

Reincarnation and Karma - 1

The Significance of Death

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### **Question::**

*Why do most people believe that 'life' is coterminous with 'bodily existence'?*

*(or)*

*Why is 'death' considered important by many people? When can it lose its importance?*

*(or)*

*Why do people, consciously or unconsciously, fear Death?*

*(or)*

*"Death" is never an irreparable loss. How so??*

*(or)*

*When can one develop a sane attitude towards "Death"? Why is it difficult to develop a positive attitude towards 'death', for a worldly minded person?*

*(or)*

*Why people lament the loss of their "loved ones"? What is the root cause of this lamenting?*

*(or)*

*What is the root cause of the sorrow of death?*

*(or)*

*Is 'death' the final annihilation of 'individual existence'?*

*(or)*

*What makes "death", so confounding?*

*(or)*

*Why people try to believe in 'life after death' or the 'immortality of the soul' irrespective of their lack of "personal experience"?*

*(or)*

*Who can get access to the knowledge of the 'existence of life after death' or the 'immortality of the soul'?*

*(or)*

*How come the 'soul' is said to be immortal? (or)*

*(or)*

*What are 'other worlds/spheres'? What are "inner planes"? Why are they not accessible to the perception of 'ordinary/worldly-minded' individuals?*

*(or)*

*How does NATURE ensure the continuity of "life", even after the death or dropping off the physical body?*

*(or)*

*When does "death" occur, NORMALLY?*

(or)

Why “suicide” is considered a sin??

(or)

What happens in “normal death”? How come ‘normal death’ is more SACRED than a ‘suicidal death’? What exactly happens in the ‘life after death’ i.e., after the physical body is discarded and before a new body is taken up?

### **Answer:**

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The ‘worldly person’ completely identifies life with the manifestation and activities of ‘gross body’. ***For him, therefore, the beginning and the end of ‘bodily existence’ are also the beginning and the end of the ‘individual soul.’***

All his experience seems to testify to the TRANSITORINESS of the ‘physical body;’ and he has often witnessed the disintegration of physical bodies that were once vibrant with life. Hence he is naturally impelled to believe that ‘life’ is co-terminus with ‘bodily existence’.

**As the ‘worldly individual’ considers death to be the cessation of life, he gives greater importance to it!** There are few, however, who contemplate ‘death’ for prolonged periods. And in spite of the fact that most people are completely engrossed in their ‘worldly pursuits,’ they are impressed by the incident of death when confronted by it.

For most people, the earthly scene of life has, as its background, the inevitable and irresistible fact of death– which imperceptively enters into their greatest triumphs and achievements, their keenest pleasures and rejoicing.

Apart from being the general background to the scene of life, death also assumes an accentuated and overwhelming importance among the variegated incidents of life.

- *‘Death’ falls among those happenings that are most dreaded and lamented.*
- People, in malice or anger, try to inflict ‘death’ upon each other as the last penalty or the worst revenge, or they rely upon it as the surest way of removing aggression or interference by others.

- People also invite 'death' upon themselves as the token of supreme "self-sacrifice"; and *at times they seek it with the FALSE HOPE of putting an end to all the worldly worries and problems they are unable to face or solve.*

Thus, in the 'minds' of most persons, death assumes an accentuated and overwhelming importance.

The over-whelming importance of death is derived from man's attachment to particular forms! But 'death' loses much of its STING and IMPORTANCE, even for the 'worldly', if one takes a BROADER VIEW of the course of life. In spite of their transitoriness, there is an UNBROKEN CONTINUITY of 'life' through these 'forms'— *'old ones' being discarded and 'new ones' being created for 'habitation' and 'expression'.*

The recurring incidence of 'death' is matched by the recurring incidence of 'birth.' Old generations are replaced by new ones; "life" is reborn in 'new forms', incessantly renewing and refreshing itself.

*The streams of life, with their ancient origin, are EVER ADVANCING ONWARD, through the 'forms' that come and go like the waves of the ocean.*

So, even within the limits of experience of the worldly, there is much that should mitigate morbid thoughts of death as being an irreparable loss.

