

Yogācāryabhūmi-śāstra section on Birth

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What is Birth?¹

1. Birth occurs due to the following reasons:
 - A. **The continuous arising of self-clinging (attachment to self):** The unceasing attachment to the notion of "self" drives the process of rebirth.
 - B. **The habitual tendency toward conceptualization and attachment since beginningless time:** The ingrained habit of indulging in conceptualizations (i.e. conceptual proliferation) and attachments from countless past lives.
 - C. **The accumulation of both wholesome and unwholesome karma:** The karmic seeds of both virtuous and non-virtuous actions that have been accumulated.
 - D. **The body (the basis of existence) being propelled by two types of empowering causal forces:** The body is driven by the power of karma and the seeds of past actions, leading to the uninterrupted arising of the intermediate state (*antarābhava*) and the ripening of karmic results.
 - E. **Simultaneity of Death and Birth of intermediate state and the person**
Death and birth occur simultaneously, like the two ends of a scale that rise and fall at the same time.
2. **Characteristics of the Intermediate State (*Antarābhava*)**
The being in the intermediate state possesses all sense faculties.
 - A. **For those who have committed unwholesome deeds:** Their intermediate state appears like the dark light of a black goat or a gloomy night.
 - B. **For those who have performed wholesome deeds:** Their intermediate state appears like the bright light of white robes or a clear, bright night.
 - C. The intermediate state is perceptible only to the extremely pure divine eye.
 - D. At this time, the previous self-love and self-identity (i.e., the gross attachment to 'I' from the past life) no longer operates, because the ālaya-consciousness (the foundational consciousness for rebirth) has already settled (with the unification of sperm and egg)." However, attachment to objects and conceptualizations arises, and the intermediate being takes on a form corresponding to its future rebirth.

¹ *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*, Volume 1, Spoken by Bodhisattva Maitreya, Translated by the Tripitaka Master Xuanzang under Imperial Decree. The Section on the Basic Stages: The State Corresponding to the Five Sense Consciousnesses, Part One

E. The Vision of the Intermediate Being

The eyes of the intermediate being are like divine eyes, free from obstruction, but limited to seeing the place of rebirth. The intermediate being can see other beings in the intermediate state and the place where it will be reborn.

- **For those who have committed unwholesome deeds:** Their gaze is downward, and they move with their faces lowered.
- **For those destined for heavenly realms:** Their gaze is upward.
- **For those destined for the human realm:** Their gaze is sideways.

F. Duration of the Intermediate State

If the conditions for rebirth are not met, the intermediate state lasts for a maximum of seven days. If the conditions are met, the duration is uncertain (i.e. maybe shortened to 7 days). If rebirth does not occur within seven days, the being dies and is reborn in the intermediate state again for another seven days. This process can repeat up to seven times (49 days). After this, the being will definitely find the conditions for rebirth.

G. Transformation of the Intermediate State

After seven days, the intermediate-being may be reborn in the same category or, if other karmic seeds are activated, in a different category.

3. Conditions for Entering the Womb

Three conditions must be met for entering the womb:

- The mother's body is suitable, and the time is right.
- The parents are united in sexual union with mutual desire.
- The intermediate being is present.

A. Process of Entering the Womb

The intermediate being perceives other beings of its kind engaging in playful activities and develops a desire for the place of rebirth. It then sees its parents engaged in sexual union and develops a deluded perception, mistaking itself for the one engaging in the act. If the being is to be born as a female, it develops desire for the father; if as a male, it develops desire for the mother. This desire drives the being toward the womb. As it approaches, it no longer sees the parents but only their reproductive organs, and it becomes confined in the womb. **This is how the process of death and rebirth should be understood."**

B. Rebirth in Low or Noble Families

- **For those with little merit:** They are reborn in lowly families. At the time of death and entering the womb, they hear chaotic sounds and perceive themselves entering thickets, bamboo groves, or reeds.
- **For those with great merit:** They are reborn in noble families. At that time, they hear peaceful, pleasant sounds and perceive themselves ascending to palaces or other agreeable places.

4. Union of Sperm and Ovum

At the peak of the parents' mutual desire, they each release a drop of thick sperm and ovum, which combine in the womb to form a single mass, like coagulated milk.

A. The Role of the Ālaya-vijñāna (Storehouse Consciousness)

At this point, the ālaya-vijñāna, which contains all karmic seeds and is the basis of ripening, merges with the combined sperm and ovum.

B. The Process of Merging

The thick sperm and ovum form a single mass, and the intermediate state, driven by deluded perceptions, ceases. Simultaneously, due to the power of the ālaya-vijñāna, subtle sense faculties and elements arise, and the mass of sperm and ovum develops into a cohesive form.

C. The Kalala Stage

This stage is called the kalala (the first stage of embryonic development). In the kalala, the elements of the sense faculties arise alongside the body faculty and its basis. The power of these elements causes the other sense faculties to develop sequentially. The arising of the sense faculties and their bases results in the complete development of the physical support.

D. The Interdependence of Mind and Matter

The kalala's material form is interdependent with the mind and mental factors, hence it is called the basis of reliance. The mind and mental factors rely on the material form, and the material form relies on them. If the material form is damaged, the mind and mental factors are also affected, and vice versa.

E. The Heart as the Basis of Consciousness

The heart is the initial place where consciousness takes support.

Consciousness first takes support here and finally departs from here at death.

This is the process of birth and the establishment of life in the womb.

