந்தும் அறியாமலும் செய்தபாவங்களுக்கு பரிகாரம் தேடுவோம். தேப்பெருமாநல்லூர் சென்று விஸ்வநாதரையும் வேதாந்தநாயகியையும் தரிசித்து மறுபிறவியற்று நற்கதி அடைவோம்.

*As are childhood, youth and old age to the soul embodied
in this body, so also is to me the attaining of another
body. Wise men are not deluded thereat.*

Bhagavad Gita, II 13.

*He, the Self-existent Being, is verily of the nature of Bliss.
Having attained this Bliss one becomes blessed.*

Taittiriyanopanishad, II, 7

Temple of Moksha

Mrs Rajalakshmi Sundar

Theperumanallur Vishwanatha Swamy Temple, in Kumbakonam, Tamilnadu, is a temple of intrigue with some fascinating legends and stories associated with it. It is famously known for the belief that only people who do not have any more rebirths can visit and worship there. This article talks about the various stories and beliefs associated with this temple and its many distinctive features that make it unique.

Attaining the transcendent state of moksha, getting released from the cycle of death and rebirth, is considered the goal of every living being. It is said that the Vishwanatha temple at Theperumanallur, is a place that bestows such a boon to those who visit it.

It is believed that one's destiny determines whether one can visit this temple and have darshan or not. Temple legend says that only those who do not have another birth, can enter this temple. Someone who is destined to be reborn may face many hurdles preventing them from visiting

this temple. Therefore, it is surmised that if one can visit this temple then they will not be reborn.

This temple is close to Kumbakonam in Tanjore district of Tamilnadu. Lord Vishwanatha Swami along with Goddess Vedanta Nayaki grace this temple. The temple is said to have been built by Rajaraja Chola.

The rest of this article talks about the temple's unique features and various legends associated with it and the story behind the current belief that it is a temple of no rebirth.

Fascinating details about the temple deities

This very ancient temple differs from other temples in many ways. The deities and shrines here are displayed differently than what is norm in other temples apparently.

A window has been set in the Eastern door of the temple in such a way that the rising Sun's rays bathes the Shiva Lingam in the Garbhakgraha (sanctum sanctorum) every single day of the year.

The whole inner shrine supposedly, shimmers with the sunlight and the aarthi light falling on the emerald stones adorning the Shiva Lingam.

The Shiva Lingam is adorned with a shield of 22,000 Rudrakshas. The Archana (ceremonial worship, usually offering flowers to the deity) for the main deity here, begins with single-faced Rudrakshas and progresses and ends with twelve-faced Rudrakshas. Rudraksha is also offered as Prasad to the devotees, which is a unique feature of this temple. Further on in the article, we will see the back story of how Rudraksha Archana came into being at this temple.

Goddess Vedanta Nayaki sits facing South in a separate sanctum in the Mahamandapam of the temple. She is seen with Her right leg forward, and Her mouth slightly opened as if She is trying to speak to us. It is said that She is depicted that way to show that She is teaching us the essence of the Vedas. Admittedly, the Goddess is not seen in this form in any other temple anywhere else.

Another interesting feature to note is that the Navagrahas in this temple sit in directions different from what are traditionally their positions.

The deity of Lord Ganesha at this temple is depicted with human eyes which are in the front instead of the conventional elephant eyes. He is also seen wearing a kabala garland (garland of skulls) on his waist, which is unique.

Temple history says that the inner sanctum of this temple has been coated with a mixture of lime and honey. Vilva (Bael) leaves and Rudraksha are offered as prasad to the devotees who visit here.

Miracles at this temple

It is said that once a year a king cobra visits the temple and worships Lord Vishwanatha. It sheds its skin and adorns the Linga with it as a garland, brings Vilva leaves from the temple's Vilva tree (the sacred Bael tree) and showers it on Him and worships Him. This fascinating event has apparently been published in print media and also the video has been telecast in local news channels and well documented. In particular, on January 15, 2010, a king cobra appeared in the sanctum sanctorum and stayed from the beginning till the end of a solar eclipse. Many devotees who came to the temple witnessed this entrancing occurrence and it was covered by many newspapers and magazines and local tv, through videos and photographs. It is considered a miracle that has not been witnessed in any other Shiva temple in the world.

