

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT DAVIS MEDICAL CENTER

LIFE BEFORE BIRTH

Esoteric Thought on the Soul's Experience Prior to Birth and
the Formation of the Physical Body

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By

Rev. Marilyn L. Buehler, M.Div.

LIFE BEFORE BIRTH

Those who have immediate access to the supersensible truths concerning the life of the soul and its reincarnation know, through their unclouded perception, that so-called birth is only an incarnation of the individualized soul in the gross sphere. The unbroken continuity of the life of the reincarnating soul is punctuated by birth and death, both of which are comparable to gateways in the stream of life as it advances from one type of existence to another. Both are equally necessary in the greater life of the soul, and the interval between death and birth is as necessary as the interval between birth and death.¹

This discussion considers beliefs about what happens to the incarnating soul prior to birth and ideas regarding how the physical body is formed. In the death and dying literature much can be found with regards to the soul's journey after casting off the physical vehicle; here, ideas are explored regarding the soul's experience prior to birth. Many in the world embrace reincarnation today. Reincarnation is assumed to be a reality and this discussion does not seek to prove it.

Major religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism teach the soul gains experience through taking human form, again and again. There is evidence that early Christianity taught reincarnation, but it was removed from church doctrine. Ivy O. Duce, in her book, *What Am I Doing Here?*, explains, "Only the Christian Church has failed to teach the truth of reincarnation; all other faiths acknowledge it. And the pity is that the doctrine *was* taught in the Christian Church until the fifth ecumenical council was held in Constantinople in 543 A.D., at which the Church fathers suddenly decided, and passed a

¹ Meher Baba, *Discourses*, 7th ed., Revised by Eruch B. Jessawala, J. Flagg Kriss, and Bal Natu (Myrtle Beach, S.C.: Sheriar Foundation, 1995), 313.

resolution (still on record in the minutes of the meeting), that they would ‘no longer teach the doctrine of rebirth.’”²

One of the old church fathers, Origen (A.D. 185 254), wrote: “Every soul has existed from the beginning—and comes into this world strengthened by victories or weakened by the defeats of its previous life—its work in this world determines its place in the world which is to follow this.”³ Origen also stated the following:

If it can be shown that an incorporeal and reasonable being has life in itself independently of the body and that it is worse off in the body than out of it, then beyond a doubt bodies are only of secondary importance and arise from time to time to meet the varying conditions of reasonable creatures. Those who require bodies are clothed with them, and contrawise, when fallen souls have lifted themselves up to better things their bodies are at once more annihilated. They are thus ever vanishing and ever reappearing.⁴

It is through the repeated experiences in the world of duality that the individual learns his true nature. If the soul goes somewhere after death, returns again to experience another human life, what happens as the soul prepares to take human form again?

The Operation of Karma through Successive Lives

Reincarnation is tied to the law of karma, or the law of cause and effect. “Your present bodies are nothing else but the result of how you thought in the past, how you felt in the past and what actions you took in the past. It is a doctrine, a beautiful Teaching that does not lead you to destruction, to stupidity, but it is a doctrine which teaches you to sublimate, to refine, to unfold your self, and eventually understand the Purpose of God

² Ivy Oneita Duce, *What Am I Doing Here?* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: Sufism Reoriented, Inc., 1976), 25.

³ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴ Steven Rosen, *The Reincarnation Controversy, Uncovering the Truth in the World's Religions* (Badger, Calif.: Torchlight Publishing, Inc., 1997), 69.

and live accordingly.”⁵ “The Law of Karma is given to us not only to know that harmful actions will bring us painful events but also to help us discover how we can transform the inevitable wave of calamities by acting through wisdom and principles.”⁶

The Vehicles of Experience

The vehicles the soul uses prior to birth are referred to as the astral, subtle and mental bodies. There are varied belief systems regarding the types and names of these bodies, but what is of essence here is that there is a physical body that supports our life on earth, and these subtler bodies are the vehicles through which the individual experiences consciousness and life after being separated from the physical body.

