

Past Lives - How To Prove Them

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Happy Monks Publication



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Syllogism to contemplate

Take the subject 'the first moment of consciousness of this life' - it arises from an immediately preceding moment of consciousness that is its substantial cause - because it is consciousness. For example, like today's consciousness.

Past Lives - How To Prove Them

Phenomena can be categorised into manifest phenomena and hidden phenomena. **Manifest phenomena** are objects that we can understand immediately with direct perception, such as our morning coffee, the flowers on our balcony (if we have one), and so forth. **Hidden phenomena** are objects that initially can only be understood through inference. Atoms and particles cannot be seen directly, but their existence and nature can be inferred irrefutably through various experiments. The existence of past and future lives is also a hidden phenomenon.

An inferential valid cognition is always arrived at as the inescapable irrefutable conclusion of a series of mental connections and understandings, or in other words, a network of insights in our mind, which allows only one possible outcome or conclusion. In such a manner one can validly infer the existence of a hidden phenomenon without having a direct perception of that phenomenon.

That is why there are always many things to meditate on when taking a syllogism as the object of contemplation. For example, here the argument is based on the assumption that one has an understanding of 'mind' as the *clear and knowing* phenomenon that was explained by the Buddha. To understand this alone is a major and essential step.

Then there also needs to be an understanding of the nature of a cause/effect relationship; e.g. that without having first a

cause there won't be a subsequent effect, i.e. the absolute dependency of an effect on its cause. But the cause, being impermanent, is also an effect in its own right. Therefore it in turn also has to be preceded by a cause, which again is an effect. And so forth, and so forth. It is impossible and invalid to posit a first cause since being a cause means to be impermanent, and to be impermanent means to have a cause. Also, every effect has to have a specific concordant direct substantial cause - the direct substantial cause of the sprout of a cherry tree has to be a cherry seed. No other seed will do.

Establishing the Existence of Consciousness

Confusing ‘Relationship’ with ‘Being’

In the West there is a tendency to confuse the sense-consciousness with the physical sense power. One reason is probably our preoccupation with physical objects, but another reason is confusing ‘*relationship*’ with actually ‘*being*’ that object.

Because we can observe a relationship between the physical eye and our visual perception we assume that the eye is that which perceives. Similarly, because we observe a relationship between certain parts in the brain and certain emotions, we assume that those emotions are parts of the brain; e.g. a change in the chemistry of the brain brings about an emotional change.

However, observing that a change in A (the brain) brings about a change in B (parts of the mind) is only proof that parts of the mind are related to the brain.

It is logically incorrect to say that A is B because I can observe that A changes if I change B.

Likewise it is incorrect to say that e.g., attachment is a part of the brain because I can observe a relationship between attachment and certain parts of the brain. Modern science has certainly established a profound relationship between the brain and parts of the mind, but that does not prove that the brain is the mind.

These findings by modern science about the relationship between the physical body and parts of the mind do not contradict Buddhist thought. Rather they complement it, since in Buddhism it is taught that different types of consciousness do indeed need a physical basis for their generation; e.g. the eye-consciousness.

Mind Is Not Matter

The above merely shows that on the one hand modern science has not at all logically established that mind is matter. But on the other hand there are also many signs indicating that mind isn't matter.

For example, clairvoyance would not be possible if mind were matter. This is not as absurd as it sounds. Many fortunate students have received clear unmistakable evidence of the clairvoyance of their teacher, which may not work as a proof for others, but it certainly works as a proof for them.

Sometimes teachers show their psychic powers to generate faith in the minds of the students. What we the students have to do is to use this sign as a valid reason to generate faith in the teachings, and one of the most important things to generate faith in is the existence of consciousness the way the Buddha taught it. From that everything else, such as the existence of past and future lives, karma, and so forth, falls into place.

Consciousness in Buddhism

The Buddha explained that consciousness is a clear and knowing phenomenon with certain other characteristics, such as being a creature of habit, and always being accompanied by a subtle psychic energy.

The ‘clear’ refers to the mind’s ability to reflect objects and eliminates the mind as matter, i.e., something atomically based. It can also refer to the intrinsically pure nature of the mind. This clear nature of the mind is something only to be seen in meditation, when the disturbing thoughts have subsided. At that time the clear nature of the mind can shine through. But even for normal people the mind is usually clearer in the morning than later in the day. Why is that? By confirming that our mind has this clear nature we have confirmed one essential feature the Buddha attributed to mind.

That our consciousness is a creature of habit we can easily verify for ourselves. We only need to observe our consciousness for a few days or weeks to see that it follows established patterns, which confirms another characteristic that the Buddha attributed to mind.

The Buddha also taught that consciousness always goes hand in hand with a psychic energy that acts as its vehicle, and that these energies travel in a network of psychic channels in our body. By controlling these energies one is able to control one’s mind. Both these psychic energies as well as the

channels are subtle types of form, not recognisable with the eye.

Explanations regarding these psychic energies and psychic channels can also be found in Chinese medicine, where the energy is referred to as 'chi', and Indian yoga, where it is referred to as 'prana'. Quite often students of these disciplines can see the relationship between consciousness and energy through their own experience. Opening blockages in certain channels, so that the energies can flow freely, brings also mental relief. Directing the energy to certain parts within one's body heightens the awareness there. These are small personal experiences through which one can confirm for oneself that the teaching of the Buddha on the co-relationship of consciousness and the subtle energy that acts as its vehicle is true.

Having arrived at an understanding that consciousness is the *clear and knowing* entity described by the Buddha we then have to contemplate its impermanence. While we might not be able to see immediately its subtle momentary nature, we can certainly observe its coarse impermanence. How often does our mind change in the course of one day? How many thoughts come and go in the course of one minute? These obvious changes in the mind would not be possible if the mind was not momentary and since it is momentary it has causes and conditions.

Establishing the Existence of Past & Future Lives

After having ascertained impermanent consciousness, the relationship between the reason 'consciousness', and the predicate 'arising from an immediately preceding moment of consciousness that is its substantial cause', has to be determined. This is an essential step. Every moment of consciousness arises from an immediately preceding moment of consciousness that is its substantial cause. They don't arise just out of nothing.

This understanding is then applied to the first moment of consciousness of this life, which also needs to be preceded by an earlier moment of consciousness that is its substantial cause. This preceding moment can't be found in the continuum of the parents, for example, since then the child would have to have the same way of thinking, same memories, same character and so forth, as the parents.

This earlier moment of consciousness can only be found in a previous life of one's own continuum, which is how the existence of the immediately preceding life is inferred. By applying this logic in a scrupulous manner further the existence of infinite past lives is ascertained, which is how one establishes that all sentient beings were one's mother in the past.

Out of self and others, it is easier to prove the existence of past lives to oneself, because the main proof, the existence of

consciousness, is best confirmed through one's own personal experience.