

IS THERE REINCARNATION IN ZOROASTRIANISM??

RUBY LILAOWALA

Reincarnation is the belief that each soul returns again and again to physical body, to atone for past errors and develop its full potential in preparation for ultimate reunion with the supreme psychic force of the Universe which we call God. This belief is older than recorded history and accepted by almost every religion.

Several friends argue with me that there is no reincarnation in our religion and this doctrine of rebirth does not apply to us. In my humble opinion IT DOES, because this doctrine is a Cosmic Law applicable to every soul, whether that soul "believes" in it or not. Suppose I say I don't believe in the "law of gravity or the action-of-law which states that "fire burns"- so what? The gravity -law or the fact that fire burns still exist whether I believe in them or not! Similarly, reincarnation is an eternal universal law so why should a Zoroastrian claim exemption from it?

According to our religion, in the constitution of the human body, there is one supreme angelic principle called FAROHAR or FRAVASHI which complements the soul (Urwan). It is the soul (Urwan) which reincarnates, bearing responsibility of all the thoughts words and deeds done on Earth (Karma-Bhumi). The purpose of rebirth is RAVAN-BOKHTEGI (Moksh., Nirvana or final liberation). The Lords of Karma (BAGHO-Bakhtars) allot one's destiny according to one's karmas with absolute justice for one (each) lifetime, carrying over the arrears of past karmic-accounts to the next lifetime.

The law of gradual evolution of the soul (Fradaiti-Veredaiti) is proclaimed loud and clear in our religion whereby the Urwan (soul) keeps descending from the Minoan (Spiritual realms) to the Getian (Physical phenomena)

in order to gain knowledge, gather experience and grow in wisdom after which, to return to the Abode, of Bliss (according to the Bundahish).

Reincarnation goes hand in hand in our religion along with the doctrine of Resurrection (Rishtakhiz) since it doesn't conflict with the fundamental principles of Zoroastrianism viz. repeated lives on Earth form the metaphorical "battlefield" for fighting ignorance, temptations and evil.

The Spentamad Gatha (49-11) has the key-word Paitiyeinti (they come back) for those imperfect souls who "return" to this world of illusions (Drujo-Demane, corresponding to the Upnishadic concept of Maya). This vital interpretation of the word Paitiyeinti to mean "come back" or "return" has been confirmed by the late Dasturji Khurshed Dabu and other religious scholars such as Sohrab Bulsara, Ervad R Meherjirana, Ervad Phiroze Masani, Dr. Irach Taraporewala, Dasturji Bode and Behramgore Anklesaria.

In the same Gatha (30-10) is another key-word Zazente, ZA meaning "to be born" and Zagenta, "to be born repeatedly". The para states that such souls will one day be reunited (Yaozente) in "God's Abode" when their illusions are over.

The Gatha has another allusion to "falling down from the Bridge of Selection" (Chinvad) into lower realms because of the souls' "hardened conscience", In Zoroastrian eschatology, souls with an imperfect record are unable to cross the Chin vad and go to Heaven (or Garothman) so "falling down" denotes reincarnation.

In Gatha (34-6) and (50-9) the variant of

the verb Paiti Ayenti means "I shall return." to fulfill some aspirations (unfulfilled desires is one of the causes of reincarnation).

In Gatha (46-19) there is a line regarding deserving souls "getting their reward in the next life (Para -Ahum). In both, Sanskrit, as well as the Avesta language, Para -Ahum means "next life".

In the Pazand book called the Dhoop Sarna, the concluding prayer says "May the Departed Souls return (Be-Ayend) to our Mazdayasni religion once again."

Afrin Rapithvan (paragraph 29) presents two alternatives for departed-souls (vataran) viz. Those who fulfilled their purpose of birth and those who failed.

The great scholar (Shams-ul-ulema) Dr. Sir Jeevanji Mody has said: "Zoroastrianism does not say no to reincarnation", Dr. Mody was an eminent Freemason and in Freemasonry, we know the implication of "resurrection" very well!

In the Pazand language, the term Tan-E-Pasin means "the last bodily existence," last suggesting several previous births in "tan" (body). This term denotes the last incarnation of an evolved-soul at the end of which, liberation Ravan-Bokhtegi (Moksh) is achieved.

Then again, the term Farshogard means "promotion" from human bondage to a higher state of consciousness in the Spiritual-realms called Soshyant.

Another terminology referring to the permanency of a soul after several sojourns in numerous incarnations is Kyamat.

In our religion there is a ritual called the Geti-Kharid which signifies "purchase of meritorious existence on Earthly realm by the departed soul after several sojourns, who is about to be born" i.e. the returning soul seeks

to have a comfy account of good deeds to ensure a good Earth-life.

Our Yasna ritual itself inculcates the doctrine of reincarnation through symbols eg. the juice of haoma twigs symbolises "wisdom derived from fate". The mortar signifies incarnation (the play of the fickle finger of Fate). The resultant juice, mixed with the extract of an evergreen tree has to pass through a dish with "nine" perforations repeatedly from the mortar to a cup (post-mortem-rest) and vice-versa (the wheel of rebirth). The dish signifies the human body which has "nine" apertures. The repeated pourings signify several births until the final stage of this ceremony when the sacrament is fit to be poured back into the well, from which water had been previously drawn. This final stage is a metaphor for liberation (Moksh) symbolising re-union (Yaozente) with the supreme Reality viz. our Divine Source.(Atma merging into Parmatma).

Reincarnation is not emphasised too often in our existing scriptures because this doctrine was mentioned in the nineteen Nasks which have been lost to us. Also, it was the most well-known Spiritual Law (as in vedic Hinduism) hence, repeated emphasis was unnecessary.

According to Dr. Framroze Chinivala, the law of Rebirth is a universal, eternal, cosmic Law which aims at giving the utmost scope for the fullest development of the soul by repeated experiences on the physical realm. The aim of life is spiritual perfection and this perfection simply cannot be achieved in a single life. Every soul achieves perfection at its own speed of evolution. Hence, different persons have different circumstances, opportunities, joys, sorrows, different relationships and different spans of lifetimes in which to learn cosmic lessons, acquire wisdom and be finally re-united with the Divine Flame (ASARE-ROSHNI).

The spastic child, mentally-ill persons, people who are noble souls but suffer throughout life, are all souls going through the "learning process". One person is born in a palace into a Royal family, in the lap of luxury while another is born in the slums, to an unfortunate prostitute into a life of misery. In both cases, it is the past accumulated Karmas of the souls being born resulting in a birth of "particular" circumstances through "particular" parents in accordance with the law of "cause and effect" (Karmic Law).

For Zoroastrians, who call themselves Ahura Tkaesha (firm believers in Divine Justice) it's wrong to attribute to God any result which (apparently) had no "cause" to justify it. The cause therefore, must be sought in a previous life's Karmic-account. The Hadokht Nask says that after death, the record of our deeds done on Earth take form as our Kerdar (the vision of a beautiful young girl for good souls and an ugly old hag for wicked souls). The Ardaiviraf Nameh also alludes to rebirth.

A soul comes into this world strengthened by the victories or weakened by the defects (sins) of its previous life. Its' place and circumstances, honour or dishonour are all determined by its' previous merits or demerits. Its' actions (thoughts, words and deeds) in this lifetime determine its' circumstances in the next life. Each one of us has to reincarnate several times before achieving the perfection which permits reunion with our Creator !!

"Him that overcometh will I make pillar in the temple of my God and he shall go no more out."

- John - 3:12.