One other miracle that the local people recount is that a few years ago, the oil lamp inside the Goddess's shrine kept getting extinguished and then relighting by itself from dawn to dusk. Local people flocked to the temple and worshipped the Goddess and witnessed the phenomenon.

Story behind the temple's unique reputation

In this temple, Sanishwar (Saturn) is depicted sitting on a raven as his vehicle, with a hand placed on his waist and looking at Lord Shiva towards the west, apparently with an arrogant expression. The story goes that once upon a time, Lord Shiva was destined to be affected by the planet Saturn (Lord Sanishwar). Lord Sani told the Goddess Shakthi that he was on his way to afflict Lord Shiva as that was his duty. She tried to save Lord Shiva from Sani and asked Him to conceal Himself behind a tree. Lord Shiva did the same. Sanishwar who came there knew that Lord Shiva was standing behind the tree and waited silently. When the time for Sanishwar to affect Lord Shiva had passed, he started to leave. Goddess Shakthi then told him that he failed in his duty by not afflicting Lord Shiva. On hearing that, Sanishwar arrogantly said that, the time when he made the Lord of the whole Universe, Lord Shiva Himself, to hide behind the tree, was the time he had successfully affected the Lord. Hearing that Lord Shiva got angry and took the form of Mahamandra Bhairava and tore Lord Sani into two.

Goddess Shakthi then recited the Vedas to Lord Shiva and pacified Him. Hence the name given to Her in this temple, Vedanta Nayaki. An appeased Lord Shiva united the two halves of Sanishwar's body who then apologised for his arrogance.

Sage Narada arrived there and told Lord Shiva that because of the sinful

act of tearing apart Sanishwar, He will no longer be able to take the Vishwaroop (Universal Form). Only if He has the darshan of all the twelve Jyotir lingams (The radiant form of Lord Shiva) together in one place will He be absolved of His sin. Lord Shiva immediately brought the twelve Jyotir lingams to this spot where the temple is now located. It was then that Sage Narada proclaimed that this place where all the twelve Jyothir lingams appeared together is an extremely powerful and miraculous location and it has the special power to get rid of the sins and curses of anyone who visited it. Sage Narada then went on to declare further that it is such an auspicious and holy place that, only those who have accumulated good karma in many births and who do not have any more births will be able to visit this place.

That is how Theperumanallur Sri Viswanatha Swamy Temple earned the reputation as the Temple of no rebirth.

Sage Agasthiya's visit to the temple

Knowing the beauty of this temple, Sage Agasthiya wanted to visit and worship Lord Vishwanatha Swamy. But knowing that he had reincarnation in his destiny, Lord Shiva wanted to prevent him from coming to the temple. He ordered Sage Makaranta to stop him from coming. Sage Magarantha proceeded to block the path of Sage Agasthiya by covering it with an abundance of Magarantha flowers. Realizing that it was the work of Makarantha Maharishi, Agasthiyar

got angry and cursed him to have his face turned into Yali (a mythical creature). Makaranta Maharishi then apologised and explained that he had only followed the orders of Lord Shiva and asked for absolution. A distraught Sage Agasthiya told him that the curse would be removed if he did puja to Lord Shiva with an object that no one in this world had ever used for puja before.

Even the blessed Sage Agasthiya Maharishi could not enter this temple since he had more rebirths in his destiny, says the Temple lore.

