

An Interpretation of the Doctrine of Transmigration

INTRODUCTION

What becomes of men after death? This is a question that has been posed time and again from the simple Ancient past to the complex Contemporary present; and this will remain a question that the future generations will ask. Like the exact time of one's death, what happens to the individual man after death will perhaps remain forever a secret. Precisely because this question is a mystery, deep thinkers have pondered upon it over and over in the hope that they may contribute to the enlightenment of the unknown area of human existence. Through the centuries, from the banks of the Nile to the Valley of the Ganges, five answers have been given to this perplexing question: (1) Continuation of Life in the Land of the Ancestors, (2) Eternal Retribution in Heaven or Hell, (3) Special Transmigration, (4) Cosmic Transmigration, (5) Annihilation.

While such thoughts are products of many minds from different parts of the globe, perhaps no country has given it such prominence in philosophy as the Indians have and the result of their brooding gave to the world what is now known as the Doctrine of Reincarnation.

There is perhaps no other basic doctrine in Indian Philosophy which has had such a hold upon the popular thinking and practical religions of India and which, inspite of Plato's Republic and Phaedo, has met with as much resistance among later Western Philosophers as the doctrine of Karma, which is the root from which the Doctrine of Transmigration springs. In consequence of the lack of knowledge regarding the doctrine of Karma, the Doctrine of Reincarnation is likewise misunderstood. One reason for this is that not much has been done by Indian Philosophy to make explicit and clear just what the status of the idea of Karma is. Few Indian philosophers have approached the Doctrine of Karma critically. It is precisely this gap between the East and the West which has evidently brought about the confusion and misinterpretation, much more the lack of understanding, on the Doctrine of Transmigration, that moved this researcher to work on this original Doctrine of India.

With the popularization of Oriental Martial Arts such as Judo, Karate, and Kung Fu into the West, came the revival of interest in such concepts as Yoga and Zen, and with these a heightened interest in the Doctrine of Transmigration. Many people may accept this doctrine as it is literally; others may discard it thoroughly dismissing it as superstition; still others may ask the question — Is this age-old doctrine founded on fact? Such a question must be approached with a completely open mind for prejudice is one of the barriers to the attainment of knowledge. The fact that this doctrine is still proving to be a consolation, and inspiration to a vast multitude of people, makes this doctrine well worthy of investigation.

With fine-comb analysis of this apparently ridiculous doctrine, this writer intends to show that there is more to the doctrine than meets the eye and hopefully expects that the future readers of this humble work will eventually open their eyes and thus see the philosophical truth that has been lying hidden underneath the maze of words in which this doctrine is intricately woven.

This analysis shall be confined to the concept of Transmigration as seen from the view point of the two most prominent schools of Indian Philosophy, namely the Vedanta of Shankara to represent Hinduism, the orthodox aspect; and Buddhism as based on

the teachings of the Buddha himself to represent the heterodox aspect. While it is true that the different schools of thoughts belonging to the orthodox schools — Yoga, Sankhya, Nyaya, Vaishesika, Mimamsa, Vedanta, and the other schools belonging to the heterodox schools — Buddhism, Jainism, Charvaka, — may present minor differences in their concepts of “soul”, on the whole, each sector, that is, the orthodox and the heterodox schools, carries a characteristic interpretation of the doctrine. It is this characteristic concept that the writer has tried to draw out from their various writings which shall make up the foundation of the critical analysis of this work.

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

The doctrine of Reincarnation is so significant a phenomenon that it deserves and demands a more comprehensive treatment than it had yet obtained. In order to remove in some measure any obscurity in this subject, and to exhibit order and consistency in place of the confused mass of contradictory conceptions, this writer deems it wise to bring out in detail the discussion of certain concepts which are prerequisites to a better understanding and appreciation of the doctrine which has not only served as a real consolation in the suffering of existence to a great number of people, but also served as a powerful incentive to habitual right conduct to them.

I. THE DOCTRINE OF KARMA

The Doctrine of Karma is a derivative of the “Law of Karma”. In brief, the Law of Karma is the principle of causality which holds that all actions produce effects. The term “Karma” was derived from *kr* — “to act”. Thus in general, Karma stands for “action” or “deeds.” It is best known as a term of the Buddhist who are responsible both for the definition and wide diffusion of the Doctrine of Karma, but the idea is Brahmanic as well as

Buddhist. It occurs in well known passages of the Upanishads where it is laid down that "as a man acts so shall he be in the next life."¹ The Upanishadic texts that best put the concept forward are those found in the Brihadaranyaka and the Svetasvatara:

"According as one acts, according as one conducts himself so does he become. The doer of good becomes good, the doer of evil becomes evil."²

"Course and fine, many in number, the embodied one chooses form according to his own quality."³

According to the doctrine of Karma, everyone as a Jiva (individual self) in bondage to the world is conditioned and determined by his conduct. Every deed that one performs has its effects in the world and forms within the doer a "samskara" or "vasana" (tendency) that becomes the basis for his future deeds. Based on this view, the merits and demerits of previous lives determine the condition of the present one. Each one generates the causes of which his later experiences are the effects. Karma is thus a law that sets forth the relations that obtain between one's action as a Jiva and one's state of being. Under Karmic Law, every human action — mental, emotional or physical produces an exactly appropriate reaction. The exactness of the law of cause and effect demands that causes must produce their effects at the level or the plane or in the world in which the cause was generated. Consequently, physical actions produce physical effects: emotional, mental, and spiritual actions produce their effects in their appropriate worlds. The condition of human lives, whether of health, happiness, capacity and opportunity, or of disease, sorrow, weakness and limitations, are the result of the operation of the exact law: they are the reapings from past sowings.

In early Vedic times, man thought that he could determine his own destiny, — make it or mar it; he was the master of his own destiny. He had no conception of salvation, of an existence beyond the life of action. Everything — happiness, misery, heaven and hell, depended on his own action. To the Vedic thinker, the world is a world of action, meant for action and sustained by action —

¹ Brih. Ar. III 2.13.

² Brih. IV 4.5.

³ Svet. V. 12.

by prescribed action (action prescribed by the Vedas) and this is the so-called "Dharma" (duty). Thus Dharma is Karma according to the Vedas.

One point is worth noting here and this is, that the past Karma determines the present nature of the world; but the present Karma may determine the future form of the world and may change its present form. So the Doctrine of Karma is not pure fatalism as it is commonly believed: man has the power to change his environment through action.

The sages of the past held tight to the concept that throughout all nature, from the densest matter to the most subtle ether, there is an exact law. Life should not be an exception. In view of the existence of the exact law throughout the physical universe, it is hardly reasonable to assume its absence in the selection of the human birth and the life which follows. Thus one observes that the Law of Karma goes with the Hermetic principle "as above so below."

If action determines the future, it is helpful to know the different types of action which abound in the world. The Vedanta distinguishes three kinds of Karma: there is the Sancita-Karma — seeds of destiny already stored as a result of former acts but which have not yet begun to germinate. Left alone, this would generate in time, a set of latent dispositions which would yield a biography, but they are still in the seed state. Next, there is the Agami-Karma — the seeds that would normally collect and be stored if one were to continue in the path of ignorance, basic to the present biography. Then there is the Prarabdha-Karma — the seeds that have been collected and stored in the past that have actually begun to grow. If analyzed, one would realize that the first kind of Karma refers to the past life; these are the Karman (seeds) accumulated in the past life and are as yet, stored in the present life awaiting their fruition. They are still in the state of potentiality, waiting to be actualized or fulfilled in the present life. The second type refers to the future life; this has to do with the new seeds that the present existence would collect through the actions committed in the present life and which in time would become the Sancita-Karma of the next life. The third type refers to the present life; these are the Sancita-Karma that have passed from

the state of potentiality to the state of actuality. These are the effects that are being reaped in the present existence — the fruits of the action in the former existence. Indians believe that there is a Karma of merit and a Karma of demerit and if according to the Law of Karma, one has to reap the fruits of action one has performed whether they are good or bad according to the Karmas one performed, it is wise to consider another classification of action: The first of these is the Obligatory action — which must be performed, for their violation results in sin, though their performance leads to no merit; the second is the Optional action which may or may not be performed; their performance leads to merit though their non-performance does not lead to sin. Lastly, there is the Prohibited action, which must not be performed for their performance leads to sin, though their non-performance does not lead to merit. Analysis of these three kinds of actions shows that Optional actions when performed leads to merit, Prohibited actions when performed leads to demerit; Obligatory acts when performed does not lead to merit. Thus in this manner of thinking one realizes that the Optional and Prohibited actions have to be avoided; only the Obligatory acts can be performed without leading to bondage.

On the whole, Vedanta believes that the soul is chained to Samsara (cycle of birth and death) on account of its association with the body, the senses, the mind and the understanding. Through this very association, the soul becomes a knower, an enjoyer and an agent. This association is due to Karma which is the cause of bondage. When the cause is removed, the effect also ceases to exist. Thus abstention from Karma automatically leads to the dissolution of the "marriage-tie" of the soul with the body, senses and mind. Consequently, when the cause (Karma) is removed, the effect (Bondage — cycle of birth and death) is also destroyed.

In Buddhism, the Buddha affirms four kinds of actions: He says there are actions which are black with black outcome; there are actions which are bright with bright outcome; there are still other actions which are both black and bright with a black and bright outcome; there are finally, actions which are neither black nor bright with an outcome neither black nor bright and which is conducive to the destructive of Karma. This is evidently using

figurative language. Stated simply, the Buddha tried to state that there are some good actions which bring about happy lives. There are actions which are bad that bring about a life of misery; and there are still other actions that are neither good nor bad but indifferent. The last type of action is detached from worldly consideration and does not bring about rebirth.

Philosophically, Karma which is specifically human conduct and its influence was divided into three different categories in early Buddhism. These consisted of wholesome, unwholesome, and neutral varieties. A wholesome conduct was further divided into two different spheres: the first relating to worldly actions which largely pertain to the laity; and the second, to the religious on non worldly actions. The laity were promised that if they properly practiced offering and morality, they would attain sufficient virtues to be admitted into a deva heaven. Conversely, those who failed to practice offering and morality could anticipate hell. As a consequence of such teaching, the layman's goal became the acquisition of merit (*puñña*) to attain future reward in a happy heaven. Although merit (*puñña*), signifies a form of good conduct, it is confined to the sphere of worldly morality since its goal is deemed to be birth in a happy heaven. It was on the level of wholesome worldly actions that *puñña* was considered to be merit, in contrast to Nirvana, which was the goal of the monks. *Puñña* was regarded as an inferior form of good conduct motivated by mundane desires. In fact as one advanced to the level of religious spiritual awareness, the aim of attaining *puñña* for a happy rebirth had to be renounced in favor of the non-worldly Bramacharya conduct.

Unwholesome Karma was considered to be the anti-thesis of *puñña* and such a form of Karma was only considered to occur at the worldly level. The contrast between *puñña* and evil conduct can clearly be seen in the early text: "All must die. Life is death. They shall go according to their Karma following the result of virtue (*puñña*) and evil (*papa*). Because of evil Karman, to hell (*naraya*). and because of virtuous Karman to the good place (*Suggati*). Thus one should be good which is accumulating a fortune for the future."⁴

⁴ SN I. 97.

The doctrine of Karma, is the most difficult doctrine of Buddhism. Its complexity and illusiveness oftenly baffles one to the point of exasperation. While it is true that, explicitly, Karma means action; implicitly, Karma means force. Now, since action always produces a certain force and this force in turn promotes further actions, Karma is essentially a doctrine of the intimate reciprocations between forces and actions that push forward the turning wheel of samsara (cycle of birth and death). When expressed in cosmological scale, this force-action complex is a stupendous power that propels the universe and life. When expressed in the ethical sense, it is an unfailing impersonal law that effectuates the moral order, "dispensing" nature rewards and retribution. Metaphysically, Karma is a creative energy brought forth by a collective action of certain groups. It sustains the order and function of a particular universe in which these groups reside. All the great wonders of the world such as biological and astronomical mysteries — according to Buddhism are due to the ingenuity of the power of Karma.

Very early the doctrine of Karma and its corollary — Metempsychosis grasped and choked the Indian spirit. The good or evil which a man did was thought neither to die with him nor to meet proper reward or punishment in another world, but to bring him back to this world in a happier or less happy condition. Karma was regarded as an inherited trait and an ungrateful portent overshadowing the future ages of one's reincarnations.

II. ON THE CONCEPT OF MOKSHA

The doctrine of Karma is intimately connected to the concept of Moksha. The term Moksha comes from the root "muc" which is "to loose, set free, let go, deliver" and thus means liberation, deliverance, escape, rescue. In philosophical terms, it means freedom itself or spiritual release. Moksha is a force that has impressed itself in every feature, every trait and discipline of Indian life and has shaped the entire scale of values. It is to be understood as a final flowering of a successful man. In practically every Advaitin text, Moksha is defined initially in terms of liberation from bondage (bandha) and one of the central concepts

employed in the notion of bondage is that of Karma.⁵ For instance, the idea of Karma teaches a Hindu that he is born into a caste because of certain actions he performed in a previous life. The Dharmasutra mentions that if a man does good deeds he will be born in a higher caste and be well-endowed, while if he does sinful acts he will be born of a low caste or even as an animal, a pig or a donkey. The progress and retrogression of a soul goes on until it attains Moksha or salvation, the nature of which is differently conceived in the different sects, but all have this in common: that the perfected soul is released from the necessity of continued birth and death, and that it either lives in intimate and perpetual contact with God or is absorbed by HIM. Therefore birth in a particular caste becomes an index of a soul's progress towards God.

The Indians speak of four aims or ends or areas of human life. Briefly, these are: Artha, which refers to material possessions; Kama, which is pleasure; Dharma, which comprises the whole concept of religious and moral duties; and Moksha, which is spiritual release.

The goal of life then is the attainment of release (Moksha) from the empirical state of samsara or the recurrent round of birth and death. It is thus regarded as the ultimate aim, the final end of a human being and as such is set over and against the other three. The greater part of Indian Philosophy proper is concerned with guiding the individual during the so called second portion of his life. The Hindus believed that after one has accomplished the normal worldly aims of the individual's career, that is, after one's duties had been served as a moral member and supporter of the family and community, one turns to

⁵ The Sanskrit word "Moksha" connotes to the Advaitin "freedom from Karma". Bondage here refers to being tied to worldly existence and thus a life on the basis of the senses and the belief that as long as one is attached to the world of sense, one would always stay and live on that world. Such bondage is called rebirth. One wonders at the need for defining freedom in terms of bondage that is grounded on Karma. The reason behind this is based on the Upanishadic concept that except for the very few to whom true knowledge dawns naturally, an awareness of being in bondage is necessary to inspire one to make the quest for freedom — release from bondage in this world — Karma provides a ready means for instilling these awareness, for Karma can be acknowledged with but little imagination to be operative in life.

the tasks of the final human adventures. The latter is referred to as the second portion of the individual's life; the former — the first portions of the individual's life. In stricter terms, Moksha is the technique of transcending the senses in order to discover, know, and dwell on with the timeless reality which underlies the dream of life in the world. It is the goal of every man and consists in the soul's freedom from the need to be reborn. In accord with the acosmic conception of the Absolute, the goal is the release which is not a state to be newly attained, as it is, the eternal nature of the self itself.

III. THE CONCEPT OF SOUL

All schools of Indian philosophy agree that transmigration takes place but different schools have different concepts of what it is that transmigrates. It is however accepted among all the Orthodox schools (Sankhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaiseshika, Mimamsa, and Vedanta) that it is the soul which transmigrates. In order to prepare the readers toward a better understanding of the Doctrine of Transmigration (Samsara) proper, as expounded in the next chapter, this writer deems it wise to dwell more extensively on the concept of the soul from two angles — the Brahmanic and the Buddhist aspect.

The Brahmanic Concept of Soul.

The Vedanta of Shankara and his School makes a distinction between the supreme soul (paramatman) and a multitude of individual souls (jiva atman, the sarira atman). The Supreme Soul is regarded as omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent; the individual souls are limited in wisdom, power and capacity for movement. Again, the Supreme Soul is neither active nor passive and therefore free from the very beginning; the individual souls are active and receptive and are therefore entangled in the eternal round of samsara (rebirth) and stand in need of deliverance. Yet the individual atmans are not properly distinct from the Supreme atman. Each of them is in full and complete measure the Supreme atman himself, as he manifests himself, though his real atman is concealed in "upadhis"—manas (mind), indriyas (sense faculties

etc.). These "upadhis" are unable to change his real nature, as little as the purity of a rock crystal is destroyed by the red color with which it is externally smeared. Rather, is it solely "avidya" ignorance, which imposes the "upadhis" on the Supreme Atman and thus comes to regard him as an individual atman. Accordingly, the entire individual soul as such has no reality, and yet the system cannot avoid treating it as a reality and discussing its wandering and final deliverance. This internal contradiction inherent in the system, as well as the designation of two different and yet not different entities by the one word — atman — points to the conclusion that the whole theory of a two-fold soul, supreme and individual, is of secondary origin.