To briefly describe these bodies, Meher Baba gives the following definitions:

Astral body: the form that experiences the astral world, which serves as a link between the gross and subtle worlds.

Subtle body: the vital energy force (pran), which functions in the subtle sphere; the vehicle of desires and vital forces.

Mental body: the causal body, which functions in the mental sphere; the seat of the mind.⁷

“The ego mind, seated in the mental body, takes lower bodies according to the impressions stored in it.” Here the order of the bodies descends from the mental body, the subtle body, the astral body, the etheric body, and finally the physical body. Actions from previous lives are the foundation of the experiences of future lives. Desire for experience

⁵ Torkum Saraydarian, *Karma and Reincarnation* (Cave Creek Ariz.: T.S.G. Publishing Foundation, Inc., 1999), 204.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁷ Meher Baba, *Discourses*, 410.

in the physical world and debts to be paid draw the soul into human incarnation. “Karmic determination is made possible by the existence of the subtle and mental bodies and worlds.”⁸

Irving S. Cooper explains how these bodies come together in preparation for human incarnation:

At the commencement of a new incarnation, when we have exhausted our previous experience and begin to yearn for more, we draw round ourselves automatically a cloudlike mass of mental and astral matter. Out of this later on we are able to fashion our mental and emotional bodies. In the meantime we await in the astral world the formation of our new physical body, which is to be supplied by our parents. At a variable period between conception and birth we are linked with that body, and at birth our consciousness begins to function through the infant brain.⁹

This paper is not going to discuss the pre-birth experience of the soul through the astral, subtle and mental realms; but, it will discuss the formation of the physical (gross) body, as it relates to the etheric body. The etheric body, also called the etheric double, can be considered the mold for the physical body. The etheric body, not actually a subtle body, is the subtlest physical body. The etheric body is the web of life that is the closest body to the physical vehicle and is the blue print of the physical body.

The etheric network is a vital energy body that feeds and makes possible the life of the dense body. It interpenetrates all substance, relates it and holds it in form. It is electrical in nature, being composed of many tiny lines of force, which form channels for the flow of energies throughout its entire system. In the human form these lines of force underlie and are peculiarly related to the physical body and the nervous system. From here the etheric body interpenetrates every atom of the physical body and extends out some inches from it, varying in distance according to the evolution of the consciousness concerned.¹⁰

⁸Meher Baba, *Discourses*, 328.

⁹ Irving S. Cooper, *Reincarnation* (Wheaton, Ill., The Theosophical Publishing House, 1972), 43.

¹⁰ Lucille Cedercrans, *The Soul and Its Instrument, Volume III The Path of Initiation* (Whittier, Calif.: Wisdom Impressions, 1995), 28.

The etheric is a physical substance; however, very subtle, and is not commonly perceived. “Every solid, liquid, and gaseous particle of the physical body is surrounded with an etheric envelope: hence the Etheric Double, as its name implies is a perfect duplicate of the dense form.”¹¹ From the etheric body, the physical body is formed. Some believe that devas are involved in building the physical body. The devas are:

called “angels.” . . . Devic forces, know as the “builders of form’ or “Nature spirits”, command many forces of nature. They work with the lesser kingdoms evolving on Earth and cowork effectively with humans of stable temperament and advanced in understanding of spiritual law.¹²

Before the physical body is created, the etheric body must be formed. “Looking at the devic kingdom, it can be said that it holds the dynamic blueprints of natural evolution, and is the agent of their fulfillment—as a builder carries out the instructions of the architect through his own activities and those of his subordinates.”¹³

There are the Arupa devas who work in the formless world. There are Rupa devas which work in the personal or material world. “These devas are the builders of the etheric body. . . influenced more or less profoundly from the first moment of fertilization of the ovum, by the individuality of the incarnating Monad. The Monad is “an indivisible and divine life-atom. The immortal self within each living successive incarnation . . . the spark

¹¹ Arthur E. Powell, *The Etheric Double, and Allied Phenomena* (Wheaton, Ill.: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1925), 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, 68.