How Rudraksha puja came into practise at this temple

To get rid of the curse of Sage Agasthiya, Makaranta Maharishi came to Theperumanallur Sri Viswanatha Swamy Temple and worshiped Lord Shiva every day with every type of flower that existed in this world. Legend says that he did that for fifty years. One day the Rudraksha garland he was wearing around his neck broke and fell on the Shiva Lingam. Immediately the Lingam glowed brightly. Seeing that,

Makaranta Maharishi started doing puja to the Lingam starting from single-faced Rudraksha upto fourteen-faced Rudraksha. Lord Shiva then appeared in front of him and he got salvation. It is believed that that is the reason why Rudraksha Puja is performed daily to Lord Shiva and He is adorned with the Rudraksha Kavasa on special days like Pradosham and Maha Shivratri.

Liberation from the cycle of rebirth

It is believed that Lord Shiva as Vishwanatha Swamy and Goddess Shakthi as Vedanta Nayaki, in this temple of Theppurumanallur, bless the worshippers to get moksha from this mystical birth and reach the state of no reincarnation.

Hence the surmise is, growing our good karma by focusing on doing good deeds, thinking good thoughts and seeking reparation for the mistakes committed so far, would be the way to successfully visit Theperumanallur Lord Viswanatha Swami at the Temple of no rebirth and get liberated from the cycle of birth.

*The self is worth knowing and realizing – the ultimate aim
Arise, awake, realize the self, having approached the
excellent teachers,
Do ye meditate upon the self alone.
God speed you in your journey beyond the darkness of
ignorance.*

Upanishads.

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

a 1			b						
			2						e
3						d			
			4			c			
5									
		6							

ACROSS:

- Which character from the Upanishad visited Lord Yama to question him about Death? (9)
- According to Hindu mythology, which demon periodically swallows up the sun to cause solar eclipse? (4)
- What Dharma is known as the noble Dharma in Hinduism (4)
- Who is the Hindu God of Death? (4)
- This means 'big' or 'great' in Sanskrit. (4)
- Which son of Vayu – the Wind God – was about to eat the Sun mistaking it for a fruit?

DOWN:

- Which Avatar of Vishnu repeatedly saved his devotee, Prahlada, from being killed by his father? (9)
- Which demon was killed by Lord Vishnu in his Varaha avatar? (10)
- This three-letter word means 'unborn' in Sanskrit. It is also the name of Dasaratha's father and Lord Rama's grandfather. (3)
- This two-letter word means 'who?' in Sanskrit. But in the Brahmanas this interrogative pronoun was given the status of a deity. (2)
- Who is the goddess of death in Hinduism? (6)

Answers @ page 64

Story for Children (Adapted by Dr. Neelam Aggarwal)

Nachiketa and Yama

The Katha Upanishad (Kathopanishad) relates the story of Nachiketa and Yama. The narrative is in the form of a dialogue about the nature of atman and the mysteries of life and death.

Nachiketa was the son of the sage Vājashravas also known as Uddalaka. Vajashravas desired to obtain gifts from the gods, and to that end, he decided to perform the Viswajit Yagna, the fire ritual for world conquest. In this sacrificial ritual, the performer is required to give away his wealth. Nachiketa watched with interest as his father donated his cows. The young lad was surprised to notice that his father was giving away only the old cows which were unable to give milk. Although young, he was a sincere and intelligent boy with a pure heart and he felt that donating useless cows was not the correct thing to do.

Nachiketa knew that this yagna required Vajashravas to give away all that he owned, so he repeatedly asked his father to whom he would give him away. After all, in this yagna, one has to give up all that one possesses and a son belongs to one's father. Vajashravas lost his temper at the repeated questioning and angrily burst out, "I will give you to Yama, the God of Death."

Nachiketa decided he should heed the words of his father and set off for the kingdom of Death. His father was very sad but had no choice but to honour his word hence he allowed the boy to go. When he reached the abode of Yama, Nachiketa learnt that Yama was not at home, so he waited for him for three days and three nights without food or water. When Yama returned, he was very distressed



that he had kept a Brahmin waiting for so long without any hospitality being offered to him. He welcomed Nachiketa and because he wanted to make amends, requested him to ask for three boons.

