

[continued from page 014]

that my uncle told me on a mountain. He told me about the benefit of the doll, which acted like a human being except speaking. He told me that I could send the doll anywhere, to deliver a letter, thing, or message, from one place to another, and the doll would go directly to the exact place where I wanted her to go and give the things to the right person. I remembered the story, and when I saw the doll I got really excited because I wanted to buy the doll and send a letter to my family about my journey. So believing my uncle's story, I bought the doll for 15 rupees then rushed to our hotel room. We put the doll on the ground and asked it to walk, but it didn't listen to us. Then we held the doll tightly, pressed its hand, and warned and scolded it to walk. Still it didn't listen to us. Finally I pressed the doll so hard that a sound like crying came out of it from somewhere. I was so afraid and piteous of the doll, thinking that scolding and speaking harshly had hurt it. Then the other boy told me to let it rest for a while, because it might be tired of staying a long time in the sun on the roadside. So we let it rest in the corner of the room. After some time, the elder people of our group returned to the room and when they heard the things that we had done, they couldn't stop laughing. They explained that such things are impossible and said my uncle told a children's story to a child. Then I found out that the man took from me a huge amount of money for the doll. The sound like crying that came out of the doll was under its feet, where there was a small hole that helps you to hear the sound when you press the doll.

The next day, we continued our journey on a train. There were thousands of people on the train, and I was concerned about where all the people were going. Was everyone traveling like me in search of some answer? Some time later, a man came through with snacks and gave them to the people. He gave me one, too, and passed

without asking for money. I admired how kind and generous this man was to give out snacks freely. I had been eating it peacefully when he shocked me by collecting money from the people who ate his goods.

After this long journey, we finally reached our destination in a remote Indian village where it seemed nothing would be easy, even if we spent our entire lives there. In the beginning, it was really not easy, as my whole life changed. The food, water, people, weather, environment, culture, language, and habits were all different. Ten students stayed in a room only one meter square, and one bathroom was shared by 300 students. The breakfast we lived on was only a cup of tea, lunch a simple tea with bread, and dinner innutritious rice with dal. Not a single day did we eat enough food to fill our stomachs. But my aim was to find the answer. That was like water to quench my thirsty question.

I have been here and studied the five treatises of the epistemology of ancient Indian thought for the past 22 years and even completed a doctorate in Indian philosophy. But what about my search about rebirth? Did this help me to understand what exactly rebirth is?

I will focus on the concept of rebirth in general before beginning to talk about it specifically according to ancient Indian thought. Rebirth is a concept with which many people have difficulty. This has been especially true over the past century or so, when we have become increasingly conditioned to think in what are regarded as "scientific terms," that is to say, terms that many people naively take to be scientific. This attitude has caused many people to discard the idea of rebirth because they think that it is just a superstition and belongs to an old-fashioned, out-of-date way of looking at the world. But major schools of religion commonly accept the

truth of rebirth. For many years, there has been a vast amount of scientific investigation into the question of rebirth. Many of these investigations have gradually built up a convincing case for the reality of rebirth.

The main reason for rebirth as explained in ancient Indian philosophy is the continuity of the mind. The mind naturally has no beginning and no end. It has been and will be produced only by the mind itself rather than any outside object. The idea that a mind needs to be produced by another mind makes it clear that if we try to find the beginning of a mind, we will never find it. But this is not transmigration. When we light one candle from another, no substance travels from one to the other, though the first is the cause of the second.

Every sentient being has a mind, but why are there such great physical differences between human beings and animals? Understanding how the concept of rebirth and karmic action is closely connected to particular physical differences is helpful. We can learn from this concept that a murderer is in jail as the result of his karmic action of killing someone. Another example is that some of us are wealthy, while others are poor; some are strong and healthy, while others are weak and diseased; and so forth. The particular circumstances in which each living being finds himself are the effects of his particular karmic action, which conditions his specific situation. That seems right to me, because all of us have our own particular capabilities, our own particular inclinations or disinclinations. For instance, some of us are more talented at some sports than others are. Some of us have a talent for mathematics, while others have a talent for music. Some like swimming, while others are afraid of water. Are all such differences in our abilities and attitudes merely the result of conditioning?

There are often dramatic and unexpected turns in the course of personal development. Let me take my own case. I was born into a family in a remote region of the Himalayas. There was absolutely nothing in my background to indicate that I would become a monk and would travel to south India at an early age, or that I would spend the next two and a half decades of my life predominantly in south India where I would become deeply involved in ancient Indian thought, nonviolence and peace, while my two other brothers joined the Indian armed forces and endured frightening episodes of violence. There are also situations in which we sometimes feel a strong presentiment that we have been in a particular place before though we have not visited it in our present lifetime. On occasion, we feel that we have known someone before. We meet a person for the first time and yet very soon we feel that we have known that person all our life.

Thinking deeply on such things, all powerful logic could not convince me one way or the other but did give the concept of rebirth the benefit of the doubt. Even as we discuss whether rebirth truly exists, I should become ready for my next life, to be in a peaceful family and country where there is no war, fighting, or famine, no hurting or killing. I am totally preparing for my rebirth in a better place, and therefore always walking the right path. I became a vegetarian in 1990 and don't eat eggs, use leather, or go to circuses or the zoo, which are associated with abuse of animals, because I don't want to be reborn as an animal and experience cruelties like that to provide enjoyment to people. I work for animal rights because I hope that if the next life truly exists and if I am reborn as an animal and trapped by great problems, then those animals who received help from me can be reborn as human beings and will return the favor by helping me.

I am always friendly to everyone and even patient

if someone makes fun of me. I always pray that any country where people suffer in much violence will soon have no more conflict, because I don't want to be reborn into a life where there is violence. I founded a center called peace ling (www.peaceling.org) for helping people and at the moment I am volunteering at a philosophy school. So if rebirth truly exists, then my rebirth will be in a peaceful land, born to beautiful parents, brothers, and sisters, because I have totally prepared the cause and condition. I want to be born as the youngest child in my family, so all my sisters and brothers will love me very much.

While I was studying, I returned to my country about three times for vacation. During those times, on several occasions I went to the village where the shrine is. When I reached the village, people asked me, "Are you going to your shrine?" One day I went there hoping just to check the shrine. It looked very old, and outside and all around the shrine there was the place where the monk had been cremated. I felt frightened seeing all these unusual things, like my shrine and my funerary place, for the first time in my life. I really wanted to enter the shrine, but the idea of death remained in my mind and made me stop, because at that time my mind was not in a position to bear the concept of my death. But after studying ancient Indian thought for a long time, now my knowledge of the concept of death is more durable and has reached a level that I can bear the process of death and rebirth. So in the future, I will return to my shrine and will follow the path of my predecessor in the way he practiced meditation in the shrine room where he stayed, and I will be cremated where he was cremated.

Finally, it is clear to me that there is only one time when I will be able to find the answer to my question of rebirth clearly on my own. I have to wait until I die. That will be the only time to know the answers to many different questions and ex-

pectations. So when I die, my mind will die, too, like scientific people claim. Or it will go to heaven or hell, like the Christians and Muslims believe. Or it will be born back into a sentient being like ancient Indian writings explain. If I die and my mind dies, too, then my past efforts won't bring me the expected results. But they won't be useless, either, because your respect towards others is not related to the issue of rebirth. My final death will give rise to two important feelings: joy and sorrow. Joy that I will clearly see for myself the exact answer to my question about rebirth that I have anxiously sought for so long. And sorrow that I cannot tell my fellow human beings of my proof of the truth of the existence of rebirth, rebirth, rebirth. ★