

(1) DEATH IS INEVITABLE - even for the holy and enlightened

1. Everyone has to die.
2. Our life span is decreasing continuously
3. The amount of time spent in our life to develop the heart/mind is very small.

The uncertainty of the time of death

4. Human life expectancy is uncertain.
5. There are many causes of death
6. The human body is so fragile

Only spiritual practice can help us at the time of death

7. Our possessions and enjoyments cannot help
8. Our loved ones cannot help
9. Our own body cannot help

King Pasenadi asked the Buddha, "Venerable sir, for one who has taken birth, is there anything other to expect than aging and death?" The king was overcome with sorrow as his mother had died. He told the Buddha he would have given anything, a huge gem or even his entire country, if he could have saved her from death. The Buddha answered that just as a potter's clay vessel always ends up broken into pieces, so, when a person assembles and is born, there is no escaping death, no matter how wealthy, politically powerful, or enlightened you are.

The Buddha lived 80 years, suffering in his old age from back pain and digestive problems, and eventually died, saying that his body had become like an old cart, barely held together by straps, unable to be held together any longer. He died lying under two sala trees, instructing his disciples, answering final questions, consoling those who grieved, and then entering his final meditation. SN: 3 (3) Aging and Death

(2) FEAR of DEATH IS GOOD - it spurs you not to waste life and to undertake spiritual practice**THE FIVE DIVINE MESSENGERS**

The Buddha taught that everyone has to die. This may seem obvious, but it is a fact that most people in the developed modern world continue to deny until they face death in a doctor's diagnosis. In the Devaduta Sutta the Buddha describes a person who has died and arrived in hell, where he meets King Yama. The wardens of hell say, "Sire, this person has ill treated their father, mother, holy people, and elders."

The First Divine Messenger: King Yama asks, "Good person, haven't you ever seen a young tender infant lying prone in his own excrement and urine?" "I have, sir." "Didn't it ever occur to you – an intelligent and mature person – that you, too, are subject to birth and death? Surely I had better do good by body, speech and mind." "No, sir, I was negligent." King Yama says, "This negligence is not due to your mother or father, sisters, brothers, friends, etc, but it is your own, and you will experience the result."

The Second Divine Messenger: King Yama asks, “ Good person, have you never seen a man or woman at 80, 90 or 100 years, aged, as crooked as a roof bracket, doubled up, supported by a walking stick, tottering, frail, youth gone, teeth broken, grey-haired, scanty-haired, bald, wrinkled, with limbs all

blotchy?” “ I have, sir.” “Didn’t it ever occur to you – an intelligent and mature person – I , too am subject to ageing . . surely I had better do good ...” “ No sir, I was negligent” “This negligence is your own and you will experience the result.”

The Third Divine Messenger: King Yama asks, “ Good person, have you never seen a man or woman afflicted, suffering, and gravely ill, lying fouled in their own excrement and urine, lifted up by some and set down by others? “ I have, sir.” “Did it not occur to you, I, too am subject to sickness, I had better do good . . .” “No sir, . . .” “This is your own negligence and you will experience the result.”

The Fourth Divine Messenger: Good person, have you never seen when a robber or culprit is caught, kings have many kinds of torture inflicted on them, flogging, beheading ...” “I have, sir.” “Did it not occur to you, those who do evil are tortured in this life, what about in the next?”

The Fifth Divine Messenger: King Yama asks, “ Have you never seen a man or woman one-day dead, two-days dead, three-days dead, bloated, livid, oozing with matter?” “I have, sir.” “Did it not occur to you, I too am subject to death. . .” Then, after pressing and questioning and cross-questioning him, King Yama is silent. MN: 130 Devaduta Sutta

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In a grove at Savatthi, a deva recited this verse in the presence of the Buddha.

Life is swept along *Time flies by, the nights*
swiftly pass
No shelters exist for one who has reached old age. The stages of life successively desert us.
Seeing clearly this danger in death *Seeing clearly this danger in death,*
One should do deeds of merit that bring happiness. One should do deeds of merit that bring happiness.

Life is swept along *Time flies by, the nights*
swiftly pass.
No shelters exist for one who has reached old age. The stages of life successively desert us.
Seeing clearly this danger in death *Seeing clearly this danger in death,*
A seeker of peace should drop the world’s bait.” A seeker of peace should drop the world’s bait.

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(3) THERE IS SOMETHING/ ENERGY THAT CONTINUES AND DETERMINES FUTURE EXISTENCE

Just as the physical energies that make up our life (carbon, nitrogen, calcium, iron, electrons, quarks, strings) do not cease to exist when we die, becoming the building blocks of new life forms, so, too, our mental-emotional energy continues and affects/infects other beings. It could be our children or co-workers, it could be someone we don't know or is still unborn. Just as we desire to clean up the physical energy we pass on to future generations, so they don't inherit our DDT, PCB's, arsenic, and so on, so, too, we undertake spiritual practice in order to "clean up" as much unwholesome energy of the heart/mind as we can, so that future generations do not suffer under its burden. This applies to the afflictive emotions: anger, jealousy, cruelty, greed, debilitating doubt, sloth and ignorance. Through spiritual practice these energies can be transformed into beneficial forces, the energy of determination to change that which is unjust, into sympathetic joy, generosity, deep questioning, serenity and wisdom arising out of inner stillness. Just as one thought moment conditions the next thought moment, so one existence can be said to condition (not become) the next.

