

# FOUNDATION COURSE

## *Investigating Rebirth*

### What is rebirth?

- Our mind is propelled by karma and attachment to take one body after another, just like iron filings are drawn to a magnet. At present we have no control over this process, just like we have no control over whether we get sick and when we are going to die, or often even our mood when we wake up in the morning.
- A person is made up of a body and a mind, each with its own continuum. While we are alive body and mind are linked, when we die they separate. Our bodies disintegrate at death but our mind continues on to take the next body (this is more of a stream or continuity of changing consciousness than a soul that travels from life to life).
- The continuum of the body is a physical continuum of matter and energy. The DNA from parents combines to form an embryo, which grows into a baby, then a child, a teenager, it matures into an adult, old-age sets in and then death, the body decomposes and the nutrients then re-enter the food chain.
- The continuum of mind is a mental continuum of moments of mind, always changing. It carries the imprints of our actions from life to life, so the person in the next life is uniquely related to the person of this life, but is not the same person.

### Why should we investigate rebirth?

- We are not on a spiritual path until we motivated by a concern for future lives (whether rebirth or heaven), otherwise it is a worldly activity.
- It may answer a lot of other questions, like why there is such unjust suffering in world, why our habit patterns are so strong, or why certain things happen to us.
- If we prepare for our next life now we can die without fear.

*If you want to know about your past life, look at your present body.*

*If you want to know your future life, look at your present mind.*

### Using logic and reasoning

According to Karl Popper, a proof must be: (1) Repeatable - everyone must be able to do it with the same conditions. Must have same result in the same conditions, (2) Consistent - it must always be true, in every case. It just takes one exception to disprove a theory, and (3) Predictive - must be able to explain other related phenomena. Other discoveries bear it out, and one can make testable predictions.



Everything has a cause (something cannot come from nothing). Just because we cannot identify the cause, doesn't mean there isn't one. The main cause is called the substantial cause, and it must be similar to the result, just like an apple tree cannot come from an orange seed, but must come from a seed of a similar type. Everything else is a condition or a co-operative cause (what we usually think of as causes are actually conditions).



## Applying reasoning to our objections about rebirth

Rebirth is not an immediately obvious thing, but it can be deduced through reasoning and logic, and applying the above principles to navigate our way through our enquiry. We owe it to ourselves to be consistent and apply the same criteria as we do with science. HH the Dalai Lama said that if science proves something different, then we have to go with that, but so far it has been unable to disprove rebirth.

After examining as many objections to rebirth as we can, there comes a time when we have to say "that's enough for me". We accept that the earth is round, but probably less than 10 people have actually seen this! Don't worry if we don't feel very strongly now - that's because our reasoning is new and our assumptions strong. As we become more familiar we will feel more convinced.



## Overcoming common objections

- **Can't remember:** Is this a valid reason? I can't remember my first birthday, does this mean it didn't happen? Dramatic changes make us forget. Our mind is obscured by ignorance, so is difficult to remember what happened this morning, or last year.
- **No proof:** Is there any proof, and if so, have we investigated it? Some very persuasive evidence does exist. And remember - logically, all it takes is one instance, and the concept of no rebirth has to go!
- **I came from a creator:** Buddha refuted creation by an omnipotent god as both illogical and purposeless. To exist I must have been created, therefore so must the creator. Who created him? If there was a creator, why did he create such terrible suffering? (Belief in a creator is only useful if it holds us back from suffering.)
- **I came from nothing:** Is there anything in the universe that exists but has no cause? There is a difference between having no cause, and not finding a cause.
- **I came from my parents:** My body contains half my mother's DNA and half my father's, so my mind must also. Therefore my mind must be half my mother's and half my father's. So how to explain children who are different from their parents? Mind is not physical, so we cannot chop it in half and give it away.
- **Body and mind are the same:** Are they? Body and mind are connected, but they are not the same. The body can experience pleasure but the mind is still distressed. The body can experience pain, but the mind can remain calm.
- **Mind comes from body:** If it is, then it ends at death so why worry? Yet we do... We think that because mind cannot be measured, therefore it doesn't exist. Happiness cannot be measured either, but no one denies its existence! Memory exists but science doesn't know where. Can a mental thing come from a physical cause? The brain influences our moods, but our mind can also influence the activity of our synapses. It has not been conclusively proven that mind is just an effect of brain.
- **Our culture says so:** Received wisdom that we rarely question. As with the flat earth theory, things change over time.
- **Don't know:** Keep an open mind and continue to investigate. Make a decision based on clear logic, or if you are unable to make your mind up, hedge your bets!