

REBIRTH WITHOUT A SOUL

Dear Sayadaw,

I am studying in a Seventh Adventist (Christian) University. In my philosophy class, I also have to learn about different philosophies from different religions. Though I am a Buddhist, I do not much about Buddhist teaching. According to my instructor (a Christian), Buddha thought that nothing is permanent and the belief of Buddhism is that there is no self, no soul and no body. She has a question for that. The question is that why Buddhism believes in reincarnation or rebirth if there is no self, no soul and no body? How do the death people reborn? She does not find the answer for that question and she said the idea is not logical and it does not make sense. I would like to know whether her lectures are correct or not and I also would like to request Sayadaws to give me some explanations regarding to my instructor's question.

With much respects,
Eh Dah

Soul-idea

There are two kinds of soul - individual and universal or divine. The individual soul is called *Jiva-atta*. It is an unchanging,

eternal and immortal entity and controls the whole mind and body activities. When the body is destroyed by death it is separated and looks for new one. As soon as it finds out one it is transformed into a being and a new life begins again. It is supposed to be the essence of man. The Universal soul is called *Parama-atta*. It is a God or Creator or Governor or a Divine essence. *Jiva-atta* is created by *Parama-atta*, another words, the former is a tiny part of the latter. Immortal soul and God are absolutely necessary to prove the existence of eternal heaven and hell.

Just process

Buddhism denies all eternal things mentioned above. It teaches that every thing is changeable and not eternal and there is no immortality inside or outside this world.

What we call a being is mind and body or five aggregates - namely; materiality, feeling, perception, and mental formations. All kinds of consciousness and mental states are called mind. One mind-moment consists of three sub-moments: arising, presence and dissolution. What we called body is a compound of twenty-eight types of matter. The duration of matter consists of seventeen such mind-moments. Immediately after one moment of mind or matter there occurs another arising of the subsequent one. So, mind and body or aggregates are constantly changing.

It is like the flame of a lamp or the stream of a river that is a succession of sparks that follow upon one another with such rapidity that we cannot perceive them separately. The arising of one moment means the passing away of another moment and vice versa. No eternal entity between these rapid moments of mind and material phenomena.

Think about how you were last seven years ago. We cannot say that I am the same person as I was the last moment. Every moment there is birth, every moment there is death. In the course of one life-time there is momentary death and rebirth without a soul. Life is just process.

Rebirth

As the process of one life-span is possible without a permanent entity passing from one moment to another, so a series of life-processes is possible without anything to transmigrate from one existence to another. The force of *tanhā* – the attachment to live - is produced a new being under the guidance of *Kamma* energy.

Re-birth is the arising of new aggregates (*khandhānam pātubhāvo*) caused by the last generative thought of a dying person. The last thought-moment of this life perishes conditioning another thought-moment in a subsequent life. With this mind and body one does a deed and by reason of this deed another mind and body is reborn into next existence.

In one sense it is a new being, in another it is not (*na ca so na ca añño*), like reflection in a mirror.

No reincarnation

This doctrine of rebirth is different from the idea of reincarnation which implies the transmigration of a soul and its invariable material rebirth.

A simile

We may illustrate this process by a series of billiard balls. "If another ball is rolled against the last stationary ball, the moving ball will stop dead, and the foremost stationary ball will move on. The first moving ball does not pass over, it remains behind, it dies; but it is un-deniably the movement of that ball, its momentum, its *Kamma*, and not any newly created movement, which is reborn in the foremost ball." (Dr. Ānanda K. Kumāraswāmi, *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism*, p.106.) □

See also: H. S. Olcott, *The Buddhist Catechism*, Q. No. 231-240.



Buddha's Method

If any question has to be considered, it has to be considered peacefully and democratically in the way taught by the Buddha.

- Nehru