The future is born out of our actions in the present. The present is the result of the accumulation of our actions in the past.

Suppose I die afraid or demented? *A student once became worried about this notion of continuity after death and told the Buddha, "When I leave your presence I feel uplifted, mindful and serene, but then I enter the city which is populous and congested. Suppose I'm run down by a stray elephant or horse or cart, or murderer, and I'm killed. Then my last thoughts would be muddled and fearful. What then would be my destination?" The Buddha reassured him, saying, "Don't be afraid. Your death will not be a bad one. When a person's mind has been fortified over a long time by faith, virtue, earning, generosity, and wisdom, the crows, vultures, hawks, dogs, jackals [will] eat his body, consisting of form, composed of the four great elements, originating from mother and father, built up out of rice and gruel, subject to impermanence, to being worn and rubbed away, to breaking apart and dispersal. But his mind, which has been fortified over a long time by faith, virtue, learning, generosity and wisdom, that goes upward, goes to distinction."*

The Buddha uses a simile: "Suppose that a man submerges a pot of ghee in a deep pool of water and breaks it. All of its shards would sink downward, but the oil would rise upwards. So, too, will your fortified mind rise upward. Do not be afraid." SN 21(1) Mahanama

(4) REALIZE THE DEATHLESS -- REMOVE the FEAR of DEATH

Of course, we should be prudent about the safety of our body, jumping out of the path of an oncoming elephant or car. But consider, if the fear of death were gone from our lives, how different would our thoughts, and thus our life, be? Don't most of our fears, when we trace them down to the bottom, have the origin in fear of death? Our spiritual task is to experience for ourselves that which is beyond the bounds of time, space, and beyond human attempts to grasp with the mind. It is simultaneously endless birth and death, and no birth and no death. The place it can be touched is in the eternal present, when our minds are clear, open and completely receptive. That great mystery is the source of our life. We were born out of it, and will merge again with it when we die.

Vow for Awakening – Zen Master Dai E Zenji

“ Our deepest prayer is to be firm in our determination to give ourselves to the Buddha’s Way, so that no doubts arise however long the road seems to be, to be light and easy in the four parts of the body, to be strong and undismayed in body and in mind, to be free from illness and drive out both depressed feelings and distractions .

...

Our further prayer is not to be extremely ill or to be suffering at the time of departure, to know its coming seven days ahead so that we can quiet the mind to abandon the body and be unattached to all things in the last moment,

Where in we return to the Original Mind of no birth and no death and merge infinitely into the whole universe to manifest as all things in their true nature and with the great wisdom of the Buddhas to awaken all beings to the Buddha Mind.”

WHAT CONTINUES AFTER DEATH?

Now, the Pali word *kamma* or the Sanskrit word *karma* (from the root *kr* to do) literally means 'action', 'doing'. But in the Buddhist theory of karma it has a specific meaning: it means only 'volitional action', not all action. Nor does it mean the result of karma as many people wrongly and loosely use it. In Buddhist terminology karma never means its effect; its effect is known as the 'fruit' or the 'result' of karma (*kamma-phala* or *kamma-vipāka*).

Volition may relatively be good or bad, just as a desire may relatively be good or bad. So karma may be good or bad relatively. Good karma (*kusala*) produces good effects, and bad karma (*akusala*) produces bad effects. 'Thirst', volition, karma, whether good or bad, has one force as its effect: force to continue—to continue in a good or bad direction. Whether good or bad it is relative, and is within the cycle of continuity (*samsāra*). An Arahant, though he acts, does not accumulate karma, because he is free from the false idea of self, free from the 'thirst' for continuity and becoming, free from all other defilements and impurities (*kilesā, sāsava dhammā*). For him there is no rebirth.

The theory of karma should not be confused with so-called 'moral justice' or 'reward and punishment'. The idea of moral justice, or reward and punishment, arises out of the conception of a supreme being, a God, who sits in judgment, who is a law-giver and who decides what is right and wrong. The term 'justice' is ambiguous and dangerous, and in its name more harm than good is done to humanity. The theory of karma is the theory of cause and effect, of action and reaction; it is a natural law, which has nothing to do with the idea of justice or reward and punishment. Every volitional action produces its effects or results. If a good action produces good effects and a bad action bad effects, it is not justice, or reward, or punishment meted out by anybody or any power sitting in judgment on your action, but this is in virtue of its own nature, its own law. This is not difficult to understand. But what is difficult is that, according to the karma theory, the effects of a volitional action may continue to manifest themselves even in a life after death. Here we have to explain what death is according to Buddhism.