The Organs of the Soul.

The Vedanta also speaks of four organs of the soul — (1) Manas and indriyas (the organs of relation). Manas here is conceived as the central organs of the faculties of knowledge and action, of the powers of perception and conscious determination and, therefore, of that which we call "mind" and "conscious will". The brain here is taken as the central organ upon which depends the sensible and the motor nerves. This makes us the relation of Manas (mind and conscious will) to the five Jnana-indriyas or organs of knowledge, namely — hearing, touch, sight, taste, and smell and the five Karma-indriyas or organs of action — speech, hands, feet, and the organs of generation and secretion. (2) The five Pranas (the organ of nutrition) with which are associated as accompanying upadhis of the soul — breathing, circulation of the blood and nourishment equally with the body are the functions of the Prana which are of five varieties: — (a) Prana causes expiration (b) Apana — inspiration (c) Vyana — sustains life when the breath is arrested (d) Samana — concerns with digestion and (e) Udana — effects the departure of the soul from the body at death. Prana is a word of very varied meaning. Originally Prana is the "breath" then the "life" as connected with the process of breathing. In the older period, all the vital powers (speech, breath, eye, ear, manas, etc.) like the life were called the Pranas. Only gradually, manas and indriyas as the forces of conscious life were separated from the Prana, which

with its five sub-division is incessantly active in waking and in sleep and is consequently the especial vehicle of life as such. (3) Sukhsman sariram, the subtle body, that is — the subtle parts of the elements which forms the seed of the body. This is the third companion of the soul on its wandering together with the Indriyas, Manas and the Pranas.

The subtle body is called the "primitive substance" (Bhuta-asraya). The subtle body in its capacity as vehicle of the physical organs accompanies the soul on its wandering up to the time of its release. (4) Besides this substratum of the elements (Bhuta-Asraya) out of which the body is built up in the following birth, the soul lastly is further attended by the ethical substratum (Karma-asraya) which determines the character of the new body and life. This ethical substratum is formed by the actions committed in the course of each several life and is therefore different for each soul and for each life course. Without these factors the souls with their organs will be indistinguishable from one another. The Karma-asraya is the "foundation of works", the moral qualification which condition the future life.

In Brahmanic philosophy, then, the soul is the individual self (jiva) which is a composite of self and not-self. Jiva is a manifestation or an empirical form of the supreme soul (Brahman). This Jiva is the ethical personality which enjoys and suffers the fruits of its actions and which transmigrates from one birth to another.

Buddhist Concept of Soul.

To the Buddha, there is one law without exception: whatever has a beginning has also an end. The Buddha believes that the whole universe offers no analogy or parallel to the soul (as accepted by others) which has a beginning but no end. Thus He does not believe in an individual soul for this concept is contrary to the nature of things. This is reflected in his famous Anatta Doctrine which states: "There is no soul. In the world, everything is transitory and relative." Thus, if there is to be a self, that self for Buddha, must be that which is perpetual and unchanging. Neither is there a changing self for him, for a changing self is a contradiction in terms because, by definition, change means the

arising of something new in place of something old that has disappeared. The inherent meaning of change implies the loss of identity which is incompatible with the concept of self. The self must be unitary a simple, pure, unblended unit. Hence, if there were many selves, the sense of self is lost.

IV. THE CONCEPT OF CONTINUITY

Another concept relevant to the doctrine of Samsara is the Doctrine of Continuity. Indians strongly believe in the continuity of things. For the Hindus the world is an endless repetition, not a progress towards an end; they believe that everything is cyclical. They think of this world as a circular and an unending jump, an ocean without shore, a shadow play without even a plot.

It is remarkable that Indian thought, restless and speculative as it is, hardly ever concerned itself with the design, object and end of the world. The concept of Telos plays little part in their cosmogony or ethics. Everything for them is periodic: Buddhas, Jinas, and incarnations of all sorts are all viewed as members of a series. Consequently, they all deserve great respect and are of great importance in their own days, but they are none of them final; still less are they able to create a new heaven and earth or to rise above the perpetual flux of Samsara. The Buddhist look forward to the advent of Maitraya, the future Buddha and the Hindus to the re-appearance of Vishnu of Kalki who, sword in hand and mounted on a white horse, will purge India of Barbarians; but this future apparition excites only a folk interest in the popular conscience and cannot be compared in intensity with such ideas as the Jewish Messiah. The world is taken to be in a continual process of coming into existence and passing away. It is in the universality of the process that birth (jati) depends. But on what does the endless becoming itself depend? The Buddhist answer is that existence depends on the clinging to life (Upadana) which clinging depends on the thirst, or craving for existence (tanha).

The Law of Karma and the periodic rhythm of growth and decay which the world obeys are ideas common to Hindus and Buddhists. Though the Pitakas insist on the universality of causation, they have no notion of the uniformity of nature in our sense.

The Buddhist doctrine of causation states that one cannot obtain emancipation and happiness unless one understood and removed the cause of his desire. Karma in early Buddhism simply states that everything has a cause and that everyone's nature and circumstances are the results of previous action in this or other existences. Hence, it is not invoked as a metaphysical explanation of the universe but an ultimate moral fact. It is in this line of thinking that the Kalpa theory comes in. Based on this concept, the world cannot continue to exist for all time. Having run its course for a certain period of time it will be dissolved. One period after creation is followed by a state of destruction. Now, the duration of one created world is known as Kalpa or world-period. It is interesting to know that the process of Kalpa goes on according to the Law of Karma, which according to atheistic writers rules events by its own force without depending upon any other supreme agency. Vedantin and other theistic writers are of the opinion that Kalpa and Karma depend on God's will. It is He who sets an order with the view of helping souls to attain final release since by one Kalpa all souls are not able to expiate all their sins. Brahman dissolves the existing world periodically in order to give some rest in those souls suffering in Samsara for a long time. This cycle goes on and on.

V. THE CONCEPT OF MAN

In India or in any country in the East, man is thought of as part of nature, not a center or master. A good man does not kill birds and beasts for pleasure, they should treat animals as humble brethren rather than as lower creatures over whom they have dominion. Yet from the lower viewpoint, man is a creature with a double status. He partakes of the character of both the seen and the unseen worlds. He is truly a creature of the borderland — with animal desires and spiritual yearnings. While he is a part of the natural order, he has in him the seed of the spirit. It is this spirit in him that has been the theme of India's great writing. The ideal man of India is not the magnanimous man of Greece or the radiant knight of Medieval Europe, but the free man of spirit who has attained insight into the universal source by rigid discipline and practice of disinterested virtues, who has freed him-

self from the prejudices of his time and place. From the higher standpoint, man is a spirit. The goal is the vision of God and it is open to all.

The above concepts shall be utilized by this researcher whenever necessary in making explanations in later chapters, clearer or in driving home a point even to the extent of suffering redundancy.

THE DOCTRINE OF TRANSMIGRATION

While Brahmin priests were strengthening the Vedic orthodoxy with their commentaries, some free-lancing philosophers had challenged the authority of tradition and had struck out on their own quest for truth. The works of these free-thinkers of the 7th century B.C. have been handed down to posterity and have come to be known classically as the Upanishads. It is in this great work, that one finds the true beginnings of the doctrine of Samsara.

The Upanishads were called Vedanta — a contraction of the term Veda-anta which literally means “the end of the Vedas” where the term “end” carries the twin meaning of the goal of the Veda teaching as well as the termination of the Vedic teaching. This writer upholds the idea that the doctrine under investigation is not only rooted in the Upanishads but is a necessary consequence of the basic doctrine of the Upanishads. As such it is imperative that a review of the basic doctrine dominant in the Upanishads be also presented here for certainly, as with a great number of doctrines, a lot of misinterpretations come about as a result of taking a doctrine out of the milieu in which it grew up. This section will therefore present first, the fundamental Upanishadic teaching, then the beginning of the doctrine of Samsara and establish the connection between the two. This basic doctrine however shall be presented briefly. Its main purpose here will be solely to help establish its relation to the doctrine under investigation.

I. THE FUNDAMENTAL TEACHINGS OF THE UPANISHADS

The great theme of all Vedantic teaching is the identity of Atman with Brahman. In its most distilled form, the Upanishads

state that Brahman is the only Reality; the world is ultimately false and the soul or the individual self (jivatman) is non-different from Brahman who is the Highest Self (paramatman). The mind in its ignorance superimposes a world of duality and plurality on the non-dual unique identity of jiva and Brahman thus bringing into view, like a wonderful mirage, a multitude of beings, interests, and conflicting opposites. In the world in which men move, one not only finds differentiation and multiplicity but also a plurality of individual souls apparently distinct from one another and from Brahman. This appearance has been ascribed to the principle of Maya which is associated with Brahman and is the cause of the phenomenal world. Now, Maya is that power of Brahman by which the world of multiplicity comes into existence. It is a creative power until one realized the truth of the sole reality of the Brahman. Maya as the inherent power of Brahman has two aspects — negative and positive. In its negative aspect, it conceals reality and acts as a screen to hide it. In its positive aspect, it projects the world of plurality on the Brahman — ground. The study of Vedanta texts is undertaken in order to free oneself from this false notion of superimposition (the notion of a thing in something else) and thereby realize the essential unity of the self. Metaphysically, Maya is that mysterious power of Brahman that deludes us into taking this empirical world as reality. Epistemologically, Maya is ignorance. It distorts reality. For Advaita⁶ the phenomenal world is Maya and is produced by Maya. The term "Maya" is commonly translated as "illusion". If such translation shall be rendered, it is wise to remind the readers that the meaning of Maya is not so much that the world and individual existences are illusory in the strict sense of the word, as phenomenal. As Shankara says — The world is said to be real for practical purposes, but unreal in the ultimate sense. It is likened to a dream. When one is dreaming the objects in the dream are real to the dreamer; hence the water in his dream can quench his thirst, but, when the dreamer wakes up, he realizes that everything in the dream was unreal. So with this world. It is a public

⁶ Advaita Vedanta is a school of Indian thought, it is the most representative of all schools of Indian Philosophy to the Upanishadic teaching. It is the most popular school and its best representative philosopher is Shankara.

dream. Only when one wakes to the reality can he realize the truth that he is Brahman, yet he had always been Brahman.

Interpretation of Atman — Brahman

In order that the reader may truly understand the fundamental Upanishadic doctrine, this writer shall now give the interpretation behind the much argued doctrine.

The crux of the whole tenet of "only the Brahman is real" and its subsequent implication that "the world is ultimately false", lies in the correct interpretation of the concept of "Brahman". This writer upholds the contention that the basic doctrine of the Upanishad is symbolic following upon the doctrine of orthodox Hinduism. Now, the Upanishadic sages, in their contemplation of the things around recognized certain characteristics of the world: day changes into night, seedlings grow into big trees, the helpless infant develops into a strong man, and in the series they realized that it belongs to the nature of the world to change. Definitely, what changes cannot be real, for the real (by Indian interpretation) must be permanent; it must be true for all times. Consider the following lines taken from the instructions given by Uddalaka to his son, Svetaketu:

"My dear, as by one clod of clay all that is made of clay is known, the difference (change) being only a name, arising from speech, but the truth (reality) being that all is clay".

"And as, my dear, by one nugget of gold, all that is made of gold is known, the difference being only a name, arising from speech, but the truth being that all is gold."⁷

In the mind should this be perceived,
Here there is no plurality anywhere;
From death to death is he led blindly;
Who here gaze on a plurality:⁸

Since nothing in this world can subscribe to the definition of "real", then the world is declared by the Hindu thinkers to be

⁷ Chand. 6.4 and 5.

⁸ Brih. 4.4.19.

unreal. But if the world is unreal, yet it is there as perceivable by the senses, common sense and logic then will dictate that there must be something real behind the unreal. If the world were false or illusory, there must be truth behind the falsity, a reality behind the illusory. That truth, that reality, that ground upon which the false and the illusory is based is the Brahman — the ground of all things. Thus re-stating the doctrine: "Only the Brahman is real; the world is unreal" one comes up with the statement that "Only the eternal is real; what evolves to perfection is unreal". Expanding this doctrine to embrace everything belonging to this world of matter, one can move from one level to another level of existence; from one category to another category. In the end, one should come to the truth — that behind all things that change is something unchangeable; behind the many is a one. Applying this to man, this means to state that behind the changes that occur within the individual man is something that abides — the innerself; the Spirit — Atman. What man does not realize however is that this inner self is one with the Universal Self (Brahman). Such a unity with the Brahman will only dawn upon man, at the moment of the highest perfection. This peak of perfection is what has been variably called — Self-Realization, Transformation, Absorption. He who does not realize the unity of Atman — Brahman is ignorant of the true nature of the self. For better clarification, it is wise to remind the reader that Brahmanic teaching gives two ways of viewing the world: one, is from the point of view of one who is in a state of ignorance (ignorance of the true reality — that Atman-Brahman is the only reality) and the other is from the point of view of one who is in the state of knowledge (realization that Brahman is the only reality). He who is in the state of ignorance believes the world and everything in it to be lasting. Because of this delusion, he clings to the objects of the world and thus becomes attached to the world. Such a man is said to be in bondage. Therefore, it said that bondage is due to ignorance.

Now the only way to destroy ignorance is by knowledge of the true reality which is, that Atman is Brahman. Consequently, the goal of life is to obtain release from this ignorance. This release is what is known as Moksha.

Now this writer wishes to draw the attention of the readers to the beginning of the popular doctrine of transmigration.

II. THE ORIGIN OF THE DOCTRINE OF SAMSA RA

In India, the doctrine seems indigenous to the soil and not brought over by the Aryan invaders for the Hindu doctrine of Metempsychosis is totally unknown to the Vedas. In all probability, the suggestion, at least, of the possibility of rebirth came from the aborigines, for Indo-European eschatology is unfamiliar with such an idea. In some animistic superstitions cherished by the aborigines, we may conjecture, the Upanishadic philosophers found help to round out the theory of Karma. The Videka (fruit of retribution) of a man's life was equated according to Vedic teachings in a future life of heaven or hell. But the gods who were there to punish or reward had faded out. So the Upanishads seized eagerly on the suggestions that the guilty one will carry his load of guilt into another earthly life. They deferred rewards and punishment partly to the other world. In place of the ancient Vedic conception of the indiscriminate felicity of the pious, the idea of recompense is formulated involving the need of setting before the departed different degrees of compensation in the other world proportionate to their knowledge and action. Since, however, the oldest form of punishment among all peoples in a natural state, is revenge, this recompense also consists originally in the doing to us in the other world of the very same good or evil which we have done to anyone in this aspect. This theory is realistically expressed in Satap Br. 12-9.1.1: — "For whatever food a man eats in this world by the very same is he eaten again in the others." Gradually, the idea of equalizing justice was developed as it appears in Br. 11.2.7.33: — "For they lay it (the good and evil) on the scales in yonder world, and whichever it be good or evil." In the course of time, a distinction arose between the Way of the Father and the Way of the Gods and similarly as between the World of the Gods as the abode of the blessed and the World of the Fathers as the place of retribution. With special frequency, there is expressed the fear that instead of the hope for immortality, a renewed death may await even in the other world.⁹ Thus,

⁹ Taitt. Br. 3.11.8.6.

escape from renewed death became a stereo-type formula.¹⁰ However, this renewed death is to be understood as repeated dying in the other world. This may be seen from the following passages:

"Accordingly he brings his fathers who are mortal to a condition of immortality and causes them who are mortal to rise again from out of the condition of immortality; in truth, he who knows this averts renewed death from his father."¹¹

Also,

"They who know this or do this work rise again after death and when they rise again, they rise to immortality; but they who do not know this or failed to do this work rise again after death, and become again and again its prey."¹²

From the parallel which these passages draw between immortality and the current death, it is clear that the latter also is not to be understood as transmigration but only of a resurrection and repeated death in the other world. However, it was only necessary to transfer that renewed death from an imaginary future into the present in order to arrive at the doctrine of transmigration. This takes place first in the Upanishads.

III. FOUNDATIONS OF THE DOCTRINE OF TRANSMIGRATION

The chief text that sets forth the Doctrine of Transmigration is found in a two-fold recension for the most part in verbal agreement in one another. These passages are (Chand. 5.3.-10 and Brih. 6.2). The Indian authorities call it the Doctrine of the Five Fires — (pancagnividya). Indian authorities are inclined to believe that when the two parts that make up this transmigration text were collected and later on combined with one another, the Doctrine of Transmigration must have been still unknown. This could be a proof that the text is of late origin and a secondary product; so too are its content. The first expression of the con-

¹⁰ Satap. Br. 10.6.1.4.

¹¹ Ibid. 12.9.3.12.

