

Reincarnation

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The ultimate purpose of life is much greater than you can hope to accomplish in one lifetime. It would be far too limited to have only one lifetime worth of potential. Reincarnation is yoga's description of how it works. It is becoming quite a popular theory in America. There are television shows with the host describing the past lives of audience members. Scientific research has recently validated reincarnation so thoroughly that no one can refute it, unless they just really want to have a closed mind. USA Today recently published statistics showing that over 60 percent of Americans believe in reincarnation. Ministers quote Bible passages to support it. You can even go to a past-life regression therapist — but I recommend you do not! More about that later . . .

Technically called “the doctrine of the transmigration of souls,” reincarnation teaches that life is truly and ultimately fair. If you do something that harms another person, you will go through that same experience of pain yourself. If you do something that serves and uplifts another, you will be served and uplifted. What you put out comes back to you, in this lifetime or the next. Since it is impossible to balance it all in one lifetime, the balancing out carries into future lifetimes. If your actions were extremely bad, you cannot bear the consequences in a frail human body. So, you go to hell — but not for eternity. In this way, God's universe is compassionate as well as completely fair. Once you have balanced out the painful actions, you get another chance as a human being. Similarly, good actions can take you to heaven, but not for eternity. No one is consigned to hell forever, but no one gets to heaven forever either. The reason is that the ultimate goal is better than heaven. More about that later, too . . .

The key to understanding reincarnation is to understand your power of choice. As a human being, you have free will. You are able to make choices. Many of your life experiences are karmic — the results of actions you chose in prior lifetimes. This shows up most strongly in your childhood. The family into which you were born was your karma — the result of your past actions. You chose the prior actions that led to the current life experiences.

When you understand reincarnation, you will very naturally take on full responsibility for your situation. It does not matter whether you are creating it now, through your current actions, or if it is due to you from prior lifetimes.

Don't just lie around in your misery, blaming someone else! Get going on making new choices. Take action to change your situation, and do it in a positive and uplifting manner. You will create new karma that brings joy into your life. Be careful! If your actions come out of anger and revenge, then you create future pain for yourself. Your power of choice and action is called svatantra, “free will.” How you use it will affect your current life and your future lives as well.

Don't waste your time trying to find about your past lives. Anything from a previous lifetime that affects this life will be “in your face.” Looking into your past lifetimes can be another avoidance technique — a way of avoiding looking into the mirror of this life, where you can see yourself fully. Your current life is full of experiences which arise from a mixture of choices made in past lives and choices made in this life. Do not waste your time to figure out which is which. You need every moment available to figure out which choices to make now, and how to best implement them. If you spend time trying to figure out what you did in a past life that gives you this karma, you still have the same karma. Instead, accept the situation now as though you created it, whether you remember creating it or not. Make a decision about what to do now and about how to do it! This is the best approach to karma and reincarnation.

If all you had to do were to make it to heaven, then the goal of life would come after death. Yoga says that life itself has meaning. Life is not about reaching a destination — the meaning is found in the journey. You must perform karma-free actions in order to draw closer to the ultimate goal of knowing

your Self as Consciousness-Itself. Your choices and actions create what is popularly called “good” or “bad” karma. This is based on the quality of your actions, as well as your reason for doing them. These karmas trap you in the endless cycle of death and rebirth. Any time you act out of desire for personal fulfillment, you collect more karma (good or bad). You are guaranteed to keep coming and going (even to heaven and hell), whether you want to or not.

The way out is by performing your actions as offering. When you offer true service to another human being, or to God, then your action is karma free. Karma free actions not only free you from future lifetimes. They create your own upliftment in this life. You are ennobled and uplifted when you give from the heart without any desire for repayment or recognition. Be careful — if there is a desire to be ennobled and uplifted, then you still collect karma from your action, and remain bound to another cycle of lifetimes. Watch your motivation— that is an important key.

How high does this upliftment go? What is the goal that is even “better than heaven?” Yoga promises that you will live in the completely fulfilling, ever-deepening, inner experience of the one Reality, while living out your full life span. All your choices and actions will be divinely inspired, and spread love and light into the world. At the end of your life, you merge fully into the Source of All Being. This is your destiny, and yoga will take you there.

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