We have seen earlier that a being is nothing but a combination of physical and mental forces or energies. What we call death is the total non-functioning of the physical body. Do all these forces and energies stop altogether with the non-functioning of the body? Buddhism says 'No'. Will, volition, desire, thirst to exist, to continue, to become more and more, is a tremendous force that moves whole lives, whole existences, that even moves the whole world. This is the greatest force, the greatest energy in the world. According to Buddhism, this force does not stop with the non-functioning of the body, which is death; but it continues manifesting itself in another form, producing re-existence which is called rebirth.

Now, another question arises: If there is no permanent, unchanging entity or substance like Self or Soul (*ātman*), what is it that can re-exist or be reborn after death? Before we go on to life after death, let us consider what this life is, and how it continues now. What we call life, as we have so often repeated, is the combination of the Five Aggregates, a combination of physical and mental energies. These are constantly changing; they do not remain the same for two consecutive moments. Every moment they are born and they die. 'When the Aggregates arise, decay and die, O bhikkhu, every moment you are born, decay and die.'¹ Thus, even now during this life time, every moment we are born and die, but we continue. If we can understand that in this life we can continue without a permanent, unchanging substance like Self or Soul, why can't we understand that those forces themselves can continue without a Self or a Soul behind them after the non-functioning of the body?

When this physical body is no more capable of functioning, energies do not die with it, but continue to take some other shape or form, which we call another life. In a child all the physical, mental and intellectual faculties are tender and weak, but they have within them the potentiality of producing a full grown man. Physical and mental energies which constitute the so-called being have within themselves the power to take a new form, and grow gradually and gather force to the full.

As there is no permanent, unchanging substance, nothing passes from one moment to the next. So quite obviously, nothing permanent or unchanging can pass or transmigrate from one life to the next. It is a series that continues unbroken, but changes every moment. The series is, really speaking, nothing but movement. It is like a flame that burns through the night: it is not the same flame nor is it another. A child grows up to be a man of sixty. Certainly the man of sixty is not the same as the child of sixty years ago, nor is he another person. Similarly, a person who dies here and is reborn elsewhere is neither the same person, nor another (*na ca so na ca añño*). It is the continuity of the same series. The difference between death and birth is only a thought-moment: the last thought-moment in this life conditions the first thought-moment in the so-called next life, which, in fact, is the continuity of the same series. During this life itself, too, one thought-moment conditions the next thought-moment. So from the Buddhist point of view, the question of life after death is not a great mystery, and a Buddhist is never worried about this problem.

As long as there is this 'thirst' to be and to become, the cycle of continuity (*samsāra*) goes on. It can stop only when its driving force, this 'thirst', is cut off through wisdom which sees Reality, Truth, Nirvāṇa.

from "What the Buddha Taught"
by Walpola Rahula

Rebirth vs. Reincarnation

Although these terms are often used interchangeably, there is a significant conceptual difference between the two. On the whole, Buddhists believe in rebirth while Hindus, Jains, and some Christians believe in reincarnation. Strictly speaking, reincarnation means the assumption of another body by a permanent, eternal self (the Hindu notion of atman or the Christian notion of soul).

Most Buddhists do not believe in a permanent self (anatman or anatta, without enduring self) but believe human consciousness (the "I" or self) dissolves at death and that only a subtle mindstream remains. The mindstream carries with it karmic imprints from prior lives (but not memories and emotions associated with prior lives, unless the person is a highly developed spiritual practitioner, in which case reincarnation is possible) and it is this subtle mindstream that conjoins with a new life-form after death. Thus, rebirth does not mean an identifiable human being assuming a new human body. Moreover, in Buddhism, rebirth is not always accomplished in human form. Depending on karmic circumstances, a human being can be reborn as an animal or as a being in any of the upper or lower realms.

There is a lot of confusion surrounding the concepts of Reincarnation and Rebirth. At first glance it seems like they are synonyms, but there is a big difference between these two concepts.

The doctrine of reincarnation, also referred to as transmigration, is taught by Hinduism, Jainism and Gnostic Christianity. It's main postulate is that there is an indestructible, eternal, personal element that travels from one life to the next. This element is called atman in the Hindu religion, jiva in the Jain faith and soul by Gnostic Christianity. Reincarnation assumes identity between the occupant of this body and, when this body dies, the occupant of the following body.

In contrast, Buddhism teaches the doctrine of rebirth. Between a series of lifetimes there is a relationship of causality, not of identity. To make this more clear, let's use the example of the falling dominos. If I place a series of dominos standing up in line next to each other, and I strike the first one to make it fall down, this causes the second one to fall down, and the next, until the last in line falls down. The fall of the first domino is the cause of the fall of the last one, but there is not a shared identity between the first and the last domino.

When somebody dies, rebirth is caused by the continuation of the mental processes of the dead person in a new body. The new person however is not identical to the one that left the previous body (a lot of causes and conditions come into play to shape this new being), nor a completely different person (because of causality relation).

The only serious, scientific research on reincarnation and rebirth has been carried out over the course of more than 30 years by Dr. Ian Stevenson at the University of Virginia. I strongly recommend his book *Where Reincarnation and Biology Intersect*.