

Question 23:

Help me understand how a person's conduct in a previous life determines a person's level of health, intelligence, and beauty in this life. Are you aware of the science of genetics? Please provide me with empirical, scientific evidence that supports the claim that karma and conduct in a previous life is responsible for the circumstances in a current life. The way I could be convinced would sound something like this. Let's take someone who is very beautiful, healthy, wealthy, and successful such as supermodel Heidi Klum. Now, I need you to demonstrate that based on Heidi's conduct in previous lives she is being rewarded in this life. So, you will have to provide me with the name of a deceased individual and that individual's specific actions that lead to that person "becoming" Heidi. How could anyone claim to know that person X dying will lead to person Y being born? How could you possibly establish a causal connection between the two? *From Michael Moshenrose*

Answer:

Genetics, health, intelligence and beauty are manifestations, in a particular birth, of the results of a set of karmas from past lives. A person who has a very large set of good karmas manifesting in the particular life will be born with favorable genes, health, beauty and success. That does not mean that the person is particularly saintly or had only excellent conduct in the immediately previous life. There are people who seem to “have it all” but don’t seem to have good enough character to have earned it, and there are very innocent people who suffer intensely yet have the character of a saint – we cannot imagine that the person ever did anything bad, even in a past life, to earn such suffering. This is due to the complexity of karma – humans have accumulated so many karmas over so many past lives, and at times will experience “chunks” of the results of good karmas from several lives, and “chunks” of the results of bad karmas from several lives. So, even where a particular person can remember a past life and can tell facts to prove it, the conduct in that past life may not necessarily tally with the particular successes, health and wealth in the present life. For example even the Buddha, as saintly as his conduct was over many lives, suffered injury to his foot due to bad karma from a past life.

Therefore, a particular person’s circumstances cannot be traced to particular past lives. As the Buddha said according to Anguttara Nikaya 4.77 (Acintita Sutta), “The precise working out of the results of karma are not to be conjectured about, because they will bring madness and vexation to a person who conjectures about it.”

Instead, to find evidence as to the law of karma, we start with the fact that the law of karma has been taught and believed by uncountable millions of people since before recorded history in Hinduism, and by millions of Buddhists, and is even suggested in the Bible (“A man reaps what he sows” Galatians 6:7, see also 2 Corinthians 9:6, Job 4:8).

Next, we observe that the law of karma is simply the theory of cause and effect, consistent with other processes that can be scientifically tested, such as specific physical actions that lead to physical results. For example, Newton’s law of reciprocal actions, that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Similarly, the law of karma indicates that what goes from you to the external world later goes from the external world to you. As another example, when people eat healthy, exercise and reduce stress, studies show that they tend to have a healthy body as a result. Similarly, when people do many meritorious acts, their future tends to have favorable

circumstances. But there is not a perfect cause and effect relationship, as health is also affected by preexisting conditions (genes and fetal exposures to disease, chemicals, toxins, etc.), and similarly, a person's circumstances are affected by pre-existing karmas, from remote past lives.

There are characteristics, such as personality, behavioral traits, skills, habits and interests, which tend to appear in successive lives of a person, however. The Buddha would often comment that a particular tendency or habit of a person was also his tendency or habit in a past life.

Some examples of people, even young children and child prodigies, who have memories, skills or behaviors from past lives that could not have been learned from any other source, are described in a book *Do You Believe in Rebirth?* By Ven. Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda.