DEATH AND REBIRTH

From the Buddhist point of view, every period of time is a transition, whether birth, life, death or dying. Every human being has a body, which is composed of conditions and therefore must also die; the mind, which perceives everything, experiences everything and has all qualities inherent in it, is like space and is indestructible by its very nature, beyond time and unlimited. As long as the mind is connected to the body, one lives. If the mind separates completely from the body, one is dead. It connects after about seven weeks with a new developing body at conception. If one fundamentally understands that the mind cannot die because it is not a thing, one loses the fear of death.

Buddha explained in the teachings on cause and effect that all living beings have corresponding experiences in the cycle of rebirths because of their thoughts, words and deeds, but they can also change them by setting corresponding new causes.

The consciousness (in Buddhism called "mind") connects from life to life with a new body, depending on the impressions collected in the previous lives. If one understands the meaning of cause and effect, one will consciously act sensibly and avoid negative impressions as much as possible. Burdensome impressions that one has not cleared up, and things that one always wanted to do and did not do, make the dying process more difficult. Thus, an essential part of Buddha's teaching is to use life wisely, as one is constantly planting seeds for the future, including future lives.

On the dying process, Buddha gave precise descriptions:
When a person is dying, certain processes take place that can be observed, the inner processes are only experienced by the dying person himself. One increasingly loses control over the solid element in the body, over the bodily fluids, over the warmth and breathing. At the same time, the senses become weaker and the mind more confused and one often encounters one's fears, in general it can be said that one dies as one has lived. If clinical death is established in medicine - the end of life - this does not mean death in Buddhist terms. It takes about another half hour for all the inner energies to dissolve into each other and for consciousness to finally leave the body.

During this half hour after clinical death, it is advisable to leave the body of the dying person alone so that these final energy processes can proceed undisturbed. At this time, the relatives or friends are of great help through calm compassion, conscious presence and trust.

In the so-called Bardo teachings, such as those recorded in the "Tibetan Book of the Dead", there are detailed descriptions of which processes take place in the mind after death. Different phases throw the untrained mind uncontrollably back and forth for 49 days.

According to Buddhist terminology, there are six realms of consciousness in which one can be reborn. The six realms of existence are called samsara (sanskr.: "coming and going", tib: khorwa: "the wheel"). They are not created by anything external or by a higher power, but are the result of past attitudes, actions, and the resulting experience. The spectrum includes all mental states: from extremely sorrowful to very joyful. However, all realms of existence are subject to impermanence and therefore offer no lasting happiness. Only liberation from the cycle means ultimate happiness. This is what is meant by the Sanskrit term "nirvana".

When one is reborn as a human being, the consciousness is drawn to the future parents. It connects with the sperm and egg of the parents and a new life is formed. A new body is formed. Here the effects on the causes set earlier are shown: The tendencies in the mind give an appropriate environment and culture, a body - strong and healthy or fragile and weak - and appropriate mental and emotional attitudes.

Some people - especially in early childhood - can remember past lives. Special abilities of so-called "prodigies" suggest that they have already laid out their special talents in earlier lives. But also our own, clearly existing, special talents, which we did not have the opportunity to develop in this life, suggest causes in former lives.

There are meditation masters who are consciously reborn because of their Bodhisattva attitude, such as the Karmapas, Shamarpas or Dalai Lamas. They are highly realized or even fully enlightened and free from the cycle of rebirths, but they come back in a human body out of compassion for the benefit of living beings.

In some Buddhist schools, there are meditations that are aimed at placing the consciousness in a suffering-free state after death, in what is called a "Pure Land." This is the force field of a Buddha, which he manifests based on his strong wishes for the benefit of living beings. The Pure Land of the Buddha of Limitless Light (Tibetan "Dewachen," which means "Land of Supreme Joy") is one of these perfect realms.