

# **The Four Noble Truths**

**An Explanation of Samsara and Nirvana**



Happy Monks Publication

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## **Samsara and Nirvana**

### **INTRODUCTION - LAM-RIM AND ITS THREE STAGES**

My name is Tenzin Fedor. I am going to do this segment on Samsara Nirvana teachings. This course is about the meditations that are common to the being of medium capacity. These meditations are for the purpose of generating renunciation from cyclic existence, which is the motivation of the practitioner with medium capacity. These topics are called Samsara and Nirvana. The topics of meditation are the Four Noble Truths, primarily suffering and its origin and the twelve dependent links.

First of all, 'Graduated Path to Enlightenment' is the translation of the Tibetan word Jang-chub Lam-rim. Jang-chub is the Tibetan word for the Sanskrit word bodhi and means awakening. Therefore it is translated as enlightenment. The Tibetan word Jang-chub includes both the final result as well as the path and the method of implementing it. 'Jang' means to purify all one's obscurations and 'chub' means to perfect one's realization or knowledge. Therefore enlightenment is a state where one has purified all one's faults and obscurations and perfected all one's inner qualities. The first happens through the second.

By developing our inner qualities of wisdom, compassion, concentration etc. we overcome and abandon the two obscurations. The two obscurations are the obscurations to liberation and the obscurations to knowledge.

The obscurations to liberation are true-grasping, the afflictions arising through it and their seeds. The obscurations to knowledge are the karmic latencies of true-grasping and the subtle dualistic appearances caused by them.

We can take the example of true-grasping which is a root affliction and in fact is the root of cyclic existence. It is a wrong mind, meaning that the object that it apprehends doesn't exist. It is therefore like a misunderstanding. A basic, fundamental misunderstanding of the final nature of phenomena and ourselves. But misunderstandings can be rectified by generating wisdom. In this case the wisdom understanding emptiness. Through first realizing emptiness, and then continually meditating on it, we can peel away the various levels of true-grasping until our mind is completely purified from true-grasping.

The same system applies to the other afflictions and their antidotes. By perfecting our compassion we will pacify our manifest anger. By perfecting our detachment we will overcome manifest attachment. This works only on a temporary basis. To overcome all our afflictions from the root we have to rely on the wisdom realizing emptiness, which can cut off the root of cyclic existence, true-grasping.

To me this shows two things. First of all, enlightenment is not a coma like state without any feelings, but is a state full of bliss, wisdom and compassion. And it is not reached through some kind of magic or outer power but through oneself implementing the dharma.

Lam-rim means the graduated path, hence the Graduated Path to Enlightenment. Those teachings outline the sequence in which one has to meditate on the many meditations taught by the Buddha. It outlines the psychological development of the mind from the very beginning stages up to enlightenment. Since Graduated Path to Enlightenment teachings is quite a long word I am from now on going to refer to it as the Lam-rim.

The lam-rim is basically divided into three stages, the meditations common to the small, medium and great scope. The meditations common to the practitioner with inferior capacity are for the purpose of generating the motivation common to the practitioner with inferior capacity, which is the thought wishing to obtain happiness in the next life. Here the aim is a higher rebirth. The objects of abandonment are the ten non-virtuous actions<sup>1</sup> and the path is the practice of the ten virtuous actions.

The meditations common to the practitioner with medium capacity are for the purpose of generating the wish to obtain liberation from cyclic existence all together. Here the aim is liberation. The objects of abandonment are the obscurations to liberation and the path is the practice of the three higher trainings<sup>2</sup>.

The practitioner of inferior capacity wants to become free from the sufferings of the lower realms and in order to do so, has to practice the ten virtuous actions, which are the opposite of the ten non-virtuous actions. The practitioner of medium capacity doesn't just aim for higher rebirth within cyclic existence but wants to obtain complete liberation. Therefore he has to abandon the obscurations to liberation and the path to do that are the three higher trainings.

The meditations of the practitioner with superior capacity are for the purpose of generating bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment. Here the aim is enlightenment. The objects of abandonment are the obscurations to knowledge and the path is the practice of the six perfections<sup>3</sup>.

After having gone through the preliminary stages of meditating on guru devotion and the precious human rebirth one then tries to generate the motivation common to the being of small capacity, which is the thought wanting to obtain happiness in the next life. Here the practice is to give up grasping to the happiness of this life and generate concern for the happiness of the future life. This is done by meditating on death and impermanence, the suffering of the lower realms, going for refuge and karma. By doing these meditations one generates the understanding that one definitely has to die, that the time of death is definite, that after death one can only go up or down. Whether one takes a higher or lower rebirth is determined by one's karma. Since one generates predominantly non-virtuous karma one is definitely going to fall into one of the lower realms. Recognizing that only the three jewels have the capacity to protect oneself from such a rebirth, one then takes heartfelt refuge in the three jewels, and then practices the law of cause and effect – avoiding non-virtue and creating virtue, practicing the ten virtuous actions.

Now here at the time of the practitioner of medium capacity one realizes that just to obtain samsaric happiness in a future life is not enough. Even though one might attain a higher rebirth

one might still fall again into the lower realms in the future. And even while being in the higher realms one still experiences sufferings. As was said by Nagarjuna in his letter to a student:

The stronger one thinks of all migrations as happy that much more the darkness of ignorance thickens. The stronger one recognizes all migrations as suffering that much the darkness of ignorance becomes thinner. The more one increases one's meditation on beauty that much more the fire tongues of desire lick. The more one increases one's meditation on ugliness that much more the fire tongues of desire will be subdued.

Here Nagarjuna is saying that in order to counter the wrong conception grasping onto the perfections of cyclic existence as happiness, and the mental elaboration of beauty that we have had since beginningless time, one needs to meditate on suffering and ugliness. If one doesn't do that, then by ignorance and desire increasing, the wheels of samsara will turn round and round.

As we mentioned before, in order to attain enlightenment we need to develop our wisdom, our understanding, in order to counter those misconceptions that we have in regards to ourselves, that we have with regards to the environment and towards others and which cause us all our problems.

For example, here in the first line Nagarjuna says the more one thinks of all migrations as happy that much more the darkness of ignorance thickens. Because the grasping at samsara as being a happy place, the grasping at samsaric existence as being a happy existence, is ignorance. It is a misunderstanding. The Buddha is saying that we grasp at something that is actually suffering as happiness. We are so confused that we are actually holding onto something that is suffering as being happiness. And the more we do that the more and more deluded we become.

Then of course the second line, the more one recognizes all migrations as suffering that much more the darkness of ignorance becomes thinner. The more we increase our understanding that existence within cyclic existence is suffering, that every aspect of it is suffering, then that much more our ignorance becomes less and less and our understanding and wisdom increases more and more.

He refers to one misconception that is counteracted by meditating on the first noble truth, the noble truth of suffering, and the misconception of grasping at suffering as being in the nature of happiness.

And the second part of the quotation by Nagarjuna, the more one increases one's meditation of beauty that much more the desire tongues of desire lick. That refers to another misconception that is also counteracted by meditating on the noble truth of suffering. Our misconception grasping at something that is in its nature ugly as being beautiful. This is maybe a little bit difficult to understand but if we honestly look we will be able to see how much of the beauty that appears to our mind is just a mere mental elaboration, by our mind. In fact from the side of the object there is not that much beauty there.

This of course is a difficult meditation to do, but if we look at the human body, very few people are able to bear seeing the inside of the human body. By its nature the human body is something that can be quite disgusting. At the same time we apprehend the human body as being something very beautiful and desire it. One can see there is a clear discrepancy between what appears to our mind and the actual reality. The more we are able to recognize the coarseness and ugliness of our objects of desire, the more we will be able to overcome desire.

If we do not overcome those misconceptions, and there are many more misconceptions regarding our situation and our reality, then we will just create more and more karma. More and more disturbing thoughts will arise in our mind. We will create more and more karma and create more and more causes to be reborn in cyclic existence. In such a way we never become free from samsara. Like a self-perpetuating motion or engine.

### 1.2. Importance of 'common to'

It is important to understand the significance of saying the meditations *common to* the practitioner of inferior capacity, the meditations *common to* the practitioner of medium capacity. That is very important because we do not want to become a person following only the practices of the small scope. We do not want to actually become a person of the small scope. Also we do not want to become a person of the medium scope. We want to become a person of the great scope. But the development of the motivation of a person of the great scope depends on doing all the meditations common to the practitioner of medium and small capacity. We therefore engage in those practices and meditate on those topics. We actually meditate on the topics of the small and medium scope for the purpose of generating bodhicitta.

It is actually already done on the basis of appreciation of compassion, altruism and bodhicitta. We do it for the development of bodhicitta. The development of bodhicitta depends upon compassion. Compassion is generated through an understanding of the suffering of others. We can only understand the suffering of others if we have first understood our own suffering.

As it is mentioned by Lama Tsong Khapa, if we meditate on the suffering of others without having first understood our own situation, our own suffering, we will not be able to generate very effective compassion. In order to be able to generate effective compassion we first need to reflect on our own suffering. Reflecting on our own suffering generates renunciation. Then by having understood your own suffering, if you reflect on the suffering of others you will be able to generate strong compassion.

If we experience a particular problem or we experience a particular sickness, and then we see another person who has that same problem, that same sickness, it will be very easy for us to have empathy with that person. It will be easy for us to feel with that person and to have compassion for that person. Here, even though the meditations are common to the practitioner of medium capacity, the aim is to generate compassion. The aim is not to familiarize oneself with the idea wanting to obtain liberation only for one's own purpose alone.

The significance is that we are not trying to become practitioners of small capacity. We are also not trying to become practitioners of medium scope. What we are doing is we are walking the



same path as those practitioners. We do not stop when they stop. We go on further. Their aim is not our aim. We have to walk the same road as them for a certain distance but then we go on to the practitioner of great capacity.

First of all the practitioner of small capacity is concerned only with the happiness of future lives, wanting to be liberated from the sufferings of the lower realms. We need to generate that kind of motivation but then we do not stop there. Because we recognize that even if we have a higher rebirth in the next life still we experience sufferings in that type of rebirth. Also that type of rebirth wouldn't be permanent and we would again take another rebirth after that and another after that and would again fall into the lower realms. We increase the motivation, wanting to attain freedom from the whole of cyclic existence. Not wanting freedom only from the lower realms but wanting to have freedom from the whole of cyclic existence.

But then again, we do not stop there because we recognize it wouldn't be enough only to have freedom from cyclic existence only for ourselves. It wouldn't be enough to have freedom from suffering only for us, because all other sentient beings experience the same situation. We have to become enlightened to be able help all other sentient beings.

In fact, when we do those meditations of the small and medium scope it is already done from the point of view that we have a great admiration for the practices of the great scope. We have a great admiration for bodhicitta. We have a great admiration for compassion. We have already a certain amount of compassion of course. When we generate renunciation, of course the thought will arise, "I want to be free of cyclic existence". But it should be more in the context of, "I want to become free of cyclic existence because as long as I am in cyclic existence I am not able to help other sentient beings".

Also, when we generate the thought of wanting to be free of the lower realms and wanting to attain higher rebirth in the next life it should be more in the context, "If I fall into the lower realms I am not able to help other sentient beings." And the happiness in the next life we do not just want for the enjoyment of the next life, but because the attainment of enlightenment happens only on the basis of consecutive lifetimes.

I shouldn't say only because there is possibility to become enlightened in one short lifetime in degenerated age through the practice of highest yoga tantra. But we shouldn't just rely on that. Within our motivation we should have the motivation that we are going to practice until we reach enlightenment, no matter how many life times it takes. Realistically, as His Holiness the Dalai Lama says, it can take many, many lifetimes just to generate bodhicitta and great compassion.

