

Reincarnation, And After Life: What Gurbani says about it

According to Webster dictionary, “reincarnation is the belief that the soul returns after death to live in a new body; rebirth of a soul in a new living form; a new embodiment.”

So far, the general view is that eastern religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism believe in Reincarnation, but the western religions, such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Bahá'ís don't believe in it. However, all major religions do believe in the justice of God, or after life, and the souls are rewarded or punished according their deeds in the human life.

For example, in Christianity, they believe that when the final judgement is rendered, those who believe in Christ, and live good life will be given eternal life in Heaven, and the wicked are judged according to their deeds and face suitable punishment.

According to Islam “there will be a day of judgement when all will be sent to go to the eternal destinations of Paradise or Hell. “The Day of judgment” is described as passing over Hell on a narrow bridge in order to enter Paradise. Those who fall, weighted by their bad deeds, will remain in Hell forever.”

On the eastern side, according to Hinduism “a soul reincarnates again and again on earth, until it becomes perfect and returns to its source (God). During this process the soul enters into many bodies, assumes many forms, and passes through many births and deaths. As per Bhagwad Gita, “just as a man discards old clothes and puts on new clothes, the soul discards worn out bodies and wears new ones.”

According to Buddhism, the actions of a person during his life lead to a new existence after death in an endless cycle called Samsara. This cycle is unsatisfactory and painful, and it stops only, if liberation is achieved, with extinguishing of the craving. Rebirth is then considered a foundational doctrine.

Now as for Sikhism, let us try to find out what Gurbani says about this topic. As for as this humble author is concerned God blessed him with the Sewa of interpreting the entire Guru Granth Sahib, which took him almost 20 years to publish, present the seven volumes to Akal Takhat, and upload it on his website www.gurbaniwisdom.com

Instead of picking and choosing the relevant quotes from unfamiliar pages of Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS), I would request the readers to start with the “Mool Mantar” in the Nit Nem itself, with which most of the Sikhs are familiar. As per my understanding this Mantar tells us about the unique qualities of God, which either no body else has, or only very rare divine and virtuous souls might have. Towards the end it says “Nirbhao, Nirvaair, Akal Moorat, Ajooni, Saibhang, Guruprasad.” So does it not indicate that one of God's unique quality is that He doesn't go through existences. Conversely, we ordinary human beings do go through many existences. If we human beings also were not subject to go through existences or “Joons”, then there was no need for Guru Nanak Dev Ji to say that God is “Ajooni”.

Now let us go little further into Japuji Sahib, and reflect on the lines, which say “Punni Paapi Akhan Nahe, Kar Kar Karna Likh Jahen, Aapey Beej Aapey hi Khahen, Nanak Hukmi Aveh Jahen.”

As per my humble understanding, the above lines mean that vices and virtues are not just mere sayings. Whatever good or bad deeds we do, we receive rewards or suffer punishment according to our good or bad deeds, and as per God's order we keep coming and going (in and out of this world).

Now let us go to Jaap Sahib, the next Bani of Sikhs' Nitnem, which is almost entirely about unique qualities of God. Here in “Ek Achari Chandd” stanza (194), Guru Ji says God is “Anathaiy, Parmathaiy, AJONI, Amoni”. As per Prof. Sahib Singh, generally considered the most widely accepted authentic translator of Sri Guru

Granth Sahib, Guru Ji says: “ O’ God, there is no Master above You, You are the Destroyer of all. O’ God, You neither go through existences (births or deaths), nor You are sitting silent and speechless.”

After Jaap Sahib, the next Nit Nem Bani is “Saveeaiy”. The last line of eighth Saveea says “Jo Nar Sripat kaiy Pras Haain Pag, taiy Nar Faer Na Deh Dharaingaiy”. Which according to Prof Sahib Singh Ji means that only those human beings do not fall into the rounds of births (and deaths), who fall at the feet of God (i.e., who meditate on God). Conversely it means that the rest of people like us, do go through rounds of births and deaths.

Let us now look at “Sohela”, the last Bani, which a Sikh recites daily before sleeping. Towards the very end are the lines, “Ja kou aaiy soee behajo, Har Gur Taiy Maneh Basera, Nij Ghar Mehal Paavouh Sukh Shajaiy, Boher Na Hoego Faira.” Which again according to Prof Sahib Singh Ji means: “ (O’ brothers!), the job for which you have come here, only do that business. It is only through the Guru, that Name is enshrined in the mind, and you easily obtain to your real (or God’s) abode, and then you will not go through the rounds (of births and deaths. But) by meditating on (God’s) Name, one finds (eternal) rest (in God’s shelter.)