*A sane attitude toward death is possible only if "life" is considered impersonally and without any attachment to "particular forms".*

This, the "worldly person" finds difficult because of his ENTANGLEMENT with 'specific forms.' For him, *one 'form' is not as good as another. THE 'FORM' HE IDENTIFIES HIMSELF IS BY FAR THE MOST IMPORTANT! The general 'preservation' and 'advancement' of the stream of life has for him no special interest.*

What the "worldly individual" craves is *a continuation of his own 'form' and other 'particular forms' with which he is entangled. His heart cannot reconcile itself to his intellect!*

With the vanishing of the forms that have been dear to him, he becomes a victim of unending sorrow— though "life" as a whole MAY HAVE REPLACED ELSEWHERE the 'lost forms' with new ones.

**The sorrow of death, on closer analysis, turns out to be rooted in SELFISHNESS.** The person who loses his beloved may know INTELLECTUALLY that— "life", as a whole, has elsewhere compensated for the loss; *but his only feeling is, 'What is that to me?'*

*When one looks at it from one's own PERSONAL point of view— "death" becomes a cause of unending sorrow. From the point of view of life in GENERAL, it is an episode of minor importance!*

**"Impersonal considerations" go a long way to fortify the mind against the personal sorrow caused by death.** But they do not, by themselves, solve the wider problems that confound even the "impersonal intellect" of man when he considers some of the implications of 'death' within the limits of his ordinary experience.

**If 'death' is regarded as the final annihilation of "individual existence", there seems to be an irreparable loss to the universe.**

- Each individual may be in a position to give to the universe something, so unique that no one else can exactly replace it.
- Further, in most cases, there is the cutting short of an earthly career long before the attainment of "spiritual Perfection" by the individual.
- All his struggles toward the ideal, all his endeavor and enthusiasm for the great, the good, the beautiful, and all his ASPIRATIONS for things divine and eternal seem to end in the VAST NOTHINGNESS created by death.

**The implications in assuming death to be the termination of 'individual existence' run counter to the ineradicable expectations based on 'rationalized intuition.'**

A conflict usually arises between 'the claims of intuition' and 'the conclusions of impure intellect,' which ASSUMES death to be the termination of individual existence.'

Such “conflict” is often a BEGINNING of “pure thinking”, which immediately seriously challenges the USUALLY accepted belief that– ‘death’ is the real termination of ‘individual existence.’

**"Death" as an extinction of life can never be wholly acceptable to the ‘spiritual aspirations’ of man.** Therefore, belief in the immortality of the individualized soul is often accepted by the human mind without much resistance, even in the absence of direct super-sensible knowledge about the existence of ‘life after death.’

Those who know from ‘personal experience’ the immortality of the soul to be true are few.

**Super-sensible knowledge of the existence of ‘life after death’ is inaccessible to the vast majority of persons.** *For them, ‘immortality’ must remain an agreeable and acceptable belief, but nothing more. It becomes a part of "personal knowledge" for -*

- those who, through their interest in the OCCULT, have built up means of communication with "other worlds"; or
- those whose special circumstances have resulted in their personally experiencing the ‘appearance’ or ‘intervention’ of departed spirits ; or
- those who, through their spiritual advancement, have automatically unfolded certain latent perceptual capacities of the inner vehicles of consciousness.

**“Immortality of the individualized soul” is made possible by the fact that the ‘individualized soul’ is NOT the same as the ‘physical body.’**

***The ‘individualized soul’ continues to exist with all its sanskaras in the inner worlds through its ‘mental’ and ‘subtle’ bodies, even after it has discarded its ‘gross body’ at the time of death.*** Hence, "life" through the medium of gross body is only a section of the continuous life of individualized soul; the other sections of its life have their **EXPRESSION** in “other spheres”.

Nature is much greater than what a person can perceive through ‘ordinary senses’ of the physical body. The hidden aspects of nature consist of finer ‘matter’ and ‘forces.’