So even though the attainment of enlightenment in one short lifetime is possible – there are practitioners who did that such as Milarepa, Gyalwa Ensapa – it is better if our motivation is not just focused on enlightenment in this life. At least in my case I can say I have to work for many, many lifetimes. If it doesn't take many lifetimes and we become enlightened in one lifetime then very good. Then there is no problem. But if we do not have a strong motivation wanting to practice over many lifetimes then many difficulties can arise. We might get discouraged because we might come to a point where we see 'I am not going to become enlightened in this lifetime',

and then we become depressed. His Holiness the Dalai Lama always advises particular westerners students; Tibetan students already have this idea of having to work for many lifetimes much more than us. He always emphasizes this point. You should have the strength of mind wanting to work for three countless great eons.

Now we are able to practice the dharma in this life because we have a precious human rebirth. To be able to practice the dharma we need certain inner and outer conditions complete. If we do not complete our dharma practice in this life we need to have those conditions again in consecutive future lives.

That is where the motivation of the small capable being comes in. We again want to have a happy future life and higher rebirth to be able to continue our dharma practice in a future life, for the purpose of being able to practice the bodhisattva path in a future life. The whole Lam-rim is done on the basis of, even though we might not have developed bodhicitta and great compassion, definitely belonging to the family of that type of practitioner, definitely aspiring to be that type of practitioner.

So, then the actual generation of renunciation. Now I have finished with the introductory topics, leading up to how we arrive at the meditations of the practitioner of medium scope and giving the context, which forms the basis of the medium of our practice. Now we go to the actual meditations common to the medium scope.



## **PREPARATION FOR MEDITATION**

Before starting with the actual meditations I wanted to talk a little about the importance of practicing the guru devotion and the seven-limb practice.

What we are going to go through has to ripen in your mind. The various meditations we go through you have to contemplate on in order to get a feeling for them, and in order for them to affect your mind. But in order for those meditations to be able to affect your mind various conditions are needed. In the same way as we cannot just throw some seeds in a field and then expect to reap a perfect crop, we cannot just sit down and do those meditations and expect them to have immediate effect. There are various things that need to be done in order to prepare the mind, that the mind becomes a receptive and fertile field in which we can grow the crop of those meditations.

The great lineage lamas such as Pabongka Rinpoche explain this that in order for the Lam-rim meditations to take effect, four factors are needed:

1. We need to make requests to the guru deity.
2. Then we need to engage into the practice of the accumulation of merits.
3. We need to engage in the practice of purification of negativities and
4. Then we need to do the actual meditations.

If those four factors come together then definitely the meditation will affect our mind and will have the desired effect. If we do not engage into the practice of purification and accumulation of merits combined with making requests to the guru, then it could be that we might feel that our mind is like a dry field in which those teachings do not take root.

In Sera Je Monastery, where the monks engage in a great deal of dharma study, it is said that in order to be able to complete one's dharma study a great deal of merit is needed. That is why the monks in the monastery engage in lots and lots of pujas, for example doing lots of Tara Praises, recitation of the Heart Sutra and forth.

When we practice requests to the guru deity we actually visualize our guru as being indivisible from our meditational deity, if we have a meditational deity. Otherwise we can visualize the guru is in the nature of the Buddha. Actually we should be convinced the guru is a buddha, that the guru is the manifestation of all the buddhas, and has come in order to teach us. And when we make requests to the guru for the realizations of the meditations we are engaging in, and for the completion of the stages of the path, that will definitely have a good effect on our mind. I have been repeatedly advised by my teachers to do that practice.

And that is also the practice of guru devotion. The practice of guru devotion is a catalyst that will transform a non-dharmic mind into a dharmic mind and make it a receptive field for realization.

Then we also have to engage into the practice of accumulation of merit and the purification of non-virtuous karma. The best way of doing that is by doing the seven-limb practice. It is said that if one wants to attain enlightenment quickly one should practice the seven-limb practice. Within the seven-limb practice we have:

1. the limb of prostration;
2. we have the limb of making offering;
3. we have the limb of confessing our non virtuous karmas;
4. we have the limb of rejoicing,
5. we have the limb of requesting the gurus and buddhas to remain until samara ends;
6. we have the limb of requesting them to teach the dharma.
7. and we have the limb of dedication

Within the seven limbs we have both purification and accumulation of merits complete. It is actually very good if every time before you start the actual study, you sit down and do some meditation on the seven limbs. The best is if you can do the whole six preparatory practices<sup>4</sup>.

Most monks will offer water bowls at least once a day in the morning, and some for the accumulation of merits before each study session. But since this is not part of my topic, and is explained in another part of the study program, and you can read about the six preparatory practices in great detail in Pabongka Rinpoche's Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand, I am not going to go into it any further. But I just felt to mention, since what we are going to go through is for the purpose of practice, in order to effect a change in our mind, I thought it important to mention those four factors that are needed in order for the Lam-rim to transform our mind.



## **Actual Meditations Common to the Medium Scope<sup>5</sup>**

This commentary is based on the outline of the *Great Lam-Rim* by Lama Tsong Khapa. Meditators sometimes just use the outlines as a map for their meditation. By mentally going through the outlines, the meditators reflect on the different points of the lam-rim.

### **ACTUAL GENERATION OF RENUNCIATION**

#### **IDENTIFYING RENUNCIATION**

So the first section – the actual generation of the thought of renunciation has two parts, first of all identifying renunciation and then the method for generating renunciation. Here we first deal with the outline identifying renunciation.

Renunciation is the aspiration wishing to attain liberation. What is called liberation is the freedom from bondage. When we talk about liberation we refer to being free from bondage. Here the bonds are karma and affliction. Karma and affliction are the shackles that bind one to samsara.

#### **Place of Rebirth**

From the point of view of place, through the control of karma and afflictions one takes rebirth in the three realms. We take rebirth through the control of karma and afflictions and if we look at that process of taking rebirth from the point of view of place, where we are taking rebirth is in the three realms – in the desire realm, in the form realm and the formless realm.

#### **Type of Rebirth**

If you look at it from the point of view of the type of rebirth, there are five types. We can either be reborn as a being in the hell realm, we can be reborn as a hungry ghost, we can be reborn as an animal, we can be reborn as a human being, and we can be reborn as a god. Sometimes one talks about five types of beings, sometimes about six types of beings. This happens when the gods are further divided into demi gods and gods. Then we have six types of beings.

#### **Way of Birth**

If you look at taking rebirth from the point of view of the way we take rebirth there are four ways. Either one takes rebirth from a womb, or one takes rebirth from an egg, or one takes rebirth through heat and moisture, or instantaneous or miraculous rebirth.

The nature of the bondage that was mentioned before is one is reborn without choice in those conditions, reborn without any choice in any of the three realms, taking any of the five types of rebirth through any of the four ways or rebirth.

Liberation from samsara is attained when the cycle of continuous rebirth is broken. Therefore renunciation is the aspiration wishing to attain freedom from the continuous cycle of rebirth under the control of karma and delusions. You can see that renunciation is an inner state to be developed, not an outer state. It has nothing to do with being poor or living in a cave. There are many people who are poor and live in caves who do not have renunciation.

When we develop renunciation as an inner state it doesn't mean that we have to give up our house or give up our friends and family and job and forth. What it means is we have to give up the attachment to samsaric happiness. We have to give up the craving for samsaric happiness. That is renunciation.

### **What is Cyclic Existence?**

Here maybe very briefly – what is cyclic existence or samsara. We have come across the term samsara and cyclic existence quite a few times. First of all samsara is the Sanskrit word for cyclic existence. What we term samsara or cyclic existence is continuity of the contaminated, afflicted aggregates. As you can see, even though we often refer to outside places as samsara, and even though we say we are reborn in samsara, actually samsara refers to our contaminated aggregates. To be reborn in samsara means to be reborn with those aggregates.

### **Aggregates**

Maybe I can make here a short remake about the term aggregates. A more expansive explanation can be found in the Abhidharma teachings. The aggregates are the five aggregates of form, feeling, recognition, compositional factors and consciousness. An aggregate is the total sum of its parts.

1. Form - the aggregate of form encompasses anything that is atomically based. The other four aggregates are mainly mental aggregates.
2. Feeling<sup>6</sup> within feeling we have the three basic feelings of happiness, suffering and equanimity.
3. Recognition<sup>7</sup> is the mental factor that recognizes the characteristics of the object and thus can discriminate it from other objects.
4. Compositional factors - the aggregate of compositional factors encompasses everything that is not contained in one of the other four aggregates. Here for example what is contained in the aggregate of compositional aggregates would be the various types of delusions – anger, attachment, ignorance, pride etc. They are all in that aggregate. Also, the various virtuous mental factors such as compassion, love and forth. They all fall into this aggregate of compositional factors. Anything that is awareness that is not in one of the other aggregates is one of the compositional factors.
5. Primary consciousness - the aggregate of primary consciousness encompasses the six types of main consciousnesses; i.e. eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, smell-consciousness, taste-consciousness, body-consciousness and mental consciousness.

As human beings we have five aggregates. When those aggregates are contaminated by the afflictions they are referred to as contaminated afflicted aggregates. They are called like that because they arise from the afflictions, they are related to the afflictions and because they are

the cause of future afflictions. Our actual samsara, our actual suffering place is an internal place. Our contaminated aggregates are the samsaric machine – first of all they come from the suffering, they are suffering, and they produce suffering. It is also the place where the suffering is experienced.

So the way that happens is the main topic of these tapes and I will go into it in more detail later. But I think we can definitely say samsara is not much fun.



#### THE METHOD FOR GENERATING RENUNCIATION.

We all want to attain the bliss of nirvana, but in order to do so we must first generate renunciation. If we do not have the wish to become free from our prison we will not attempt to break out. The only way to generate renunciation is to meditate on our sufferings. If we are in a constricting or confining situation, which causes us problems and sufferings, and which we experience against our wish, it will generate the wish to change that situation, the very first step to become free from that situation.

One reason is that quite often we choose suffering over happiness because of familiarity. We all want happiness. We have an inherent wish for happiness but because of our karmic baggage sometimes we experience situations that cause us suffering and somehow we seem to be unable to break out of that situation.

The first step of breaking out of the cycle of suffering is wanting to break out. Superficially we might have aversion to the suffering we are experiencing but deep down we have some kind of resistance against change. To generate a strong wish to change our situation we need to reflect on the various sufferings that our situation is causing us.

The only way to generate renunciation to cyclic existence is to meditate on our sufferings. That is why the Buddha had a pretty hard job. He had to teach us about things that we didn't want to hear. He had to educate us about our situation. Even though we might have some suffering, some problems in our life at the moment, actually we have not yet fully comprehended the extent of our suffering. We have not yet comprehended the extent of our samsara. Our suffering comes also in the guise of happiness or equanimity. Our situation is that we are in the prison without necessarily being aware that we are in the prison. Somebody has to make us aware of the fact that we are in a prison otherwise we won't generate the motivation to be free of that situation.

Much of our suffering comes in the guise of happiness or equanimity. As I mentioned previously, one of our delusions is to grasp onto suffering as happiness. If you think this is not possible what about the example of a drug addict. For a drug addict the high induced by the drug is happiness. That is the happiness they crave. An addict thinks the high induced by the drug is happiness. Otherwise they wouldn't crave it. But any sane person would look at the drug-induced person with disgust and won't want to have anything to do with it. One would see it as a brief transient state, contaminated in nature, harmful to both body and mind, inducing greater suffering once over and being the pathway to misery.

Therefore no sane person would regard drug-induced states as happiness and would want to have anything to do with it. I think this is how Superior beings and Buddhas view our transitory pleasure that we are craving. Just as a drug addict craves the drug, they have the same destructive effect on us. Even though the majority of you do not take drugs, there are still many things in life we regard as happiness even though in nature they are suffering, and which we crave very much because we regard them as happiness. Often we find that the things we grasp onto as happiness do not turn out to be happiness but turn out to be unsatisfactory and suffering in nature.

Suffering, its origin, its cessation and the path leading there are called the our Noble Truths. The reason is because they are perceived to be true by Superior beings. Superior beings are practitioners that have reached the path of seeing and above. They can see emptiness and the Four Noble Truths directly, just as we can see a table or the glass standing on it. They look at our situation from a higher and more perceptive point of view and can see the whole expanse of the mess we are in. They are not deluded as we are and can see things the way they really are. The truth of suffering, the truth of the origin of suffering, the truth of cessation and the truth of the path that leads to that cessation are perceived to be true by Superior or superior beings. Superior is the Sanskrit word for superior. Superior because they have reached the path of seeing that sees emptiness and the Four Noble Truths directly.

