

[Contemplation of the Unborn](#)

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FROM THE VEDAS

Contemplation of the Unborn

Garbha Upanishad relates the anguish of the reincarnating soul

Garbha is the 17th of the 108 upanishads and is attached to the Krishna Yajur Veda. The "Womb " Upanishad includes this description of the thoughts of the newly embodied soul as it approaches the moment of birth.

In the ninth month the body, made of the five elements and able to sense the five senses, through tejas (spiritual fire) and more then cognizes the indestructible Omkara, the supreme mantra Aum, through its deep wisdom and contemplation. It is now full of all attributes. It then remembers its previous births, finds out what has been done and what has not been done, and discriminates between actions, right and wrong. Then it thinks thus: "Many thousands of wombs have been seen by me, many kinds of food have been tasted, and many breasts have nursed me. All parts of the world have been my place of birth, as also my burning-ground, in the past. In the 8.4 million different kinds of wombs have I been born. I have been often born and have often died. I have been subject to the cycle of rebirths very often. I have had birth and death, again birth and death, and again birth.

"There is much suffering while living in the womb. Delusion and sorrow attend every birth. In youth are sorrow, grief, dependence on others, ignorance, the nonperformance of what is beneficial, laziness and the performance of what is unfavorable. In adult age, the sources of sorrow are attachment to sensual objects and the groaning under the three kinds of pain--those that arise from the body,

from the elements and from the devas. In old age, anxiety, disease, fear of death, desires, love of self, passion, anger and non-independence--all these produce very great suffering. This birth is the seed of sorrow, and being of the form of sorrow is unbearable. I have not attained the dharma of nivritti, the means of overcoming the cycle of rebirth, nor have I acquired the means of yoga and jnana, wisdom. Alas! I am sunk in the ocean of sorrow and find no remedy for it. Fie on ajnana, ignorance! Fie on ajnana! Fie on the troubles caused by passion and anger. Fie on the fetters of samsara, the process of worldly life! I shall attain wisdom from a guru.

"If I get myself freed from the womb, then I shall practise Sankhya Yoga, which is the cause of the extinction of all evil and the bestower of the fruit of emancipation. If I get myself freed from the womb, I shall seek refuge in Mahesvara, Siva, the great Lord, who is the cause of the extinction of all evil and bestower of the four goals of life--love, wealth, dharma and liberation. If I get myself freed from the womb, then I shall seek refuge in that Lord of the World who is the cause of all causes. If I get myself freed from the womb, then I shall seek refuge in that supreme Lord Bhargah, Siva, who is Lord of Souls, Rudra, Mahadeva and Guru of the World. If I get myself freed from the bondage of the womb, I shall perform great penances. If I get myself freed from the passage of the womb, I shall worship Vishnu in my heart, who is the bestower of nectar, who is bliss, who is Narayana and who never decays. I am now confined in my mother's womb, and were I freed from its bonds, I shall please the divine Vasudeva without diverting my mind from Him.

"I am burnt through actions, good and bad, committed by me alone before for the sake of others, whilst those who enjoyed the fruits thereof have disappeared. Through lack of belief, I formerly gave up all fear of sin and committed sins. I now reap their fruits. I shall become a believer hereafter."

Thus does the jiva, the soul, within the mother's womb contemplate again and again the many kinds of miseries it had undergone, and remembering always the miseries of the cycle of rebirths, becomes disgusted with the material enjoyments of the world, often fainting in the inmost center, that is, the heart of all creatures, at the idea of his ignorance, desire and karma. Then this being, who had entered many hundreds of female wombs of beings in the previous births, comes to the mouth of the womb wishing to obtain release. Here it suffers much trouble in the process of delivery. As soon as it is born, it comes in contact with the air and ceases to remember anything of the past. It also ceases to see far and to be the cognizer of the Real. Coming into contact with the earth, it becomes fierce-eyed and debased. The evil of the eye after it is cleaned by water vanishes; and with it, vanishes memory of birth and death, good and bad actions and their affinities.

K. Narayanasvami Aiyar published this translation of Barbha Upanishad (slightly edited here) in 1914 along with the Adyar Library as part of his book, Thirty Minor Upanishads. The translations had previously appeared in the monthly journal, The Theosophist. He collaborated on the work with Sundara Sastri.

The Vedas are the divinely revealed and most revered scriptures, shruti, of Hinduism, likened to the Torah (1,200 bce), Bible New Testament (100 ce), Koran (630 ce) or Zend Avesta (600 bce). Four in number, Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva, the Vedas include over 100,000 verses. Oldest portions may date back as far as 6,000 bce.