As his first boon, Nachiketa asked Yama to let his father's anger and anxiety about him disappear and to welcome him back when he returned to earth. For his second boon, he asked that he be taught the correct way of conducting the fire ritual so that he may experience heavenly and blissful joy. Yama immediately granted these boons. He assured Nachiketa that his father would henceforth be able to spend his life in peace and joy. Yama also explained the processes of the science of the inner fire which bestows heaven. As his third and final boon, Nachiketa asked Yama to enlighten him about the mysteries of life and death and whether there is indeed a life beyond death. Yama was hesitant about this boon and tried to dissuade Nachiketa by telling him that this was a complex issue which even the gods were not fully clear about. He offered the boy boundless wealth and worldly possessions but Nachiketa would not change his mind. He renounced the pleasures offered to him and said he only longed to know the ultimate truth about the soul and about life after death.

Finally, Yama was convinced of Nachiketa's worthiness and shared with him the ultimate truth of the destiny of the soul. He explained the nature of the real Self, which lives on after the body dies. The Soul is formless, all-pervading, and immortal: it is smaller than the smallest and greater than the largest. One must distinguish the Atma from the body and seek to understand it. The body is the chariot, intelligence is the driver, the senses are the horses, the conscience the rein and the Atma, which is superior to body, mind and senses is the lord of the chariot. This Self is inextricably linked to Brahman, the super consciousness, the highest spirit and the universe's life force. When one realises Brahman through self-awareness, one attains Moksha. Until then, one remains entangled in the cycle of rebirths. The path to realisation is a long and arduous one but the wise aspire to attain that goal.

Nachiketa returned to his father after acquiring the learning and wisdom from Yama. Because of his faith, his fearlessness, his rejection of material desires, and his sensibility, Nachiketa is regarded as a prominent figure in Hinduism.

*This self cannot be cut, nor burnt, nor wetted, nor dried.
It is changeless, all-pervading, unmoving, immovable
and eternal.*

Bhagavad Gita, II, 24.

Story for Children (Adapted by Dr. Neelam Aggarwal)

Prahlad and Hiranyakashyapa

The Bhagavat Purana relates the story of a king named Hiranyakashyapa who retreated to the Himalayas and performed many years of arduous penance. Lord Brahma was pleased with him and offered to grant him whatever boon he sought. Hiranyakashyapa promptly asked for a boon which practically made him immortal: that he would not die either during the day or night, neither indoors nor outdoors, neither on the earth nor the sky, not at the hands of man or animal, and by no weapon made of metal or wood or stone. Once the boon was granted, Hiranyakashyapa started to consider himself invincible and the undisputed lord of the earth. He declared he should be worshipped as God, and ruthlessly unleashed a reign of terror killing those who did not acknowledge his supremacy.

Hiranyakashyapa had a son named Prahlad who was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu. When Prahlad was to be born, the divine sage Narad had protected his mother, the wife of Hiranyakashyapa. The unborn baby had imbibed the teachings of Narad. As he grew older, Prahlad would constantly chant Vishnu's Name.

Obviously Hiranyakashyapa became upset and eventually enraged at his son's devotion to Vishnu. Initially he tried to cajole, persuade and influence Prahlad against Lord Vishnu but he totally failed and Prahlad's devotion to Lord Vishnu remained unshakeable. In a fit of angry egoism, Hiranyakashyapa decided to kill his own son. He ordered that a maddened elephant be brought to trample Prahlad underfoot. Lo and behold, the enraged elephant was unable to crush the boy. Then the king ordered the boy to be thrown over a precipice, but instead of a painful death, Prahlad dropped gently upon the grass. The king tried various means such as boiling oil, starvation, throwing into a well, etc but Prahlada

remained unscathed as Lord Vishnu was protecting his devotee.

As a last resort, Hiranyakashyapa called upon his demoness sister, Holika for help. Now Holika had been granted a special cloak that prevented her from being harmed by fire when she wrapped herself in it. On Hiranyakashyapa's instructions, Holika sat with Prahlad in her lap while a bonfire was lit. The cruel hope was that the boy would be burnt to death. Without any fear or anxiety, Prahlad started to chant the name of Lord Vishnu. Miraculously, he remained safe while Holika became a victim of the fire.