If we investigate with an open mind we will find that those four truths are reality. They are not just something made up by the mind. They are not just something that we have to believe in to benefit from them. They are features of our existence. That is why they are called truths. That is what the Buddha taught. All of the Buddha's teachings can be condensed into the Four Noble Truths. Because they are true the buddha dharma is as relevant and as applicable these days as it was 2500 years ago.

The Buddha's job and our teacher's job is first of all to make us aware of our situation of our suffering. Quite often a metaphor of a doctor is used for the Buddha. The disciples are like patients. The Buddha is like a very good doctor who can see sicknesses that are there even though the patient feels fine at the time. But then the Buddha has to give the patient the bad news. Then the patient generates the wish to take the medicine. If the doctor doesn't tell the patient about various problems he can see, even though the patient feels fine at the time, there can be various problems existing, various sicknesses already present. But if the doctor doesn't give the bad news to the patient, the patient won't get cured because they won't take the medicine.

We have to take courage and face our situation. Often western people think that Buddhism and meditation is about escaping from reality, but it is not. Buddhism is about becoming aware of and confronting our reality. Particularly our reality, both the positive aspects of our inner reality, our potential, our good sides, but also our problems. The reality of our problems and our suffering. Then maybe confronting our inner situation and working with it can have a liberating effect. After all Buddhists are known for their good humor and smiling faces even though they meditate on much suffering.

I am giving this as a little bit of a pep talk for you because normally we do not want to reflect on suffering. To some of the sufferings that are going to be mentioned later you will say, “Oh yes, that makes complete sense.” But some of them you might find a little bit too heavy or too difficult to reflect on. In our society we have become experts in escaping from reality. If someone talks about death, which is in fact the only thing that is certain in life, that person is regarded as morbid. We do not want to look at dead people. We are far removed that we find it surprising if someone dies. We find it very surprising if someone gets sick. Instead of understanding the nature of cyclic existence, instead of knowing, instead of expecting that something bad is going to happen while we are in cyclic existence. We are very naive and if something bad happens it comes as a great surprise. “Oh my god, that person has become very sick. How could that happen to that person.” Or we say, “Oh my god, that person has had an accident and died.” And “that person was young and always friendly. How could that happen? Having that type of reaction just shows our naivety. We are very naive about the situation of cyclic existence. If we would fully comprehend the situation of cyclic existence, then if something bad happens we would say. “Of course. It is bound to happen. After all we are in cyclic existence.”



## **MEDITATING ON SUFFERING AND THE ORIGIN OF SUFFERING**

### **1 CONTEMPLATING THE FAULTS OF SAMBARA, I.E. THE TRUTH OF SUFFERING**

#### **1.1 THE PURPOSE OF TEACHING THE TRUTH OF SUFFERING FIRST**

The first meditation is the meditation on the Truth of Suffering. Before one gets to the actual meditation it explains why the Four Noble Truths are taught in the sequence they are taught. Because the Truth of Origin is actually the cause. The Truth of Suffering is the effect. Since the cause is always preceding the effect, why did the Buddha teach the Truth of Suffering first and the Truth of Origin second. The Buddha taught that way from the point of view of one's individual practice. He taught the Four Noble Truths according to the sequence they have to be meditated upon. He taught them from the point of view of our own inner mental development, of our own psychological mental development.

If we do not meditate on suffering first and generate renunciation, how could we attain liberation? Renunciation is the root of liberation. In order to generate renunciation one has to meditate on suffering. The Buddha taught the Truth of Suffering first that we can overcome our conceptions of samsara being happiness. As long as we hold onto samsaric perceptions as being happiness we won't generate renunciation.

At the present time we probably think human existence as a whole is not too bad, with a few sufferings interspaced here and there. Even if one experiences very heavy suffering, since it finishes at the time of death after all it is not bad. And if you look at all the nice things in life, which are the perceptions of samsara, instead of regarding them as a prison, instead of regarding them as suffering, we regard them as happiness. The Buddha said that is a complete misconception. As long as we do not overcome that misconception we won't attain liberation.



The aim of these meditations is to gradually eliminate the conception of anything within cyclic existence as being desirable and happiness. Since the disciples are deceived by the nature of samsara and we think the samsaric perfections are happiness even though they are suffering, the Buddha taught first the Noble Truth of Suffering in order to overcome that misconception. Having generated the wish to become free of the ocean of suffering, the disciples then investigate the cause of samsara because they understand that they cannot stop samsara without eliminating its cause<sup>8</sup>.

By realizing our suffering we generate a wish to be free from the cause of our suffering. That is why the Buddha taught the Noble Truth of Origin second. Here the understanding is generated that samsara arises from contaminated karma which in turn arises from the afflictions such as anger, attachment, pride, competitiveness etc., which in turn arise from self-grasping, which is the root of the afflictions. Self-grasping is the root of the afflictions and from self-grasping arises the multitude of the other afflictions such as the many non-virtuous mental factors and the root delusions etc. Through those one creates contaminated karma. Then contaminated karma becomes the cause of further rebirth in cyclic existence.

When one understands that self-grasping can be eliminated because of being a wrong awareness, one knows it is possible to abandon samsara. As one then makes the pledge to attain the cessation that is free from samsaric sufferings, the Noble Truth of Cessation is taught third. After having reflected on our problems, on our suffering, we then have investigated the cause for our problem, for our suffering and have understood the cause here is contaminated karma and the delusions. Then, understanding the delusions for what they are, principally the root of the delusions, self grasping, for what it is, a wrong mind, basically a misconception, a misapprehension of reality, we then understand that it can be rectified. Misunderstandings can be rectified through understanding. Also the innate misunderstanding of grasping at a truly existent self can be rectified through the understanding of selflessness. When we have opposed this misconception grasping at the self of a person with understanding the selflessness of person, we have effectively cut off the root of cyclic existence, because we have taken away the main catalyst that causes or brings into effect the samsaric chain reaction. Without the catalyst of self-grasping the rest of the samsaric chain reaction won't happen and one won't experience any suffering.

By really understanding the second noble truth, the noble truth of the origin of suffering, we also understand the potential to become free from it. By understanding that we actually can become free from suffering and the cause of suffering we arrive at the understanding that we can attain cessation. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama always mentions, by reflecting on emptiness he gradually gained a very firm conviction that it is possible to attain liberation. Here one makes the actual determination, an inner pledge to attain liberation.

That is why liberation or cessation, the cessation of the first two Noble Truths is taught third. The Truth of Cessation is taught third. What is being ceased are suffering and the cause of suffering.

Here one question can be asked. Since the practitioner already generated the wish for cessation when meditating on the Truth of Suffering then cessation could also be taught second. But even though one generates a yearning for a cessation that has pacified sufferings by meditating on

the first Noble Truth, one has not yet understood the causes for samsara and therefore one also doesn't know that they can be abandoned. Therefore one hasn't yet taken cessation as the object of attainment and one hasn't yet determined to attain cessation. While we meditate on suffering of course we will generate the wish wanting to become free from that suffering. But it would be a mere wish, how nice it would be if I were free from those sufferings, those problems. I want to become free from those problems. But as we have not yet determined their cause and as we have not yet determined that we can become free from the cause of our sufferings, it will be just a more general, a wishing state. We have not yet made the actual determination that we are actually going to attain liberation. That we only do after having understood the noble truth of the origin of suffering. That is why the Truth of Cessation is taught third and not second.

After having determined to attain liberation, one wonders about the nature of the path that leads to that liberation and therefore the Noble Truth of the Path is taught fourth.

As it is taught by Maitreya in the Uttaratantra, 'sickness is to be known, the cause of sickness to be abandoned, abiding in happiness is the aim and the medicine to be relied upon. Likewise suffering, cause, cessation and path are to be known, to be abandoned, to be experienced and to be relied upon.'

This refers to what we mentioned before, that we ourselves are like a patient. First of all we have to understand our sickness. We have to understand our problem. The problem, the sickness is what has to be understood. The cause of the sickness is what has to be abandoned. In order to stop the sickness we have to abandon the cause for the sickness. The aim, what we want to attain, is happiness. That is what we are aiming for, abiding in happiness, perfect, valid happiness. The path is what we have to rely upon in order to attain that happiness.

In the same way we have to take the medicine according to the instructions of the doctor in order to be cured of our sickness, we have to practice the dharma in concordance with the Buddha's instruction and in concordance with our teacher's instructions in order to become free from our problems.

Here quite often, as in real life, we might experience certain symptoms without knowing what caused those symptoms. We go to the doctor and the doctor can determine the cause for our symptoms and then prescribe the appropriate medicine and then we will be cured if we take the appropriate medicine in accordance with the doctor's instructions. If we do not take the medicine we won't be cured. In order for us to be cured from the root of our problems we have to practice the dharma. We cannot expect to be cured from the problems if we do not practice the dharma. If you do not take the medicine the cure won't happen. We will only experience the result of dharma practice we are actually engaging in.

We can only experience the result of meditation we actually do. We won't experience the result of meditation we are only talking about, and we won't experience the result of meditations we know about, but we will only experience the result of dharma practice we actually do. Because cause and effect is true, because karma is true, if we take the medicine, if we do the dharma practice, then we will experience the result of the dharma practice. We create the cause we will experience the result. We do not create the cause; we will not experience the result. It is up to us.

Our own samsara and our own nirvana are within our own hand. What we have to do is take it into our own hands. Nobody can do it for us. We have to recognize that we have Buddha nature, we have to recognize that we have the ability to become enlightened, and therefore we have the possibility not only to generate great bliss and joy for ourselves, but we have the possibility to bring great bliss and happiness to others because as an enlightened being we can benefit others immeasurably. We just have to look at examples starting from Shakyamuni Buddha himself up to now the present teachers we have, such as the Dalai Lama and Lama Zopa Rinpoche. Once we become like them we can benefit others immeasurably. We have to recognize that we have that potential now and take our own destiny in our hands and practice the dharma, and in such a way attain enlightenment.

One obstacle might be that in our society we do not really have a very clear understanding of the happiness that we can attain. When we talk about the happiness of liberation, when we talk about the bliss of enlightenment, it doesn't mean very much to us. It doesn't give us great taste. But definitely our mind that has very great potential for happiness and for development. We have the potential to be happier human beings. We have the potential to worry less. We have the potential to be more positive. But then also we have the potential to attain the various types of bliss that can be induced through meditation. We have the potential to have limitless love and compassion.

If one doesn't have a natural revulsion for samsara by contemplating suffering, the wish to attain liberation will be mere words. Even though we might say 'I want to attain liberation, I want to attain enlightenment', it will be mere words as long as we have not generated the natural renunciation for samsara. Then whatever we do will become the Truth of Origin, source of suffering. The reason for that is that any karma we create without renunciation is contaminated karma that causes further rebirth in cyclic existence, in samsara. Contaminated karma can be both virtuous and non-virtuous. Even if we engage into dharma practice, if our dharma practice is not done on the basis of the motivation of renunciation then our dharma practice will not become the cause for liberation from cyclic existence.

The result that we attain through our meditation, the result that we attain through our dharma practice, completely depends on the motivation with which we engage into our dharma practice. For example, if we do certain practice such as the recitation of mantras, a certain sadhana or another type of meditation, or the very simple practice of meditating on the coming and going of the breathing, if you do those practices just with the motivation to attain the happiness of this life, that is the whole result we will get from that practice. If we recite one mala of OM MANI PEDME HUM with the motivation of happiness of this life, that is the result we will get. If we recite a mala of OM MANI PEDME HUM with the motivation wanting to attain happiness in the future life, that is the whole result we will get. If we recite a mala of OM MANI PEDME HUM with the motivation of renunciation wishing to attain liberation that is result we will get. Liberation. If we recite that mala of OM MANI PEDME HUM with the motivation of bodhicitta that recitation will become the cause of enlightenment. In fact, if we even recite just one OM MANI PEDME HUM but we do it with the pure intention of bodhicitta, that one recitation becomes the cause of enlightenment.

