

What Is Reincarnation? Do Souls Return to the World After Death?

An Examination of the Concept of Reincarnation from the Perspective of Islamic Philosophy

What do you know about reincarnation? Have you ever heard about it?

Life after death has always been one of the greatest mysteries and most challenging topics in the fields of humanology, philosophy, and religion. There are different perspectives on the fate of human beings after death. Each school of thought, based on its specific definition of the human being, pictures a particular destiny.

Followers of some materialist schools of thought believe that the human is a material being and his soul is a part of his brain. Consequently, they believe that the human being is mortal, is completely destroyed after the death of the body, and becomes non-existent. Monotheistic religions, especially Islam, do not believe in the concept of [nonexistence](#) at all. In the Islamic perspective, the human being is not mortal in any way; rather he is an immortal being, and his immortality is related to his soul. After death, the human soul gets separated from the physical body and the material world, and it continues its life in another realm called the hereafter.

Besides this, some people believe that the soul is immaterial and that the human being is immortal. However, they believe that this immortality happens in this world, not in the hereafter. The beliefs of this group form the basis of the theory of **Reincarnation**. This theory has a long history in human societies and it originates from the Indian subcontinent and the nontheistic religions of

[Buddhism](#) and [Hinduism](#). According to this theory, when a human dies, his soul does not go to the hereafter, but continues to live in this world in a different body.

Despite serious and unjustifiable ambiguities about this theory, many people around the world still believe in it. The principles of this theory, including the law of 'karma,' have laid the foundation for emerging new sects and schools of mysticism. This concept has become so widespread that many people believe that their troubles are due to karma. They try to solve life's problems, and achieve happiness and peace by relying on karma. Given the importance of these points and the rejection of resurrection by these sects, it is essential to address reincarnation and its flaws from a rational perspective within the framework of humanology.

What Is Reincarnation?

In simple terms, reincarnation is the transfer of the soul to another body after death and its return to this world. Those who believe in this theory, whether in Hinduism or Buddhism, agree on this main principle. However, there is no unified view to which body the soul transfers, what path it takes, and where its final destination is. Some believe that the soul can only transfer from one human body to another, while others accept the possibility of the soul transferring to the body of an animal, a plant, or even an inanimate object. There are also those who believe that after going through the stages of perfection, the soul can transcend the human body and begin his new life in celestial objects or as an angel.

According to this belief, someone who was virtuous and righteous in his previous life will return to this world after death, elevated in status, as a wealthy person, prince, or aristocrat to enjoy the rewards of his good deeds. On the other hand, a person who acted unjustly and sinfully in his previous life will be downgraded and reincarnated as a disabled person, a poor individual, or even as a plant or animal in order to make up for his misdeeds. From this perspective, if we see some people as wealthy and others as poor or sick, both situations are the result of their past actions, with no other factors involved. This system of reward and punishment in the theory of reincarnation is called the ‘law of karma.’

Believers of karma think that one faces the consequences of his actions in this world, and the concept of heaven and hell, as described in monotheistic religions, is not present in this belief system. Heaven refers to worldly pleasures and beauties, while hell refers to suffering, problems, and illnesses. The soul continues to cycle between these heavens and hells endlessly, with no escape, unless the person reaches the highest level of spiritual perfection, known as Nirvana in Buddhism or Brahman in Hinduism. Only then can he break free from the cycle of reincarnation and achieve liberation.

Is Reincarnation Rationally Acceptable?

This theory has significant rational and philosophical flaws; we will discuss the most important reasons for its invalidity below.

First Reason: One Body Cannot Have Two Souls

As previously mentioned, the reason for the superiority of living beings—plants,

animals, and humans—over non-living entities or inanimate objects is the presence of a soul or spirit. Thus, all living beings possess a soul, and there is no human, animal, or plant that lacks one. If reincarnation were to occur, with the soul of one being entered the body of another, the receiving body would then contain two souls, which is impossible. The soul is responsible for managing and governing the body, and if two souls were to coexist in a single body, their functions would interfere with each other, leading to chaos and destruction. Additionally, a person maintains only one identity with a continuous sense of ‘self’ from the beginning to the end of his life. This unity of personality further emphasizes the uniqueness of the soul.

It is also important to note that some individuals, due to traumatic past experiences or the use of certain drugs and hallucinogens, may experience severe fluctuations in mood, emotions, and behavior. This can lead them to feel as though they have multiple distinct identities or personalities. This rare condition, known as [dissociative identity disorder \(DID\)](#), is a complex psychological issue, which is beyond the scope of this lesson. In reality, these individuals, like everyone else in society, possess a single identity; however, due to disruptions in their imaginal and estimative faculties, they perceive their identity as fragmented.

