

# Questions and Answers on Causality

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A German student once raised the following questions the answers of which are given here for the benefit of all Buddhist communities in the UK.

**Q: How can an animal be reborn as a human being, or how can a human being be reborn as an animal?**

Modern science demonstrates and teaches that different species cannot be changed and become the same, even though some hybrid plants and cross-bred animals can be found. Consider such cross bred animals for example. A mare can give birth to a mule or pony by mating with a male donkey but a human being cannot be hybridized to give birth to an animal, If you admit that such a scientific teaching is true, the *Jataka* stories cannot be true events since we come across in the *Jataka* books a hermit called *Isisinga* who came to be born from a female deer which gave birth to a human baby by taking the human father's urine mixed up with seminal fluid. And the prince named *Padakusala* came to be born as a human baby from his human mother princess who consorted with a lion. Such stories can be found in the Asian fables and fairy tales. What is your answer from the point of Abhidhamma philosophy?

A: Before dealing with your question, we must distinguish between the law of physical nature and that of the psychic order of things.

The former means the usual physical events without any connection with spiritual or *karmic* forces, For example, the physical features of the universe gradually evolve by way of the transitional process which is called the Law of Natural Order (*Dhammaa Niyama*). The latter means spiritual or mental force which can create animate and sentient beings and differentiate them from each other. This law of Psychic Order is the most powerful of all forces, both physical and mental. It can create the whole universe, i.e., It has the capacity or potentiality for producing not only sentient beings but also inanimate things and states, not to mention human beings. It means that due to his or her intentions a person can be reborn as a human being, a celestial being, a Brahma or even as an animal.

Q: *Bhante*, may I propose an argument in this point?

Consider vegetation: As I mentioned before, any plant, not to mention a sentient being, cannot be modified. We cannot change a lemon plant to bear a sweet fruit by filling manure mixed with honey, sugar, milk, butter and so on. Nobody can make an apple tree give bitter fruit by adding bitter ingredients such a pepper, chilly powder, etc., so we cannot change one species to another. We cannot change man into an animal and vice versa.

A: Yes, It is right to some extent.

Vegetation is governed by the Law of Genetic Order (*Bija Niyama*). In the animal kingdom, genes are a very important factor to produce the same kind of offspring. The subject of genetic order may lead to a very long discussion, so let us leave It at the moment. Let us go on to Psychic Order and Intentional behaviour, another law of kammic force which we call *Kamma Niyama*. Volitional action (*cetana*) is closely connected with mental disposition. It is profoundly connected with sentient beings. Any action, whether good or bad, whether bodily, verbal or mental, which was done intentionally in the previous life is called *kamma*. This *kamma* is a potential stored up in one's process of being, which is ready to give birth to a corresponding result. It is somewhat like a seed which is ready to grow into a plant, when other supporting causes are present, to bear the same kind of fruit as the seed.

It is very remarkable that when a seed gives Its fruit, It does not pay any regard to the doer's face but retains its own true nature and characteristics. It means that the doer of a *kamma*, no matter whether he may be a human being, deity or animal, the deed or *kamma* bears precisely its own character and performs its own function, For example, anger (*dosa*) in the form of cruelty produces a cruel effect in this present life by

making the subject suffer from a severe painful sensation, and as a further result in the next life the subject will be affected by being reborn as a snake, tiger or other aggressive animal, and its attendant result being beaten, hit or killed. In this way *karmic* force never loses its potential until It Is exhausted after begetting its corresponding effect.

Q: Bhante, can you give me any evidence that a human being can be reborn as an animal or vice versa?

A: No, we cannot nowadays give any proof as we have no supernatural power, but in the Buddha's lifetime many *bhikkhus* were possessed of supernatural power (*iddhi*) or supernormal knowledge (*abhinna*) by means of which they could demonstrate invisible things or creatures to be seen, or inaudible things or voices to be heard.

These two kinds of supernatural power are something like clairvoyance and clairaudience. At the present time, some people, men or women who are possessed of these mental powers can see or hear things hidden from other people. This type of phenomena has already been tested in a scientific manner by some scientific researchers such as John Stellar. There the motto "Seeing is believing" has become out of date. Of course, we can explain the rebirth of some creatures from their original life. Please consider human beings for example. Some of them are very beautiful, but some are very ugly. Some have excellent bodily features, while others are physically defective, being born blind or deaf. Why is this? According to their good or bad *kamma* they become born with such and such features. People with physical defects come to be born from lower states such as that of fox, wolf, snake and so on, while well featured persons come to be born from the life of a human, deity and so forth. This relationship of cause and effect can be explained only by the inferential method but not by any directly perceptible method.

Q: Bhante, the law of genetic order is a very important factor in deciding about reincarnation. What is your opinion? Please explain about it.

A: Now let us come back to discuss the Genetic Order.

People usually say that heredity is the most important factor, both for animate and inanimate things but it is not totally true because among one family, although all family members are facially similar to each other, their characters are different to a much greater extent. One of them might become a learned professor, another may turn out to be a criminal, or another may be a great inventor while others may remain commoners. In this manner, one's environment and associates are collaborating causes making for the success of one, or the failure of another. In this connection Buddhism teaches the main cause of development or degeneration as being one's own *kamma*, and that very *kamma* also causes one to get good opportunities, such as wise teachers, good friends, thorough education, moral associates, etc. Thus *kamma* raises one person but debases another, and causes rebirth as a higher species or the lowest forms of life.