Prahlada continued to claim that Vishnu was all-pervading and omnipresent and refused to acknowledge his father as the supreme lord of the universe. Angrily, Hiranyakashyapa pointed to a nearby pillar and asked sarcastically if the omniscient Vishnu was in it. When the supreme devotee confidently replied in the affirmative, the enraged king got up from his throne and furiously hit the pillar with his mace. The pillar broke into two with a thundering sound and Lord Vishnu emerged from it in the avatar (form) of Narasimha, half human and half lion, with a fierce expression, matted hair and terrible nails on its paws. It was twilight, hence neither day nor night when this happened. Narasimha lifted the king and took him to the threshold of the palace, that is, neither inside nor outside the palace. There he placed the king on his lap and killed him with his claws, that is, neither with metal nor wood weapons! In this way, Lord Vishnu in his manifestation as Narasimha cleverly circumvented the boon given to Hiranyakashyapa by Lord Brahma, and rid the world of an evil man.

Prahlad touched the feet of Lord Narsimha and sought his blessings. Lord Narasimha pronounced Prahlad as the King and instructed him to carry out his duties ethically.

Story for Children (Adapted by Vandana Agarwal)

Garuda and the little bird

This story has been adapted from folklore.

In Hindu mythology, Garuda is a bird that is the vahana or mount of Lord Vishnu. With the head of a human and the body of a large bird, Garuda is known as a strong bird that can travel long distances in a short time. He is also referred to as Khageshwar or the king of birds.

One day, Vishnu, the protector of the world, came to meet Shiva at Mount Kailash. Garuda waited outside, waiting for Vishnu to return, admiring the natural beauty of his surroundings. As far as his eyes could see, the white snow covered the beautiful Himalayan peaks. Clouds floated in the sky and all around him was peace and tranquility.

“There seem to be very few animals around here,” he thought. Suddenly he spotted a tiny bird fluttering around looking for a place



to perch. Garuda was fascinated. He could not but marvel at the wonder of nature. It was amazing that the creator had made the lofty mountains as well as beautiful little creatures like the small bird.

Just then Yama, the God of Death, passed by riding his buffalo. He also spotted the bird and for a moment, stopped and stared at it. There was a quizzical expression on his face. But not before the bird noticed Yama's gaze on her. The poor bird was distraught. In ancient times it was believed that a fleeting glance from Yama was a harbinger of death and the bird thought that her time was up.

Knowing how kind Garuda was, she flew to the king of birds and pleaded with him to save her. Garuda agreed immediately and holding the bird firmly in its claws flew speedily across mountains and frozen rivers, to a forest thousands of miles away. "You shall be safe here," he told the shivering creature, who thanked Garuda for saving her life.

Garuda then returned to Mount Kailash to wait for Vishnu. Not unexpectedly, Yama once again passed by. He looked around and stopped. Garuda was secretly pleased that Yama had been tricked and could not find the bird. He asked Yama what he was looking for. "Well, when I was here a little while ago, I saw a bird. As soon as I saw her, I knew that her time was up and that she would die in a lush, green forest at the hands of a snake. I was thinking how she could ever travel that distance in a short time. I wonder where she is now," said Yama, perplexed as he moved away.

Garuda was stunned. He didn't know what to say. Had he played a role in sending the bird to the other world he wondered?

From this story, we learn that it is important that we do what is right. In this instance, Garuda did his karma with noble thought, but sometimes the consequences are not in our hands and beyond our control. We should always focus on doing our actions with the right intent and leave the rest to the will of God.