Whatever action we do if it is done with the motivation of bodhicitta it will become the cause of enlightenment. If it is done without any type of motivation it is questionable it will become the cause of enlightenment. In fact it probably won't become the cause for enlightenment. Of course there are certain actions which we refer to as natural virtuous karmas, meaning that even if we do them without any motivation there will still be some virtue, but whether that virtue will be the actual cause for enlightenment is questionable<sup>9</sup>.

According to Pabongka Rinpoche in "Liberation" it actually says it completely depends on the motivation whether the recitation of mantras becomes the cause for enlightenment or the cause for the lower realms. He gives the example of one practitioner who was practicing the highest yoga tantra of Hevajra, which is actually a sublime very special, profound method for attaining complete enlightenment within a very short lifetime of this degenerated age. The practice of Hevajra is a very profound special practice that can give enlightenment in a short lifetime. But there was one yogi who engaged in that practice with the wrong motivation. His practice lacked the motivation of bodhicitta. Because his practice lacked the motivation of bodhicitta, even though he was doing the practice of Hevajra, his practice of Hevajra didn't lead him to enlightenment. The result he attained was the result of a stream enterer, which is a result of the Hinayana path. From the point of view of what could have been attained and what was attained that yogi received a great loss by not combining his practice with the motivation of bodhicitta.

Here it says if our practice lacks the motivation of renunciation, whatever karma we create is contaminated karma that will only cause further rebirth in cyclic existence. It will not only not lead us to enlightenment, it will not even lead us to liberation from cyclic existence. If one doesn't understand that karma and delusions are the root of samsara by contemplating the Truth of Origin, one's practice will be like shooting an arrow without having identified the target. Our practice should be aimed at eliminating the cause of cyclic existence but this can only be done if we have actually identified the causes of cyclic existence. How can we aim our practice at eliminating the causes of cyclic existence if we have not identified those causes of cyclic existence? First we have to understand how karma and delusion are the root of all our problems and identify karma and delusions, and then we can direct our practice, our dharma practice, at overcoming karma and delusions. If we have not understood the truth of the Truth of Origin we won't be clear about the path leading to liberation. Because we will be confused about what has to be abandoned. In such a way our practice will become fruitless. It will be like taking medicine without knowing the exact causes for the sickness.

Also, if we have not identified suffering and it's cause, we won't know what cessation, freedom from those two, actually means. And as such our wish to attain that cessation, our wish to attain liberation, will be a mere hallucination.

In order for us to understand the nature of the path we have to understand the nature of the origin of suffering. This is very important. First of all, 'path' refers to an inner state, a mental state. Our virtuous mental states are the path leading us to liberation. They are mental states free from anger, attachment and ignorance. Mental states free from anger, attachment and ignorance are the path that is leading us to liberation. Why? Because anger, attachment and ignorance, particularly ignorance, and the karma we create because of those, are the causes for our problems. We need to generate the virtuous states in the mind that can oppose the

delusions and karma. Therefore, those virtuous states that will be used to overcome the delusions have to be free from the delusions.

Also, here it becomes important to exactly identify what the object of negation is. Self-grasping is the root of cyclic existence. Self-grasping is grasping at an inherently existent self. We need to identify that grasping within our mind. Only after having identified this grasping in our mind by having identified the apprehended<sup>10</sup> object of that grasping, then we can go about generating the wisdom that understands that this type of grasping is misapprehending reality. Only after having identified self-grasping can we understand that its apprehended object is non-existent. Through analysis we understand that the apprehended object of self-grasping is non-existent and in such a way understand emptiness. If we understand in such a way that self-grasping is a wrong mind, is a misconception, then we understand that liberation is possible. If we are not very clear about the object of negation, and if we are not very clear about what self-grasping actually means, and what it grasps at, then it will be very difficult for us to realize the absence of the apprehended object of self-grasping. This ties in with another subject of your study program, which talks about the importance of identifying the object of negation very clearly. That was just an aside.

Even though we have manifest suffering, which is referred to as the suffering of suffering, which is the actual physical and mental pain we experience, that is not all there is to the truth of suffering. We also have the suffering of change and all pervasive suffering. The suffering of change is suffering that comes in the guise of happiness and all pervasive suffering is suffering that comes in the guise of equanimity, happiness and actual suffering. As long as we have not clearly identified changeable suffering and all pervasive suffering we will not understand that true cessation is a state free from changeable suffering and all pervasive suffering.

For example, there are certain meditation techniques through which we attain certain concentrative absorptions. Once the practitioner has attained those concentrative absorptions they experience great bliss in their mind. Then they might think that great bliss they experience in their mind is the bliss of nirvana. Why? Because they have not really understood the nature of nirvana. If they understand the nature of nirvana they would understand that liberation has to be attained through realizing selflessness. That it cannot be attained through concentration alone. The practitioner has to understand that even the bliss that arises through meditation can be contaminated bliss. Bliss that is contaminated by the delusion and karma. Why? Because it is devoid of the realization of selflessness.

So that was a little bit of introduction into the Noble Truth of Suffering. Particularly here the emphasis being why the Noble Truth of Suffering is being taught first even though the actual sequence is that the cause comes first and the result second. The way the Four Noble Truths are generated is that first the Truth of Origin is generated. First we have karma and delusions. Out of those two we have first delusions and then karma. Within the delusions we have first self-grasping, then from self-grasping arise the multitude of the other delusions such as attachment, anger, pride, greed etc. Out of those we generate karma. Then that karma causes suffering. That is the sequence. The second noble truth, the Noble Truth of Origin comes first and the first noble truth, the Noble Truth of Suffering comes second. The same for the third and fourth Noble Truth.

First we practice the path and then through practicing the path we attain cessation. But even though their way of generating is in that way, the way we meditate on them, the way we understand them is different. First we understand suffering, that leads us to the cause of suffering, that leads us to the determination to attain cessation which in turn leads us to the truth of the path in order to attain that cessation.



## 1.2. ACTUAL MEDITATION ON TRUTH OF SUFFERING

### 1.2.1. CONTEMPLATING THE GENERAL SUFFERINGS OF CYCLIC EXISTENCE

#### 1.2.1.1. CONTEMPLATING THE EIGHT SUFFERINGS

Now we are going to start on the contemplations of the various sufferings. We are going to go through the eight sufferings, the six sufferings and the three sufferings. We are going to start with the eight sufferings.

The eight sufferings are:

- the sufferings of birth,
- aging,
- sickness,
- death,
- encountering the unpleasant
- being separated from the pleasant,
- not achieving one's desires even though one works for them
- The suffering of taking rebirth with contaminated aggregates.

#### **First Suffering: Birth**

With regards to the first suffering, in the West we quite often do not regard birth as being a suffering. In Buddhism it is taught that birth is suffering. It is taught in detail, even though I may not go into all the details. It is important not to get too upset and to look at it with an open mind and check up if what was taught in Buddhism could be concordant with reality, or whether it is just fiction. Definitely there is no doubt that birth is a great suffering for the mother, why should it not be a great suffering for the child as well, since both mother and child are closely interrelated during that time of pregnancy and birth.

One important thing is, if we can accept that birth is suffering then it will generate in our mind the motivation not wanting again to take rebirth with contaminated aggregates. This is a very important motivation, because it goes into the direction of wanting to obtain liberation from cyclic existence. As we said before, cyclic existence basically refers to one's contaminated aggregates, and taking rebirth in cyclic existence means taking rebirth with the contaminated aggregates. If we can generate a motivation not wanting to take rebirth with contaminated aggregates at all, that is taking us in the right direction.

First of all it lists five points why birth is regarded as suffering.

- The birth process itself is suffering
- The place of birth, which is the aggregates, is suffering
- Our birth is a source for the generation of suffering
- Birth is the source for the afflictions to arise
- Separation is the nature of birth

**First** of all **the birth process** itself is said to be **suffering**. Here one looks at the various aspects of being cramped up for a long period in a small space etc. But I do not want to go into those too much.

The **second** one is that **the place of birth**, which is the aggregates, is suffering. One aspect of taking rebirth is when the consciousness goes from the intermediate state to the fertilized egg in the mother's womb. That is one aspect of the birth process. The place where this consciousness takes rebirth is one's own five contaminated aggregates.

When we take rebirth with the five contaminated aggregates we will be confronted with two situations. First of all unworkability or non-flexibility, and also loss of control. What this refers to is because our mind takes rebirth under control of karma and delusion, after having taken rebirth, our mind is not very workable, also our body is not very workable, meaning we do not really have any great control over them. If you think about it, even though we are from a free country, can do what we want and are independent human beings, actually we are very limited. Also our physical bodies are very limited. If we do not eat a certain amount every day, if we do not take enough fluid regularly, then very quickly our physical bodies will deteriorate. Also our physical bodies are very limited in what they can do. They are very fragile. We cannot go everywhere with our physical body. As soon the situation changes slightly we need protective clothing, we need strong protection. Even though we might think we have our body under control and that we are free to do whatever we want, this is actually not the case.

Once one has attained high levels of concentrative meditation and one has attained physical and mental pliancy or physical and mental workability, the physical body is very light, one doesn't experience the physical heaviness that we experience at the present time quite often. The physical body will always be under our control. Also, at that time one can do certain feats that otherwise would be regarded as supernatural if one doesn't have the right understanding and understand how they come about.

I will tell this story to make it more entertaining. In one of those books they made out of those mind science meetings western scientists have with His Holiness the Dalai Lama on a regular basis there is one professor from one of the more prestigious universities who was working in the mind body department. He was investigating the effect meditation can have on the physical health of human beings. For that purpose he travelled to India so he could analyze the experienced yogis who could go into deep meditative states, investigate them while they were doing their meditation. One experience he reported and taped on video.

He went to Manali in wintertime. Manali is in the Himalayas and in winter gets very cold. There in the night he met a few yogis. Those yogis were completely undressed. Already for us that would be very difficult – in a very cold winter night in the Himalayas to sit there undressed and physically not start to shiver and shake. But those yogis were not really affected. On top of that they soaked cotton cloth in ice water and wrapped themselves in the cotton cloth that had been soaked in ice water. For us we would turn blue, start to shiver and get sick at minus temperatures. Those yogis not only didn't start to get cold, shiver or turn blue, they seemed to get warmer. After twenty minutes they had dried those cotton sheets with their body heat. That is because they practiced the meditation called the meditation on inner heat, where the yogi can increase and make use of the inner body heat. Here the aim is not just to keep the body warm. It would be easier to light a fire or buy a heater. But there is a deeper purpose for which that meditation is used. One of the more visible effects of that meditation is that those yogis have control of the heat in their body to that extent, and this is something that has been observed by this professor. That shows a little bit of the type of potential we have.

When we are reborn we experience a lack of workability and a lack of control. Also we experience a lack of control because we are not able to do whatever we want. First of all our body, our five aggregates, were generated from the delusions, and in dependence on those five aggregates the delusions are generated again, abide and increase.

We do not have very much control over that process. We are born with the seeds for afflictive mental states. We are born with the seeds for destructive mental patterns, disturbing mental patterns, disturbing mental thoughts to arise during our lifetime. Even if we say we do not want that to happen or we do not want to be like that, it still happens, it still is like that. That is why it is said when we are born we experience a lack of workability or pliancy. Our mind and body are not pliant. They are not flexible. We cannot bring them to do whatever we want them to do. In such a way we experience a loss of control.

**Thirdly**, wherever we are reborn in any of the three realms, the desire realm, the form realm or even the highest realm the formless realm, **our birth is a source for the generation of suffering**. Why? First of all our birth becomes the basis for aging, sickness and death, and also it becomes the occasion for our delusions to increase. Wherever we take rebirth, that rebirth by itself provides the basis, provides the platform, for sickness, old age and death to occur. Basically it comes with the package one might say.

