

# Rebirth and Western Science

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During the natural science introductory seminars of the project "Science meets Dharma", nuns and monks frequently ask the following question:

According to Western science, there is no life after death. What is your personal opinion about it?

These words highlight the centrality of the topic of rebirth in Buddhism, and the consequent scepticism towards Western science. I am often asked in a very direct and concrete way if, as a physicist, I believe in rebirth. It should be noted that this is not, of course, considered a rebirth in flesh and blood (clone), but a rebirth of the conscious and the unconscious part of the psyche. In many in-depth discussions in Tibetan Buddhism, this twofold unity is often described with the comprehensive term "mind". Each time I am asked this question, I give nuns and monks the following explanatory answer, based on my personal point of view:

I have a certain idea of what, in this context, the concept of rebirth entails, and this on the basis of the following considerations:

1. Imagine that you lived in the remote hills of Nepal 100 years ago. Imagine that a good friend visited you, put a small box in your hand and told you to dial a specific number on it. If you had followed his advice, a moment later you would have talked to your mother in Tibet. Back then, 100 years ago, you would have said that it was impossible and never would be possible.

2. All major technical achievements are ultimately a result of accidental discoveries in the field of natural science. The example above with the small box was the discovery of the electric current (battery) made by Luigi Galvani as he observed the twitching of frog legs; afterwards, Hans Christian Ørsted accidentally discovered the connection between electric current and magnetism. Sometimes later, this led to the discovery of induction and electromagnetic waves. Thanks to these and many other discoveries, today we can build a smartphone.

3. The structure of the visible matter in the universe has been determined since the formation of the atoms, which took place about 375'000 years after the Big Bang. From that moment, there are only processes of conversion still taking place. For example, most of the rock that covers our earth, consists of atoms that, in earlier stages, had been often parts of marine organisms and were then deposited by sedimentation. The human body also consists mainly of hydrogen, oxygen and carbon atoms, which have been recycled countless times. We can observe these processes in the interplay of life and death. That is, each human body carries atoms that used to be found in other creatures.

4. Now it may be that just in this moment, somewhere, by accident, somebody discovers that, in addition to electrical charges and a particular mass, atoms have other fundamental properties, such as the ability to store the mind. Therefore, it is conceivable that, thanks to this property, such atoms would be able to store those conscious or unconscious psychological structures that the human organism has

generated in the course of a lifetime. It could also be that these stored information "jump" into other atoms and thus "multiply". After the death of the individual, the atoms of his/her body are indeed preserved. They will be reintegrated into new ways of life, and thus could bring conscious or unconscious parts of the psyche into these new organisms. Put in these terms, a rebirth would also be possible from a scientific point of view. However, we have not yet discovered this hypothetical fundamental property in the atoms, that is a memory capacity of consciousness.

Nuns and monks are usually very happy with this comprehensible explanation on the topic of rebirth and science. They learn that there is no necessary contradiction between "Science" and "Dharma" concerning this matter.

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