

# FROM THE UNDERWORLD OF YAMA TO THE ISLAND OF GEMS

## Concepts of afterlife in Hinduism

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### 1 Introduction

The term ‘Hinduism’ covers a wide variety of systems of belief and practice. It includes such perspectives as monotheism, dualism, polytheism, non-theism, henotheism, monism, and pantheism. Its ideas of death and afterlife are thus equally varied. The earliest known religious system in India was associated with the Aryan people of India, and the writings of the Vedas (from about 1500 BCE on). These Sanskrit texts described death as the time when the soul left the physical body and went to the ancestor world (the *pitriloka*). One funeral hymn tells the soul not to linger, but rather to follow the ancient paths to the land of the fathers, and unite with Yama, lord of the dead, to gain the rewards of good deeds and sacrifices (RV 10.14:7–8). Another asks Agni, god of fire, to lead the soul to Yama, the fathers, and the heavens, where the person can become an ancestor. His eyes go to the sun, his breath to the wind, his limbs to the plants (RV 10.16:3). The general goal is a long life, and no more rebirth, which is understood as no more re-death. The ritual of cremation allows the soul to escape from the body and continue on its way. The soul is carried by Agni, escorted by Savitur, protected by Pusan, and taken to the land of the gods or to the fathers.

### 2 Re-death and reincarnation

The Brahmana commentaries on the Vedas emphasize the problem of ‘re-death’ (*punarmrityu*). Dying once is unpleasant enough, but having to die over and over again is something one would wish to escape. Even the gods feared death, but they performed the rituals that allowed them to become immortal and left ‘re-death’ to humanity (Satapatha Brahmana, 10.4:1–10). The highest goal of Vedic religious ritual was to bring immortality.

The most well-known Vedic commentaries are the Upanishads (from about 1000 BCE on), and many of these writings saw death in a more positive light. Escape from rebirth and redeath meant escaping from ignorance and desire, and the goal changed to liberation from the limits

of life and death. Meditation, asceticism, and *jnana yoga* led to a higher good than the ancestor worlds or the heavens of the Vedic gods. In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (6.2:15) and the Chandogya Upanishad (10: 1–6), those who dwell in the dark ancestor world (*pitriloka*) are contrasted with those who go to the bright heavens of the gods (*devaloka*). But the heavens are coming to be understood as having other qualities, such as infinite awareness or *brahman*, the being, consciousness, and bliss which is the source of all things.

In the Upanishads we first hear details of enlightenment and reincarnation. *Moksha* is liberation from both life and death, a state of ultimate freedom. It is attained by the *atman*, the eternal aspect of the self, which can merge with *brahman* as a drop of water merges into the ocean (or recognizes that the whole ocean has always existed within the drop). However, most souls are trapped in the worlds of death and rebirth (*samsara*), in the illusory worlds influenced by the good and bad karma which propel the soul into rebirth. It is only with the realization of *brahman* that the soul can break the cycle of rebirth.

### 3 Liberation

In the Katha Upanishad, it is Yama himself who explains liberation to the boy Nachiketas. When his father offered an inferior cow for a sacrifice, his son Nachiketas offered himself for the ritual instead. His father was annoyed and said that he gives him to death, and the son went off to look for Yama. When he arrived at the realm of the dead, Yama was away, and the boy had to wait three days. This was a breach of proper hospitality, so when Yama returned he offered the boy three wishes. Nachiketas' first wish was a return to the land of the living, which Yama agreed to guarantee. His second wish was knowledge of immortality through the fire sacrifice. Yama gave an explanation of Vedic rituals which led to immortality, focusing on creating a spiritual body for the worlds of the ancestors or the gods. For the third wish, Nachiketas asked for the secret of the self that transcends death. Yama tried to avoid answering the question, offering Nachiketas wealth, children, and long life instead. But Yama finally answered the question. He spoke of the *atman*, the eternal and unchanging self that is the inner reality of each individual. It is invisible and could not be sensed, but could be known. This self is neither born nor dies, but is beyond birth and death. It is veiled by layers of embodiment, and by penetrating these, the ultimate self is revealed.

In the Upanishads and later Advaita Vedanta, the soul is described as going from one body to another like a caterpillar going from one leaf to another. It is purified from life to life, and it gains progressively better forms during this process, as gold is purified. We have images of the soul as a spark from a giant fire, and a drop of water in the ocean of consciousness. The best death would be as a liberated person or *jivanmukta*. Such a person has realized his or her deeper self or *atman*, and merged with *brahman*, the ocean of consciousness. The process of gaining liberation or *moksha* would be accompanied by visions of light, during life or at the moment of death.