**Fourth, birth is also the source for the afflictions to arise**. By being born, because we bring the latency with us, when we meet agreeable objects, pleasant objects, we generate attachment. If we meet with unpleasant objects we generate aversion. If we meet with neutral objects we generate ignorance. Because of having been born with the five aggregates, whenever we meet with the five objects it causes a particular mental response. Various afflictions arise without any control.

**Fifth**, last but not least, **separation is the nature of birth**. When we are born, implicit with that is that we also have to die. When we take a body, implicitly it means we also have to leave that



body behind sooner or later. That is a suffering, because our body is one of our great attachments in this life.

If we can stop rebirth with the five contaminated aggregates, e.g. Superior bodhisattvas do not experience the suffering of birth. Superior bodhisattvas do not experience a loss of control and pliancy. They experience mental and physical pliancy and the bliss of mental and physical pliancy, and also, because they have their mind under control, having gained mastery over their mind, they can do anything as long as it is within the realm of karma.

## **Second Suffering: Ageing**

- The good body changes
- The degeneration of vitality and strength
- Degeneration of the sense powers
- Ability to enjoy sense objects degenerates
- Degeneration of life span

Then we come to the next suffering, aging. Again this is a critical suffering, especially in the west. It is like when a person has reached a certain age it is almost considered impolite to ask them how old they are. This is a particular western trait. In eastern culture the older people get more respect the older they become. In the west we are so obsessed with youth and beauty we do not want to accept that we are growing older. It happens that people who have reached the ripe age of sixty or seventy they still think they need to behave like teenagers. That is like the thing to do. Instead of being a little bit dignified and maybe make use of our time for dharma practice, we are still trying to be like teenagers. I personally feel we can learn from the Indian point of view, where many old people, once they have reached a certain age, once they have brought up their children and have reached retirement, say, 'I have had enough of the worldly life and now I have maybe another ten, fifteen, twenty years to live, those years I will live practicing the dharma. I will devote to dharma practice.'

Be it as it may, ageing is a suffering that we cannot escape. The only way we can escape the suffering of ageing is if we die young. Here we experience **the degeneration of our good body**. Whatever good appearance we might have had while we were young definitely fades away with age. Also, what one might call the beauty of youth over time goes away. People who are beautiful to look at when they are thirty or even forty, once the ageing process goes on and on that beauty goes away, they get wrinkles etc etc. This is a suffering that is shared by everyone. The more we are attached to our body the greater we will suffer. If we can accept from the outset that ageing is part of the package of being born in samsara, then even though we might not like it, we might be able to at least accept it.

**Second is the degeneration of vitality and strength.** This is something that is commonly experienced. As one becomes older definitely one's body is less strong, one has less vitality, one is not able to do the same things did one did while one was young. We can observe it in sports very easily. Once an athlete becomes thirty, thirty-five they cannot do any more what they did when they were twenty-five. Then they are overtaken by athletes in their twenties. That is

because even already being thirty, thirty-five one already loses a great deal of physical strength and vitality, generally speaking. There is definitely that trait and definitely as one gets older one will experience loss of vitality and strength.

**Thirdly** we will experience **degeneration of sense powers**. As one gets older e.g. the eye sense power might decrease. One is not able any more to see as well as one used to. Or the hearing power, the ear sense power decreases, and one is not able any more to hear as clearly as one used to. Especially if one used to listen to a lot of loud music when one was young. Joking. Even though we have five sense powers, when we talk about the degeneration of the five sense powers particularly it refers to the eye sense power that degenerates and the ear sense power. I do not know if our sense of smell, taste and tactile consciousness degenerates as we get older.

One will also experience the degeneration of one's mental sense power. We experience the degeneration of the five physical sense powers and we experience the degeneration of the mental sense power. Even my teacher Geshe Dawa says now he is not able any more to meditate as strongly as he used to do when he was younger. His visualization is not clear any more. From my side I believe he is just saying this to inspire me to make use of my time now while I am still in my thirties.

Also one's ability to enjoy life, one's **ability to enjoy sense objects degenerates**. As one becomes older one's ability to enjoy the things that one enjoyed when one was younger strongly decreases. E.g., it can happen that one cannot eat any more the things one used to like. Or one cannot do the physical activities that one liked to do. There are many things. If one's ability, if one was only able to obtain happiness through experiencing various types of sense pleasure and various types of excitement, one will have a hard time as one gets older.

When one is younger one might engage into all sorts of exciting activities, one might go to the gym, one might go various types of sport, one might do sky diving whatever. As one gets older one will be less and less able to do those activities. When one is younger one might get joy drinking coffee, eating a great variety of foods. As one gets older one might not be able to drink any more coffee because it doesn't agree with one any more. One might not be able to digest all types of food. One might have to stick to certain types of food that one might not actually want to eat etc. There are many ways in which one's ability to enjoy sense objects and samsaric happiness decreases as one gets older.

If one has the ability to generate mental happiness one will not be too bothered by the aging process. If one is mentally happy, if one is not dependent on samsaric perfections to be happy, it is probably a different matter.

Finally, but not least, one experiences a **degeneration of life span**. From the moment we are born our life span degenerates, but that becomes obvious the older we become. We can observe it. People who are very old quite often need more sleep. Death is more imminent.

With regards to suffering of aging a lot can be said, but here I will read what Milarepa said,

'One, getting up is like pulling a stake out of the ground;  
Two, walking as if sneaking up on a bird,  
Three, sitting down spilling out of a ripped sack,  
Grandmother, at the time when these three come together,  
Your illusory body is a sad sight indeed.'

When we are older we cannot jump up like we used to out of any position, but getting up we are quite stiff and even getting up from a chair might take great effort. We will walk like stalking birds means we will walk softly. The strong vital energetic walk one used to have when one was younger has gone away.

When we sit down we sort of sink into a chair. Not sitting upright with vitality and strength.

Milarepa also said,

'Externally, skin that is like one great wrinkle,  
Internally, a skeleton without flesh or blood,  
In-between, senile, mute, deaf, with a vacant expression,  
Grandmother, at the time when these three come together,  
You will look like a wrathful ugly hag.'

Often we see bones stick out, as one gets older. Veins appear clearly under the skin etc. The third line refers to the degeneration of the sense powers.

It is as it says from the Great Play Sutra,

'Age makes a beautiful body ugly,  
Age takes your charisma and robs your strength,  
Age takes happiness and torments,  
Age kills and also takes away your good complexion.'

If we were to experience overnight all the effects of aging as a young person it would shock us. It would become impossible for us to bear. This is very good to think about. Even though it might be unpleasant to reflect upon, on the other hand why not, since aging is definitely a part of our reality. By reflecting on the suffering of our own aging we will generate renunciation. We will generate the motivation not wanting to experience that ever again.

Here, if we include that we won't just experience aging once in this life, but we will experience aging again and again, continuously until we attain liberation from cyclic existence, then that takes away the thought "Oh I might be able to put up with it, as it is only once in this life time". I have to say sorry. It is not just once in this lifetime, but we will experience the process of aging continuously in each life, up until the point when we have finally got our act together and attained liberation. The meditation on aging can be a very good motivator for wanting to attain liberation. It is not putting down old people. It is just highlighting what is true.

### Third Suffering: Sickness

Then thirdly we have the suffering of sickness. Everybody experiences some sickness in his or her lifetime. One can say 100% from the point of human beings; most human beings experience sickness and disease in their lifetime. This I am 100% sure. Probably one can say all human beings experience sickness and disease in their lifetime. Of course to various degrees, but human life is not a life free from sickness. Once we get sick, that can have very great effect on our life and cause us great suffering.

- The nature of the body changes
- Suffering and mental unhappiness increase and will become the better part of our experience
- One doesn't want the things that ordinarily give one pleasure
- We have to do things that we dislike
- Becoming separated from ones life-force

**The nature of the body changes.** When we become sick our body becomes weaker. It can change the shape of our body.

When we are sick, **suffering and mental unhappiness increase and will become the better part of our experience.** This is in the light of someone who doesn't practice the dharma. In the light of someone who is not able to practice Mahayana thought transformation first of all the person experiences physical sickness, physical suffering. On top of that the person experiences mental distress and mental suffering. The more one is sick the more those two sufferings will dominate our experience.

Once we are sick **we do not want those things that ordinarily give us happiness** because we cannot enjoy our normal pleasures when we are sick. Or we may not be allowed to enjoy them. For example when we have a cold, a fever, even though normally certain types of food might give us great pleasure, at the time of having a strong cold we do not want to eat those foods. In the case of migraine, I used to regularly get migraines; I couldn't eat or drink anything. Often one is not allowed to eat and drink certain things, the things one is not allowed to eat and drink during sickness are the things one likes. And on the contrary we have to eat and drink what we dislike.

When we are sick we also cannot do many other things that normally give us happiness. We may not be able to go out dancing, or go out to watch movies, or go out to have fun with our friends. There are many things that fall away if we become very sick.

**We have to experience what we dislike when we are sick.** We dislike suffering. We dislike problems. But when we are sick we have to experience them without choice. We might have to eat and drink what we do not want. We have to take pills we do not want. They might have some side effects. We have to lie in bed all the time and forth.

The final result of sickness is it can **separate one from one's life force.** If we have a fatal illness it will separate us from our life force.

Here it is also good to think about the potential to become sick. We are sometime naive about our reality. If you are a person who is experiencing some sickness or has experienced some sickness, you can relate to that point easily I think. But if at the present time we do not experience a heavy sickness and in our life have not really experienced a heavy sickness, we might find it difficult to relate to this point. We may not want to relate to this point. However, because we are born with contaminated aggregates, there is no telling what will happen to us in the future.

Every person that got very sick, they all thought I am never going to become sick. Nobody thinks 'this and this is going to happen to me'. They do not have some type of fore warning or sixth sense that something is going to happen. It doesn't happen like that. They get up in the morning, go about their day, make their plan for the day and then go to the doctor and find out they have cancer. Nobody has some kind of sixth sense – 'I am going to get cancer'. Nobody wants to have cancer. The cancer just comes along like that. There is a very great uncertainty regarding our physical health. There is a great certainty that most likely we are going to become sick. While we are in cyclic existence we should expect to become sick. To live in cyclic existence and not to expect to become sick is a fantasy.

If you go into a dangerous part of town, where people are constantly mugged, robbed, beaten up etc., what do we have to expect? We have to expect those things. If we go into the dangerous part of town and something bad happens we go 'Oh my god, how could it happen to me? I didn't expect anything. I didn't do anything.' That is very unrealistic.

Quite often we are like the Buddha. When the Buddha went out from the palace and saw a sick person lying on the side of the road, he asked his coach driver 'what happened to that person?' The coach driver explained, 'that is a sick person.' The Buddha asked the coach driver, 'what is a sick person?' The coach driver explained, 'when you are sick you feel such and such, experience suffering and forth.' The Buddha was shocked. He had never seen a sick person before. He had never experienced sickness. He had lived in his pleasure palace provided by his king father. We would like to live in that pleasure palace, blocking out all the unpleasant aspects of our reality. Then, when those aspects of our reality confront us it comes as a surprise. We act very surprised. 'Oh my god, that person has a heavy disease. How could this happen?' Instead of saying, 'Of course, we are in cyclic existence. We have tons and tons of unpurified karma. We are under the control of karma and delusion. Of course we are going to become sick. In fact it is a great surprise if we do not become sick. If we go into a dangerous place it is surprise if nothing happens to us. It is no surprise if something happens.'

We should not think about the suffering of sickness just from the point of view of this life thinking, 'I might be able to put up with it for this life span.' But you should also think about it from the point of view of many lives. Think about the various types of sickness that exist, that you hear about on TV, that you might see when you visit the hospital. Reflect on how there is no disease that we have not had yet in our past lives. Also, we have within our continuum the potential to experience all those different sicknesses that exist in the world, both in this life and in future lives.

## **Fourth Suffering: Death**

- Becoming separated from ones beautiful perfect possessions
- Becoming separated from ones nice relatives
- Becoming separated from ones circle of friends
- Becoming separated from ones good perfect beautiful body
- Experiencing heavy suffering, both physical and mental

When we die we experience the loss of our most prized possessions. We become separated from our relatives. We become separated from our friends and acquaintances. We even have to separate from our body. We have the actual suffering experiences of the death process.

