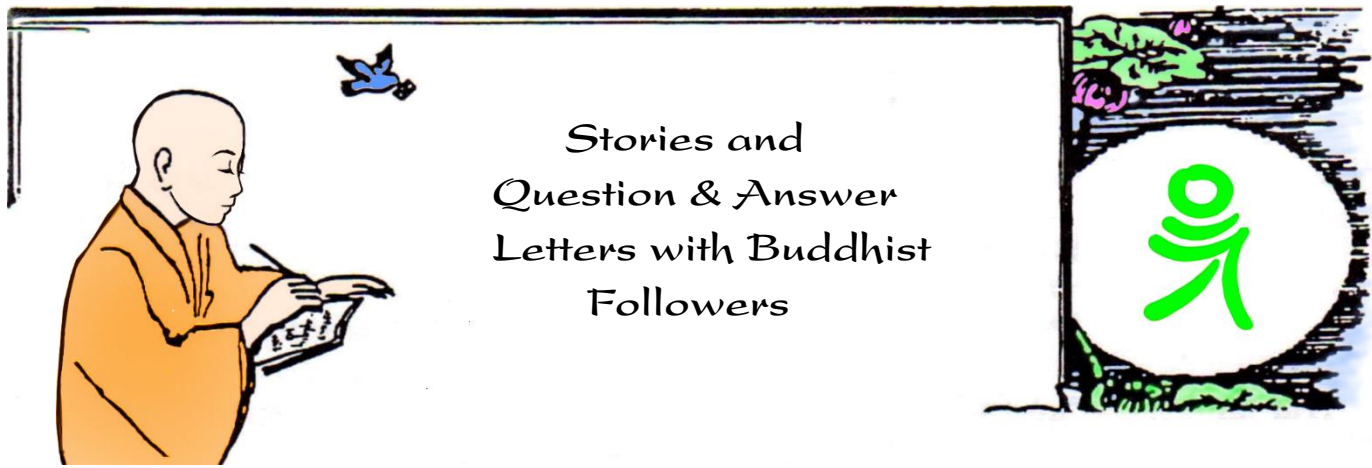




REINCARNATION EMBODIES THE SIX GREAT ELEMENTS:

(Earth, Water, Wind, Fire, Space, and Consciousness).



*Who says reincarnation is non-sense,
Men and animals can quickly swap lives,
Light some incense, ask those gone before,
Listen to the tidal wave, and awake from dreams.*

Where does humanity come from?

What happens after death?

Why is life full of disparities: rich-poor, noble-lowly, attractive-ugly, wise-ignorant?

Why do kind people often meet with calamities while the wicked enjoy pleasure and prosperity?

This inequity is a common question for many people. According to Buddhism, everything can be explained by samsara (*reincarnation*), and karma (*cause and effect*).

Samsara and karma are two correlated events. Sentient beings are trapped in the cycle of births and rebirths, because they carry with them the good and bad karma. The concept of gaining rebirth, along with its happiness and misery in the six realms (*of reincarnation*), is influenced by the wholesome or unwholesome cause-effect.

Cause and effect is the karmic result of the “**body, speech, and thought**”. One shall reap what one sows.

Reincarnation is the rebirths among the six realms (*where the soul travels post-death*), and within the two paths of “**happiness**” and “**suffering**”.

Since ancient time, life is a series of peaks and valleys, where people tirelessly envy, compete, and harm each other for fame, fortune, and glamour. We bear much suffering because we have accumulated too much negative karma from the past.

Buddhism explains the reincarnation concept in order to clarify and refute the rigid misconceptions of earthly attachments from the masses and nonbelievers. Some believe that the afterlife is nonexistent. The body and soul of man, as well as animals, all disintegrate after death. This theory is incorrect, as proven by many proofs of rebirths in both Eastern and Western philosophical history. If one believe that sins and merits will not be carried over to their next lives, and that death is the end; then you are free to commit any sin, for meritorious deeds are insignificant. Consequently, our society and the world will drown in wars and chaos. Some believe that:

The soul always lives on even after death. A man will forever be a man and an animal will forever be an animal in the next life.