Death is complex in Upanishadic or Vedanta philosophy, for several of the texts speak of the person having many sheaths (*koshas*) and bodies (*sariras*). These have been compared to layers of an onion. According to the model of the three bodies, the outermost self is the physical body (*sthula-sarira*), and there are inner layers that follow, including the subtle body which focuses on thoughts and feelings (*sukhma-sarira*), and the causal body with its karmic seeds (*karana-sarira*). According to the model of five sheaths in the Taittiriya Upanishad, we have the physical or food body (*annamayakosha*), the vital body (*pranamayakosha*), the mind body (*manomayakosha*), and the body of the intellect or wisdom (*vijanamayakosha*), as well as the bliss body (*anandamayakosha*) which surround the *atman*. At death, the physical body drops away, but the soul may still travel with the other bodies.

#### 4 Karma and reincarnation

There are different models of reincarnation. In some models it is controlled by karma but includes rebirth in other species, while in others, reincarnation is an evolutionary process in which simple forms of consciousness gain greater awareness, eventually reaching infinite consciousness. Reincarnation is thus teleological. Karma continues to exist within the soul over the process of birth, death, and rebirth, popularly known as *samsara*. It was often seen in a negative fashion, symbolized as a web, a wheel, a prison, or a trap for human beings. Liberation or *moksha* was understood to allow the soul to escape the process of *samsara*, and attain perfection and self-realization. In the Upanishads, such liberation came primarily through wisdom, especially the realization that the deepest level of self, or *atman*, was equivalent to the universal awareness or *brahman*. This equation was especially popular in the Upanishadic philosophy known as Advaita Vedanta. We see such new conceptual additions in this philosophy as *atman* and *brahman*, and the two forms of *brahman*, which are *nirguna* (*brahman* without form, an understanding of god as pure consciousness or energy) and *saguna* (*brahman* with form, as a deity, and generally one possessing human qualities). *Brahman* can be experienced as *sat chit ananda*, or being, consciousness, and bliss.

One's next life is dependent upon one's karma, the results of one's deeds. The role of karma in death and rebirth is elaborated in the dharmashastras or law texts. These books develop theories of the different sub-types of karma which influence the direction and situation of rebirth. These are primarily theoretical texts, and they discuss the influences of karma on rebirth and rewards and punishments for deeds.

There are many categorizations of karma, but the most widespread understanding includes three types. *Sanchita* is the karma accumulated over lifetimes. From this vast collection of *sanchita karma*, a small amount is experienced in one lifetime. This set of karmas, which will be exhausted only on their seeds being ripened (or fully understood) is known as *prarabdha karma*. *Prarabdha* karma is the portion of accumulated karma that has 'ripened' and appears in the present life. *Kriyamana* is everything that we produce in the current life. All *kriyamana karmas* flow in to *sanchita karma* and consequently shape our future. Thus the concept of karma is not a fatalistic one; we are continually experiencing past karma and creating future karma. The karmas still associated with the soul will influence the processes of death and rebirth.

In more popular Hinduism, epics like the Mahabharata and the Ramayana give stories of folk beliefs about the afterlife, as well as Hindu philosophy and theology. In the Bhagavad Gita section of the Mahabharata, the god Krishna explains various approaches to life and death. He tells Arjuna not to grieve for those he loves, for bodies may perish, but the soul is enduring and indestructible (2:18). 'Weapons do not hurt the self, nor does fire burn it' (2:23). The goal is *brahman*, and people who act without egotism and are not attached to the fruits of their actions can reach that state and be at peace (2:72). As a person takes off his old clothes and puts on new ones, so souls can take on new bodies. However, Krishna also notes that there are different afterlives for people who believe differently: 'Those who choose gods go to the gods; those who choose ancestors go to the ancestors. Those who honor the ghosts go to the ghosts, but those who sacrifice to me go to me' (9:25). In chapter nine of the Gita, Krishna reveals his universal form, as the supreme god of life and death. He showed that he had all gods of creation and all gods of destruction within himself. Still, Krishna stated that the person who loves him shall not perish (9:33). This brings in the devotion to the god, or *bhakti*, as another way of overcoming death, separate from Vedic ritual and Upanishadic wisdom.