Story for Children (Adapted by Vandana Agarwal)

Markandeya: The boy who defied death

A long time ago, there lived a sage Mrikandu and his wife Marudmati. They were devoted to Lord Shiva and spent time in prayer and worship. However, for many years, they were unable to have a child which saddened them deeply. In order to seek his blessings and have children, they spent their time praying to Lord Shiva. Pleased by their dedication Shiva appeared before them and promised them a boon. But he gave them a choice. They could have a foolish son with a long life or an intelligent son who would only live till the age of sixteen. The couple joyfully took the latter option and soon a beautiful baby boy was born to them. The couple joyously named him Markandeya.

Markandeya grew up to be a profound devotee of Lord Shiva. He was a cheerful boy with pleasant manners, who won the heart of anyone who met him. He learned the Vedas and Upanishads at the feet of his noble father and was wise beyond his years.

As the years passed, Markandeya crossed his teens and his parents, knowing what the future held for him, grew sadder and sadder. They felt miserable that soon the day would come when they would never see their beloved son again.

One day, Markandeya asked his parents why they looked so sad. Sage Mrikandu, then told him the story of his birth. Markandeya took the news calmly. He told his parents not to worry. Lord Shiva had brought him into this world and it was him he would pray to, for a way out of this problem, he said.

Markandeya, with his parent's permission, went to the forest. He prayed before the Shivalinga and performed deep austerities.

Finally, the day of his death dawned. Lord Yama sent his Yamdoots or messengers to take away the life of Markandeya. However, as he sat in deep meditation, his aura was so strong that the Yamdoots could not go near him. When they

returned empty-handed, Yama was enraged. He decided to go to fetch Markandeya himself, but he was too dazzled by the radiance emanating from the lad.

Yama then threw his noose around the young sage's neck. As fate would have it, the noose fell around the Shivalinga and from it emerged a very angry Shiva. We all know that when Shiva is angry, he takes on the form of a destroyer. Shiva took out his Trishul and attacked Yama, almost killing him. Immediately thereafter, the Gods from heaven requested Shiva to revive Yama, as without death life on earth would be thrown out of balance. Shiva relented. He blessed Markandeya with a boon of immortality and never aging. He then brought Yama back to life.



Thus, thanks to his extraordinary devotion Markandeya was saved by Lord Shiva from the clutches of death. Even today, elders bless the young by saying that they may live like Markandeya, forever youthful and beautiful.

Reaching the highest perfection and having attained Me – the Divine – the great-souled ones are no more subject to rebirth, painful and ephemeral. All the world is subject to return, but after attaining Me, there is no re-birth.

Bhagavad Gita, VIII, 15,16.

This, the Indweller in the bodies of all, is ever indestructible. Therefore, you should not mourn for any creature

Bhagavad Gita, II, 30.

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Answers

^a N ¹	A	C	^b H	I	K	E	T	A	
A			I						
R			R ²	A	H	U			^e M
A ³	R	Y	A				^d K		R
S			N				A		I
I			Y ⁴	A	M	^c A			T
M ⁵	A	H	A			I			Y
H			K			A			U
A			S						
		H ⁶	A	N	U	M	A	N	

Acknowledgements

The Editorial Committee Of Omkara would like to thank all contributors, advertisers, volunteers, content providers, staff and all others who made this issue possible. We hope you enjoy reading this magazine. We welcome your feedback, comments, articles and contributions. Please send them to:

OMKARA

The Hindu Centre,

132 Owen Road, Singapore 218935

E-mail: hinducentre@singnet.com.sg

Webpage: <http://www.hinducentre.org.sg>

Facebook: www.facebook.com/hinducentresg

This page has been intentionally left blank

Published by:

Hindu Centre

132 Owen Road, Singapore 218935

Tel: +65-6291-8540 (12pm to 6pm weekdays)

E-mail: admin@hinducentre.org.sg

Website: www.hinducentre.org.sg

Connect with us on:

www.facebook.com/hinducentresg

www.youtube.com/hinducentresg

**Subscribe to our Calendar of Events,
and join us for our public programs:**

www.sfh.sg/hcevents

To support our work with your generosity, please visit:

www.hinducentre.org.sg/donate

Donate via PayNow to UEN S78SS0017J