If we just think about the first four, becoming separated from our possessions, relatives, friends and body. Just try to imagine how it might be to go on a journey where we have to leave everything behind. Would we be happy? Would we be able to do so? We would have to believe we are leaving it behind forever. Here the forever aspect is very important. Once we die we do not come back as the same person. We won't have those possessions ever, ever again. All the possessions we may spend a great deal of effort accumulating in this life, and to which we become very attached, to the point of getting upset if even one possession breaks. How would we feel if we had to leave behind all those possessions without any choice? That is one thing to reflect upon.

Also we become separated from our relatives, our children, if they are still alive, our father and mother, our children's children. We become separated from all of those. We become separated from our wife or husband. How would we feel now if we had to go somewhere and live somewhere without ever being able to see our near and dear one's again. When we die, definitely, without any choice we have to leave them behind.

All our friends and acquaintances who now provide a source for our happiness, entertainment, comfort, sense of stability etc, we also have to leave them all behind. Our house, our car, our bank account, everything has to stay behind.

Even our body, which we have cherished throughout our lifetime, we have to leave behind. Throughout our lifetime we have cherished our body quite often as our most cherished possession. We clean it daily, sometimes several times daily. Sometimes we do not just clean it for the purpose of avoiding bad smell and looking unpleasant, but we also polish it up on a daily basis, making it look pleasant and appealing as much as possible. We try to dress it nicely. Often we go to the gym and do other exercises to give it a nice shape, a nice tone. We try to give our body the right food. The amount of time we spend on our body throughout our lifetime is incredibly actually, the amount of time, energy and attention. If we were to spend that amount of effort that we spend on our body on becoming enlightened, we would probably now be already enlightened.

But then after all of that, at the time of death, we have to leave our body behind. At that time our body says, 'ok now you have to go alone, I stay behind.' There is nothing more we can do about

it. This is actually, from the point of view of having to give up an object of attachment, very frightening. But also because we strongly identify with our body, quite often there will also be a sense of lost identity when we die. That is also a very strong suffering. Like going down a black hole, one has to leave everything behind.

Then there are various sufferings associated with death that come from losing possessions that we are attached to, but there are also the various sufferings of the death process itself. Gradually one loses physical strength, one loses one's ability to see, hear. One loses one's ability to think clearly. Then, depending on our karma, if we have not lived a virtuous life we will have a very unpeaceful and suffering death. Visions appear to the person, the person might see himself or herself as being threatened by various animals or beings. All together I think one can definitely say that death is not a pleasant experience. Being cut off from everything that one is attached to, that is near and dear and close to us.

Not going through it only once. Thinking, 'Oh I might be able to put up with it once.' But if you think about having to die again and again and again. Not only ten times, not only a hundred times. But thousands of times. Because our mental continuum goes on and on and on. As we said before, as long as we do not make an effort to get out of cyclic existence we do not attain liberation. As long as we have not attained liberation we will take another rebirth. Death is implicit in rebirth.

On the contrary, for the person who has practiced the dharma and done lots of meditation practice, death can become the path to liberation. For the real dharma practitioner death is a very pleasant experience and they can use the death process, when the clear light mind of death manifests, as the path to liberation.

We have those four sufferings, birth, aging, sickness and death.

### **Fifth Suffering: Encountering the Unpleasant**

Then we come to the next suffering, which is the suffering of encountering the unpleasant. That means we meet with unpleasant circumstances, we meet with enemies, disease, evil spirits, lawsuits, thieves etc. Basically one can say that while one is in cyclic existence one will always encounter unfortunate circumstances. We will always encounter problems. That is why it is also important to practice Mahayana thought transformation. Lama Zopa in his Transforming Problems into the Path says that without practicing Mahayana thought transformation one won't become enlightened, one won't be able to practice the dharma. Why? We will experience problems. Problems and sufferings are part of the package of being in cyclic existence.

We will encounter hunger, we will encounter thirst, and we will encounter the suffering of heat and cold. We will encounter the suffering of being tired. We will encounter relationship problems. We will encounter problems with our boss. We will encounter problems with our neighbors. We will encounter problems with our children. While we are in cyclic existence we will definitely meet with the unpleasant.

## **Sixth Suffering: Separation from the Pleasant**

- Being miserable because of thinking about ones separation from close friends
- Wailing because of the above
- Becoming sick because of the above
- Becoming depressed by remembering the qualities of nice places and wishing to be there
- Not having enough money and forth

We will always be separated from the pleasant. While we are in cyclic existence we will experience separation from close friends and relatives. Who has during their lifetime not been separated at least once from close friend or relative and suffered as a consequence.

We will also become depressed by thinking about beautiful places. We have all gone on holidays many times and then later, by being separated from the beautiful place where we would like to be, we again experience suffering and become depressed.

We are separated from the material situation we would like to have. We do not have as much as we would like to. We are lacking materially. There is something not quite right in our situation. There are various ways we are separated from the pleasant.

This is just being in the nature of cyclic existence.

## **Seventh Suffering: Not Achieving One's Desires Though Working For Them**

Not achieving one's desires even though one works for it. Here the same points apply as in the sixth suffering. We are not getting a good job, promotion, even though we are working very hard. We have no success even though we do the best from our side in a relationship. There are one thousand and one ways that samsara does not turn out the way we want it to be, even though from our side we put in a lot of effort. That we do not achieve what we desire even though we put in lots of effort is one problem of cyclic existence.

Here the problem lies with us looking for happiness in samsaric perfection.

Deep down we want happiness, every body wants happiness. We look, but there is no happiness to be found within samsaric perfection. Therefore, whatever we do is already sort of doomed to fail. Also, because we do not have any control over cyclic existence, just as the farmer might fertilize the field very well, plant the field very well etc., the crop might still turn out bad, because he doesn't have any control over the weather. Also, because of karma, from our side we might put lots of effort into a relationship; still the relationship doesn't turn off very well. Or we might work our butt off, to speak, work very hard, and still we might not get the promotion we actually deserve. Or, even though we went to school, we have all the qualifications, went to university, fully qualified, we cannot find a good job.

There are many, many ways in which one doesn't achieve what one desires even though one works very hard for it.



## **Eighth Suffering: Taking Rebirth With Contaminated Aggregates**

- Inducing the suffering of future lives
- Becoming the basis for the suffering of sickness, aging and forth.
- Becoming the vessel for the suffering of suffering
- Becoming the vessel for the suffering of change
- Being born in the nature of pervasive compounded suffering

Last but not least, the eighth suffering of taking rebirth with contaminated aggregates. Just by taking rebirth with contaminated aggregates we induce the suffering of future lives. In order to understand how this works one has to have understanding of the twelve interdependent links. Basically, because we take rebirth with contaminated aggregates we take rebirth with the seeds for the generation of the delusions. By meeting with pleasant objects we generate attachment. By meeting with unpleasant we generate aversion. In either of those two cases we generate a non-virtuous karma, which then acts as the cause for future rebirth and further suffering.

So just by being reborn with the contaminated aggregates one induces future rebirth and future suffering in cyclic existence. Here the motivation we try to generate is 'I definitely do not want to take one more rebirth with the contaminated aggregates. For that purpose I have to practice the path'. Of course we will always take rebirth in the future. Bodhisattvas take rebirth. Buddhas take rebirth all the time. But they do not take rebirth with contaminated aggregates.

Enlightened beings, even though they might look like a human being, act like a human being, with suffering and problems, do not actually experience suffering and problems. Suffering and problems have to be experienced internally. The feeling of suffering is internal. If we do not have any non-virtuous karma to ripen as the mental experience of suffering we won't experience any suffering. A person who takes rebirth with uncontaminated aggregates won't experience any suffering.

Further, the contaminated aggregates become the basis for the experience of sickness, aging and death in this life. They become the vessel for the experience of the suffering of suffering. They become the vessel for the experience of the suffering of change. They become the vessel for the experience of pervasive, compounded suffering. Because we have contaminated aggregates we experience suffering of suffering and we experience suffering of change and also pervasive, compounded suffering.

Those three sufferings will be explained in more detail later I won't go into them now. This completes the eight sufferings.

Now, when we meditate on those eight sufferings, we should do it preceded by the seven-limb practice and request to the guru, having taken refuge etc. When we sit down to meditate, even though it is not single pointed meditation, we should still focus only on the object of our contemplation and not let the mind wander off to other objects. The realizations of the path can only be generated on the basis of a calm and focused mind. The more calm and focused our mind can be the more effective our meditation can be.

Many of those sufferings I have gone through are quite subtle and maybe difficult to understand. Some are obvious and we will be able to relate to immediately and some not.

One problem we have in the west is we do not have this concept of perfect happiness. Many of us might have the idea that suffering is such an integral part of life, that the delusions are such an integral part of life, that they are necessary in order to have happiness. Like saying we cannot have happiness without having suffering. Of course, generally what is happiness will always be determined in relation to something else that is suffering. But from the point of view of one's own personal experience it is not necessary to have suffering in order to be able to experience happiness. True happiness in fact is happiness that does not degenerate. We all do more or less wish for true and perfect happiness. Even those who say, 'I want to have some suffering in my life I can appreciate happiness better.' The fundamental idea is wanting to have the best quality of happiness. They think they can have the best happiness if they have a little bit of suffering.

Fundamentally what we all want is the best happiness. Unfortunately in the west we do not have the concept that it is possible to attain a state where one has perfect bliss and happiness all the time. So, we shouldn't think of the bliss of enlightenment or liberation as something boring that might bore us over time. It is a type of happiness I think that one will never get tired of.

When we are now presented with this idea of liberation and enlightenment, and the concept of perfect happiness, we might find it difficult to relate to. But slowly, slowly over time, by understanding the nature of our mind and understanding that we have buddha nature, it will become more comprehensible to us.



#### 1.2.1.2. CONTEMPLATING THE SIX SUFFERINGS

So then we go onto the next set of suffering, which is called the six sufferings. The six sufferings are:

- the suffering of indefiniteness,
- the suffering of dissatisfaction,
- the suffering of abandoning one's body again and again,
- taking rebirth again and again,
- moving constantly between high and low and
- Being friendless.

#### **First Suffering: Suffering of Indefiniteness**

First of all regarding the suffering of indefiniteness. There is no definiteness to cyclic existence both from the point of view of one life and many lives. Whether you look at it from the point of view of just this life or from the point of view of all our past lives and all our future lives, there is no definiteness in cyclic existence.

Just from the point of view of this life the only thing that is definite is that you are going to die. Being born means to die, that one has to die in the future. But that is the only thing that is definite. Even here the time of death is not certain. We are not sure when we are going to die. But apart from that what is definite? Is it definite that we will always be healthy in our life? No, there is no definiteness with regards to that. Is it definite that we will always have our parents around? No, it is not because they are going to die. Is it definite that we will always be together with the partner that we are with now? No, that is also not definite. We just need to look around to see how easily that changes.

How easily friends can turn into enemies. How easily enemies can turn into friends. Is it very definite that we will regard the person we regard now with dislike, always like that? No, in fact that person could become our best friend in the next year.

Will we always have the job we have now, the income we have now? No, there is nothing definite. It has been repeatedly been the experience of many people that through slight change of circumstances a situation that seems very stable and enduring changes just like that.

From the point of view of many lives there is no definiteness in cyclic existence. Our parents of this life become our enemies in the next life. Our enemies of this life become our friends in the next life etc. There is the story where Shariputra passed by a house. In that house the father of the person living in the house used to eat fish from a pool behind the house. Then the father died and was reborn as a fish in that pool. The house owner's mother was very attached to the house. When she took rebirth she took rebirth as the house owner's dog. The father became a fish in the pond and the mother became the dog. The house owner's enemy, who had been killed for raping the house owner's wife, was reborn as the house owner's son. The house owner had an enemy who had raped his wife, who then got killed for that rape. Because of being attached to the house owner's wife he took rebirth as the house owner's son. As the son of the woman he had raped in the previous life.