## 5 Hindu texts and understandings of death

The epics and puranas include many popular stories. Their focus is not upon the ultimate religious goal, but rather on the intermediate worlds. They describe heaven (*svarga*) and hell (*naraka*). Heaven is where the gods dwell, and each major god has his or her own heaven. People can visit the heavens because of their good karma, but they cannot stay – heaven is a temporary place for human beings. So are the temporary hell worlds, which are places for punishment and atonement. Yama rules over the sinners being punished. The Garuda Purana (2.3:3) states that there are thousands of hells, and these focus upon specific sins. Gods and others can see the tortures that souls will undergo there until they are purified.

Puranas also contain folk stories about the souls of the dead. Those who cannot reach any of the accepted afterlife worlds, and have not reincarnated, may stay on earth after their deaths to haunt their families and villages. Each region of India has its own set of stories about wandering ghosts and spirits. *Bhutas* and *pretas* have generally had inauspicious deaths, by murder or execution or suicide, and they are bound to this world. Tamil Nadu has the *pey*, Gujarat has the *chir abatti*, and Nepal has the *bayyu*. The *churel* is the ghost of a woman who dies in childbirth or is killed by her in-laws, while the *begho bhoot* is the ghost of a person eaten by a tiger. The *brahmadaitya* is a kindly Brahmin ghost who wears a dhoti, while the *mamdo bhuta* is a Muslim ghost, and the *daini* may be the ghost of a dead witch, or the wandering soul of a living witch. Ghosts are bound by unfulfilled desires, and religious specialists (such as the *ojha* or *gunin*) can act as exorcists to find out these desires and try to fulfill them. When their desires are fulfilled, angry ghosts may be transformed by worship and respect into local village deities – *gramadevatas* and *gramadevis*.

In folk tales, the soul could become a wandering ghost (*preta*), or be taken by Yama, lord of death, who grabs the soul at the end of life and drags it into the underworld. There it goes before the court of Yama in his role as Dharmaraj, lord of *dharma* or cosmic order, to be judged on his actions. Yama comes to pull out the soul at death with his noose, accompanied by his two dogs and riding on his water buffalo. He takes the soul to the appropriate section of Naraka, the hell worlds, or he can guide the soul up to Swarga or heaven if it is suitable.

Souls become wandering ghosts when the proper funeral rites are not followed. From the Vedic period on, children have been creating afterlife bodies for their parents. In the Shraddha rites, the surviving child offers the priest a rice ball, which symbolically becomes the soul's head in the afterlife. Sesame seeds and ghee were added for strength and nutrition in the ritual of *sapindi-karana*. More rice balls were added as limbs and other parts of the body. By the tenth day of this ritual, the body was complete, and the soul was on its way to becoming an ancestor.

In Indian tradition, there are two understandings of the moment of death. One is the moment of physical death, when the body dies. The other is the time of cremation, and more specifically the *kapala kriya* – the ritual midway through the cremation, when the chief mourner cracks open the skull of the burnt corpse with a staff, to release the *prana* or vital breath. This is when the soul leaves the body. There is thus a distinction between physical death of the body and ritual death of the soul. Death impurity begins at the release of this *prana*, and the *shraddha* rite of commemoration is performed on the anniversary of the burning of the body, not of the person's death.

According to the folk tradition of *paraloka vidya*, the bonds that link the soul and body are dissolved at the moment of death. Mantras should be chanted at the cremation ground to encourage the vital energies (*pranas*) to leave the body, and the five bodily elements to return to their origins. The soul hovers around familiar places in disembodied form for up to ten days. When the *pranas* are withdrawn from the body into the soul (*jiva*), the person perceives the

desires and memories (*vasanas*) which are normally unconscious. These are traditionally personified as Chitrugupta ('secret pictures'), the messenger of Yama, lord of death. On the eleventh day, the soul begins its journey to Yama's world. It can be strengthened by the rituals performed for the soul by relatives on earth.

The epics and puranas also begin the rise of the devotional or *bhakti* traditions, in which people are dedicated to specific gods. Some of the major deities are Vishnu (and his avatar forms), Shiva, and Devi. In the approach of *bhakti*, devotion leads to rebirth in heaven of god, reached through love, good deeds, ritual worship or *pūja*, and emotional surrender to the deity. God is lord (*ishvara*), in some schools appearing to humanity in avatar form. There is generally cyclical rebirth until the soul attains the heaven of the deity (such as Shiva's heaven of Kailash, Vishnu's heaven of Vaikuntha, Krishna's heaven of Vrindavana, and the Devi's heaven of Manidvipa). With the rise of *bhakti* or devotional religion, there were new possibilities for the soul. Love of a god or goddess could change what happened at the moment of death. Chanting the name of the god, or visualization of divine images or symbols (such as *yantras*), could bring the deity to the dying soul. Among Vaishnavas, the name of Rama or Narayana acted as a *taraka mantra*, which helps in crossing the ocean of *samsara*, and frees the soul from rebirth.