Second Reason: The Transition from Actuality to Potentiality Is Impossible

In previous articles, we discussed the concepts of potentiality and actuality. The universe is not static and stagnant; rather, it is constantly changing and moving towards perfection. Beings in the world continuously progress from one stage to a higher one, actualizing their potential qualities. We also stated that when a potential is actualized, it can no longer revert to its previous state. For instance,

once an embryo within an egg becomes a chick, it cannot return to its embryonic stage; likewise, a cluster of wheat cannot revert to its seed state.

The human soul, in its stages of growth and development, passes through the stages of the [vegetative soul](#) and [animal soul](#), with its [perceptive faculties](#) being activated progressively throughout its life. Therefore, when someone dies, his soul is no longer the original potential soul but a developed and actualized one. When the soul transitions from potentiality to actuality, even if that actuality is insignificant, it is impossible for it to revert to the state of potentiality. As a result, it is inconceivable for the soul of an adult, who has surpassed the vegetative and animal stages and has actualized many of its potentials, to belong to a fetus that is still in the stage of potentiality, or to a plant or animal that exists at lower stages of development. It is even impossible for the soul of a one-day-old baby to be transferred to a fetus in the womb, as the fetus is at an earlier stage of development.

Third Reason: No One Remembers His Past Life

When followers of Hinduism and Buddhism speak of the transfer of the soul between different bodies, they acknowledge that the source of all thoughts, actions, and feelings is the soul, not the body. It is the soul that sins or performs good deeds; it is the soul that experiences pain or pleasure; it is the soul that is punished or rewarded; in short, it is the soul that experiences life. With this understanding, if reincarnation truly occurred, each of our souls would live for hundreds of years in this world and experience thousands of joyful and sorrowful moments. Then why do none of us remember these experiences? Why are our oldest memories related only to the time when we have lived in this body? How is it possible to forget previous lives when forgetting things is impossible for the

soul?

These reasons, along with other reasons we will not mention here for the sake of brevity, clearly show that reincarnation, as defined by religions like Buddhism, Hinduism, and some other sects, is neither logically justifiable nor accepted in Islam.

The Difference Between Corporeal and *Malakut* Reincarnations

What we have discussed so far is known as corporeal reincarnation.

There is another type called *Malakut* reincarnation, which is not a new topic, as we have previously addressed it in discussions related to the acquisitions of the soul and the manifestation of actions.

Malakut reincarnation means that the inward forms of our deeds are manifested in the hereafter as a facsimile body in the *Barzakh* and a resurrection body on the Day of Judgement. In other words, the soul of each of us, based on the beliefs, thoughts, intentions, and behaviors we have in the world, creates a facsimile body suitable for the *Barzakh* and a resurrection body appropriate for the Day of Judgement.

Thus, *Malakut* reincarnation differs from corporeal reincarnation in several ways. Based on *Malakut* reincarnation:

1. Firstly, the human soul completely exits this world after death and transfers to another realm known as the *Barzakh* or *Malakut*.
2. Secondly, the soul does not enter the bodies of other beings; instead, it creates a body that corresponds to the new conditions it encounters.
3. Thirdly, individuals are not rewarded and punished in the material world.

Instead, each person's actions are manifested in the hereafter as Heaven or Hell, and each person is resurrected with the deeds he performed in the world.

In general, belief in reincarnation and the law of karma leads to the establishment of unjust class systems in the world and justifies a culture of oppression and subjugation. Those who enjoy comfort and ease believe they deserve this prosperity and take pride in it, even though they have no memory of their past good deeds! The poor and the miserable also believe they deserve punishment for the sins they have never committed and have no recollection of committing!

This belief is entirely different from what is mentioned in Islam regarding the punishment and reward of deeds. According to Islamic teachings, in the *Barzakh* and on the Day of Judgement, we will remember all our good and bad deeds in detail; moreover, we will see our deeds present before us, as if we are performing them at that very moment. The court of judgement will be held within our souls, and we will be the witness, judge, and defendant of our own deeds. Each of our deeds shapes our soul, and depending on what we have acquired, we will either be compatible with the living conditions of the hereafter and enjoy its blessings or lack harmony and cannot use the resources of the hereafter. Now, which do you think is more reasonable and just: corporeal reincarnation or *Malakut* reincarnation?

In the upcoming lessons, we will discuss the concept of karma and its fundamental differences from the systems of decree and destiny, as well as action and reaction.