¹² Ibid. 10.4.3.10.

cept of the soul's transmigration is found in the Brihadaranyaka. There Garalkanava Artabhaga said:

"Yajnavalkhya, when the speech of the dead person enters into fire, breath into the air, the eye into the sun, the mind into the moon, the hearing into space, into the earth the body, into the ether the self, into the shrubs the hairs of the body, into the trees the hairs of the hands, when the blood and the seed are deposited in the water, where is then that person?"

"Yajnavalkhya said: "Take my hand, my friend. We two alone shall know this; let this question of ours not be discussed in public; and what they said was Karman (work) what they praised was Karman (work), viz. that a man becomes good by good works, and bad by bad works."¹³

Ultimately, the motive which lies at the basis of the Doctrine of Transmigration is clearly expressed. It is the great moral difference of character existing from birth and which the philosopher explains in our passage from the hypothesis that a man has already existed once before his birth and that his inborn character is the fruit and consequence of his previous action.

Yajnavalkhya expresses himself more clearly still in another well-known passage. Here, the description of the departure of the soul from the body is given after which it is said:

"Then, both his knowledge and his works take hold of him and his acquaintance with former things. And as a caterpillar, after having reached the end of a blade of grass, and after having made another approach to another blade, draws himself together towards it, thus, this Self, after having thrown off this body and dispelled all ignorance (i. e. empirical existence) and after making another approach to another body draws himself together towards it.

And as a goldsmith, taking a piece of gold turns it into another newer and more beautiful shape, so does this Self, after having thrown off this body and dispelled all ignorance, make unto himself another, newer and more beautiful shape (form) whether it be like the Fathers or like the Gandharvas, or like the Devas, or like Prajapati, or like Brahman or like other beings... now as a man

¹³ Brih. 3.2.13.

is like this or like that, according as he acts and according as he behaves — so will he be. A man of good acts will become good, a man of bad acts, bad. He becomes pure by pure deeds, bad by bad deeds. And here they say that a person consists of desires — and as is his desire so is his will, and as is his will, so is his deed; and whatever deed he does that he will reap.¹⁴

And here is this verse: "To whatever object a man's own mind is attached to that he goes strenuously together with his deeds; and having obtained the end (the last results) of whatever deed he does on earth, he returns again from that world to this world of action."¹⁵

This passage does not yet recognize a two-fold retribution in a future world and again upon earth, but only by transmigration. The illustration of the caterpillar, which as soon as it has eaten up one leaf transfers itself to another, shows that immediately after death, the soul enters a new body, in accordance with its good or evil deeds. It illustrates the fact that this sphere of transmigration is extended to the worlds of men, fathers, and gods, up to Prajapati and the personal Brahman. Consequently, the worlds of the fathers and the gods cannot be set apart, as according to the later theory, for a recompense by the side and independent of that by transmigration.

The eschatology therefore of Yajnavalkya (Brih. 1-5) does not yet recognize a two-fold retribution in a future world and again by a new life, but only one by a rebirth in (the worlds of men, fathers and gods). Later, in accordance with the Indian custom of not abandoning an old concept, one sees how by the side of the belief in a return to earth the ancient ideas of a recompense of good and evil in the other world persist, and become united with the Doctrine of Transmigration so that now, all good and evil actions experienced a two-fold retribution: one in the other world and again by a renewed life on earth. This is of course, the case in the chief text of the Doctrine of Transmigration. It must be remembered that distinction was made of two parts of this chief texts: an older part which was called the Doctrine of the Five Fires and a later part which was called the Doctrine of the Two Ways. The difference of the two parts is clearly shown by the

¹⁴ Brih. 4.4.2-6

¹⁵ Chand. 3.14.1.

fact that according to the Doctrine of the Two Ways, faith (Sraddha) leads to Brahman without return, while according to Doctrine of the Five Fires, it is this which above all constitutes the motive for the return to earth.

The first and older doctrine assumes the absence of recompense in the other worlds; but depicts how the soul after it has journeyed to heaven in a burning of the corpse (Brih. 6.2.14) returns thence immediately through the three regions of the universe, heaven, atmosphere and earth, and through the bodies of father and mother, these being the five transit stations to a new existence. Just as in Yajavalkhya, the Doctrine of Transmigration makes its appearance as a great mystery (Brih. 3.2.13) so here also it comes before us marked in secrecy as something new, not to be profaned. In India, it was natural to conceive of burning as a sacrifice. As the libation poured into the fire (soma, milk, etc.) ascends in spiritual form to the gods, so the immortal part of man ascends to heaven by the funeral pyre. This immortal part is termed by Yajavalkhya, Karman, "work" which in the text is analogically described as the sacrificial fluid like "water" and later on "faith." This signifies that the soul of the work (Karman) that ascends as the sacrificial vapor (apas) is the faith (sraddha) with which it is offered. This work in Yajnavalkhya's phrase, this "faith" ascends to heaven as the immortal part of man, and is there offered five times in succession to the sacrificial fires of the heaven, the atmosphere, the earth, the man, and the woman. By this means, it is changed successively from faith to soma, from soma to rain, from rain to food, from food to seed, and from seed to the embryo; thus it is led to a renewed existence on earth.

The Doctrine of the Two Ways

The second half of the doctrine which is called the Doctrine of the Two Ways marks a considerable further advance and, combining the ancient Vedic eschatology with the Doctrine of Transmigration, it teaches a two-fold recompense on the one hand in the other world, and once again by a return to earth. To this end, it represents the souls of the dead as ascending in two different ways, the Devayana (Way of the Gods) and the Pitryana (Way of

the Fathers). In the Chandogya, one finds a detailed description of Devayana: "On the burning of the corpse, the soul enters into the flame, thence into the day, thence into the bright half of the month, thence into the bright half of the year (the summer season), thence into the year, thence into the sun, thence into the moon, thence into the lightning, and so finally into Brahman. The meaning of the whole is that the soul on the way of the gods reaches regions of ever increasing light, in which is concentrated all that is bright and radiant as stations on the way to Brahman who is himself the "light of lights".¹⁶

The Pitryana or Way of the Fathers was next explained after the analogy of the Devayana: the soul on the burning of the corpse enters the smoke, thence the night, thence the dark half of the month, thence the dark half of the year (winter season), thence the world of the fathers, thence the ether, and finally as in Devayana into the moon and remains there as long as the remnant of goodwill yet exist. (Chand. 5.10.5). Then, there follows a second recompense upon earth. There is a descent of the soul from ether to wind, to smoke, to mist, to cloud, to rain, to herbage, to food, and to seed, to which succeeds the entrance into the womb of a new mother and the renewed birth. The descent here is not a passing through the five sacrificial fires but a progressive materialization of the substance of the soul. As everything that was bright and radiant was directed to the Devayana, everything that was darkness and gloom was directed to the Pitryana. A further development of these ideas may be found in the Chandogya wherein a distinction was drawn among the souls returning from the moon between those of "pleasing conduct" and those of "abominable conduct". Those of "pleasing conduct" are reborn as Brahmins, Kshatriyas, or Vaisyas: those of "abominable conduct" as dogs, pigs, or c'andalas (outcasts).

These then are the crude beginnings of the Doctrine of Transmigration of the soul which from Upanishadic times down to the present has held a foremost position in Indian thought. It carries the conviction that each life with all its actions and sufferings is on the one hand the inevitable consequence of the actions of a birth, and conditions on the other hand by the actions performed

¹⁶ Chand. 4.15.5.

in it, the next succeeding life. In detail, the Doctrine of Metempsychosis assumes various forms since different views are held regarding the relation of the soul to the body, but the essence of all is the same, namely — that life does not begin at birth and does not end at death but is a link in an infinite series of lives each of which is conditioned and determined by the acts done in previous existences (Karma). Animal, human, and divine (or at least angelic) existences may all be links in the chain. So a man's deeds of good may exalt him to the heaven; if evil, may degrade him to life as a beast.

This conception mythical as it is, nevertheless, contains the germ of philosophical truth. It is the avowed purpose of this work to draw this out in detail.

IV. TEACHINGS OF THE VEDANTA

The Advaita Vedanta teaching claims that to be freed from the Law of Karma, one has to get rid of "avidya" (ignorance). However, it is only through the knowledge of Brahman that ignorance is finally overcome and Brahman is to be known by being "it". To refresh the memory of the reader, it is good to repeat the underlying doctrine of Vedanta — "the individual self (jiva) is a composite of self and not-self. The self (jiva) is a manifestation or an empirical form of Brahman. According to Shankara, individuality is due to Karman, which is the product of ignorance (avidya). When true knowledge dawns, then the realization comes — that jiva is Brahman. In accord with the *acosmic* conception of the absolute, the goal which is release is not a state to be merely attained as it is the eternal nature of the self itself. When ignorance which is the cause of bondage is dispelled by wisdom, the soul realizes its non-difference from Brahman. Release is absolute bliss; it is undisturbed peace.

Vedanta thus offers the process of realizing Brahman through 3 stages: (1) the study of the Upanishads under a proper guide, (2) the intellectual conviction that what the Upanishads teach can be obtained through unitary reflection and inward analysis and, (3) a continued meditation that leads to final wisdom.

There is no mistaking the fact that the Hindus seek for salvation by knowledge. But a Hindu is equally convinced that to be free is to be free from Karma, and to be free from Karma, he must suppress all desires. Doubtless, the Hindus feel the power of deeds, but he realizes that it is only the lower happiness which lies in doing good works and enjoying their fruits. The higher bliss consists in being entirely free from the bondage of deeds and karma. Thus moral life is assumed to be a condition precedent to the inquiring into Brahman-Atman. As Shāṅkara says: "karman of ethical activity does not directly contribute to spiritual freedom (Moksha). It creates in us the desire to know. It is the indirect preparation for moksha or liberation." As the Katha says "not he who has not ceased from bad conduct, not he who is not tranquil, not he who is not composed, not he whose mind is turbulent can obtain Him by intelligence."¹⁷

The philosophy of the Upanishads is avowedly a quest for happiness and that happiness is found in some form of union with Brahman. But the Upanishadic seers doubtless recognized the fact that there were men of low mentality as well as men of high mentality. If they were to teach everyone to obtain happiness, they must have to put across the way to do it; they must give the people the means to attain it. Thus, they conceived of two levels of preaching the same doctrine of release — the lower level was presented with the doctrine of Samsara — rebirth. This was offered as a means to happiness for those of low mentality; the higher form was centered on meditation. This was the means offered to those of gifted mentality. These two levels of doctrines on Release are based on the two-world views — outward and inward; lower and higher views; worldly and other worldly; the moral and the intellectual views respectively. This is to say that those of lower mentality see the outer world, the world of phenomena, the material things outside of man, whereas those of higher mentality look into the essence of things, the noumena, the inner self, the spirit.

From the lower viewpoint, this world as we see it and know it is real (in the sense that we perceive it). From the higher standpoint, the world is unreal (in the sense that it is not perma-

¹⁷ Kath. xii 24.

ment). The world is real for practical purposes but unreal in the ultimate sense, for the real is unchanging and the world is changing. In consonance with this, the Indians presented means by which rebirth and consequently suffering could be offset. They presented a Doctrine of Salvation or Emancipation. Certainly the means of obtaining salvation or release from rebirth must be within reach of the people for whom it was instituted. In other words the doctrine of emancipation or liberation must lie along the same plane as the doctrine of bondage. Thus, in the lower level of thinking where the world and the things in it are considered to be real, suffering must be real and the means to end this suffering must be presented as real. Following a cause-effect presentation, the sages formulated the concept that whatever you do in the present will affect you in the future; the good that you do today will come back to you perhaps in another form but that form will be a good. On the other hand, the evil that you do will boomerang and thus give you an evil in another form. Thus the power of deeds done in past existences conditions or even creates future existences. This is evidently the Doctrine of Karma. It is not difficult to present such a doctrine and to have people believe and to accept it particularly if one uses illustration from nature, a fact which the sages were fond of doing. For instance — if you plant a good seed on good ground you can have a good harvest; inversely, if you plant a bad seed on bad ground you can have a bad harvest. Applying this assumption to individuals, a good conduct is expected to bring about the Highest Good — Happiness; bad conduct will bring about the worst evil — Suffering or Unhappiness — Rebirth. To obtain release from this suffering, this vale of tears, one was encouraged to abstain from action (Karma).

These views of rebirth and Karma have a moral value for they teach that what a man gets depends on what he is or makes himself to be. By far, the most important consequence of the doctrine is that ordinary folk in the East cling to the hope that a life of virtue will secure for them another life as a happy being on earth or perhaps in some heaven which though not eternal will still be long.

Problem on Moksha

The Upanishadic gurus were confronted with several practical philosophical problems related to teaching their students the way

to Moksha. The first was to work out a conception of Moksha or freedom itself. The Upanishadic teachers realized that except for a gifted few to whom Advaita comes naturally, an awareness of being in bondage is necessary to inspire one to make the quest for freedom; they recognized that Karma could provide a ready means for instilling this awareness. Much more they were confident that Karma can easily be acknowledged as operative in life; after all, it is far easier to convince another of the lasting effect of his actions than it is to talk to one about the binding nature of his ideas, concepts and language. Every one can become aware of motives based on desire that leads to acts and decisions that have moral consequences. Karma was thus employed for formulating a definition of bondage that is necessary for formulating a conception of freedom.

A second problem related to the first problem and of more specific application is the problem of moral preparation. The Upanishadic sages were aware that the "study of Philosophy requires moral prerequisites such as purity of heart, self-control, renunciation of sensual pleasures which are important for one who aspires for enlightenment".¹⁸ Thus the real problem was how they could persuade man to lead a moral life. The sages thought that, if men realized that whatever they did would determine the future, then they would attach a tremendous importance to their moral acts and decisions. This would make men think twice about leading a life other than a moral one. Much more, the wise men of the Upanishads recognized the enormous distance that most persons must cover before they could pursue a life of the spirit, and even then, there would doubtless be a number of failures accompanying it. Hence the gurus have wondered how they could avoid discouragement and retreat among the students. Lastly, there was the problem of inequality among man and the problem of evil. The gurus found in the Doctrine of Karma the solutions to all these problems. The spiritual and mental and socio-economic differences between individuals are said to be the results of their conduct and their past actions. Karma was thus used by the Upanishadic wisemen and taken over by later Advaitins with expectation that it would satisfy certain problems that arise

¹⁸ Kath. 1, 2.2.

within the context of a philosophical practice that aspires to the realization of self knowledge and freedom. To insure success and avoid discouragement, the Upanishadic gurus utilized the Hindu concept of continuity. The Doctrine of Karma was extended from "life to life" and the result was the Doctrine of Transmigration. Thus the Doctrine of Karma was connected to the Doctrine of Transmigration. In essence, the Doctrine of Karma states that while man in the present may be the product of his own past, he of his own destiny. For him happiness and misery depended on is also the architect of his own future. Man was thus the master his own actions. He performed action on earth and accumulated merit wherein part of it he enjoyed here on earth and the rest in heaven. He exhausted his merit and came back to the human world and performed actions again in order to accumulate merit. Most men are bound by their deed; every new act brings consequences which attaches the doer to the world of transmigrations and which creates for him new existences, but the deeds of a man who is really free have no such trammelling effects for they are not prompted by desire or directed to an object.

Taking over these concepts, the Upanishads preached Rita or moral law: "according as a man acts and walks in the path of life so he becomes. He that does good becomes good, he that does evil becomes evil". It is quite clear to the Upanishadic thinkers that a man can no more escape the consequences of his least acts than he can escape from his shadow; also that good and evil Karma pile up quite independently of any concept of a god offended by human transgression. They thought that a man is bound by his acts and, as long as he is in bondage, he is reborn. To the Indian thinkers, rebirth is envisaged as suffering and suffering is considered as evil. As such, the means to escaping it are sought.

The common aspiration of the Hindu is for deliverance, that is release from the cycle of birth and death and rebirth and repose in some changeless state called by such names as union with Brahman, Nirvana and many others. Moksha or release is the goal of every man and release consists in the souls' freedom from the need to be re-born; consequently, freedom from subjecting to the Law of Karma becomes the goal of life.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE HINDU CONCEPT

I. ANALYSIS

The influence of the Doctrine of Transmigration has been felt far and wide, yet this writer wishes to declare that the idea that was disseminated in all regions was not the very idea that its originators sought to propound. While this may appear to be a very drastic conclusion, the following pages will try to support this radical conclusion.

The Doctrine of Transmigration is one of the tributaries of speculations which sprang from the fundamental doctrine of the Upanishads but which in time was separated from the basic doctrine to which it was originally attached. It was formulated as a companion to the Upanishadic tenet of "Only the Brahman is" and therefore was never intended to be separated from it. It was designed by the sages to help those who were bound to the "this world" cravings to rise up to the understanding of the deep Upanishadic concept as the following passages will prove:

"He who knows Him the wise long-emancipated youthful atman, no more fears death."¹⁹

"The Self is his pathfinder, he who finds him is no longer stained by action, that evil thing."²⁰

The Doctrine of Transmigration was a masterpiece of psychology. While the sages looked upon the Doctrine of Transmigration as a necessary aid to reach the higher step that would lead to the door of Self-Realization, the idea gripped the minds of men living in the shackles of ignorance. They took the first step for the last step and were content with it. One begins to wonder how such a false concept can have been so influential as to create a wide spread that has become the solace of millions of people. The answer to this riddle is not far away. Many people have conceived of this world as a vale of tears where pain and suffering predominate. Many people other than the Hindus have at

¹⁹ Atharva 10.8.44.