After looking briefly at the Nit Nem, let us look at Sukhmani Sahib, which many Gursikhs, particularly ladies read and recite alone or in congregation. In this Bani alone, I have noted twenty references to Janam Maran (life and death), and Awa Gavan, which according to Punjabi- English Dictionary by Punjabi University means transmigration of soul, or cycle of birth and death. To avoid making article too long, I have loaded the complete list on my website www.gurbaniwisdom.com. But a few of the examples are as follows:

Ashtpadi 2, stanza 3- “Anik Joan Janmaiyy Mar Janam, Nam Japat Pavaaiy Bisraam.” Which as per Prof. Sahib Singh means, “ (A creature), takes birth, dies, (and then again) takes birth in countless existences. In this way, he keeps roaming around in the cycle of birth and death. In Ashtpadi 13, Salok, Guru Ji says: “Sant Ki Ninda Nanka, Bohur Bohur Avtaar (O’ Nanak, the slander of a saint, would make you go through human birth again and again)

Let us now talk a little bit about the rest of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Over a period of one month, while doing my Nit Nem, Sehaj Path, and translation work, I covered approximately 80 pages of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, and came across 146 references to reincarnation, afterlife, and other such topics. This list is also included in my website. If I assume the same ratio of 146 references for 80 pages, or roughly 2 reference per page, then I guess there may be more than 2500 references. May be some IT expert can find exact number of relevant quotes on this topic. Again, to avoid making my article too lengthy, I would just take two quotes from the sgggs page 700 of Sri Guru Granth Sahib line 2 which says: “maat pitaa banitaa sut banDhap isat meet ar bhaa-ee.poorab janam kay milay sanjogee anteh ko na sahaa-ee.”. Again, according to Prof. Sahib Singh, and my humble understanding, here Guru Ji is telling us the back ground reasons, why certain persons happened to become our relatives. He says: “(O’ my friends, our) mother, father, wife, son, relatives, and dear friends, have all joined together here (in one place), as a result of some connections of previous births, but in the end, nobody is truly helpful (to us).” (1). The second quote is from sgggs page 970, and it says “ poorab janam ham tum^hray sayvak ab ta-o miti-aa na jaa-ee.tayray du-aarai Dhun sahj kee maathai mayray dagaa-ee. ||2||As per Prof. Sahib Singh, here Kabir Ji is saying :“ O God, even in my previous births, I have been Your servant, I cannot relinquish Your service, even now (in this birth),

These lines clearly refer to previous or past births, and as a corollary, if there are previous or past births, then automatically there should be past or future births, (unless in this birth we so please God, that He permanently joins us with Him)

Finally let us take the often criticized shabad “ant Kaal Jo Lachhmi Simrey, which ends with the words, “ ant Kaal Naryan Simraiyy Aisi Chinta Meh Jo Marai, Badit Tilochan Te Nar Mukta, Pitambar Va Kaiy Ridaiyy Basaiyy.” Some people may doubt the truth of this line, arguing that this could mean that a person could keep doing

worst of sins, all through his or her life, but can get united with God Himself, only by just worrying about or remembering God at the last moment (of his or her death). But in some rare instances that could happen and has happened according to Gurbani, in which the story of the great sinner Aja Mall is often quoted, and at one place is written "Aja Mall Ko Ant Kaal Narayan Sudh Aayee, Jaan gat ko Jogeesar Baanchhet so gat Chhin Meh Paaee." Which again, according to Prof. Sahib Singh means that, it was in the last moment of his death that Ajamall, (the well known worst sinner), realized the necessity of remembering God. By doing so, he obtained that supreme status in an instant, for which the greatest of yogis keep craving (for many many years). Instead of thinking about such instances as gross injustice, we need to take it in a positive sense, and believe in the great mercy of God, and say to ourselves that even if so far, we have been committing many mistakes and sins, still if we remember and meditate on God with true love and devotion, He may still forgive us, and save us from future pains of births and deaths.

Another criticism of this shabad is made regarding the line "Ant Kaal Jo Istri Simrai, Aisi Chinta meh Jae Marai, Baesava Jon Val Val Autarai." They say that there can be a jon or existence of a serpent or a pig, but there is no jon of a Baesava or prostitute. Well, it could so happen that due to one's past sins, one may be so condemned as to be repeatedly born in such poor circumstances, or in such poor and immoral families that again and again one is forced to become a prostitute.

Still another criticism which is made regarding the obvious meaning of this shabad is that if one's fate after death is determined only on the basis of his or her last moments near death, then what about his or her deeds during the rest of life. In this regard, I would submit, that first of all doesn't necessarily mean only at the very last moment of death, it could mean till the last moment of death. Secondly, we should keep in mind that most likely, what our thoughts or tendencies are during our life time, i.e., if we have always been worried or concerned about our wealth or family, it is most likely that even at the last moment of death, our concern or worry would be about our wealth or our family such as who is going to take care of our wealth or our family, and our next life would be determined on that basis.