¹³ Lawrence J. Bendit and Phoebe D. Bendit, *The Etheric Body of Man; the Bridge of Consciousness*, (Wheaton, Ill.: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1977), 41.

of Divinity invested in the constitution of the human beings.”¹⁴ To describe the Monad more completely, Monad is further defined as:

The innermost self, the source of life and light that nurtures the unfolding soul. This true Self, a breath of Absolute, is in no way influenced by conditional, finite personality. The immortal and eternal principle within us and indivisible part of the integral whole. The universal spirit from which it emanates and into which it will be absorbed upon its return to the Godhead.¹⁵

The Silver Cord and the Permanent Seed Atoms

The seed atoms are carried by the soul from life to life. Parrish-Harra explains the permanent seed atom is a “reservoir of data encoded to preserve information to be used in the evolutionary pattern of an individual on a specific level of expression. These atoms, or small force centers, form the bodies of the personality—physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual—each of which distributes a certain type of force and is able to respond to a particular vibration.”¹⁶ It is the information in the seed atom that provides the “architect” devas with the facts needed to build the physical body of the incarnating soul.

The developing human being is connected to the soul by the silver cord. The silver cord transfers the life force from the soul to the physical form. The physical body and personality are built upon the information carried in the seed atoms; the seed atoms travel through the silver cord from the soul to the embryo. Upon physical death, the seed atoms

¹⁴ Carol E. Parrish, Ph.D., *The New Dictionary of Spiritual Thought*. (Tahlequah, Okla.: Sparrow Hawk Press), 179.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 213.

return to their origin via the silver cord until activated for another incarnation in the physical world.¹⁷

Remember him before the silver cord is cut off and the golden bowl is broken and the pitcher is broken at the fountain or the wheel is broken at the cistern,
Then the dust shall return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return to God who gave it. (Ecclesiastes 12:6-7 George M. Lamsa translation)

There are three permanent seed atoms: the emotional, the mental and the heart.

The individual's karma is encoded into the DNA by the heart seed atom at the moment of conception between the sperm and the egg. The heart seed atom contains the blueprint for the developing physical form. The heart seed atom is located in the heart/thymus area and contains the record of the soul's physical, emotional, mental and spiritual experience. It is the first seed atom to enter the forming body and causes the heartbeat to begin.

The emotional seed atom is located in the liver. It contains the record of all past desires and habits. It is the second to enter the body. The mental seed atom is located in the pineal gland at the center of the brain and contains the record of all thoughts. It enters the body at the moment of birth.¹⁸

The Return to the Physical Body

In the book, *The Etheric Body of Man, The Bridge of Consciousness*, Lawrence and Phoebe Bendit describe how the physical body is built to house the soul of man. "Each man, in the technical occult sense, is a Monad coming into incarnation in order to make his

¹⁷ "Through the Tunnel, A Traveler's Guide to Spiritual Rebirth" available from <http://www.beyondtheveil.net/append2.html#silvercord>, accessed February 25, 2007.

¹⁸ Ibid.

latent individuality actual and explicit.”¹⁹ At the moment of conception “the resulting zygote at once becomes the physical focus for the incarnation of a particular Monad.” “The zygote becomes the vehicle of a human Monad and its psyche.”²⁰ At this point the Arupa Devas assist in building the physical form.

The time of quickening is when the mother first becomes aware of movement in the womb; this is a time when the forming body becomes coordinated and begins to function as a whole. From the time of conception to the time of quickening is:

. . . the earlier stages represent the activity of the rupas devas and elementals, building the etheric structure in which the physical form is developed, following the general patterns representing early stages of animal evolution. . . The incoming human individual hovers above the growing body at his own psychic level. He is not yet consciously linked to it, perhaps not even aware of it. The link, however is stabilized by the mediation of the Arupa Deva, who is a partial reflection of the individual spirit. At the quickening, however, it seems that the human individual becomes, perhaps for the first time, attentive to what is taking place in the vehicle he is to inhabit.²¹

Torkum Saraydarian explains the soul’s presence and the attachment to the physical form prior to birth:

Before conception even takes place, the baby’s soul floats in the mother’s aura. . . conception causes an anchor of a blue light to go from the heart center of the incoming soul to the embryo in the womb.