²⁰ Taiit. Br. 3.12.9.8.

one time or another taken refuge in the thought that this world is but a temporary abode where men are but pilgrims and that salvation can be obtained only in some other place of existence. But no other people carried that thought to so rigorous a length as did the Hindus. Most other folks halted in the hope that death would inevitably open the door to salvation. They believed that though life in this world was utterably vain, death was approaching and with it the assurance of real life in some other or more glorious world. But the Hindus (who were in the state of "ignorance") did not cherish so easy a hope — death seems to them anything but a way out. In the dread valley of the Ganges where existence meant perpetual struggle beneath a sun that seared one's flesh and in an air that strangled one's courage, even death did not hold out any immediate promise of peace. The full idea of transmigration, of a weary round of endless life, set in. Men, other than those who were acquainted with the teachings of the Upanishads, took the Doctrine of Transmigration at its face value and the doctrine spread as such.

The decisive factor in the idea of Samsara (cycle of birth and death) is death — Hindus believe that all the sufferings of man in this world come from death. Facing death, a man is led to the metaphysical contemplation of the problem.

The Brahmanic Concept.

The Doctrine of Transmigration is known under different names like Reincarnation and Metempsychosis but it is highly important to note that in the language of its origin, Sanskrit, the term used is "Samsara" which means "migration," or simply "passing".

In its most condensed presentation, the Brahmanic Doctrine of Transmigration (as popularly known) states that when a man dies his body breaks up, but something, the soul (jiva) passes on and migrates to an equally transitory tenement. That tenement is the home which it is able to occupy by virtue of the configuration and qualities which it has induced upon itself. The character of the successive tenements of the Atman is determined by the Law of Karma. The Doctrine of Transmigration clearly suggests a belief in multiplicity for certainly to state that the jiva "passes" from one tenement to another tenement shows that distinction

has to be made between the soul entering deliverance and that into which it enters as found in the Chandogya: "To him shall I departing hence enter in".²¹

Now it is interesting to note that all the Upanishads, even the oldest when they discuss bondage in samsara (cycle of birth and death) and of "moksha" liberation from "samsara", distinguish between the atman imprisoned in samsara and the divine emancipated atman.

As mentioned earlier the Upanishads distinguished two types of Atman: the individual Atman (jivatman) and the supreme Atman (paramatman). The supreme Atman is said to be free from the start; the individual soul (jiva) is entangled in the round of Samsara and stands in need of emancipation or deliverance, yet the individual atman is the supreme atman itself but his real nature is concealed by the Upadhis (limiting attributes). However, strictly speaking, these upadhis cannot change the true nature of the atman; rather it is only ignorance (avidya) which imposes the Upadhis (limiting attributes) on the supreme atman and thus the individual atman comes to regard itself as the individual atman. Consequently the individual atman as such has no reality. One cannot help accusing the Vedanta of some kind of contradiction found in its system. Now this internal contradiction becomes highly significant in this research work for it forms the basis for this writer's interpretation of the doctrine under investigation. This apparent contradiction suggests that the doctrine is trying to say something other than what is explicitly expressed. This apparent contradiction points to the conclusion that the designation of two atman as jivatman and paramatman is of secondary origin. Certainly the *text* of the oldest Upanishads does not recognize two souls, but only one. To quote from the Brihadaranyaka: "It is the atman which is within all".²²

It is the writer's belief that the Doctrine of Transmigration is lodged in the theory of the two atmans. The theory of the two forms of atman of which one is the real self and the other its shadow²³ definitely suggests the two views of reality that the Upanishadic sages had continually harped about in their

²¹ Chand. 6.3.2.

²² Brih. 3.4.1., 3.5.1.

²³ This concept is expressed in the section entitled: The Concept of Soul.

desire to establish the fundamental doctrine of the unity of Brahman. The Gurus realized that the manifold world would strongly present itself as real to a world viewer and unless they accede to its reality (in a way) they could not easily put across the supreme teaching (the unity of the Brahman). As already mentioned before there are two ways of viewing reality: one is the outward or wordly view and the other is the inward or other-worldly view. The first view (outward) is turned towards the objects of the world and perceives the manyness of reality while the latter view (inward) is turned towards himself and conceives of the oneness of reality. The Upanishadic sages were convinced that those who were set on the things of the material world, namely — pleasure, wealth, power — declare its reality because they are ignorant of the true reality, the knowledge of which can be attained only by turning to the innermost nature of the self (inward view). Since the masters likewise recognized differences of intellectual capacities among men, they believed that those of lower mentality are most prone towards the outward view than towards the inward view and, consequently, those of higher mentality tend towards the inner view of things. The outer view can be considered as that which concerns itself with the accidents, the phenomena of things while the inner view would be that concerning the essences, the noumena of things. The two viewpoints were later related to the levels of teaching: the lower and the higher, with the hope that the lower level of knowledge was to be transcended by the higher level which to the Upanishadic sages is Knowledge. In contrast to this Knowledge (of the sole reality of the Brahman) the lower knowledge was labeled as Ignorance. Following upon this line of thinking, the Indian sages thought of two forms of the same goal — Happiness: one for each view and, in accordance with these ends, two types of means to attain these ends. To the outward view which was considered as a lower type, there was presented as its goal, the personal Brahman, the Brahman full of qualities (Saguna Brahman — happiness), but to the inward view was presented, the impersonal Brahman, the Brahman that is qualityless (Nirguna Brahman) which is the higher form of Brahman (bliss). The means leading to both was a process of purification. However even in this, some form of distinction was given: the purifica-

tion belonging to the outward lower view was a moral purification, whereas that of the inward higher view, a mental spiritual purification. It is in connection with the moral purification that the Doctrine of Transmigration was formulated.²⁴ The lower teaching was — that one has to strive to do good and perfect himself morally in the earthly life. Otherwise, he will be reborn into the state of suffering. Conversely, he who leads a moral life will be liberated from rebirth and thus from all forms of suffering. To illustrate: the older Upanishads hint at the doctrine that man is bound and conditioned in so far as he is a part of the world of phenomena but free in so far as the self within him is identical with the divine self which is the creator of all bonds and conditions. Thus the Kaushitaki Upanishad says: "He it is who causes the man whom he will lead upwards from this world to do good works and it is he who causes the man whom he will lead downwards to do evil works. He is the guardian of the world, he is the ruler of the world; he is the Lord of the world, and he is my self."²⁵ Similarly in the Chandogya: "They who depart hence without having known the self and those true desires, for them there is no freedom in all worlds. But who depart hence, after knowing the Self and those true desires, for them there is freedom in all worlds."²⁶ To the Indian, freedom is liberation (moksha) and liberation is equated with the state of happiness.

The Indian thinkers envisioned the need for moral discipline and perfection as prerequisites to mental and spiritual discipline and perfection. Thus, they related the Law of Karma to the Doctrine of Transmigration by working out a convenient fiction and preached this doctrine to the greater majority of men with the truth that "only the Brahman is." Hence, it is clear that the doctrines of Samsara belongs to the lower level of teaching. As mentioned previously, in essence, the Doctrine of Metempsychosis

²⁴ The Indian idea of Samsara is based on their view that life in this world is suffering. This view is found early in the Upanishads. Yajñavalkya thought that a man is happy when he realized the Atman and that a man is in torment when he is detached from the Atman, ignorant of this source of happiness. He explained the essence of the Atman (the Self) saying: "This is thy Self, the ruler within, the immortal. Everything else is of evil." (Brih. Up. III, 7, SBE, XV. 136).

²⁵ Kaush. III. 8.

²⁶ Chand. 8.1-6.

declares that at death the body breaks up and the soul migrates to another body — to use Upanishadic language — “even as a caterpillar, when coming to the end of a blade of grass reaches out to another blade of grass and draws itself to it, in the same way the atman leaving the body and unwisdom behind it reaches out to another body and draws itself over to it.”²⁷

It should be borne in mind that the Doctrine of Transmigration simply states that at death, the atman transfers to another body, there to reap the fruits of its past actions. Now the question is, into which body must it transfer, and the answer given is the specific type of body that its past action created for it. Definitely, if there are individuals and individuals are so-called precisely because they have something unique in them, there must be a number of types of bodies to suit these transmigrating individual atman (jiva). For this reason, Hindu sages have to take recourse to nature to categorize the bodies into which the soul may reside. Thus, they spoke of the five sheaths of the Self. They recognized levels of existence and came up with a hierarchy of animate beings where the lowest rank would be the body whose existence depends purely on food. This corresponds to the “Annamaya Kosa” of the Doctrine of the Five Sheaths — the physical corporeal self or body, thereby implying that its activity is purely nutrition, growth and reproduction; the higher rank would consist of the body whose existence is also based on nutrition but whose activity extends beyond those of the lowest level for such body perceives, enjoys, and suffers. This corresponds to the “Manomaya Kosa” or the sheath of mind. And the highest rank, whose activity consists in discrimination between objects, corresponds to the “Vijnanamaya Kosa” or sheath of understanding. These categories correspond to the Vegetative, the Sensitive and the Rational beings respectively. Thus, those who, in their previous existence have led lives strongly dominated by passion and desire for material things would be reincarnated in an animal existence as they do desire and one who in his previous existence has devoted his time to a life of reason and choice, would be reborn as a man.

The Hindus, however, do not stop at such broad classification for within these categories they still found divisions according to

²⁷ Brih. Up. IV. 4.3.

a correlation between the behavior characteristic of a certain type of animal and the behavior of a man as for instance, the craving for sensual pleasure is declared to be Darkness which is the vilest type of activity to the Laws of Manu and according to which Law: "Immovable beings, insects both small and great, fishes, snakes and tortoises, cattles and wild animals are the lowest condition to which the quality of Darkness leads,"²⁸ Implying that those who indulged in sensual pleasure would be leading lives no better than those of a snake or cattle or wild animal.

Following upon the Hindu belief in the continuity of things, the Doctrine of Reincarnation was meant to expand to wider, greater and higher areas. Thus, from the gross — that is the body — one is expected to move on to subtle — that is the soul. This is where the analysis of Consciousness comes in since Consciousness is declared by the Indian seers as the characteristic activity of the soul and man's Consciousness the reflection of Atman.

States of Consciousness.

The Upanishadic writers were rather too keen to appeal to the testimony of consciousness in confirmation of the transmigration theory. The passing over the individual atman into the new body is a doctrine to which the Upanishads stand committed. Certainly, the prospect of rebirth offers sorry cheer to the heart. Death, which should offer an "out" thus becomes only the entrance to another corridor in the labyrinth of sorrow. Human longing for release from the miseries of one's exiled state grows more poignant at the thought that man serves out his present sentence only to begin a new one. Through the Upanishads, this cry for release echoes and to still it is an anxious concern of the sages of old India. They do claim firstly to have found a formula which ensures mortals against the danger of rebirth: "In dreams", says the Prashna Upanishads, "the mind beholds its own immensity." "The Self" says the Mandukya Upanishad "has four conditions. The first condition is Vishva, the Waking Life of outward moving consciousness, a state which is common to all men and in which one is aware of the phenomenal world, and can enjoy outer and gross objects. Here one finds a subject-object duality. The second condition is Taijasa, the Dreaming Life of inner moving

²⁸ The Laws of Manu. Chapter 12.42.

consciousness directed towards representations of the objects of the extramental world, and can enjoy the subtle elements of its own light and solitude. In this state, one also finds a subject-object duality. The third condition is the Dreaming Life of silent consciousness where a person has no desire and beholds no dream. This state is called the Deep Sleep or *Prajna* or *Sushupti*. That condition of deep sleep is one of oneness, a mass of silent consciousness made of peace and enjoying peace. The silent consciousness is all powerful, all-knowing, the inner release, the source of all, the beginning and end of all things. In this state there is no subject-object duality. It is said to be the shadow of the supreme bliss since one does not enjoy positive bliss but ignorance. The fourth condition is *Atman* or the Self in the pure state, the awakened life of pure consciousness. Like in *Prajna*, there is no subject-object duality, but unlike *Prajna*, there is enjoyment of positive bliss. In this state, ignorance vanishes and the Self shines in its own light. It is called *Turiya*, "the Fourth". This is the awakened life of supreme consciousness. This is transcendental consciousness. In this last state, thought is one with the object of thought thereby resulting in a state of "unconsciousness" that is not equivalent to non-existence but the highest and purest state of the soul in which it enjoys untrammelled bliss of its own nature.²⁹ To sum up — the analysis of the four states of consciousness shows that there is continuity of consciousness, in fact, there is but one consciousness, namely that which is associated with *Atman* but which appears in different states because of misidentification of the self with one or more aspects of phenomenal self-hood. Strictly speaking, the four states are really stages of the development of one's power of awareness.

Moksha.

By the time of the Upanishads, a definite conception of man's ideal as salvation was formulated: salvation was understood as self-realization. Man's life was meant for the realization of the

²⁹ This idea is found in the *Phaedo* — "Thought is best when the mind is gathered in herself and none of these things trouble her — neither sounds nor sight nor pain nor any pleasure — when she has as little as possible to do with the body and has no bodily sense or feeling but is aspiring after being."

inward reality. The whole life of man was meant to be education for self-realization — for Moksha.

The higher teaching of Moksha is that one must shift the forces of consciousness to see better and more. The way to growth leads to an increasing impersonality, through unifying the self with a greater than the self. Prayer, worship, meditation as well as philosophy and art to revive and purify the inner being and predispose it to contact with the divine — these may be by purification, concentration and identification.

Yoga.

And this is where Yoga comes in. The opening line of the Yoga-Sutras of Patanjali (traditional founder of the Yoga System) gives the goal of the Yoga: "Yoga consists in the (intentional) stopping of the spontaneous activities of the mind-stuff."³⁰

According to the analysis of the "psyche" rendered by the Yoga system, the mind, by nature, is continually transforming itself into the shapes of the objects of which it becomes aware. Its subtle substance assumes the forms and colors of everything offered to it by the external senses, imagination, memory, and emotion. The mind is thus in a continuous ripple, like the surface of a pond stirred by a breeze. Just as when left to itself, the water would never be crystal clear to reflect a jewel at the bottom of the pond, so also is the mind, left to itself, would never be clear to reflect the inner man (Atman). It is necessary that all sense-impressions coming from without, be stopped. The moment this quieting is accomplished, the inner man (atman) is revealed like the jewel of a quieted pond.

The supreme contribution of Yoga to Indian philosophy lies in their strictly psychological interpretation of existence. Their analysis of the micromacrocosm as well as the whole range of human problems are presented in terms of psychological functionalism. The world is understood as unfolding from a quiescent state of inward absorption and introspection becomes the key to the energies of life. The cosmogonic process thus is read in terms of psychological experience, as the unfoldment of a perceived environment from an innermost, all-pervading center. Yoga

³⁰ Patanjali, Yoga-Sutras I, 1-2.

advocates control over the body, the senses and the mind. To achieve this end, it gives the Eightfold Path of Discipline.

In the Yoga Sutra which is the classic on the subject, the moral training is included in the first two stages of the eight disciplines. The first which is Yama, which means abstention, consists of the negative aspect — non-injury (ahimsa) truth-speaking (satya) integrity or abstinence from appropriating the property of others (asteya), celibacy (brahmacharya) and not having possession (aparigraha). The second, Niyama, which is self-culture, consists of the positive part in the cultivation of the positive virtues of purity (sauca), contentment (santosha), austerity (tapas), study (svadyaya) and devotion to God (ishvara pranidhana). These two stages make up the moral training. The wise men recognized as obstacles to purification, the common defects of sensuality, avarice, gluttony, envy and sloth. To counteract this, three stages of Yogic training were designed to restrain the mind from the physical side: Asana, which is a comfortable posture; Pranayama, which is the regulation of breath to help ease the mind; and Pratyahara, which is withdrawing the soul away from its familiar surroundings and objects — all three geared towards helping the mind move through the three remaining stages which are — Dharana, usually translated as concentration but better described as fixing the mind on its object of concentration; Dhyana, which is meditation and; Samadhi, often-times translated as absorption but better described as unification. By the process of introversion-concentration one gets to his inner nature and achieves self-realization. Yoga is connected with the four states of Consciousness. By correlation, the first four ways of Yoga (Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama) may be correlated with the waking state for these states necessarily imply consciousness of the objects of the external world; the fifth state Dharana may be correlated with the dream state, where its objects are conscious representations of extramental realities. The sixth path — Dhyana could be likened to the Deep-sleep state in which there is steadfast concentration on the object of meditation, such that there is hardly any consciousness of the object on the part of the subject. The seventh stage — Samadhi corresponds to the fourth state — Turiya which is bliss — This is the state of Pure Consciousness, the state of self-realization, the state where sub-

ject and object, soul and God are so completely blended into one that the consciousness of the separate subject altogether disappears. While outer knowledge can be easily acquired, inner truth demands an absolute concentration of the mind on its object. So, in the highest stage of Samadhi, the conscious separation of the self from the divine being is destroyed. The distinction between subject and object disappears — he becomes what he beholds: This is the supreme moment of unification. This is self-realization — Moksha.

