

Janma-Janmantar (Life-Afterlife)

Sunanda Sharma, Jet Propulsion Laboratory, California Institute of Technology,
Pasadena, United States

When I was a child, my father taught me about the cycles of life.

How we are all incarnated and reincarnated endlessly, until we are not.

When our good becomes incandescent, we emerge from the cycle,

Dripping in divinity.

How lonely, I thought, to cycle forever while your best friend and brother and favorite teacher

diverge from your path, and you forget each other's face and laugh and that time you broke the picture frame but didn't tell your mother?

In the stories, demons and gods cycle between worlds,

Because there are *worlds* - at least three, maybe fourteen, maybe infinite.

The many universes are pulsating, each according to its own rhythm,

Like the humming heartbeats of countless fish in the ocean.

Now I ask, will I reincarnate across worlds?

After I've left my mortal coil,

Will I swim the briny waters of an icy moon?

Will I dissolve into the primordial soup of another planet?

Will I turn my face to a different sun?

And I still wonder -

Will I look back and remember me?