The incarnating human soul waits in the mother’s etheric body for three to four months to enter the body which is forming in the mother’s womb.²²

Saraydarian continues to explain:

The birth of the human body is the result of the coordination of higher bodies, which reach perfect coordination in seven steps.

¹⁹ Lawrence J. Bendit and Phoebe D. Bendit, *The Etheric Body of Man, The Bridge of Consciousness*, 41.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

²² Torkum Saraydarian, *Sex, Family, and the Women in Society* (Cave Creek, Ariz.: T.S.G. Publishing Foundation, Inc., 1987), 365.

When mental coordination reaches the second step, the first step of the coordination of the astral body starts.

When the astral body coordination reaches the second step, the first step of the etheric coordination starts.

When etheric coordination reaches its second step, physical conception takes place, which develops in three periods:

1. Three and one-half months
2. Three and one-half months
3. Two months.

This means that when conception takes place, coordination of the mental body of the embryo has already reached the fourth step of development, the astral body has reached the third step of coordination, and the etheric body has reached the second step of coordination.²³

When Is the Fetus Ensouled?

There are conflicting ideas about when the soul enters the physical vehicle; however, it appears to be sometime between conception and the fourth month. Saraydarian believes the moment the egg is fertilized the soul is there.²⁴ In *Understanding Death*, Pascal M. Kaplan, Ph.D. states that the “fetus is not ensouled until the fourth month.”²⁵ If the soul has moved in to the fetus in its mother’s womb, what happens when the mother miscarries and how does the practice of abortion effect the incarnating soul?

Miscarriage or Natural Abortion

Miscarriage can occur when the soul decides not to incarnate in the specific conditions presented. Jose Netto Trigueirinho, the founder of the Figueira Monastery in Brazil, states:

²³ Ibid., 367.

²⁴ Torkum Saraydarian, *Karma and Reincarnation*, 284.

²⁵ Pascal M. Kaplan, Ph.D., *Understanding Death* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: Sufism Reoriented, Inc., 1977), 78.

A natural abortion can mean that a being that is incarnating cannot attain material incarnation. Perhaps, it is because this being has no more vitality, no more strength to attain an incarnation here on earth. And when a natural abortion happens, it's because the being attempted to incarnate, but could not do so.²⁶

Saraydarian adds further thoughts regarding miscarriage:

Miscarriage occurs when the human soul leaves the aura of the woman. Often this happens as a result of karmic complications between mother and child, where, because of certain psychic events, the incoming soul decides against incarnation and withdraws.

Other times it occurs because of the poor health of the mother, or as the result of accidents, use of drugs or alcohol, wrong physical exercise, and such factors. These cases, too, reflect karmic complications.²⁷

Induced Abortion

Saraydarian explains in his book, *Reincarnation and Karma*, “In esoteric books, abortion is condemned unless the mother’s life is endangered because it violates a person who has worked very hard to leave the subtle planes to enter the womb. You are breaking that house that he is building for his survival.”²⁸

The etheric body is built prior to and continues to form as the fetus forms in the womb. According to Saraydarian, “The incarnating human soul waits in the mother’s etheric body for three to four months to enter the body which is forming in his mother’s womb. If abortion is performed during this period, he cannot descend into the body, but becomes trapped in the mother’s etheric body.”²⁹

²⁶ Jose Netto Trigueirinho, *When the Soul is Set Free, Taking Charge of One’s Dying Process* (Figueira, Brazil: Irdin Editora, LTDA, 1987), CD.

²⁷ Torkum Saraydarian, *Sex, Family, and the Women in Society*, 366.

²⁸ Torkum Saraydarian, *Karma and Reincarnation*, 284.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 365.