Yoga discipline assumes that human nature has the inherent capacity for the divine and thus man can reach the depths of his own nature by bursting through the outer strata. Deep down within his own self is the divine secret which man can reach.

The path to purification is said to be more of a slope than a staircase. The first step insists on the ethical preparation which is an essential prerequisite for spiritual insight. The mind must be cleared of its impurities just like muddy water which is allowed to stand till the dirt settles down and the water becomes clear, ready to reflect the moon. Similarly, the mind becomes a clear mirror where the divine can be reflected. The ethical acts involve not only ordinary obligations but austere vows of chastity and poverty since these are taken to be great aids to the development of a moral life. Ascetic practices are sometimes adopted for disciplining man's nature and strengthening one's will and character.

II. INTERPRETATION

As hinted at earlier the Doctrine of Transmigration was used as a preparation to the Higher Knowledge, (of Atman is Brahman). It was intended to be used as a ladder with which to climb greater heights, a ferry boat to get to the other shore but meant to be discarded when one reaches his goal. Such expression as transmigration of soul or metempsychosis imperfectly represents the Indian idea as this writer will show in this paper. Before going into the interpretation of the Doctrine of Transmigration, the writer requests the readers to constantly bear in mind two things: (1) that the Doctrine of Metempsychosis was born at the time it was customary for men to speak and teach in figurative language, and (2) that the Upanishadic doctrine was meant to be communicated only to a chosen few as the Svetasvatara Upanishad

says: "this highest mystery in the Vedanta delivered in a former age should not be given to one whose passions have not been subdued, nor to one who is not a son or who is not a pupil".³¹

Taking the first consideration, it must be born in mind that the profoundest wisdom of the past is transmitted to us in the form of myths and metaphors. Men of old enjoyed the habit of saying things or of expressing their deep ideas in figures of speech. They took pride in pouring out sustained allegories which are the true marks of genuine intelligence for doubtless figurative language can tax the mind to go into deep abstraction. It is not amiss to say then that when the sages gave out their doctrine of — only the Brahman is real; the world is unreal — they were conveying a message other than the literal meaning that an ordinary mind comprehends. The Seers who were wise and subtle, by letting their imaginations work on their experience, devised symbolic conceptions such as "crossing the ocean of Samsara (cycle of birth and death)." They often looked to nature to find instances which would confirm the truth they wished to preach. These analogies and metaphors, though fascinating at first sight, cannot really prove their point; they can only illustrate. It is wise to heed the warning: metaphors can only go up to a certain extent; they should not be pushed beyond their breaking point. If we insist on interpreting these symbols literally, difficulties will arise but if we go behind the words to the moods they symbolize, agreement is possible.

Esoterism

Concerning the second aspect — it is wise to take note of the fact that the Upanishadic sages guarded the highest teaching as the deepest secret. In fact, one of the meanings given to the term "Upanishads" is "secret". As such the doctrines found in the Upanishads were not meant for everyone (the discrimination was not drawn on the basis of social or economic hierarchy but on intellectual and moral capacity) and, because of this, the gurus were constrained to employ a language with a double meaning. Following upon this manner of thinking, this writer has worked

³¹ Svet. VI.22.

herself up to the conviction that the Doctrine of Transmigration (Samsara) which in reality is based upon the underlying doctrine of the Upanishad (Atman is Brahman) is likewise given in figurative language and the interpretation that follows bears the stamp of this conviction.

The Doctrine of Transmigration is Brahmanic in origin. It was born out of the Upanishadic seer's desire to bring men to Self-realization. It was formulated as a companion to the basic doctrine of the Upanishads which in the ultimate analysis teaches that "only the Brahman is" — that Atman and Brahman are really one. Now, this Doctrine of the Upanishad is highly symbolic and is sustained in figurative language. It is but logical to assume then, that the accompanying doctrine, namely, the Doctrine of Samsara, must likewise be figurative. Properly speaking, the whole Doctrine of Transmigration is figurative. As such, terms are not to be taken according to their literal meaning. Accordingly, "death" here means the end of something; the termination of anything while "birth" is the beginning of anything. "Body" stands for anything gross and material and tangible; the individual soul of the lower teaching is to be interpreted as anything subtle though still material³² and the Universal soul or supreme as the being that is immaterial³³ thus, when the sages give the five sheaths of the self, they refer to the different strata that make up the individual man. The Annanaya Atman definitely refers to the mind. To avoid misunderstanding, it must be known that for the Indians, "mind;" is an external sense much like modern psychology uses the term "mind;" it is likewise taken for the will.³⁴ The Vijyanamaya Atman refers to understanding — this

³² To help clarify this point, it is wise to use Thomistic teaching on the distinction of the two types of materiality and the two types of immateriality: a thing is said to be material in the first sense if it itself is made up of matter; it is said to be material in the second sense if it is not made up of matter but it cannot exist and operate without matter. Immateriality is of two forms: a thing is said to be immaterial in the first sense if it is not made up of matter. It is immaterial in the second sense if in addition to its not being made up of matter it can exist and operate independently of matter. This second meaning of immateriality is properly called — spirituality. It should be noted that the materiality in the second sense may be likened to the immateriality in the first sense. It is in this particular sense that the term material is taken in the above statement.

³³ This is taken in the second sense of immateriality, therefore it is spiritual.

³⁴ Rationalizing this idea, this writer carries the impression that the Indians classify the will which in Thomism — is a rational appetite which

is the intellect and Anandamaya Atman which is characterized by bliss is the true self within the individual self which in their highest teaching is identified with Brahman.

Perhaps it is also wise to state that Indians also look upon the "body" and the "soul" as a relation. By this is meant that what is regarded as a "soul" in relation to another "body" may be regarded as a body in another form of relation. For instance, the Absolute (Brahman) in relation to the world is referred to as, the "soul" to which the world is the "body"; the corporeal body of man is said to be a body in relation to his soul. Even within man are found souls and bodies. Thus Indians speak of a suksma sarira (subtle body) and a sthula sarira (gross body). The suksma sarira is oftentimes referred to as a soul.

In the teaching of Samsara where the soul is said to pass from one body to another body — that body refers to the different strata of sheaths given above. It is expected that one shall go deeper and deeper into the self passing from a lower to a higher self, from a gross to a less gross, to a subtle. Thus, they go to the levels of consciousness. It should be observed that in the analysis of Consciousness, the Waking State is symbolic of the lowest level of awareness which dumb animals exhibit. For contemporary man, this can be described as being one with the world. In terms of contemporary philosophers this is known as the inauthentic man. Thus one finds that such level of consciousness is shared by all living things who enjoy the faculty of awareness to material things. The second level is the Dream State which is symbolic of a higher state for it suggests sensation which is the basic characteristic of animals since dreams presuppose outer senses and imagination (internal sense). This is representative of animal existence. Then, this is followed by the Deep-Sleep State which is characterized by the absence of a subject-object-duality. In this level of awareness one finds the abstracted nature of material object in the mind and this level of consciousness would be representative of human existence. The fourth state, Turiya is the state of ecstasy which is exhibited by mystics.

is contrasted with the sensitive appetite — in the realm of the senses since this faculty is drawn to the material object which may be explained in Thomistic light as, the will finds repose only when it possesses not only the form but also the matter of the material object.

The Doctrine of Samsara implies that different forms of existence may be phases of the same soul and thus prepares the way for the doctrine that all forms of existence are the same and all souls, parts of or even identical with the Atman or self, the divine soul which not only pervades the world but is the world.

If one were to get to the core of the teaching, the sages wish that a man should move from the outer to the inner aspects of man and, symbolically, this is passing from one level of existence to another level of existence; from the lower to the higher; from the gross to the subtle as evident in the Hindu Doctrine of the Five Sheaths and the five types of consciousness. By interpretation then, when the Doctrine states that the soul is reborn in another body, this is meant to teach that when the activity of man is carried according to instincts and sensual desires, he leads a kind of existence no better than a beast until such time when he can control his passion and can gain mastery over his animal desires or bodily desires by reason and thus leads the kind of existence that is rational. Termination of the slavery to the desires of the body is said to be "death", and the beginning of the bridling of the next area is said to be "birth." One is thus expected to dominate all lower desires again and again until he overcomes the body and moves to the spirit, there, to attain the realization of the true self — the realization that is liberation itself.

The higher level of teaching declares that Samsara (cycle of existence) is just one's own thought and the best excerpt for this is found in the Maitrayana Upanishads:³⁵

"With effort, he should cleanse it, then
 What is one's thought, that he becomes,
 This is the eternal mystery.
 For by tranquility of thought
 Deeds, good and evil one destroys
 With self serene stayed on the self
 The light eternal one enjoys?"
 As firmly is the thought of man
 Is fixed within the realm of sense
 If thus on Brahman it were fixed
 Who would not be released from bond?
 By making mind all motionless

³⁵ Maitr. VI. 17-18, 30, 34.

From slopes and from destruction free
 When unto mindlessness one comes
 That is the supreme state!
 The mind, in truth is for mankind
 The means of bondage and release,
 For bondage, if to objects bound
 From objects free — that's called release!"

India has kept the essential spirit alive. The self of man is not to be confused with the physical body or the intellect. There is something deeper than the intellect, mind and body. This is the real self, which is one with the self of all goodness, truth, and beauty.

"He is the Atman, the spirit Himself that cannot be seen or touched; that is above all distinction beyond thought and ineffable. In the union with Him is the supreme proof of His reality. He is the end of evolution and is non-duality."³⁶

The Truth

The last sentence in the preceeding quotation is the key. Reality is not what it seems to be: a universe of individual, personal subjects registering impressions from an external order. This is the fatal illusion "that makes calamity of so long a life. For if one cherishes the illusion of his own separate personality he shall remain bound by way of punishment on the torture wheel of life-death-rebirth. On the other hand, he can painlessly shuffle off this mortal coil by cherishing monistic faith that he and the Atman are ontologically One.

"Know the Atman, transcend all sorrows, and reach the fountain of joy. Be illumined by this knowledge, and you have nothing to fear. If you wish to find liberation, there is no other way of breaking the bonds of rebirth.

What can break the bondage and misery of this world? The knowledge that the Atman is Brahman.

Realize Brahman, and there will be no more returning to this world — the house of all sorrows. You must realize absolutely that Atman is Brahman."³⁷

The Upanishad's interesting thesis labels the individual ego as a pure illusion. Now, transmigration of souls belong to the

³⁶ Mandukya Upanishads.

³⁷ Shankara. The Crest-Jewel of Discrimination p. 16.

illusory world and, in an illusory world, everything is illusory. There is then in the scheme of things, no reward to which the individual will aspire. For the lower (illusory) self, so the Indian sages tell us, there will continue the illusion of rewards and penalties in successive rebirth.

While the concept of transmigration tended to have a strong fatalistic tone, coupled with the concept of physical transmigration, the Doctrine was a consolation to the masses. Those enduring suffering or hardships could comfort themselves in believing that their present fate was the result of past actions and that if they patiently endured it while continuing to lead a moral life, they would be assured of a pleasant state in the next life. Such literal understanding of the Doctrine also led individuals to attain a certain appreciation of the interrelated nature of all existents, for if someone believed that in a past life, he might have been an animal or an insect possessed of various shades of color, then he would feel a closer living relationship with all creatures and beings. Such a belief tended to create a spontaneous attitude of love and compassion towards all, that eventually developed into the doctrine of non-violence.

For the ordinary mind, that is, for those who are in this world, who are agents, enjoyers, and sufferers, who cannot conceive of events except as following one another in time, the succession of birth, the wandering of the soul in a way of transmigration is as true as everything else, and such minds find contentment in the thought that they have found the key to the problem of suffering and inequalities abounding in this world; they have found a way to make justice-triumph; this, to them is the truth. But those who take the path of higher knowledge may not be bound in this way by the idea of time and may see that the essential truth is not so much a series of births in which something persists and passes from existence to existence as the fact that the human soul is one with the supreme and only Being. When the ignorant wrapped in the darkness of ignorance conceives eternity or bliss in objects as they appear or as they are in themselves, they drift into the ocean of transmigration. As the ancient Gaudapada states in his celebrated commentary to the Mandukya Upanishads: "There is no dissolution, no beginning, no bondage,

no liberation, nor a liberated soul. This is the final truth."³⁸ The echo of this concept is found in his disciple Shankara:

"In past lives while he still dwelt in ignorance, he created certain Karmas. In this present life, he apparently enjoys or suffers their effects.

Both bondage and liberation are the fictions of our ignorance.... People speak of bondage and liberation — meaning the presence or absence of the covering out of ignorance. But, in reality, Brahman has no covering. For there is none other than Brahman — the one without a second....

Bondage and liberation exist in the mind only, but the ignorant attribute these falsely to the Atman itself.

To imagine that the Atman can be bound or liberated is false. Both bondage and liberation are states of the mind....

There is neither birth nor death, neither bound nor aspiring soul, neither liberated soul nor seeker after liberation — this is the ultimate and absolute truth...."³⁹

From the absolute point of view there is no birth, when a man perceives the true meaning of changing reality as it becomes he understands that the path of existence is empty. As perceptions take place in a dream which when one awakes disappears so it is with sleeping in the darkness of ignorance: when awakened, transmigration is not obtained. But for the enlightened, the one consummation devoutly to be wished is the realization of the sole Reality of the Brahman. The whole life of man was meant to be education for self-realization. Man is part of this cosmos but he has his own individuality and personality which apparently transcends all relationships. He must therefore still learn how far this transcendence reaches and what he himself is in that transcendence. If he learns this, he will know what is beyond death.

The knowledge of the Atman does not affect emancipation itself for he who possesses it has found the existence of the universe as well as his own bodily existence and individual existence to be an illusion (*Maya*).

³⁸ Gaudapada — Karika 2.32 Gaudapada is supposed to have been the teacher of Govinda, who was the teacher of Shankara. A translation of his commentary will be found in Swamikhinanda, the *Mandokyopanishad* with Gaudapada's Karika and Shankara's commentary, Mysore, 1936 where the above quotation Karika 2.32 appears on page 136.

³⁹ Shankara; *Crest-Jewel of Discrimination*; Tr. Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood (New York and Toronto) p. 119.

When the Hindu thinkers ask us to free ourselves from Maya, they are asking us to escape from the illusion which holds us by the throat and make us pursue physical satisfaction as the highest end. In the final analysis, they want us to move away from falsehood and thereby recognize truth. This is the true end of man, to which the Doctrine of Transmigration in its full figurative language stands committed. This is the message of the sages which only a few have ever grasped. This is the Upanishad — the secret!

THE BUDDHIST CONCEPT ON TRANSMIGRATION ITS ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

I. ANALYSIS

The Teachings of the Buddha

By the time of the Buddha, the Doctrine of Transmigration had become a popular belief. While its roots still spring from the Upanishadic grounds, the historical Buddha gave it a distinct color of its own thereby giving rise to the Buddhist version of metempsychosis. Accepting the Indian's belief on Reincarnation, the Buddha had taught that until one has attained perfect enlightenment, he will remain bound to the wheel of life and subject to the misery of being again reincarnated. To understand and appreciate such a concept, it is wise to set the Buddhist Doctrine of Transmigration against the background of which it is a part. Buddhism was the only religious and philosophical message of India to spread far beyond the borders of the land of its origin. The philosophical doctrine underlying its numerous fascinating popular features is not the kind of teaching that was intended to interfere with the life and habits of the multitude. Yet in northern and eastern Asia, it became the creed of the masses and it even shaped their civilizations for centuries. The secret of its success lay in the unique approach which Gautama, the Buddha, used in teaching the doctrine. He broke from all the popular modes and accepted methods of Indian religious and philosophical

instructions. He presented his teaching as a therapy — a method and a process of healing.

The Root of the Buddhist Doctrine on Transmigration

It is of utmost importance for one to realize that the Buddhist doctrine of transmigration as with the other doctrines of the Buddha, is deduced as a corollary of the Buddha's central teaching — "Patticasamutpada," translated as the Doctrine of Dependent Origination.

The doctrine of Patticasamutpada is contained in the Four Noble Truths of the Buddha, namely, in the Second Noble Truth — "There is a Cause of Suffering" and in the Third Noble Truth — "There is Cessation of Suffering". It is worthwhile to bear in mind that Gautama, the Buddha renounced the world to seek for the way of deliverance from pain or suffering in this life. Really, the first problem that Buddhism took up was the suffering pervasive of this life: birth is suffering; old age is suffering; grief is suffering; despair is suffering. Now to get what one wants is also suffering. In short, life in this world is suffering.