Then what happened? The son went to the pool and fished and caught the fish that had been the house owner's father in the previous life and killed it. Then while he ate the meat, the dog, which was his mother, ate the fish bones and was beaten by her son. The little son, who was actually his enemy, was sitting on his knee. When he saw this Shariputra said,

'He eats his father flesh and beats his mother,  
He carries the enemy he killed on his lap,  
The wife clings to her husband's bones,  
Samsara is hilarious.'

So whether we look at it from the point of view of one life or from the point of view of many lives, there is nothing definite in samsara.

## **Second Suffering: No Satisfaction**

Then we have the second of the six sufferings, which is that we won't experience satisfaction while in cyclic existence. The second suffering is the suffering of dissatisfaction, of not knowing satisfaction. There is no contentment to be found in experiencing samsaric happiness. No

matter how much we experience them, we are never satisfied. On the contrary, we seem to need more and more. It is like trying to satisfy thirst with salt water. Samsaric happiness is very transient, over in an instant, like the last moment of a candle flame. Once they are gone they are irreversibly lost. Once they are over they are like a dream one has had, a mere memory. This is a very subtle point to understand.

If we would really understand the happiness's we are normally placing our hope in is giving us only a fleeting experience of pleasure but will never be able to give us lasting happiness, then we wouldn't be attached to them, crave them, follow them. At the present moment transitory pleasures are all we know, our only method for achieving happiness, therefore our craving for them is overwhelming. If we would reflect on their nature, that first of all they are transitory, do not last very long. And once they have outlived their life, they are over without any chance of experiencing them again. Of course we can experience a similar pleasure again. We can try to repeat the experience, but that one particular experience we had will never come again in the future. Therefore we can think about how many pleasures we have had in our life, how many times have we eaten good food. How many times have we listened to nice music. How many times have we had other types of pleasure. How many times did we go to nice places, to movies, to nice restaurants etc. There are many things. Still, after having experienced those pleasures in this life and uncountable times if we include this life and all our past lives, at the present moment where are we? Still dissatisfied, still looking for happiness.

That is proof that samsaric happiness doesn't give satisfaction. And by experiencing samsaric happiness we will not become more satisfied. Actually it is to the contrary. The more we experience samsaric happiness, the more we seem to crave it. The more we seem to need it. If we have a certain income we need a greater income. We want a greater income. If we have that greater income we still want more. If we have one car soon we might want two cars. People who have a million dollars want two or three million dollars. If we have one child we want two or three children. There is no happiness in samsaric perfections.

What seems to happen is, the more we allow our mind to indulge in samsaric happiness, it seems the more our mind degenerates. It is a very contradictory, confusing aspect of cyclic existence, that the very things that promise us happiness, the very things that we expect to make us happy, actually do the opposite and give us more suffering.

This point of never being able to gain satisfaction is a very subtle point. It is very important to understand. Of course, we might have the attitude, 'Oh yes, I am happy with cyclic existence, I am happy with my life, I have this etc etc.' But the question is, are we really happy?

Also again we shouldn't just look at it from the point of view of one life. We should look from the point of view of many lives. Will us experiencing a certain amount of pleasure in this life, will that finally satisfy us? Will that stop samsara? No, it will not stop samsara. Samsara will go on and on and on. As long as we are in cyclic existence we will not find satisfaction.

### **Third Suffering: Abandoning One's Body Again and Again**

Then we have the third suffering of abandoning one's body again and again. Already before we talked about the suffering of death. Here it says we abandon our body again and again. So, we do not just die once, but we go through the death process many, many times over again and again. As it says from Nagarjuna's letter,

'Having attained the extremely great happiness and bliss of the god realms,  
And the bliss without attachment of a Brahma,  
One again becomes the fuel for the fires in hell -  
Reliably one is continuously looking for suffering.

So, we have had many past lives, that basically there is nothing that we have not already experienced in a past life. If we reflect on that it will also cause tiredness and revulsion with the process of cyclic existence.

### **Fourth Suffering: Taking Rebirth Again and Again**

Fourth we have the suffering of taking birth again and again. Here Nagarjuna says,

'The earth won't suffice for a mountain of juniper seeds  
For each meeting with a mother, accounting for each body.'

We have taken rebirth already many times that even if you would make a small ball of earth for every time we took rebirth we would use up all the earth that makes up our planet and that wouldn't be enough. To understand the reason for that we have to reflect on the continuity of past and future lives, how we have taken already countless past lives. Also, how we in the future, as long as we are in cyclic existence, again and again take more rebirths.

There is not the slightest suffering that we have not experienced yet, while we were in those rebirths. We might now look around us and think our situation is very safe and sound and permanent, and that the sufferings of others that we see them experiencing in other countries or also on other levels, such as animals, has nothing to do with us. But in fact the only thing that is separating us from experiencing those sufferings is the coming and going of our breathing. When the coming and going of our breathing stops we will be thrown by our karma into a future life and because we do not have any control and because most of our karma is non-virtuous, all bets are off.

### **Fifth Suffering: Moving From High to Low**

Then next comes the suffering of moving from high to low and low to high. Moving constantly between high and low. As it says in the Vinaya,

'The conclusion of every accumulation is exhaustion,  
The conclusion of being high is to fall low,  
The conclusion of meeting is to part,  
The conclusion of life is death.'

Everything that comes together, everything that was assembled separates. Everything that is high ends up coming back down. It is preordained if we meet with someone, if we establish a relationship with someone, that we have to separate from that person. We have to separate from that situation. Implicit in living is that one has to die sooner or later. The only thing that is definite in life is that one is going to die. We can also observe how often it happens to people about whom we read this year in the newspapers, about who we read being president or prime minister of a country. And then next we read about them is that they have fallen down completely. They have been imprisoned, they have been destroyed by their own greed etc. Also the other way around, the people who didn't have much success in the early part of their life and then in the later part of their life they have lots of success and become very rich and powerful. And maybe towards the end of their life again they ended up without any friends, very poor. While one is in cyclic existence one is always going from up to down and from down to up.

Also, in the context of the three realms, we are always going from the desire realm to a higher realm, and then again taken rebirth in the desire realm. Within the desire realm we take rebirth in the lower realms, and then sometimes some good karma ripens and we take rebirth in the higher realms. Then again we fall down to the lower realms. We are constantly going up and down without actually, in the final analysis, getting anywhere.

### **Sixth Suffering: Being Friendless**

The final of the six sufferings is the suffering of being friendless. You might say, 'Oh, I am not friendless. I have many friends.' But if we really think about this, first of all when we were born we were born alone. Also, when we die we die alone. Whatever we experience only we ourselves can experience it. Others cannot share our pain. Our pain cannot be taken away by others. Others might show sympathy and affection for us, but finally we have to experience our own suffering by ourselves. Therefore it is said we are wandering through cyclic existence without any friends.

In such a way, when we reflect on the shortcomings of cyclic existence by way of the eight sufferings and by way of the six sufferings, the purpose is to generate a very strong motivation wanting to become free from that situation. To generate that wish, the very strong wish of renunciation, is not an easy thing. It can only come about through lots and lots of contemplation and meditation, partly because our grasping at cyclic existence as being a very nice place is very strong. We strongly romanticize our existence and very strongly grasp at what is actually suffering and unpleasant as being happiness.

When someone comes along and tells us that actually all those things are suffering it even might make us upset to a certain degree. And it might be very difficult to see there is really not the slightest happiness, the slightest real happiness in any part of cyclic existence.

We can also reflect on the various sufferings that are experienced while one is in the desire realm, and on the bliss of meditation that one experiences when one is in the form realm, and then generate a wish to be born in the form realm. And then reflecting further that the experience of happiness of bliss in the form realm is still somewhat coarse and unsatisfactory,

and that the deep feeling of equanimity in the formless realm is far better. In this way we generate a motivation to be reborn in the formless realm, to experience equanimity in the formless realm. But then we reflect further that even if we get reborn in the formless realm, which is the highest realm is samsara, there is not the slightest happiness, because we have been reborn in the formless realm already countless times. As long as we take rebirth in the formless realm under the control of karma and delusion the only result is that again we fall down again and experience the suffering of the lower realms, or the suffering of the human realm etc.<sup>11</sup>

So, no matter how we look at it, rebirth in cyclic existence always remains unsatisfactory. No matter how often we experience samsaric pleasures, they will not give us happiness. True happiness has to come from within and not through the experience of some outer objects.

When I was very new in Buddhism, about one and a half years after I had become a monk, I sat down for dinner with my father and being very enthusiastic I explained this to him how happiness has to come from the mind etc. My father said, 'yes of course, happiness comes from the mind. For example, if I drink this glass of wine (and he drank a sip from his glass of wine) then that gives me happiness in the mind. Of course the happiness comes from the mind.' Because being quite new at that time I didn't know what to say. Only later after having thought about it I realized that is not what is meant when we say happiness comes from the mind.

Of course happiness and suffering are always experienced within the mind, because they are mental experiences, but true happiness should come about from within the mind. True happiness shouldn't be induced through meeting with an outside object. True happiness shouldn't depend on meeting with an outside object, but should be induced through the power that lies within the mind itself.

Therefore it says that there is no satisfaction experiencing samsaric pleasures. As long as we have not utilized the power that lies within our mind for happiness, and only rely on the happinesses that are induced through meeting certain outside objects, we will never establish stable happiness within our mental continuum. As such we will never experience true inner happiness. We will never get anywhere, because once the sensory experience is finished and over with we are exactly where we were before. Not having happiness and wanting happiness. One never experiences the various pleasures of cyclic existence enough. That in itself is one of the greatest sufferings.



#### 1.2.1.3. CONTEMPLATING THE THREE SUFFERINGS

So then, having talked about the six sufferings, we go on to talk about the three sufferings. The three sufferings are:

- suffering of suffering,
- suffering of change
- pervasive compounded suffering

All the sufferings, as the Buddha explained, will be found within those three sufferings. We can use an example to explain those three sufferings.

If we imagine we have a wound, like a wound we got by burning ourselves. When we first burnt ourselves with some hot water then we experience very strong pain, very strong physical pain and maybe even mental pain. This very strong pain that we experience at the time of burning ourselves would be the suffering of suffering. Suffering of suffering refers to what we ordinarily would regard as suffering, our mental and physical pain that we experience.

Then, if we apply a cool cream on the wound, which burns and is hurting us a lot, we can lessen the suffering of the burn. This lessening of the suffering of the burn we experience as happiness, and this is regarded as the suffering of change. The lessening of the pain is experienced as happiness, and that is what we would refer to as the suffering of change. Most of the time, what we experience as happiness, what we would regard as happiness, is the suffering of change, and it is quite often just a lessening of a pain that we are experiencing.

Then also we have the third situation where, after some time as long as there is no contact with the wound, we do not feel it; there is the feeling of equanimity. This feeling of equanimity is pervasive compounded suffering. Even though there is no actual pain there at the moment, there is still the potential for pain, because we just need to touch our wound in the wrong way and immediately we will again experience the pain.

By reflecting on this example we can understand how all the feelings that we are experiencing are suffering in one way or another. Of course, the suffering feelings that we are experiencing, physical pain such as a toothache or headache, or some other type of physical sickness there would be suffering of suffering. Then also mental pain, mental unhappiness and depression and maybe also even stress, mental types of suffering, they would also fall into the category of suffering of suffering. These are the sufferings that are quite easy for us to recognise; we can recognise them as being actually suffering.

But then, if you try to understand the suffering of change, then it becomes a little bit more difficult, because what is defined as suffering of change is what you ordinarily regard as happiness.

For example, if we are feeling very hot and experience the suffering of heat, maybe we have been lying on the beach in the sun too long, and now we have got very hot we feel the need to go to a cool and shady place, thus we will change our position and go somewhere where it's cool and shady. Then, once we are in the shade, and the heat in our body lessens, that cooling down we experience as happiness. But then, if you stay in the shade too long then again we will start to feel cold and we will feel the need to go again into the sun then where we warm up, and experience the lessening of the cold feeling as happiness.