Some may claim that:

If we have faith in and completely submit to a holy figure, after death, we will ascend to heaven, and indulge in all kinds of pleasures eternally. Meanwhile, non-believers will be condemned to hell, forever enduring punishments.

Both beliefs above are incorrect and dangerous. If man stays man, and never degrade to the lower realms, then none will need to cultivate good deeds. People will employ unscrupulous means and endlessly commit wicked acts, in order to gain various pleasures.

Having *absolute faith and submission to a holy figure will bring permanent dwelling in Heaven; and the opposite will result in endless sufferings in Hell. This belief is also wrong.*

Common observations reveal that nothing in life is permanently stationary. On the contrary, everything is always changing and in flux. Unlike a clock, which has neither a beginning nor ending, life is constantly moving. What can be more unreasonable than karmas accumulated over a short period of time, that has the power to dictate one's joyful or unfortunate fate forever in the future?

According to the law of cause and effect, sentient beings reincarnate among the six realms based on their positive or negative karmas. The **Great Venerable Yongjia** taught:

- The fruit of happiness or misery is planted and grown by the mind.
- Anger, adultery, and wickedness condemn you to Hell.
- Greed and stinginess imprison your soul in Hell as a starving ghost.
- Ignorance and sloth lead to becoming animals.
- Egotism and elevated pride lead to becoming **Asura (Semi Devils.)**
- Wholly upholding the five precepts (*no: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and alcoholism*) lead to the human realm.
- Steadfast practice of the ten meritorious deeds earns you the ticket to Heaven.

- Achieving the truth of Selflessness earns one **the rank Auditory-Perceiver of their Sainthood**.
- Clearly understanding **dependent origination** leads to Pratyeka-Buddha (*rank in Sainthood, Affinitive – Comprehensor*).
- Cultivating six **paramitas** (*invaluable qualities: charity, devotion, patience, discipline, meditation, wisdom*) is the karma of Bodhisattvas.
- Having the mind of compassion and equanimity lead to the Buddha karma.
- Pure minds will be reborn in pure land, residing in bejeweled palaces, and fragrant thrones.

Disturbed minds will gain rebirth in an impure world, full of rugged terrains and pits. All forms of natural phenomena originate from the mind, and only within the limit of the mind will they exist. Therefore, to enjoy the wholesome fruit, one must cultivate pure conducts.

This brief teaching of Venerable Yongjia, effectively explains the theory of rebirths among the six realms. It clearly presents the cause-effect concept to be born in any of the ten dharma worlds.

Once we understand the law of cause and effect, we cannot refute the theory of reincarnation. Reincarnation is simply inevitable cause-effect. Depending on their good/bad karma, sentient beings experience changes in physical appearance and realms of rebirth. However, many cannot recognize the correlation. Indeed, cause and effect constantly manipulate each other from one life to the next. Only Saints who achieved true 'Altruism' can avoid that influence. In practice, reincarnation embodies the six great elements: *Earth, Water, Wind, Fire, Space, and Consciousness*.

The Practical Reincarnation of Earth:

Ceramics after a period of time will break down and return to dust. Dust turns into soil, nurturing vegetations.

Eventually, the nutrients would feed and become the flesh and blood of an animal. Finally, the carcass of animals will deteriorate and returns to dust.

The Practical Reincarnation of Water:

Water in the river or sea, evaporates when heated by the sun. The vapor rises up and fuses into clouds. When the clouds meet cold air, it condenses and rains down. Rain water flow into various bodies of water and become ice at freezing temperatures. Ice melts back into water when heated by the sun.

The Practical Reincarnation of Wind:

Wind is the movement of air. Air expands and rises up high when heated by the sun, resulting in empty pockets. Air from other places quickly fills up those pockets,

generating wind. Slow air movements create mild wind, fast movements create strong wind, and rapid movements create a storm.