It is interesting to note that Patticasamutpada is the solution which the Buddha found as an answer to the problem of misery in earthly life, the solution that came to his mind when he brooded under the famous Bodhi-Tree — an act which came to be classically known as The Enlightenment.

Patticasamutpada actually consists in a chain of question and answer which runs as follows:

Question: Why do we suffer misery and pain? (Old age and death) ?

Answer: Because we are born.

Question: Why are we born?

Answer: Because there is a will to be born.

Question: Why should there be this will to become?

Answer: Because we cling to the objects of the world.

Question: Why do we have this clinging?

Answer: Because we crave for the objects of the world.

Question: Why do we have this craving, this thirst for enjoyment?

Answer: Because of sense-experience.

Question: Why do we have this sense-experience?

Answer: Because of sense-object contact.

Question: Why do we have this contact?

Answer: Because of the six sense organs (the sixth sense being the mind).

Question: Why do we have the six sense organs?

Answer: Because of the Psycho-physical organism.

Question: Why do we have this organism?

Answer: Because of the initial consciousness of the embryo.

Question: Why do we have this consciousness?

Answer: Because of our previous position or impression of Karma.

Question: Why do we have these impressions?

Answer: Because of Ignorance.

Thus one finds ignorance as the root of all sufferings. This series of questions and answers makes up the famous 12-spoked wheel of dependent origination. The twelve links of the causal wheel of dependent origination. Stated more clearly these 12 links are:

1. Ignorance (Avidya)
2. Impressions of Karmic forces (samskara)
3. Initial consciousness of the Embryo (Vijnana)
4. Psychophysical organism (Nama-rupa)
5. Six sense organs including mind (Sadayatana)
6. Sense-object contact (Sparsha)
7. Sense-experience (Vedana)
8. Thirst for sense enjoyment (Tanha)
9. Clinging to this enjoyment (Upadana)
10. Will to be born (Bhava)
11. Birth or rebirth (Jati)
12. Old age and death (Jara-marana)

It is to be noted that out of these twelve links, the first two are related to the past life, the last two to the future life, and the rest to the present life. This is the wheel of Samsara — the cycle of birth and death: the vicious circle of causation where death is not viewed as an end but only as a beginning of a new life.

One can readily see that Patticasamutpada reflects the influence of the ancient doctrine of Karma — that the present life is due to the impressions of the Karma of the past life and it will shape the future life — since the same thought is expressed in the causal wheel of dependent origination. Now the Buddhist doctrine of metempsychosis is rooted in Patticasamutpada, thus, ultimately, it is based on the ancient Brahmanic doctrine of Karma.

Anatta Doctrine

There is another doctrine that is justly emphasized as the most important part of the teaching of the Buddha and that is derived from *Patticasamutpada*. This is the Anatta Doctrine or the so-called No-Soul Theory which briefly stated is, that there is no such thing as a soul or self. Considering the Doctrine of Transmigration, Anatta seems to be out of place for definitely the concept of transmigration implies that a soul transmigrates from one body to another; but Anatta advocates a No-Soul Theory. How then can one speak of transmigration if there is no soul that transmigrates? To be relieved of an apparently glaring contradiction, it is wise to take note of the concept of "soul" in the Buddhist light. There is danger that those who are unfamiliar with the Buddha's concept may exaggerate and misunderstand this doctrine by taking it as equivalent to a flat denial of the soul's immortality or of free will or to an affirmation that mind is a function of the body. It is helpful to note that for the Buddha "the self" or "soul" is considered as that which is perpetual, unchanging, unitary, and autonomous and since in all the whole universe there is nothing unchanging, therefore there cannot be anything here that can be called "self" or "soul". Consequently, the negation of the soul in the Anatta Doctrine amounts only to this — that in all the world organic or inorganic, there is nothing which is simple, self-existent, self-determined, and permanent; Everything is composed, relative and transitory. One gathers from this statement that for Buddhism, a "soul or self" must be an eternal simple being. Applied to man — the obvious fact that infancy, youth, and age form a series is not denied: for Buddhism the series may be called a personality.

The number of factors that enter into individuality or personality is said to be five skandas or aggregates which fall under two headings; "Naman" (name) or the psychological factor, and "rupa" (form) or the physical form. "Rupa" is composed ultimately of four material elements: earth, water, air, and fire. "Naman" is distributed into four types: sensation or feeling, perception or idea, conative disposition or discrimination: intellect or reason. Thus "Nama-rupa" for Buddhism indicates the group of experiences or elements (five aggregates). The assemblage of representation and ideas, habits and dispositions, feelings

and sentiments, conesthetic and other presentation make up the entire texture of the personality and all these are said to be constantly changing and are ultimately unreal so that there is nothing abiding in the cyclical life to which the term "soul" might correspond. It is to be expected then that Buddhism adheres to the No-Soul Theory.

Gautama did not believe in the individual soul. He claimed it to be no more than a name for the totality of human desires. As he himself puts it: the chariot is made up of wheels, shaft and axel, carriage and banner staff and has no real existence when these are removed and thus so the individual soul is made up of desires and psychic tendencies and disappear the moment these are taken away. This is an echo of the Milinda-Panho, a famous dialogue between the Greek King Menander and the Indian King Nagasena. What is sought to be brought out in this regard is that just as the body is a complex of many parts or elements, so also what is called an individual is a similar complex of psychical and physical elements and that these are ultimately liable to their dissolution into their components. In similar terms, there is no permanent being behind simple and complex thoughts, pleasurable and painful feeling, impulses and tendencies, predispositions and residual impressions, just as behind and beyond the various parts that make up a chariot, there is no additional substance called "chariot" which abides even in the absence of the component part. Based on the above contentions, it is evident that Gautama considered transmigration of soul a sheer folly. Nonetheless, Buddhists are concerned to show that transmigration is not inconsistent with its denial of Atman or self.

The ordinary and indeed inevitable translation of the "soul" leads to misunderstanding, for there is the tendency naturally to interpret it to mean that there is nothing that provides the death of the body and afortiori nothing to transmigrate. But what is oftentimes overlooked is the fact that for Buddhism, the denial of the Atman applies to the living not to the dead. It means that in the living man there is no permanent unchanging entity but only a series of mental states. And since human beings, although they have no Atman, certainly exist in this present life, the absence of the Atman is not in itself an obstacle to belief in a similar life after death or before death.

It is not uncommon to find discussions on the question of the nature of the soul and immortality, but, there is a common tendency to concentrate attention on death and neglect the phenomenon of birth, which is equally important. Certainly if the soul survives the death of this complex entity which is called the body, its origin and development must according to all analogy, be different from those of the perishable body. The question — what is destroyed at death and how and why — is closely connected to the question — what comes with the existence of birth and how and why.

The Buddhist teaching states that when men die in whom the desire for another life exists as it exists in all except saints, the desire which is really the center of the world, fashions another being conditioned by the characters and merits of the being which has just come to an end. A new life is generated from an old one just as a new candle is lighted from an old one namely: without the passage of any substance from the former to the latter. Life is likened to fire: its very nature is to burn its fuel. When one body dies, it is as if one piece of fuel were burnt. The vital process passes on and recommences in another and so long as there is a desire of life, the provision for fuel does not fail. Another analogy that may prove useful to convey the Buddhist concept of transmigration is that of the game of billiard. When the initial push is applied on the first ball, this first ball communicates motion to the first ball it hits, and the second ball then moves the third ball — all by contact of power. It will be observed that in the series of communication of movement from the first to the last ball, no substance has been transferred from one ball to another. Similarly, in transmigration no soul is transferred from one body to another body. But the common thread running from one "existence to another existence" was believed to be Karma. This word signifying literally action or act is the name of the force which finds expression in the fact the every event is the result of causes and also is it felt a cause which produces effect; furthermore, is the fact that when a life, whether of the god, man, or lower creature, comes to an end, the sum of its actions (which is in many connections equivalent to personal character) takes effects as a whole and determines the character of another aggregation of Skandas — in popular language, another being represent-

ing the net result of the life which has come to an end. As the *Dhammapada* states: "some say that freedom from death results from action and others that death exists not. Hear me explain this (Sanatsugata said) the wise maintain what is called delusion to be death. I (Sanatsugata) verily call heedlessness death, and likewise I call freedom from heedlessness, immortality."⁴⁰

Gautama believed that only the deeds, not the doer lived on from generation to generation for there was the inexorable law of Karma, an inescapable law of the death in the universe. The effect of the action lives on perpetually — good, breeding good; evil, breeding evil. Thus one's fate depended not upon what he was but on what he did. Although the Pitakas speak continually of rebirth, metempsychosis is not the correct expression if there is no soul that transmigrates and there is strictly speaking nothing but Karma. As mentioned earlier, in early Buddhism, the concept of Karma is closely connected with the doctrine of *Patticasamutpada* (doctrine of dependent origination). In fact, the theory of Karma in Buddhism is based on this belief being an implication of the law of causation. It teaches that the present life is due to the impression of Karma of past life and it will shape the future life. It is noteworthy to recall that the belief in *Patticasamutpada* completely negated the idea that there existed any enduring substance within the human being that could literally reincarnate into another life. Man was viewed as a product of changing interrelated conditions and it was in this respect that birth could be said to occur at any moment. As the historical Buddha once said, "when the aggregates arrive, decay, and die, O monk, every moment you are born, decay, and die."⁴¹

II. INTERPRETATION

Although the Buddha spoke of rebirth, it was not meant to be rebirth as it is popularly understood. Analysis however shows that the Doctrine of Transmigration simply states that, at death, something transfers. Since the concept of death is always linked with the corporeal body, and the soul is always related to the body

⁴⁰ *Dhamm. Book II Ch. II.*

⁴¹ Quoted by Ashvagoshā in the Commentary I 78.

and the body is always accepted as material and thus will dis-integrate, it is almost always believed that the soul is the immortal part of man and as such it is logical to think that it is the soul which transfers from one body to another at death. The problem however is that Buddhism does not accept the existence of the soul; thus, the usual conclusion is that Buddhism is a bundle of contradictions. What is oftentimes overlooked is the fact that transmigration need not be a transfer of a substance from one body to another body. Furthermore, that which transmigrates need not be the soul; it could be something else.

As the Milinda Panho states: "the king said: when we speak of transmigration, Nagasena, what does that mean?"

"A being born here O King dies here. Having died here, it springs up elsewhere. Having been born there, there it dies. Having died there it springs up elsewhere. That is what is meant by transmigration."

"Give me an illustration"

"It is like the case of a man, who after eating mango should set the seed in the ground. From that a great tree would be produced and give fruit. And there would be no end to the succession in that way of mango trees.⁴²
"What it is Nagasena that is reborn?"

"Name-and-form is reborn"

"What, is it the same name-and-form that is reborn?"

"No but by this name-and-form deeds are done, good or evil and by these deeds (This Karma) another name-and-form is reborn"

"If that be so sir, would not the new being be released from its evil Karma?"

"Yes if it were not reborn. But just because it is reborn it is therefore not released from its evil Karma."

"Suppose O King some men were to steal a mango from another man and the owner of the mango were to seize him and bring him before the king and charge him with a crime. And the thief were to say: "your majesty I have not taken away this man's mango. Those that he put in the ground are different from the ones I took. I

⁴² Milinda Panho book 3 Ch. VI.

do not deserve to be punished. How then would he be guilty."

"Certainly sir, he would deserve to be punished"

"But on what ground?"

"Because inspite of whatever he may say, he would be guilty in respect of the last mango which resulted from the first one. (the owner set in the ground)"

"Just so great King deeds good or evil are done by these name-and-form and other is reborn. But that other is not thereby released from its deeds (Its Karma)"⁴³

For Buddhism Karma (action) is said to determine the character of the next "body" only the deeds not the doer lived on from generation to generation.

Much like the Hindu concept the Buddhist concept of transmigration draws from the law of Karma. In fact, it hinges more on the doctrine of Karma than Hinduism does; but more than anything, it is derived from the Buddhist teaching which is the Four Noble Truths, the most fundamental of which is: "There is Suffering". From here, all the rest follow. The Buddha was pre-occupied in looking for the cause of suffering, for he believed that suffering is but an effect. Thus, if the cause could be determined then it could be avoided and, therefore the effect could never be produced.

In his analysis as step by step shown in *Patticasamutpada*, the Buddha was convinced that the cause of suffering was desire. Desire in this regard refers to the thirst for pleasure, for success, for things belonging to this world, things that are ephemeral. This thirst (*tanha*) is the craving for earthly life in the widest sense.

Pushing the problem of suffering further, the Buddha recognized that ultimately, desire which is mental activity and which brings about suffering must be rooted in the mind. These, he pinpointed to ignorance of the nature of the world.

This is to say that one does not know that he is moving in a world of mere conventions and that his feelings, thoughts, and acts are determined by these. He imagines that his ideas about things represent their ultimate reality and by his ignorance he

⁴³ Ibid. Book II Chap. 21.

assents these without question regarding them as the facts of existence; hence he becomes bound in by them as by the meshes of a net. This mistake about the true essence of reality is the cause of all the suffering that constitute life.

As the historical Buddha repeatedly claims upon His enlightenment, he discovered that the ego-eccentric desire, the product of his own mental state, created his own house of suffering which was supported by a ridgepole of ignorance, and by shattering this ignorance he attained freedom from the endless round of rebirth and reached Nirvana.⁴⁴

To the Buddha, Suffering is Samsara (the cycle of birth and death); Cessation of Suffering is Nirvana. But Suffering is due to Ignorance. Thus, only when ignorance can be destroyed can the causal wheel of dependent origination crumble. In other words, only when the cause is removed can the effect disappear. Now, it is evident that ignorance can be destroyed only by knowledge. Hence, it is clear that knowledge is the sole means of liberation. Stating it in another way, ignorance is bondage in the cycle of birth-and-death: knowledge is liberation. The Buddhist doctrine of Causation states that one cannot obtain emancipation and happiness unless he understands and removes the cause of distress and the only way which leads to the extinction of suffering is the Noble-Eight-fold Path which says that the way to be happy is to have a good heart and a good mind, taking shape in good deeds and at least finding expression and fulfillment in the rapture of ecstasy. The Buddha never taught others the possibility of absorption in the Brahman-Atman of the Upanishads. The Buddha sought to look for a way to end up suffering — to end up desire for anything here and hereafter. The goal of the Buddha was a complete mental catharsis consisting in the conviction that everything is illusory and unreal. Since, like the Upanishadic thinkers, the Buddha also realized that not everyone can easily reach the goal set for them, he advocated two levels of teaching.

In early Buddhism or Buddhism practiced during the lifetime of the historical Buddha, one can discern two levels of teaching:

⁴⁴ Narada (Trans.) Dhammapada, p. 47.

the first was directed towards the religious community, and the second for the laity engaged in worldly pursuits. These distinctions were not strictly observed since in some cases, certain monks were not spiritually advanced beyond the laity while many layman possessed profound knowledge. It was thus essential to present gradation in the teaching in accord with the general understanding of the audience. The teaching directed towards the laity had the initial goal of leading them to reach the monk's level of understanding whereby they would then be able to comprehend and practice the abstract philosophical doctrines. It was a preparation. For the average layman of this period, the belief in the existence of deva heavens inhabited by the deities of the Vedas was still the order of the day. The Buddhist utilized such beliefs as skillful means to instruct the laity along the preliminary steps of the spiritual path. The Buddhists believed it essential that the layman begins his spiritual life to the understanding of the importance of the Law of Karma whereby the individual's own good actions would lead to future good results and vice-versa. As mentioned earlier, Karma or human conduct was divided into three different categories in early Buddhism: the wholesome, unwholesome and neutral varieties. Wholesome conduct was further divided into two different spheres: the first pertained to the laity and the second to the monks. The laity were promised future rewards in a happy heaven, if they properly practiced offering and morality in contrast to Nirvana which was the goal of the monks. Conversely, unwholesome Karma was considered to be the anti-thesis of wholesome Karma. Thus since Puñña (merit) was the goal of wholesome Karma, Papa (demerit) was the goal of unwholesome Karma. It is in this lower level — to the laity — that the Doctrine of Transmigration as it is popularly known was offered. In contrast to Nirvana which was the goal of the monks, Puñña was regarded as an inferior form of good conduct motivated by mundane desires. In fact, as one advanced into the level of religious awareness, the aim of attaining Puñña for a happy rebirth had to be renounced in favor of the non-worldly Brahmacharya conduct. Basically, Puñña and Papa refer respectively to the purification of the mind and the defilement of the mind. This is why they were believed to lead the individual to happy or miserable future states. Puñña begins the process of

mental purification which leads to the understanding of religious truth. Nirvana is the final goal of monks and this could only be achieved by properly conditioning the mind.