With *bhakti* or devotional Hinduism, the dualistic or *saguna* perspective became popular. The soul was no longer just a spark or a droplet returning to the whole. Instead, it was an individual rising to enter a heaven, guided by a deity who could come to the person at the moment of death. For Vaishnavas, those who worship the god Vishnu, the deity might come to take the person to his eternal heaven of Vaikuntha or Vrindavana, or send his messengers to rescue the soul from danger at death. There are many stories of the god Vishnu fighting Yama, lord of death, for the souls of his devotees. As an example, we have the story of Ajamila, described in the sixth book of the Bhagavata Purana, a major sacred text of Vaishnavism.

In this story, the king Parikshit and his guru Sukadev discuss the life of a Brahmin named Ajamila. He had lived a pious life until he chanced upon a couple having passionate sex. The image filled his mind, and he could no longer concentrate on prayer and meditation. He left his wife and went to live with a prostitute, and he had children with her, living by robbery and fraud. On his deathbed he called to his favorite son, Narayana (Narayana is also a name of the god Vishnu). As he died, the messengers of Yama, lord of death, arrived with their nooses to drag his soul away to the underworld. But when the servants of Vishnu, the Vishnudutas, heard him call on Narayana at the moment of death, they also came to the dying man. These beautiful servants of Vishnu demanded Ajamila's soul from the fearful and twisted servants of Yama, and this begins a long discussion in the text about good and evil behavior, and the nature of the soul.

Yama's dark messengers argued that the man had lived a sinful life and deserved to be punished. But Vishnu's golden messengers argued that chanting the name of god at the moment of death atoned for the sins of millions of births. By calling the name of god on his deathbed, Ajamila left behind all of his sins. Calling the name of god burns sins to ashes, as fire burns dry grass; it is like medicine, which works even if it is used by an ignorant person. Yama's messengers were intimidated by this argument and left. Vishnu's messengers had mercy on Ajamila and allowed him to return to life. This vision that Ajamila saw on his deathbed changed his life. He realized the extent of his bad behavior and vowed never again to act in that way. He became a yogi, devoting himself to meditation. When he died later on, he had another vision of the golden messengers of Vishnu, and he consciously chose to die. He went with them to the heaven of Vishnu, where he was welcomed.

The Bhagavata Purana also describes five styles of possible Vaishnava afterlife in heaven. According to the *salokya* perspective, the soul will live in the same area or world as Vishnu/Narayana. In the *sarsti* form of afterlife, the soul acquires the same wealth or power as the god. In *sarupya*, the

soul will take on the same form as the god, thus reflecting the image of god. According to *samipya*, the soul becomes a personal friend of Vishnu and stays near him as a companion. According to *sayujya*, the liberation attained by yogis and followers of Vedanta, the soul becomes one with the light of the god, or he becomes one with the god by losing all individuality. But the highest goal is to become a servant or beloved of the god in the form of Krishna in the heavenly Vrindavana.

## 6 Deities, death, and afterlives

There are also puranas and poems dedicated to the god Shiva. He is a god of death and transcendence, often linked with the Vedic god Rudra, the storm god associated with destruction. However, Shiva is also the god of reincarnation, since in Hinduism death is believed to be a necessary step for rebirth. Shiva has different aspects that appear at different times. He is often depicted as the destroyer, and will appear as a naked ascetic, encircled with serpents and necklaces of skulls. Sometimes Shiva wanders into burning grounds, smears his body with ash and dances in the light of the funeral pyres, reminding all about the transitory nature of material things. Another common form is that of Shiva Nataraja, engaged in a cosmic dance. It is believed that the energy from this dance sustains the cosmos, and when Shiva is finished with this dance, this universe will end and a new one will begin. In his role as a bhakti deity, Shiva takes his disciples to his heaven of Kailash. According to one story, when a thief was scratched on the forehead by a dog, who accidentally made the three symbolic lines of Shiva's trident on his forehead, he was claimed by Shiva and went to his heaven. There is a Mt. Kailash on earth, which is understood to have a mystical relationship with Shiva's celestial Kailash, and is thus an important Shaivite pilgrimage locale. Shiva's heaven is said from one perspective to have clouds and mountains, and a palace where Shiva is in eternal meditation, and from another view, to shine like gold and be as transparent as crystal.

