

# REBIRTH



The first Buddhists regarded life as a process of consciousness moving through a succession of bodies, death being only a momentary event to this process. This phenomenon is sometimes called 'existence after existence', 'moving from womb to womb' or more precisely, 're-becoming'. The Buddha considered death to have taken place when bodily, verbal and mental activities stop, when vitality and heat cease, so that consciousness disengages from the body and is suspended. He said that the consciousness 'moves upwards' (uddhagàmi) and then 'descends' into the womb, i.e. the mother's newly fertilized egg, finding 'a resting place' there. These spatial descriptions are probably only metaphorical.

Some Buddhist schools teach that after death, consciousness hovers or pauses in an in-between state for a certain period before being reborn. Others assert that rebirth takes place within moments of consciousness disengaging from the body. The Tipiṅaka suggests that there is an interval between death and rebirth. When the consciousness is in transition between one life and the next it is referred to as gandhabba. For most people the whole process between death and actually being re-embodied is unconscious, although a few spiritually evolved individuals can remain fully aware during the transition.

According to the Buddha, just before attaining enlightenment some individuals have an experience called the knowledge of former lives. During this experience, vivid and detailed memories of one's former lives flash through the mind.

## **Saṃsāra - Rebirth**

Saṃsāra is a Pāḷi word literally meaning 'perpetual wandering' and refers to the continual process of rebirth – of being born, dying and being reborn again. This restless, tiresome process will continue until and unless Nirvāṇa is attained and this is the whole purpose, the Reason for Existence, of Buddhism.