**There is NO unbridgeable gulf separating the 'finer aspects' of nature from its 'gross aspect.' *THEY ALL INTERPENETRATE ONE ANOTHER AND EXIST TOGETHER.***

The 'finer aspects of nature' are NOT PERCEPTIBLE to the "ordinary individual", but they are nevertheless continuous with the 'gross aspect' that is perceptible to him. ***They are NOT REMOTE; and yet they are INACCESSIBLE to the "consciousness" that is functioning through the 'physical senses', which are NOT ADAPTED for perceiving those finer aspects of nature.***

The 'ordinary person' is UNCONSCIOUS of the 'inner planes', just as *someone deaf is unconscious of sounds, and he cannot deal with them consciously. For all practical purposes, therefore, they are "other worlds" for him!*

The finer and hidden part of NATURE has two important divisions, namely– the 'subtle' and the 'mental,' corresponding to the 'subtle' and 'mental' bodies of man.

The whole of nature may, therefore, be conveniently divided into three parts

- the gross world,
- the subtle world, and
- the mental world.

**When the "individualized soul" has incarnated in a 'physical body,' it EXPRESSES its "life" in the GROSS WORLD. *When it drops the outer sheath, the 'physical body,' it CONTINUES to have its expression of life either in the SUBTLE WORLD through the subtle body' or in the MENTAL WORLD through the 'mental body.'***

Ordinarily, "life" in the PHYSICAL BODY is terminated only when the "sanskaras" released for expression in that incarnation are all worked out. In some exceptional cases, the soul GIVES UP its 'gross body' before the working out of these sanskaras is completed.

For example, an individual who commits SUICIDE cuts short the period of his life ARTIFICIALLY, and there by ***prevents the working out of those 'sanskaras' that were released for fructification.***

When, due to untimely death, the sanskaras RELEASED for fructification are withheld from expression, *the 'discarnate soul' remains subject to the propelling force of these sanskaras even after the PHYSICAL BODY has been discarded.*

The momentum of the sanskaras that were prevented from being worked out is retained even in life after death, with the result that – *the "departed spirit" greatly desires the things of the gross world.*

In such cases, the 'discarnate soul' experiences an IRRESISTIBLE impulsion toward gross world and CRAVES 'gross objects' so badly that ***it seeks GRATIFICATION of its desires through the gross bodies of those still INCARNATE!*** Thus, for example,

- the 'discarnate soul' may want so much to drink alcohol that it takes UNNATURAL methods of gratifying the craving. **It awaits its opportunity.** When it finds someone who is a suitable medium drinking alcohol in the gross world, *the SPIRIT satisfies its own desire through that person by POSSESSING his 'physical body.'*
- In the same way, if it wants to experience the gross manifestations of CRUDE anger, **it does so through someone in the gross world who is feeling angry.**

Such souls are constantly waiting to harass incarnate persons with similar sanskaras, and they try to maintain their contact with the gross world through others as long as possible.

***In life after death, any LINGERING entanglement with the gross world is a serious hindrance to the NATURAL FLOW of the soul's onward life!*** Those who are subject to this precarious condition must be looked upon as particularly UNFORTUNATE, *since they invite upon themselves and others much UNNECESSARY suffering by seeking unnatural gratification of "coarser desires" through others who are still INCARNATE.* **Compared with these UNFORTUNATE "souls", the posthumous life of other souls is much smoother.**

In normal cases, "death" occurs when all the 'sanskaras' seeking fructification are worked out. ***When the soul drops its physical body, it is completely***

**severed from all connections with the ‘gross world,’ though the “ego” and the “mind” are *RETAINED* with all the impressions accumulated in the earthly career.**

Unlike the exceptional cases of ‘spirits’ still obsessed with gross world, “ordinary souls”– ***try to RECONCILE themselves to the severance from the gross world and CONFORM to the ‘limitations’ of changed conditions.***

They sink into a state of SUBJECTIVITY in which a new process begins– of MENTALLY REVIEWING the experiences of the earthly career by reviving the sanskaras connected with them.

**Thus, death inaugurates a period of comparative rest, consisting in a “temporary withdrawal” from the gross sphere of action.** It is the beginning of an interval between the last incarnation and the next.

– Meher Baba

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