Kali is a pan-Indian goddess, associated with death and rebirth, and she is worshiped by a variety of different castes and tribes. She ranges from being a folk village goddess who protects a small area, and an ancestress who grants boons, to a tantric and yogic goddess who gives liberation to her devotees, and a loving mother who gives them protection (as Raksha Kali) and entrance to her heaven, holding them like children upon her lap. Chanting her name can lead to union with *brahman*, for one of Kali's tantric names is Kaivalya-dayini, giver of liberation. Kali is a savior, whether by her compassion to bhaktas or by her giving liberation to yogis and tantrikas. We see this liberating role of Kali in the life of the *siddha*/saint Ramakrishna Paramahansa, where the goddess appeared to him in his famous vision of *brahman* as an ocean of consciousness.

While the goddess Kali traditionally threatens order and stability, she also represents a transcendent order, beyond dharma and the social expectations of an earthly life. In the texts she is ugly, with black and emaciated body, matted hair and snakes, but in her statues and posters she is often young and beautiful, with flirtatious eyes, large breasts, a narrow waist, and a big smile. She may be deep-blue, sky-blue, or even white – all are beneficent and auspicious forms of the goddess. Informants say that this beautiful form is her real and inner form, with the ugly image only to frighten the unworthy and the evil. If you are her enemy or do not respect her sufficiently, the frightening black Kali of the burning ground will destroy you. But if you can get her as an ally, the black Kali will be your protector when you go to a new rebirth. If you are truly devoted, she becomes the beautiful blue or white Kali, whose graceful form will come to you at the time of your death, and she will smile lovingly as she takes you to Kailash (Shiva's heaven) or Manidvipa (the Island of Jewels) to dwell on her lap forever.

As a devotional goddess, Kali is Mother of the Universe, and the beloved parent of Shakta poets like Ramprasad Sen. She is described with love, and her dark side is justified by the

presence of death in nature – Kali represents what is true, not what people would like to see. She is described as loving, sweet, and compassionate in her poetry, but she is also capable of saving her devotees from their own karma, sweeping them out of the ghostly worlds between incarnations and taking them to her paradise.

In West Bengal, there are types of bhakti which have afterlives in which all souls are transformed at death and must become female. We shall look at two of them here. In Gaudiya Vaishnavism, the ideal afterlife state is to be in the heavenly Vrindavana, with the divine couple Krishna and Radha. The worshipper is dedicated to the couple, through both the physical body (*sadhaka rupa*) and the spiritual body (*siddha rupa*). In the physical body, the devotee chants, dances, and gives offerings. The emotions of pure love (*prema*) and the desire to serve create a special form of inner body, a handmaiden or friend of Radha, called a *manjari*. The devotee visualizes this body as about 13 years old, beautiful and delicate, wearing a special color of sari and performing a special service for Krishna and Radha. As a part of this ritual practice of *manjari sadhana*, the worshipper memorizes the layout of the heavenly town, and the couple's activities during the day. When the practitioner dies, his spiritual body remains, to spend eternity in the heavenly Vrindavana. We may note that this visualization of an inner female body is performed almost exclusively by men.

Another heaven exclusively for women is found in Bengali Shaktism, in the *Srimad Devi Bhagavata Purana*. It describes the heaven of the goddess as only open to women. During worship on earth, the devotee should worship all people as forms of the goddess. When he dies, and goes to the Devi's heaven of Manidvipa or the Island of Gems, his spiritual body must be a female one to echo the form of the goddess. It is a beautiful heaven, shining with the light of a million suns. Indeed, the text mentions that the great Hindu gods Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva came to visit the goddess' paradise. In order to enter, they had to take on female form. They were accepted as attendants of the goddess by her other handmaidens, and Shiva begged the goddess never to return his masculine form. He wished to serve the goddess as a woman forever.

## 7 Hindu corpse rituals

The Hindu practice of tantra is perhaps most well known for its focus upon rituals of sexuality and death. While other regional forms of tantra in India are famed for their real or imagined sexual rituals, the Bengali style of Shakta or goddess-focused tantra is perhaps most marked by its emphasis on death. *Sava-sadhana*, or the ritual practice of sitting on a corpse, is one of its most important rituals. For many practitioners, it is the single most important ritual in Shaktism or goddess worship.