The Practical Reincarnation of Fire:

When the right elements interact with each other, the overwhelming energy (*heat*) of their activities result in a combustion, creating fire. Rubbing two dry logs together will generate fire. The burning logs then turn into ash/coal. Surrounding trees use their roots to draw in the ashes and utilize that energy (*heat*). One day when all the right elements are in place again, that 'heat' will reignite into fires.

The Practical Reincarnation of Space:

A certain empty space is filled when a new house is built. When that house is demolished, the empty space is restored. Take an unexploited piece of land for example. When tunnels are dug, the new space beneath is created. When the tunnels are back-filled, that additional space will be lost.

The Practical Reincarnation of Consciousness:

Our consciousness is indeterminable, and constantly changing. When sentient beings live in a good environment, their consciousness becomes kind and gentle. When influenced by a bad environment, they turn vicious. Furthermore, learning different subjects will enable oneself to gain the knowledge in which those materials offered.

With that said, the ultimate goal of the Buddha's teaching is to liberate sentient beings from the suffering of birth-and-death, and to achieve the ultimate fruit of nirvana. Therefore, the focus of the reincarnation theory in Buddhism is to depict the cycle of births and deaths of living beings.

A few proofs of reincarnation (a.k.a. *samsara*) (to illustrate whether there's an afterlife).

Stories of reincarnation are countless in both the East and the West, and have been either verbally retold or reported by media. For example, a Buddhist blog entry reposted an article and pictures from an old Indian newspaper, telling the following story.

1. Samsara story in India.

In Delhi, India, there lived an 8 years old girl named Phatidevin.

Many times she had tearfully requested her parents to take her to Mita to visit her husband who was a teacher. Mita is a city 200-km away from Delhi. Curious, the girl's parents asked a newspaper reporter to help investigate.

When asked by the reporter, the girl indicated that she was a wife of a teacher in her previous life, and together they had one child. When the child turned 11, she became sick and passed away.

The reporter asked if she had any evidence; she answered that when she died, she buried jewelries and other valuables in a corner of the house. Moreover, she clearly remembered a fan that a friend gave to her, and on it there were a few phrases. She then read aloud those phrases for the reporter to jot down in his notebook.

The reporter went to Mita and searched for the teacher, and indeed found one matching the name provided by the girl. He asked the teacher:

- Did you have a wife who died 8 or 9 years ago?
- Yes. It's been 9 years since my wife died. Why are you asking about that ?

The reporter repeated what the girl said, and the teacher confirmed everything. The reporter then showed the teacher the phrases in his notebook and asked:

- When your wife passed away, she left behind a hand-fan with these phrases written on it. Is that correct?
- Yes. They match exactly.

The next day, the reporter invited Phatidevin and her parents to accompany him to Mita. Since her birth until then (*8 years old*), the girl never travelled far; yet she knew all the roads leading to Mita.

She pointed out this and that street, their names, and where they lead. She even correctly called out the names of acquaintances along the roadsides. When approaching the teacher's house, she told the driver to slow down and to stop right in front of the house. Upon seeing an elder about 80 years old inside the house, she became overwhelmed with happiness and tearfully said:

- *This is my father-in-law.*

She then pointed to the teacher and said:

- *That's my husband*

She ran over to hug the child and said in tears:

- *This is my child.*

Everyone present was touched and amazed. The story quickly became a sensation in India. Global media also joined in the discussion. Many scientists worked hard to search and analyze the details, but could not come up with a rational explanation.

But for those who studied the Eastern religions and understood the theory of reincarnation, the story was not at all unusual.

2. Samsara story in China.

During the reign of Shunzhi Emperor of the Qing dynasty in China, there lived in Ji-Ning County a famous scholar named Shao-Shi-Mei. He earned a doctorate title in the year of the boar; and surprisingly still remembers his previous life as a resident named Gao-Dong-Hai in Shi-He County. The wife of Shao-Shi-Mei died at a young age; on her

deathbed, she told her husband:

I have a predestined affinity to be your spouse for three life spans. This life is the first. In the next life, I'll be born into the Dong family in the Tao County.