The Five Realms

The early Buddhists were concerned with a spiritual cosmogony. This was used to serve a dual purpose: the first was an Upaya (skillful means) to induce layman to practice virtue and the second, as a representation of the various stages and potentialities of human consciousness. This psycho-cosmic universe was divided into three "worlds," namely — the Karma loka (the world of desire), the Rupa loka (the world of form), and Arupa loka (the world of non-form). The Karma loka dealt more closely with the daily psychological possibilities of man and this was divided into five realms or "existences" consisting of: (1) the Hells (niraya or naraka); (2) the realm of animals (tiracchana — yoni); (3) the realm of unfulfilled desires for hungry ghosts (Patti-visaya); (4) the human realm (Manussa); and (5) the realm of the Deva heavens (deva-loka)⁴⁵ Used as Upaya (skillful means) for the laity, this world served as inducements to practice virtue in order to obtain future rebirth in a pleasant realm and to avoid the sufferings of hells. Although the early texts are not explicit in explaining how the five "existences" were meant to be interpreted as potentialities of consciousness, their symbolism is quite apparent. It will be noted that some kind of hierarchy is established in these various realms. The Realm of the Deva heavens was meant to encompass the purer and more spiritual stages of man and the higher elements of human civilization such as art, music, philosophy and so on; The Realm of Man was meant to relate to the life of reason and logic; The Realm of Animals and Hungry Ghosts respectively were meant to deal with instinctive behaviour and mental states dominated by greed and avarice or passions in general while the Hells were meant to represent the enmeshed works of suffering accumulating from past actions (karma) that induce further sufferings and temptation. To interpret and translate such psychological potentialities in day-to-day experiences, take as an example the situations of a

⁴⁵ DN III, 234.

professor: In the morning, he engages in the review of his lecture for the day, reading, and preparation of test questions (The Realm of Hell); at noontime, he stuffs himself with peanuts and overeats with his colleagues while worrying over how he could make the student understand the lecture, correct those test papers and finish them quickly, soon falling prey to instinctive sensual acts like throwing the papers to the waste basket and sleeping (Realm of Animals). Towards the latter part of the day, he regrets his past action and exercises control over his behaviour (Realm of Man). Finally, in the evening he goes to attend a symphony concert at the Cultural Center (The Realm of Deva). What this writer would like to show in the above illustration is the fact that the passing from one "existence" to another "existence" as the Doctrine of Transmigration is wont to show could occur within a day by passing to the different psychological states potential to the individual in a certain situation and, therefore, Transmigration is not necessarily the transferring of a soul from one body to another body, i.e., the passing from one generation to another generation. In other words, transmigration can occur within a lifetime. In fact, the best example of this would be the Buddha himself.

One should be reminded of the Indian fondness for viewing everything as a unity. With this in mind, the Doctrine of Transmigration is to be seen in a grand scale, that is, the law of Karma pervades every form of existence in the universe. Applying this to the individual, one continually passes from realm to realm and in consciousness, the stopping of the last thought is known as decease (death), the appearance of the first thought is known as rebirth. Death need not be the end of what is commonly interpreted as life.

The Rupa loka (world of forms) and the Arupa loka (the world of non-form) were correlated to the higher stages of Buddhist meditation towards the ultimate goal of Nirvana which was still considered to be beyond these three worlds of birth and death.

Karma makes its influence felt upon human life by conditioning consciousness from one birth (existence) to the next. Experience shows how the quality of consciousness in daily life results from the influence of action since mind and action are interrelated.

It is, in this respect, that the mind is described as the accumulation of actions and experiences of the past. An endless circle is created by this accumulation of past knowledge and experiences that influences the present actions of Karma which, in turn, influences the future. Thus early Buddhists could say that, by ignorance, there exists action and because of action, there exists consciousness. In such a context, human suffering which is represented as "birth" and "death" all lead to the contents of the human mind. Thus, although the Karma of the past does not directly determine the present state of joy and suffering, it does influence it indirectly by means of interaction with the mind. The mind assumes the position of mediator between actions and the experiences of joy and suffering. In turn this creates an endless circle: action moves to consciousness, consciousness moves to joy or suffering, joy and suffering moves to consciousness and consciousness again moves to action.

In view of the power of influence created by Karma upon consciousness, it can be said that, in any given moment, the individual psychological attitude is either the direct or indirect result of his Karma. Good and bad Karma in this case would relate to the mental states produced — either freedom from suffering or inducement of suffering. Symbolically, the individual is chained by his ego-centric desires for attachment to the self and the bad Karma generated as a result of these greed leads him to be "born" into the realm of suffering or hell. In other words, his present mental attitude has been conditioned by his past actions wherein he allowed his desires to control him. This has been stated in the Dhammapada:

"Mind foreruns (all evil) conditions, mind is chief
mind made are they; if one speaks or acts with
wicked mind, because of that, pain pursues him even
as the wheel following the hoof of the draught on."⁴⁶

The craving of the person addicted to careless
living grow like a creeper; he jumps from life to
life like a fruit-loving monkey in the forest.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Narada (trans.) Dhammapada p. 15.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 77.

On the other hand, the individual, reaping the reward of good actions, enjoys an easier state of mind in the present, since he is not so dominated by ignorance and desires. His level of existence can be described symbolically as representing the deva heavens.

By shattering ignorance, a man attains freedom from the endless round of rebirths and thus reaches Nirvana. When it is said that one has conquered birth and death, this symbolically refers to overcoming the world of human suffering or the circle of *Patticasamutpada* as it describes the existence of an ignorant man. In the same respect, it can be said that one who has overcome suffering has become freed of Karma. Since one's mental state of ignorance has been completely overcome, one's action can only lead him on to the higher and purer mental conditions. The new circle becomes a round of purification and increasing freedom. In early Buddhism, the first step towards enlightenment was termed as "entering the stream." Symbolically, such an individual can be viewed as one who has overcome the ignorant compulsion to struggle against the realities of life and finally entered the harmonious current to flow towards increasing happiness.

In the final analysis the Doctrine of Transmigration was a ferryboat used to bring one across the rushing river of Samsara to the distant bank of liberation — (*moksha*). Through enlightenment, the individual is transported. Symbolically, to enter the Buddhist vehicle, the boat of discipline, means to begin to cross the river of life, from the shore of the common sense experience of non-enlightenment, the shore of spiritual ignorance, desire and death, to the yonder bank of transcendental wisdom, which is liberation (*moksha*) from general bondage. The boat is the teaching of the Buddha — in this regard — Transmigration — and the implements of the ferry are the various details of Buddhist disciplines: institutions, yoga exercises, the rules of ascetic life, and the practice of self-realization. But such implements are intended only for beginners and advanced pupils. However, to the perfect, it becomes meaningless. Talking to those on the level of ignorance, the doctrine can move the still imperfect but it cannot say anything even to the mind that has been enlightened. It must be discarded as soon as the goal is reached. It can only be of value to those who see an "other shore"; but as long as one

can see a "shore" (a distant reality different from one's own being) he has not yet attained full enlightenment. For the liberated there is no stream of rebirth flowing between two separated shores: no Samsara and no Nirvana. Thus, the long pilgrimage to perfection through innumerable existences disappears. The secret meaning of Enlightenment is that the struggle to reach the goal by long strife through reincarnations to attain release from the universal law of moral causation (Karma), is without reality. So, properly speaking, Nirvana exists only for those who see Samsara or Nirvana and Samsara and Nirvana are just pairs of opposite. This state is still to be transcended. This transcendence is Enlightenment. It is Moksha. Properly understood, the Doctrine of Transmigration was meant to be an Upaya, a skillful means used by the Buddhist sages to encourage people, namely, the laity, to do good work and to exhibit good moral character thereby making this world a better place to live in. This is of course, the lower level of teaching. Therefore it was never intended to mean that upon the death of the man, his soul was to be transferred to another body. As has been mentioned earlier, the goal of the Buddha was complete mental catharsis consisting of the conviction that everything in this world is illusory and unreal. Now, in an illusory world, rebirth is also illusory. The things that a man craves for are no more reality than a dream, but he craves nonetheless and hence his illusory ego is reborn in a new but equally illusory body. To the Buddhist, all weight and emphasis is in the mind. All values and valuation lies in the mind. But, as it is, the human mind craves for something permanent. It longs to be something or produce something which is not transitory and which has an absolute value in and for itself. But neither in this world nor in any other world are such states and actions possible. Only in Nirvana does one find such a state which rises above the transitory for it rises above desire. Thus the goal in life is Nirvana.

But, striving after moral perfection or even after natural propriety could never win for men the blessedness of Nirvana for Nirvana is a stage of the mind and, therefore, it could be attained only by means of the mind. Mere acts — good or bad — could not help in the least. For Buddhism, only the total abolition of striving itself could do it, for striving, desiring — that

was the very source of all illusory life. Without desire, the individual "it" would be lost and only the Brahman, the universal "it" would be left. So, logically, there was but one sane purpose in life — to cease desiring. This can only be achieved by a mental resolve to discard all desires. The Buddha, logically enough, goes on to offer a technique of effecting a euthanasia of desire. The first step was to feed the mind with the Four Noble Truths: (1) the Truth of Sorrow or Suffering (2) of the Cause of Sorrow or Suffering (3) of the Cessation of Sorrow or Suffering and (4) the Way to end up that Sorrow or Suffering; and this way is the famous noble eightfold path.

The fourth noble truth calls for action for under the name of "The Way", the Buddha comprehended the distinct Yoga of his sect.⁴⁸ This is the Yoga chiefly of spiritual exercises, though as aids to mental concentration he recommends practices of fasting, bodily posture and breath control.

The stages of the Eightfold Path may be thus outlined:

- (1) right reason — regulate bodily cravings by right reason
- (2) right thought — think good, especially kind thoughts
- (3) right speech — bridle the tongue
- (4) right action — practice active virtues especially benevolence
- (5) right resolve — intensify practice of the preceeding form.⁴⁹
- (6) right means of livelihood — cast out fear and desire by persevering meditation on the unreality of these objects that stir you to fear or desire.
- (7) right meditation — by meditation on the impermanence and momentariness of conscious experience, convince yourself that your own individual personality is an illusion.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Further back in Indian history, so their scholars say arose the conviction that higher knowledge was attainable through peculiar forms of corporeal and spiritual disciplines. The Upanishads with their rules for bodily control and mental concentration greatly furthered this conviction so that at the period of Buddhist origins all sects were practicing Yoga. Buddha's own experience of the harmful effects of excessive Ascetism led him subordinate merely physical Yoga to mental exercises.

⁴⁹ This first five ways make up the so-called Purgative Way. It also incorporates the Buddha's ethical code — the code that anathematizes murder (Ahimsa), theft and adultery (Bramacarya); lying, slander (satya) and abuse of others, covetousness and hatred (aparigraha). Positively, it commands respect for age and authority, benevolence and sympathy. This corresponds to the first state of Prajna Yoga — Yama.

⁵⁰ These next two ways make up the so-called Illuminate Way.

(8) right concentration — the illusion of life has passed away, the candle has been snuffed out, Nirvana has ensued.⁵¹

The word "Nirvana" means "blowing out." It is highly probable that this term was used to indicate the extinction of the flame of the illusion and desire. Thus, it is expected that when a man reaches the 7th stage of the spiritual pyramid, he possesses "bodhi" (enlightenment) and he becomes an "arhat" (perfected soul) and simply waits for the "change that has no changing."

In the Sanyuta-nikaya, the positive seriation from suffering to knowledge is given as the succession of suffering, faith, joy, rapture, serenity, happiness, concentration, knowledge and insight into things as they really are. The Buddhist thinking was that if ignorance ultimately leads to suffering, suffering itself may prompt search for a remedy which is found ultimately in knowledge and insight, the opposite of ignorance which is responsible for all ills (klesa) through the veiling of the proper object of knowledge. Such a concept was beyond the comprehension of the masses hence the two levels of teaching.

In the higher knowledge, the essential truth is not so much a series of birth in which something persists and passes from existence to existence as the timeless fact that life depends on Tanha (craving), the desire for life. Still, there is no doubt that the earliest Buddhist texts and discoveries ascribed to the Buddha himself speak when using ordinary untechnical language, of rebirth and of a man dying and being born in such and such a state. It is not to be supposed however, that the self is continued or transferred in this operation. There is no entity that can be called soul, and strictly speaking no entity that can be called body, only a variable aggregation of skandas (aggregates) constantly changing. At death, this collocation disperses but a new one reassembles under the influence of Tanha (craving) the desire for life and by the Law of Karma which prescribes that every act must have its result.

This writer would like to draw the attention of the reader to this fact: Taking the Buddhist stand that desire determines the next life — "life" here is not to be interpreted according to

⁵¹ This last stage makes up the Unitive Way.

the usual concept of life which is the duration of earthly existence, but as a specific form of existence whether organic or inorganic and wherein organic existence is to be classified into the Vegetative, Sensitive and Rational existence. Consequently when a man clings to sensual desires, he stays on the level of animal existence and live the life of an animal for as long as he wishes within his lifetime and as long as he stays in that level of animal existence, he will be dominated by pains and sufferings, sorrows, as well as temporal joys — In a crude way of taking this truth — one is said to be reborn as an animal, as a wolf if one is cunning; a snake, if one is treacherous — and birth in this regard simply means the beginning of a new kind of level of existence, rebirth will mean returning to a level of existence one experienced before. It is wise to consider the excerpt of the Milinda-Panho: "A being born, O King dies here. Having died here, it springs up elsewhere."⁵² On interpretation, this suggests that "birth" and "death" belong only to this changing world which is an illusory world for the real does not change. Thus ultimately speaking, there is no rebirth.

RETROSPECT AND GENERAL CONCLUSION

I. RETROSPECT

The doctrine of transmigration is perhaps the most characteristic doctrine of India. Its true beginnings may be traced to the Upanishads in which the fundamental tenet is; the Brahman is the sole reality. One begins to wonder how a doctrine such as the transmigration doctrine, which necessarily involves the manyness of reality (since there must be a distinction between that which transmigrates and that to which it transmigrates) should be set within a teaching that subscribes to the oneness of reality. The first impression that one gets is the presence of some kind of a contradiction within the basic teaching of the Upanishads; but deeper readings and analyses of Upanishadic texts show, that the seeming contradiction disappear for one who has grasped the true teaching.

⁵² Milinda Panho Book III Chapter 6.

Samsara has a definite role to play in the whole scheme of Indian thought. It is a corollary of the Doctrine of Karma which, in essence, states that "one reaps the fruit of his actions." All the Darshanas (philosophic schools of thought) have as a common principle, the idea of karma with the attendant doctrine that rebirth is a consequence of action and that salvation is an escape from rebirth. It is a companion of the fundamental tenet of the Upanishads. In order to understand the place of Samsara in the whole teaching of the Upanishads, it is wise to consider the basic teaching of Vedanta.

In essence, Vedanta teaches that there is only one reality — Brahman, which is *Pure Consciousness*; the world and everything in it is ultimately illusory; therefore, unreal. Now, the basic problem arising out of such a doctrine is that man cannot help ascribing reality to the world as well as to his individual self. The question arises — how can the world be illusory? To this, the Indian sages answer that the world and the individual self (jiva) are manifestations of Brahman; but ultimately speaking, jiva and Brahman are one.

Indian sages realized that the basic Upanishadic doctrine is not for everyone; it can be directly grasped by only a gifted few. Aware of this difficulty, the gurus formulated two levels of teaching which brought about the two forms of knowledge: the lower level and the higher level. The lower level of teaching endowed the world with reality and to the jiva (individual self) presented as the goal in life, union with a Personal Brahman, the Lord (Isvara). This Brahman is endowed with qualities; hence it is describable. The means to this end was a good, moral life. Since the way to moral perfection was not an easy one, the Indian sages had to think up some incentive to encourage men to strive after perfection — the gurus took over the Doctrine of Karma: One shall reap the fruits of his action, good or bad, and linked it to the Doctrine of Samsara: that one shall be reborn again and again as long as he has not attained moral perfection. Actions became the basis of morality and determined the future. As the Chandogya states: "those who are of pleasant conduct here, the prospect is that they will enter a womb of a Brahman or a Ksatriya or a Vaisya, but those of stinking conduct here will enter into the

womb of a dog or a swine or c'andala (outcaste)."⁵³ This became indeed a powerful incentive; hence it was not surprising that the Doctrine of Transmigration quickly spread among the masses.