Yogācāryabhūmi-śāstra section on Death

A. Death and types of Death

What is death? It is when a lifespan reaches its limit and result in death, and there are three types (of death):

1. Caused by the expiry of lifespan
2. The exhaustion of merit
3. Not avoiding irregularity and etc.

Furthermore, there are deaths that are timely and those that are untimely. And there are those that die with:

1. A positive mind set
2. A negative mind set
3. Indifferent mind set.

B. Timely and untimely death

What is the meaning of “death resulting from reaching the limit of life expectancy”? It is like a person dies when the life-span expectancy that he or she incurred has run its course. This is called a timely death.

What is the meaning of death due to the exhaustion of merit? It is like a person dies due to the lack of recourses. What are the deaths caused by not avoiding irregularity and etc.? The Tatagatha said: “There are nine causes and nine conditions that result in untimely deaths.” What are the nines? They are eating without restraint, eating what is not appropriate, eating again while the food ate before has not yet been digested, not spitting out food that are still raw, hanging on to cooked food, not being close to medicine, not knowing what is good and what is bad for oneself, improper time and improper amount of sexual intercourse. All deaths resulting from these irregularities are all called untimely death.

C. Three different types of minds set of dying persons

1. Positive and Negative mind sets

What is the meaning of death with a positive mind set? It is like when someone is dying, he or she brings to mind on his or her own effort the meritorious deeds done before. Or, he or she brings to mind the meritorious deeds done before with the help from others. Because of this condition, then “faith” and other such positive mind sets arise in the mind while gross thoughts are still present. When subtle thoughts arise, a positive mind set will cease immediately, and only the indifferent mind set will remain. Why is it so? It is because the person cannot remember on his or her own effort the meritorious deeds done, nor other can help him or her to do so.

What is the meaning of death with a negative mind set? It is like when someone is dying, he or she brings to mind on his or her own effort, or with the help of someone else, the bad habits and evil deeds that he or she did before. At such a time, greed, hatred and other such negative mind states will come to mind until the subtle thoughts arise as has been explained above.

When someone dies with a positive mind set, he or she dies in peace and would not suffer excessive bodily pain. On the other hand, if someone dies with a negative mind set, he or she dies painfully and would endure intense painful bodily experience. Furthermore, when someone dies with a positive mind set, he or she will not witness disoriented vision. Those who die with a negative mind set will witness disoriented vision.

2. Indifferent mind set

What is the meaning of death with an indifferent mind set? It is when a person who did both good deeds and bad deeds, or neither, dies, he or she can not bring to mind any recall of memory, and there is no one to help him or her to do so. At such a time, he or she does not die with a positive mind set or a negative mind set. It is neither a peaceful nor painful death.

D. Factors that influence a person's mind at the moment of death

Furthermore, when a sentient being who has either done good or bad deeds is about to die, either by remembering on his or her own effort or with the help from other, he or she will only bring to mind the behaviors that he or she is most habitually attached to and forget the rest.

If for someone who has equally done both good and bad deeds, at the moment of death, he or she will follow what comes to mind first, or what other helps him or her to remember. He or she will hold on only to these thoughts that came to mind and forget the rest.

At such a time, the person is under the influence of two empowering causal forces, which is “the attachment to conceptual and speculative proliferation empowering causal force” and “the pure and non-pure karma empowering causal force”. For one who has endured all the karmic fruit of the past, if he or she has done bad karmic deeds then he or she will witness a vision of the unpleasant prophetic fruit of these bad karmas. Just as it is in a dream, he or she will see numerous kinds of “changing

weird images". Because of these images, the Honored One said, "If someone did evil deeds in the past, accumulated bad karma and allowed it to grow, then at that time, just like the sun going down, the shadow of the mountain and other will cast over (the land) until it is completely dark. One should know that that is the way how a sentient being go from brightness into darkness."

For someone who has endured all the bad karmic fruit of the past and cultivated merit, the opposite of the above will happen. It should be known that for such a sentient being, he or she will enter from darkness into brightness. The difference in this case is that when the person dies, just like in a dream, he or she will see numerous pleasant images and not the "changing weird images".

For those who have done exceptionally bad deeds, because of the sight of these weird images, they will sweat and have hair standing on end, hand and feet disorganized, incontinence of feces and urine, reaching and grasping into the air, eye roll and froths dripping from their mouths. At that time, they will have such weird and strange images appearing.

For those who have done ordinary bad deeds, at such a time, these weird and strange images may or may not appear (because) the conditions to substantiate them have not been established.

E. Death and the attachment of the ego

For those sentient beings that are about to die and still have not reached the stage of coma, the long habitual attachment to the ego become apparent. Because of this force of attachment and the belief that "I will cease to be", there arise an attachment of the self. And, because of this attachment, the "*bardo*"² is born.

For those who have attained the stages of "the Stream-winner" and "the once-Returner", their attachment of the egos is still present. However, because "the Stream-winner" and "the once-Returner" have continuously used the power of wisdom to analyze their "attachment of the egos", they are able to control it and would not be attached to it. One should know that it is just like a strong person has

² The Tibetan word *Bardo* means literally "intermediate state" - also translated as "transitional state" or "in-between state". It refers to the state of existence intermediate between two lives.

the ability to conquer and control a weakling in a wrestling match. For the “non-returner” their attachment of the egos will not reappear anymore.

F. Death and consciousness

For someone that is about to die, those who have accumulated bad karma, their consciousness will begin letting go of the body from the top, that is, the body will turn cold gradually from head down until it reaches the heart. Those who have accumulated good karma, their consciousness will begin letting go of the body from the bottom, that is, the body will start turning cold from the feet gradually until it reaches the heart. It should be known that the last part of the body that the consciousness will let go of is the heart, and from here on, the whole body will be completely cold.