Next let us take the point, that in many instances people die suddenly, such as severe heart attack, a serious accident, or a gun shot wound to a critical part of our body. Therefore, in such cases there could not be any question of last moment (or "Ant Kaal") thoughts in a person's mind. Regarding this point, I have to submit, that first of all, if we read about the experiences of many persons, who had suffered "near death experiences", they tell us, how all their previous life incidents, particularly their misdeeds are flashed back to them in a few seconds, and they start wishing or praying for a second chance.

But, even if we assume that in many cases, such as a sudden bomb explosion, or a plane crash, one may not have any last "Ant Kaal" thoughts. So, what happens in such cases. In this regard, I would recommend the readers to listen to the weekend edition of NPR show of January 5, 2014 at 7.00am ET. In this show Jim Tucker, a professor of psychiatry and neurobehavior sciences at the University of Virginia, describes the story of a little boy, who described, how in his previous life, he had been killed in a plane crash in world war. He even correctly named the air craft carrier ship, from which their plane had flown, and the name of his copilot.

For a detailed study on this subject, I would recommend an excellent book titled "Children who Remember Their Previous Lives" by Dr. Ian Stevenson M.D, who spent almost 40 years and investigated almost 2500 cases, where young children talked about their previous lives, and in many instances exactly identifying their previous parents, their locations, and even the circumstances of their death. Even Dr. Satwant Kaur Pasricha of India was associated in many such studies, and has written her own books on this topic. Majority of those cases relate to the persons, whose lives had been cut short by sudden accidents, or surprise murderous attacks by their enemies. In other words, in case of sudden deaths, the above instances indicate, that such souls are given a much quicker chance to the next birth, so that they could finish their unfinished jobs, (for

which they had been sent here in this world as human beings, or settle their past scores. Perhaps that is why, they carry most of their memories into the next birth, and seem to remember many crucial details about their past parents, accidents, or their enemies, who had cut short their lives.

Conclusion

We Sikhs have been blessed with the divine Word or Gurbani in the platter of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. It answers all the life questions including such matters as Reincarnation, or Life After Death. Due to our own shallow knowledge about the meanings of many words from different languages, we are likely to misinterpret many of the shabads and draw wrong conclusions. We have to remember that some words have more than one meaning. To reach at the right meaning, we have to keep in mind the context, its origin (i.e., the language from which it has been borrowed), and the applicable Gurbani grammar rules. As regards "Awagavan, Janam Maran, or Ant Kal etc.", my guess is that it is at least mentioned more than 2500 times. These terms may sometime refer to the spiritual death, and not the bodily death or life. But all the 2500 or so times, they don't mean only spiritual or moral death. Most of the times, these words mean actual bodily death, and bodily rebirth. To truly understand Guru Ji's message on this topic of Reincarnation or any other such topic, rather than depending upon others, I think we need to ourselves read and study Guru Granth Sahib carefully with open mind, and draw our own conclusions. In case of difficulty, we should consult some authentic translations, such as by Prof. Sahib Singh. (My personal preference is the one by Giani Harbans Singh, because he generally follows Prof. Sahib Singh's translation, but in case of any doubt, he consults many available translations, (such as by Bhai Vir Singh, Pandit Narain Singh, Faridkot Teeka, or Shabdarath etc.). Then he chooses the one, which seem to him the most appropriate, according to the above criteria. In addition, we should listen to such scholars and Gianis as Sant Singh Maskeen, and Giani PinderPal Singh, who have not only excellently explained many difficult topics including Reincarnation, but also narrated actual incidents of Reincarnation, which they themselves witnessed, or which happened in their own family. I hereby give the link to one of the videos of Sant Singh Maskeen, on the topic of Reincarnation, and also the one I found on the internet, relating 10 actual stories of reincarnation, as described by Professor Jim Tucker of University of Virginia, and others.

<https://youtu.be/oQ4ncO9KK1s> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8tcYzoONRvA>.

The other two books, which have been recommended to me, regarding this topic are "Many Lives, Many Masters", and "Same Soul, Many Bodies" by Brian L. Weiss. (As entered on the internet), the first book is "the story about how a skeptical doctor discovered evidence on past lives and developed a method using them to cure his patients...". In the second book, through dozens of case histories detailing both past-life and future-life experiences, Dr. Weiss shows how the choices that we make now will determine our future quality of life.

Finally, I would venture to say, that if we Sikhs, unlike Christians, neither believe in resurrection, nor unlike Muslims, in the day of judgement, nor believe in Awagavan or Reincarnation, then we basically are saying to ourselves, that all our good or bad deeds would be rewarded or punished in this life itself. But just looking at the genocide of 1984, except one or two cases, I have not seen or heard about any real punishment being awarded to all those tyrants and murderers, or have heard about painful deaths of those who mercilessly burnt alive many innocent Sikh victims by putting burning tires around their necks, or gangraped poor innocent children and teenagers.

Daljit Singh Jawa

Jawa222@gmail.com

July, 16, 2021