The higher level of teaching had for its goal — self-realization — moksha. It is to the higher level that the true teaching of — Brahman is the only reality and the world is ultimately false and that the jiva (individual self) and the Brahman are at the bottom one — was given. The means to attain self-realization was by way of mental purification and perfection — Yoga. While it is true that the gurus provided two levels of teaching to accommodate differences in intelligence — the lower level for the less intelligent — the sages recognized the fact that only a man of serene mind can realize the spiritual meaning of life. The original idea of the sages was for the lower teaching to be transcended. They believed that moral preparation and perfection were necessary to attain spiritual release. The lower teaching was meant to be used as a ladder to climb to the higher teaching but was to be discarded when one reached the truth. It was in this line of thinking that the sages used the phenomenological method in order to reach the inner self. This consists of bracketing the outer strata until one gets to the innermost self which they aptly described as passing the five sheaths of the Atman from the corporeal self (body) to the vital breath, to the internal senses including the mind, to the understanding, and finally to pure consciousness. In connection with this, they propounded the four levels of consciousness: the Waking Consciousness, which has for its object — gross material objects; the Dream Consciousness, which has for its objects, representations of the extramental gross objects; the Deep-Sleep Consciousness, which has no object neither gross nor images of the gross worldly objects, but intellectual representations (abstracted natures), and lastly, the Pure Consciousness, which has no object as against the subject of knowledge for it is Consciousness itself. It is this Pure Consciousness that has been called the Brahman. It is that state of the Consciousness which brings the individual self to realize its oneness with reality (Brahman) which it was all the time.

The Buddha accepted the usual Indian belief about Karma — Samsara, and with them, the usual conclusion that release from

⁵³ Chand. 5.10.7.

the series of rebirth is the summum bonum. This release, this deliverance, is Nirvana.

In early Buddhism, or Buddhism during the lifetime of the Buddha, the concept of karma was closely related to the Buddha's main doctrine, the so-called *Patticasamputpada* translated as the Doctrine of Dependent Origination. In essence, *Patticasamutpada* may be given in a causal formula: "This being, that arises", meaning to say — depending upon the cause, the effect arises." It is very easy to translate this to the doctrine of karma to read: "Depending upon your past action (karma) shall be your future existence." It is important to note that for the Buddha, life is not a product of the blind play of mechanical nature but as due to the will. The whole teaching is rooted in the Buddha's fundamental teaching — the Four Noble Truths: There is Suffering; There is a Cause of Suffering; There is a Cessation of Suffering; There is a Way to End the Suffering. The Buddha's interesting teaching is that Suffering is Samsara; Cessation of Suffering is Nirvana. Both however, are only aspects of the same Reality-of-Suchness (*Bhutatathata*). Like the Upanishads, the Buddha taught that the world and the individual self are unreal. Illusions of its reality grips men, and the only way to freedom is the conquest of this illusion. The conquest of this illusion is the goal of life — this is Nirvana. To the Buddha, illusion draws its vitality from desire; hence the mind's strategy must be directed towards the rooting out of desire. The Buddha, logically enough, offers a technique of effecting a euthanasia of desire — the Noble Eight-Fold Path.

To teach the Path is not an easy task. Because of the differences in the depth of understanding, it was essential to present gradations in the teaching in accord with the general understanding of the audience. Hence, two kinds of teaching could be discerned during the life-time of the Buddha and shortly after his death: the first was directed towards the religious community; the second to the laity engaged in worldly pursuits. The teaching directed to the laity was aimed at arriving at the monk's level of understanding. It was a preparation for the more abstract philosophical doctrine. The Buddhists believed it essential that the layman begins his spiritual life with an understanding of the importance of the law of karma. Thus, they need the Doctrine

of Karma as a stepping stone to reach the spiritual path (Yoga) together with the promise that if the layman practiced offering and morality, they would attain sufficient virtue to be born into a deva heaven. This was a standing belief that was later transferred to earthly existence — a renewed existence on earth (Samsara). As a result of such a teaching, the layman's goal became the acquisition of merit (puñña) to attain a happy rebirth through the Middle Path — Right Reason, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Resolve, Right Means of Livelihood, Right Meditation, Right Concentration. The higher level of teaching had for its goal — Nirvana, which could only be achieved by properly conditioning the mind by means of spiritual exercises — Yoga.

In brief, the above can give the reader an insight into the role played by the Doctrine of Transmigration in both the Brahmanic and the Buddhist teaching.

II. GENERAL CONCLUSION

In analyzing the conditions in which the doctrine of Samsara made its appearance in both the Brahmanic and the Buddhist philosophical network, it is evident that the doctrine was formulated and manipulated to overcome the drawbacks of teaching their respective doctrines. The doctrine of Samsara was used as an "upaya" (skillful means) by Hinduism and Buddhism to achieve their ultimate ends which for Brahmanism is the realization of Brahman and for Buddhism, the attainment of Nirvana. That both orthodox and heterodox schools should employ the same means to reach their ends is no accident of thought. The doctrine was Brahmanic in origin, and the Buddha had began as a Hindu. He remained within the sphere of India's traditional philosophy only approaching its classic problem of release (moksha) from a fresh and more unified point of view. Both schools recognized the tremendous influences that such a teaching could exert upon ordinary minds, for, indeed, if one were taught by those given the highest reverence and respect, that unless he led a moral life, he would be subject to rebirth (suffering) and that one's past action would determine his next existence — who would have the

temerity to question such a statement especially if these statements were bolstered by analogies in nature? It is not surprising then that ordinary folk in the East readily accepted the Doctrine of Samsara. Furthermore, behind the insurmountable difficulties of their present existence, this particular doctrine provided an incentive to work for the attainment of a better state of life later. As shown in the analysis made in this work, the doctrine under consideration was designed to be used as a ferryboat to transport one from the shore of ignorance to that of knowledge. To appreciate the full force of this Doctrine and to understand the reason for its persistence, one must begin by realizing that in everyday Hindu life, the ferryboat plays an extremely prominent role. It is an indispensable means of transportation in a continent traversed by many mighty rivers and where bridges were practically, non-existent. Both Brahmanism and Buddhism, by their doctrines, provide a ferryboat across the rushing river of Samsara to the distant lands of liberation; through enlightenment, the individual was transported. The value of the Doctrine of Samsara consists precisely in this: that it was meant to bring one to the truth. Thus to appreciate and understand the Doctrine, one must recognize its place in the whole set-up. Taken separately, it created a lot of confusion and gross misinterpretations and tended to bring about contradictions in the systems. As it is, students of Indian philosophy, who are unfamiliar with the role that the Doctrine of Samsara played in the entire teaching of both Upanishadic and Buddhist works, disseminated it as a separate doctrine. This became the source of doubts and disbeliefs.

The Doctrine of Samsara was never meant to be taken separately and literally; nevertheless, the Indian masters made a magnificent use of the Doctrine. It was meant to be a harbinger of hope to the disconsolate mass of suffering people, and to convey philosophic truth to the more enlightened. It is the contention of this writer, that the Doctrine of Samsara was given in figurative language as was the common practice in those days at the time of its formulation. One has but to look into ancient writings to accept this fact. While the Doctrine may not be literally true, nevertheless it represents a truth that the Hindu thinkers secretly guarded. This work has been dedicated to showing the philoso-

phical truth behind the maze of metaphors and similes in which it has been embedded.

The Doctrine of Samsara is an extension of the Doctrine of Karma. When it is said that one reaps the fruits of his actions, there is to be found in this statement, an implication of continuity, for necessarily, the reaping must happen in some future time and continuity is the essence of the concept of Samsara (passing). It remained for the sages to play up the theme of continuity which states that the world is in a continual process of coming into existence and passing away. Now one may ask why they chose the cycle of birth and death instead of any other incident to represent the concept of continuity. This writer deeply adheres to the belief that at a time when life was an incessant struggle and in a place where survival was a terrible plight, it was but natural to focus all attention on existence and the continuity of existence. It was therefore easy for a doctrine related to existence and the manner of existence — as “birth and death” to win acceptance from the public. Another factor that greatly contributed to its rapid spread was the fact that in those days of simplicity, life was somewhat equated with existence. The Indian thinkers definitely knew their psychology and used this to arrive at their intermediate end (moral perfection) in order, later, to get to the ultimate end — truth.

However, the paradox of paradoxes is that although the gurus knew that the doctrine of Samsara which they spun out of the ignorance of man, was ultimately false and ought to be discarded in the end; yet the sages cracked their minds to present the doctrine, logically, consistently, and attractively to gain the belief of the masses. So great was the psychological impact of the Doctrine of Samsara upon the minds of the ordinary people that they used it as a *deus ex machina* — an answer for things unexplainable.

While the Doctrine of Samsara is popularly known as the cycle of birth and death, it must be borne in mind that “birth” is not to be taken in the ordinary sense as “the beginning of life (outside of the mother’s womb)” and “death” is not to be taken to mean, “the end of earthly existence”; still these concepts suggest the idea of a beginning and an end. By deeper interpretation,

the Doctrine of Transmigration is not to be taken in its literal sense — as the transfer of a soul from one body to another body — but as the passing of the same soul from one psychological or moral state, to another psychological or moral state. In stricter terms, the Doctrine of Reincarnation is a Doctrine of Purification, from the good to the better, or a Doctrine of Evolution from the lower to the higher. In a word, it involves change. It is good to remind readers that the cycle of birth and death, is but one instance of the process of change in the world. In choosing this illustration, the Indian sages simply utilized that which was closest and dearest to men, namely, life; but if one were to be faithful to their way of thinking, one would really see that they had no intentions of stopping there. The seers would like this particular instance to be magnified to a grand scale, to reach the Universal. In so doing, the particular will be lost; only the Universal is there. The Relative will be gone; only the Absolute abides. Thus, Samsara, properly symbolizes change; but for the Indians, change is in itself evil for this embraces plurality and impermanence, hence it is unreal; it is an illusion. Consequently, all of the higher aspirations of the Indians led him to extricate himself from this labyrinth of repeated births, this phantasmagoria of fleeting unsubstantial visions and to seek final repose in some changeless state called by such names as union with Brahman, for Brahmanism, or Nirvana, for Buddhism, and he has generally the conviction that this can be done by knowledge. Since the whole Samsara is an illusion, it collapses and ceases so soon as the soul knows its own real nature and its independence of phenomena. Thus in stricter terms the end of man is to release the spirit from the bonds of matter. This is the end of Samsara in the grand scale.

The ultimate truth (philosophical) that the sages tried to propound is that the Brahman is the One, the Eternal, the Truth. They meant to teach that the Brahman stands for the One, the Eternal, the Truth. Brahman is One since Brahman is Truth and truth is one. Truth is One since if there were two contradictory things and one of them is true, the other is false. Thus, if Brahman is one and thus is true and real, and the world is many and unreal, then the world must be false. Furthermore, if Brahman is True and thus is One, it must be unchangeable for the changea-

ble implies plurality. In contrast to the world, Brahman represents the unchanging. Since the end of all men is to attain truth and the only truth is said to be Brahman, it is clear that Brahman symbolizes truth which is One, Eternal, and Unchangeable; on the other hand, Samsara represents the many, the changing, the false. Furthermore, Samsara illustrates that man is of a double nature — material and immaterial (spirit); body and soul that as such by his nature, he attains knowledge by passing from the senses to the intellect but one is not supposed to stop there for man, in the scale of being lies in the borderland — a composite of matter and spirit, highest in the realms of living things, lowest in the hierarchy of intelligent beings; and thus man is expected to rise above himself as man perfects the higher element in him — soul — spirit to transcend, to reach the highest spirit — the Pure Spirit, (Pure Consciousness) God.

Thus the sages say — discard the world as unreal for it is false — there is one truth, Brahman, since Samsara — birth and death represents change. What changes cannot be true for Truth is unchangeable. This brings forward the philosophical truth that Truth does not change. The teaching of the Indian sages was that although the world is false — by the stamp of men as a citizen of two worlds, he has to use the false world as a starting point to eventually reach the Truth. For this reason, the doctrine of Samsara was devised to point to that truth. Hence, this very doctrine illustrates the process of refinement and purification of objects present in the world, thereby inviting men to pass from the gross to the subtle, from the material to the immaterial, from the concrete to the abstract, from the phenomenon to the noumenon and establish the philosophic truth that the essences of things are not to be found on the surface; but deep within the thing; that the things of value do not just lie around in the open but must be extracted from deep within. To use a figure of speech — if one wants pearls he has to dive deep into the ocean or be content with pebbles on the shore, if men care for gold, they have to dig deep into the earth or be content with straw. Samsara then was intended for beginners and advanced pupils, but become meaningless for the perfect. Samsara involves plurality. For the enlightened there cannot be “another shore” for this is only for those of dualistic perception. Enlightenment means that

the delusory distinction between the two shores of a worldly and transcendental existence no longer holds. There is no stream of rebirths flowing between two separated shores: no Samsara, no Nirvana. Thus, the long pilgrimage to perfections through innumerable existences disappears like a landscape of dreams when one awakens. Hence the secret meaning of Enlightenment is — that Samsara is without reality. The final, paradoxical, self-annihilating formula of Advaita Vedanta perfectly harmonizes with those of the transcendental “wisdom of the other shore” of the Buddhist. Both agree that the spiritual adventures, conquests, constrictions and experiences met with in pursuit of the goal of liberation, are purely phenomenal. The jiva (individual self) and the Brahman (universal self) Samsara and Nirvana, Ignorance and Knowledge, Bondage and Liberation, are ideas showing pairs of opposites and ought to be transcended.

When one reaches Nirvana, enlightenment, union with Brahman, one is no longer blinded by passions, desires, and normal dynamics of the physique and psyche — the illusions of life; he no longer feels himself to be conditioned by the false ideas and attendant desires that normally go on shaping individuals and their spheres of life after life. One realizes himself to be void of the characteristics that constitute an individual who is subject to a destiny. Thus, release from karma, the universal law, he reposes beyond fate no longer subject to the consequences of personal limitations.

Therefore the great paradox of Buddhism is that there is no Buddha who came into existence to enlighten the world with Buddhist teachings. The life and mission of Gautama is a general misunderstanding by the unenlightened world, helpful and necessary to guide the mind toward illumination but to be discarded when and if enlightenment is attained. One who distinguishes Samara from Nirvana still clings to the general mundane delusion. Buddhism which contains this boldest paradox therefore tends to avoid statements about existence and non-existence. Their “Middle Path” goes between, by simply pointing out that the validity of conception is always relative to one’s position along the progress from the Ignorance to Buddhahood.

In terms of Vedanta — whoever clings to the polarized notions of “bondage and release” has yet to pass beyond the maya —

sphere of the "pairs-of-opposites". His mind still contains different notions. He has not yet been transformed for as long as a difference can be seen between bondage and release, the horizon has not been passed that separates the phenomenal sphere, the qualified from the unqualified. One has to rise above the pairs-of-opposites even abandon the notions that he has realized Brahman for positing Brahman involves the positing of the experience of liberation: positing liberation involves automatically the positing of bondage and when this pair-of-opposites are posited all other pairs-of-opposites are posited too like birth and death. In the end, these should be discarded, as Guadapada says: There is no dissolution, no beginning, no bondage, no aspirant. There is neither anyone arising for liberation nor a liberated soul. This is the final truth.⁵⁴

The Doctrine of Samsara represented the supreme tests of transformation — which is the aim of Indian philosophy — the problem of effecting a kind of alchemical transmutation of the soul; a transformation that shall touch the core of one's existence. It reflected the guru's wish for the pupil to pass out of bondage, beyond the limits of human imperfections and ignorance and transcend the earthly plane of being. The gist of Indian teachings can be grasped more readily and adequately by fathoming the main metaphors through which it appeals to our intuition than by a systematic study of the complicated structure and the fine details of the developed teaching. To enter the Buddhist vehicle — the boat of disciplines — means to begin to cross the river of life from the shore of common — sense experience of non-enlightenment, the shore of spiritual desire, and death, to the yonder banks of transcendental wisdom which is liberation (moksha) from this bondage.

In the final analysis, the message of the doctrine of Samsara is that there shall be a transition from the darkness of selfish individualism to the light of universal spirit, from falsehood to truth, from the slavery of the world to the liberty of the eternal.

One has to rise above the present vision of the world and its anarchic individualism, its economic interpretation of history, and individualist view of life. One has to shift the focus of cons-

⁵⁴ Gaudapada Karika 2.32.

ciousness from the outer to the inner. The way to growth lies through an increasing impersonality through the unifying of the self with the greater than the self. Thus the liberated and perfected soul discovers that the great is to be found in the small, the infinite within the bounds of form and the eternal freedom of soul in love. One must bring heaven down to earth; put eternity in an hour and realize God in this world. This is the eternal message of the Indian gurus. This is the Upanishad.

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APPENDIX A

ABBREVIATIONS

Brihadaranyaka Aranyaka	Brih. Ar.
Brihadaranyaka Upanishad	Brih.
Chandogya Upanishad	Chand.
Dhammapada	Dhamm.
Digha Nikaya	DN
Katha Upanishad	Kath.
Kaushitaki Upanishad	Kaush.
Maitrayana Upanishad	Maitr.
Mandukya Upanishad	Mand.
Sacred Books of the East	SBE
Sanyutta Nikaya	SN
Satapatha Brahmana	Satap Br.
Svetasvatara Upanishad	Svet.

N.B.

All quotations from the Upanishads are taken from the Upanishads translated by Max Muller-New Dover Edition.