The corpse ritual combines the three types of Bengali Shaktism: folk, tantric, and bhakti. From the folk perspective, the power of the corpse ritual enhances life on earth. Challenging death leads to immortality, which is defined as *amrta*, non-death, a situation implying long life, wealth, and power. From the yogic or tantric perspective, rituals in the burning ground lead to detachment from the physical world, conquering the fear of death, and union with a transcendent ground, as Shiva or Shakti or *brahman*. From the devotional or *bhakti* perspective, the ritual brings a loving relationship with a deity who has a form and personality, and gives salvation by grace. All of these are present in the *sava-sadhana* rite.

The typical *sava-sadhana* practice is performed on a new moon night (or the eighth or fourteenth day of the moon). The practitioner should go to a burning ground or some other lonely spot (a deserted house, a river side, under a *bilva* tree, or on a hill). He (or she) should bring a corpse, young and attractive, of a person who died recently. The body is washed and placed on a blanket, deer, or tiger skin. The practitioner should worship it, and then sit on the corpse and



contemplate the god or goddess. He or she will experience fearful images and sounds, as well as temptations, but he must remain emotionally detached – or else he may go insane. If he is successful, he may gain the power to use a mantra (*mantrasiddhi*), or other supernatural powers, or have a vision of the goddess. She may appear to possess the corpse, or appear before the practitioner as a beautiful woman, a little girl, or a great goddess in the sky.

In Shakta tantra, the corpse ritual is part of the tantric path known as *vamacara* (the path of the left or reverse practice) or *kulacara* (the path of a family group or religious lineage). The goal is loosening the person from the bonds of *samsara* – he or she is no longer attached, neither hates nor fears, is ashamed of nothing, and has gone beyond all traditional notions of good and evil. The practitioner is understood to have passed through the lowest stage of *pasubhava*, the animal stage, where the person conforms to social conventions and obeys rules without question. The middle stage of *virabhava* is when one acts as a hero. It has the person breaking traditional rules, to go beyond ordinary laws and gain insight into the infinity which exists beyond ordinary social conventions. One who attains this state is considered to be in the highest state of *divyabhava*, beyond purity and impurity. It is a radical breaking of attachment, with both the world of *samsara* and traditional morality.

The devotional approach to the corpse ritual interprets the practice to reflect divine love, and evidence of one's passion and dedication to the goddess. Indeed, the goddess is herself often seated on a corpse in her iconography. The god Shiva without his consort Shakti is said to be a corpse, and the goddess (usually in the form of Kali) may stand over him or sit upon him. The practitioner meditates upon Shakti who is visualized in the heart lotus.

According to Shakta folklore, it is the devotion of the practitioner which brings the goddess down to him. He is so passionate that he is willing to risk the dangers of the burning ground, its ghosts and demons and jackals, and potential madness, to bring the goddess to him. She may enter his heart, or she may enter the corpse when it becomes a dwelling place (*murti*) for the goddess. It may begin speaking affectionately (or sometimes terrifyingly) to the devotee. When the devotee asks for a boon, the goddess cannot refuse. A famous practitioner of the corpse ritual was the eighteenth-century Shakta poet and devotee Ramprasad Sen. He performed this ritual on a funeral pyre using a *mala* or rosary made of human bone. He also performed it under a bilva tree, above a seat made of the skulls of five animals, including a human skull (*pancamunda asana*). He gained a vision of the goddess, and she blessed him for his devotion and dedication. It was said that he died of love for Kali and that she brought him to her heaven.

To bring the goddess Shakti into the corpse is also to bring life and power (*sakti*) into it, as Shakti is said to enliven Shiva. Some Shakta tantrikas compare the devotee's own body to a corpse, saying that the goddess must enter into the heart to enliven it. Others say that the practitioner himself becomes both the goddess and the corpse, realizing in him or herself both the divine spirit and the physical body.

## 8 Conclusion

We can thus see a broad range of possible afterlives within the umbrella term 'Hinduism.' These range from the folk traditions of ghosts and wandering spirits, to Vedic immortality and entrance into the ancestor and god worlds, to liberation through wisdom in Vedanta, attainment of enlightenment or *moksha*, and entrance into the heavens of the gods or the temporary hell-worlds for those with bad karma. All of these are possibilities for death and afterlife.

**Key words:** Hinduism, death, reincarnation, ancestors, rebirth, redeath, brahman, atman, samsara, karma, dharma, corpse ritual, moksha



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