When you retire and relocate to Xiao Temple to study the Buddha sutras, please look for me in the third house around the bend of Xin River in that County.

Over ten years later, Shi-Mei accepted a teaching position in Deng-Zhou country, close to Shi-He County. One day, when free, he visited the residence of his previous life, but the house where Gao-Dong-Hai used to live was gone. Asking around, he was able to find a paternal grandson of Dong-Hai; he then gave him money to rebuild the house and buy farmland.

Next, he was relocated to Wu-Jiang to be the county chief. There he reported illness and retired. Having no formal responsibility, he took the opportunity to visit an age-long friend in Tao County and stayed in Xiao Temple. The temple housed a set of Buddha sutras that he often borrowed to study. One day he suddenly remembered the parting words of his former wife; he went to the Xin River and walked along its bank. When reaching a bend, he asked around and in fact found the Dong family living in the third house. The family had an unmarried daughter. He recounted his story to the Dongs and asked to marry the daughter; the family readily accepted the proposal.

A few years after the wedding, the Dong lady also passed away. When dying, she again told her husband:

"After this separation, I'll be reborn in the Wang family in Xiang-Yang. The family house is also located by a riverbank, with two willow trees in front of the gate".

You can find me there. In this final union, I'll have two children with you.

Shao-Shi-Mei remembered word for word. Later on, everything happened exactly as the wife had said. In the year of the goat, during the reign of Kangxi Emperor, Shao-Shi-Mei told his story to age-long friends such as Wang-Yu-Yang, Pan-Chen-Fu, in the capital city. The story of Shao-Shi-Mei above matches the meaning of the following verse:

"One soul embodies both present and past men

Two lives are connected by the paths of birth-death"

The world is constantly changing; our body is illusory. The story gives those who ponder deep thoughts an appreciation of life's mystery.

3. Samsara story in Vietnam.

Several decades ago, there lived a lay Buddhist woman in Thu-Duc District. Because both husband and wife were faithful Buddhists, they revered Buddha,

respected the Sangha (*monks/nuns*) who often visited, and offered hospitality to those who needed to rest for the night. At that time, proper Buddhist teaching was not widespread. Even though she took refuge in the Triple Gems and basic precepts, she still raised a few pigs to improve her family life. One day, a senior monk spent the night at her house. It was around midnight when suddenly, from underneath his bed whispered a soft voice that jolted him awake:

-*"You fools, my name is Nguyen Thi-Hoa. Because I owed the lady of the house some money, I had to reincarnate as an animal to pay off the debt."*

The senior monk became particularly curious and quietly peeked down below to search for the voice. He saw a sow feeding and talking to her 12 piglets.

The next morning, the Monk asked the faithful lady:

- *Wasn't there a woman named Nguyen-Thi-Hoa who owed you some money?*
Yes, sir.

She was poor and had passed away, so I considered the debt gone. But she and I were the only ones who knew about the debt, even my husband didn't know. How did you learn about it?

The monk recounted last night's story. The lady of the house was shocked, and hurriedly sold the sow along with the 12 piglets. Remarkably: proceeds from the sale matched the exact debt that Nguyen Thi-Hoa owed.

The event strengthened the lay woman's faith in cause-effect and reincarnation. Since then, she cultivated diligently, and eventually turned her house into a temple. That was the origin of Phuoc-Truong Temple, where a memorial tribute to her still remains and publicly displayed.

Ancient sages taught:

- *An animal is previously a human*
Man and animal have swapped lives since ancient time.

The story above has proven the sages' teaching.

(The story was recounted by Venerable Thanh-Tu when he visited and delivered a dharma speech at Phuoc-Truong Temple, Thu-Duc District.)