When an abortion occurs, the devas in the etheric realms experience shock. “They pass on the work to those devas who destroy half-built vehicles and clean the debris from the aura of the mother.”³⁰ Abortion is a crime against the soul of the incarnating soul, who loses the vehicles that were being built.

Trigueirinho explains the karmic consequences of having an abortion:

Another factor that is considered to be interference in our orderly process of incarnating and disincarnating are the abortions. Here we are referring to induced abortions, not natural abortions.

If in past lives an individual practiced abortion, or sent back beings who were seeking to reincarnate, the individuals who willingly aborted in past lives, due to the karma of retribution, they might have to undergo the experience of being aborted, of being rejected. But this is a form of karmic balance that has to be carried out. For the one who would like to incarnate, but cannot because of past lives this person did the same thing to another being. So we see that when we induce an abortion, when the abortion is not natural. The induced abortion is an act of the personality of those who are incarnated. An act of intervention in a process that probably would have been organized in a different way.

Those who have been through this experience, and after having caused the abortion, then become aware that this was interference; these people can balance this out and rebuild a harmonious relationship with this process again. After having induced an abortion, when an individual recognizes that she would not do it again today, because she now understands the imbalance that it causes, this person is then, obligated to make restitution for this situation. This does not mean to keep on thinking about it, or to feel guilty for having induced an abortion fairly recently. But, it is a question of carrying out an opposite action. For example by helping someone to live, or helping someone to come into incarnation, even if it is involved helping someone else. So, it means becoming aware of what kind of act was carried out and then doing something that is opposite to it, so that the act can be balanced out. . . Acts of love for life, acts that enhance life, one’s own life or the life of others, all these balance out the situation of the abortion had been caused.³¹

Care of the Incoming Soul

³⁰ Ibid., 367.

³¹ Jose Netto Trigueirinho, *When the Soul is Set Free, Taking Charge of One’s Dying Process*.

The ancient Vedic texts provide wisdom regarding how to treat the incoming child; it acknowledges the desires present in the fetus are from the previous life:

When the senses manifest in the fetus, its mind is immediately associated with feelings and it attains the free flow of consciousness. From this point onwards the fetus' heart pulsates and he or she expresses desires for whatever was experienced in the previous life.

The fetus' heart is connected to the mother's heart through the channels that carry the nutrients (a state known as two hearts). These channels also carry the desires of one to the other. Often the mother's cravings reflect the desires of the fetus. So the wise attend to the pregnant mother with special care, fulfilling her yearning with her favorite and wholesome items. Sarirasthana, Chapter 4,15.³²

³² *Ayurveda Today* VIII, no. 3 (Winter 1995) : 14.

Concluding Thoughts

Corrine Heline's statements in *Occult Anatomy and the Bible* summarize these thoughts on the incarnating soul into the dense world:

To the accompaniment of the music of the spheres, the returning Spirit begins its descent toward the Earth plane. In the realms of thought and desire, it attracts nuclei of mental and emotional substance in the exact attunement to the key note of its own mental and desire-body seed atoms. These seed atoms vibrate according to rhythms established in the previous incarnation by the user made of these particular substances.

The incarnational cycle of man is thus surrounded and permeated with the blessings if the Starry Guardians from its inception until the Ego's ultimate absorption or at-one-ment in and with Divinity. The power of Heaven and Earth unite in assisting the reincarnation Spirit to build new vehicles when it makes its preparation for another life cycle upon the Earth plane.³³

The beliefs regarding reincarnation, the law of karma, and the state prior to birth is so vast, that exploration such as this can only touch on these ideas. The intent is to alert the reader to the possibility that the process of birth is more than just a physical event; that the soul descends from subtler realms and the formation of the physical body is guided by an intelligent law and built by unseen workers, the devas. Hopefully this discussion increases the reader's awareness that there is a soul involved in the incarnation cycle from possibly even before conception. Life is a mystery and it is sacred.

³³ Corinne Heline, *Occult Anatomy and the Bible*, (Santa Monica, Calif.: New Age Bible & Philosophy Center, 1991), 73.

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