Even though this is a very simple example, this is basically how we are going through our lives. We are going from hot to cold and cold to hot.

There are countless examples. If we go bushwalking, etc., all our activities that are supposed to give us happiness. Why first of all do we engage in those activities? Of course there can be a



great variety of reasons. For example, we might go walking because we feel the need to engage in some physical activity, because we feel a little bit, I'm sure you know that feeling, when you have been sitting all day and your muscles are cramped up and you feel a little bit stiff and you feel like if you make some movements then you would again feel better physically. For that reason we go for a walk.

Then through the walking we get some sort of good feeling in the body, sort of an energetic feeling in the body, that makes us feel good. But that was a lessening of the stiffness and the problem that we are experiencing before, the tiredness in the body etc. Then, if we were to continue to walk, then slowly, slowly it will change, and what first was happiness will then become suffering. We will become tired, and then actually to sit down and have a rest will become happiness. But then it is the same thing, if we again were to sit down too long, again that would actually become suffering and again we have to walk.

By going through our lives in such a way we never find any real satisfaction and also we never find any rest, because we are only going from one experience to the next experience to the next experience.

That is why ordinary pleasures are referred to as the suffering of change. Even though at the time they appear to us as happiness, they are not really true happiness because if they were true happiness then they should continue to give us happiness for however long we engage in them, but through our own experience we know that that does not happen.

After some time we will get tired of the activity and then it turns into suffering. We might want to go to a movie and at the beginning we are very excited and we find the movie very nice and very exciting and forth. But then we might find out, to our surprise, that the movie has overtime instead of taking one and a half hours it is actually a super long movie that takes two and a half hours. Then by the time we get to two hours already we start to move around in our seats and to look at our watch and wonder when it's going to end, and then finally after two and half hours we are really happy when the movie is finished. And we can just imagine what would happen if it would be a movie that would take five or six hours, then that happiness that we have been experiencing would turn into very definite suffering.

As with the example of the wound, most of the time what we experience as happiness is a lessening of our suffering. If we eat when we are hungry our happiness comes partly from the taste of the food and it comes partly also because we are hungry, what we experience as happiness is actually a lessening of our hunger. Once our hunger is filled, once our stomach is filled, then even though the food might actually be very tasty, eating it will not give us any great happiness. Then the happiness of eating very tasty food has turned into suffering.

### **PERVASIVE COMPOUNDED SUFFERING**

Then we have what is called 'all-pervasive compounded suffering'. In the example we were saying the feeling of equanimity that we experience if the wound is left alone after some time, after the pain has died down, that is an example of pervasive compounded suffering. The reason is, even though there is no actual feeling of suffering there at the moment, because that feeling of equanimity contains the potential for the suffering it is referred to as pervasive compounded suffering. Particularly, pervasive compounded suffering refers to the contaminated aggregates.

The aggregates have been taken are under the control of karma and delusions and that is why they are called compounded, they are caused by karma and delusions, the result of karma and delusions. And they are pervasive because no matter where one goes in cyclic existence, one will always have the five aggregates<sup>12</sup>, one will always have the five contaminated aggregates that are in the nature of suffering, compounded pervasive suffering. To understand compounded pervasive suffering as suffering is the most difficult point in the meditation on suffering, but also the most important one, which also actually distinguishes the meditation on suffering of Buddhists from meditations on suffering by non-Buddhists. In the example of the suffering of suffering we have the suffering feeling that has been generated, either physical feeling or mental feeling. The physical feeling of suffering, the mental feeling of suffering, is referred to as suffering of suffering. And actually also all the other mental factors and the main consciousness that are concomitant with that feeling of suffering are also referred to as suffering of suffering.

The feeling of happiness and the object that it is experiencing, as well as the various other mental factors with the main mind are all referred to as suffering of change. In the example of the wound and the cool cream the lessening of the pain is the suffering of change, which we experience that as happiness. But then also the object that has given us that coolness, the cream itself, is also referred to as the suffering of change. And then the various other mental factors and the main consciousness, which are concomitant with that mental feeling of happiness, with that feeling of happiness in this case it's actually a physical feeling of happiness, they are also called suffering of change.

So, experiencing pervasive compounded suffering does not mean that the person is necessarily in great pain at that time. As we said, the contaminated aggregates that were taken under the control of karma and delusions are referred to as all pervasive suffering.

Here I use for myself the example of a person that is infected with the HIV virus because, I have been told, that when one is infected with the HIV virus one is not necessarily physically sick. The virus can lay dormant for many, many years and maybe the person will never become physically sick, maybe later in their lifetime they will become physically sick. It is like that with our contaminated aggregates. Having the contaminated aggregates, having pervasive compounded suffering, is just like having a dormant virus and we can never be quite sure when the virus is ripening. We can also connect with some of the points we went through before when we were talking about the sufferings of birth. The suffering of being born with the contaminated aggregates, the first of the eight sufferings and the last of the eight sufferings, here the significance is very much the same. One reason why being born is suffering is because we are born with the contaminated aggregates, meaning we are being born with the potential for many, many problems. We are born with non-virtuous karma than can ripen when it meets the causes and conditions. We are born with the seeds for the generation of the delusions, and just by the generation of delusions we experience mental unhappiness, and also we create further non-virtuous karma.

I linked the three types of suffering to the three types of feelings: happy feeling; the feeling of suffering; and the feeling of equanimity. We also might remember back, at the very beginning we were talking about the five aggregates. The second of the five aggregates was the

aggregate of feeling, we were saying that basically here we have three main types of feelings – happiness, suffering and equanimity. The point I want to make is that whether we experience happiness or suffering, it is always experienced within our mind even though we sometimes have the idea that happiness and suffering lie somewhere outside of us, or that happiness and suffering lie within the object.

Therefore it is possible to experience only happiness. The experience of happiness and suffering is within our mind, that experience of happiness and suffering is the ripening of our virtuous and non-virtuous karma. Someone who has purified all their non-virtuous karmas will not experience suffering, why?, because there is no cause. Even though on the outside it might look as if that person is in a very difficult situation, internally, because the causes for the experience of sufferings are lacking, that person will experience only happiness.

There is this example where at one time the Buddha went on alms during a famine and then one person gave to him food to eat, but because it was a famine the food was very poor. One of the disciples of the Buddha felt a great pity, felt very sorry that his teacher had to eat this very poor food. But then the Buddha looked at him and said “do not worry” and gave him a little bit of the food that had already been in his mouth to taste and the disciple had never tasted such blissful food. The point is that the Buddha purified all the negative karma and therefore can not experience any suffering.

The reason why I am saying this is because, quite often, we come across this idea that it is not possible to experience only happiness or that it is not possible to completely pacify our suffering. We might have various types of misconceptions, first of all, we might think it is not possible at all to eliminate suffering, that’s one misconception. Then there is another type of misconception, where one might think that it is possible to eliminate suffering temporarily but not permanently. Once we understand what the causes of happiness and suffering really are then we can also understand how it is possible to experience only happiness and not to experience any suffering. We have to understand the cause/effect relationship, how delusion and karma are causing us suffering.

If we have purified all our negative karma then we won’t experience any suffering. Or, if at least we have pacified the delusions in our mind stream then, even though we might still have karmic imprints, because the causes and conditions for the ripening of those karmic imprints won’t be present, they won’t ripen and we also won’t experience suffering.

In the case of an Arhat, even though it is explained that Arhats can experience still slight sufferings through the ripening of non-virtuous karma, that might not be a perfect example, but in the case of an Superior bodhisattva, an Superior bodhisattva won’t experience any type of suffering any more. Not because they have purified all the non-virtuous karma, but because the causes and conditions for the ripening of non-virtuous karma are not present within their mind. Also, to illustrate this point, how we experience happiness and suffering in our mind, I might tell another story as not to talk about suffering all the time. Lama Zopa Rinpoche told this story during the Kopan course in 1999, where he was talking about this geshe Jampa Wangdu, who was one very famous meditator in Dharamsala. At one time during the annual spring teachings geshe Jampa Wangdu went to the toilets during the break-time but then, because it was raining and the stairs were made out of very slippery stone, he slipped on the stairs and fell very badly

and hurt his head by falling. He hurt it to such an extent that he had actually a wound and needed to be attended to and someone had to put a bandaid on his head and forth. We would assume that it makes quite a strong noise on the stone when a person falls over on the stairs and bump their head, and then they end up with a wound on the head, and we would assume that they had experienced pain. But Lama Zopa Rinpoche said that later that evening when geshe Jampa Wangdu came to visit him and Lama Yeshe in Tushita he told them that actually he hadn't experienced the slightest pain, that actually his experience had been of bliss. Lama Zopa Rinpoche said that was a sign that he is an accomplished tantric practitioner.

In tantra, whatever experience one has, it becomes transformed into the experience of bliss. How this is possible is through cause and effect. The experiences of suffering have certain causes in the same way as also our experiences of happiness have certain causes. It is said that even the refreshing experience of a cool breeze on a hot summers day, that refreshing feeling that one gets from the cool breeze, is the result of the ripening of virtuous karma. If we create the causes of happiness then we will experience happiness and there are various types of happiness. To experience the happiness of liberation we need to create the causes for the happiness of liberation. If you want to experience the happiness of enlightenment, the bliss of enlightenment, you need to create the causes for enlightenment, for the happiness of enlightenment. Actually the whole Buddhist path is contained within the law of causes and effect.

At our beginners level we start to purify our non-virtuous karma, and the purification of non-virtuous karma on our level means that we take away the power of the non-virtuous karma to cause a suffering result. The non-experience of the suffering result of non-virtuous karma is the result of that purification.

And then on the other side we are trying to create virtuous karma. You practice generosity, morality, patience etc. but then also maybe trying to lessen the causes for the creation of non-virtuous karma. We try to lessen our delusions, we try to lessen our attachment, our anger, our ignorance etc., and we try to generate virtuous states of the mind such as wisdom, compassion, concentration etc. Then, if we generate our renunciation then the virtuous actions we are engaging in on the basis of renunciation will become the cause for the bliss of liberation.

And afterwards, by meditating on the meditations common to the practitioner of great capacity, if we generate bodhicitta, then the virtuous activities we engage in on the basis of bodhicitta will become the cause for the bliss of enlightenment. And then, once we have gone through this purification process and the more and more we have purified our non-virtuous karmas, and the more and more we have purified our delusions and the mental afflictions from our mind, the more and more we have developed our mental qualities such as wisdom, compassion, renunciation, the less and less suffering we will experience and the more and more happiness we will experience.

When we can come to such a level, such as this very advanced tantric yogi, that even though we fall down like the yogi and it looks like we actually have hurt ourselves internally we won't experience any pain. Which is why, for the Buddha, the very poor food that he received during

the time of famine tasted better than any type of exquisite meal we can imagine. A Buddha doesn't experience any suffering.

So, whenever we are in cyclic existence we will always experience one of the three types of suffering. In the lower realms we will basically be consumed by suffering of suffering, the experience of the lower realms is characterized by a very strong experience of suffering of suffering.

And maybe also here, if you think about what I said before how suffering is basically an internal experience and how the internal experience is a result of the ripened karma on our mental stream. How the experience of suffering is actually a mental state, a state in our mind, which has come about through the ripening of mental imprints.

Then maybe you also imagine better how one could experience suffering of the hell realms through the ripening of very strong, powerful, non-virtuous karmic imprints on our mental continuum.

And then we have the human realm and the god realms. In the human realm we have suffering of suffering, we have suffering of change and we have all pervasive suffering.

Then we have the god realms. We have the desire god realms, the form realms and the formless realms. The gods that belong to the desire realms still experience suffering of change, suffering of suffering and all pervasive suffering of course. All pervasive suffering any being in cyclic existence has, from the very lowest hell up to the highest formless realm. But then, once we get to the form realm, then there is no experience of suffering of suffering or suffering of change. The same goes for the formless realm, there is also no experience of suffering of suffering or suffering of change. Here the suffering experience is the experience of all pervasive suffering, that even though one might at the present time not have the manifest physical suffering, there is the potential for further suffering.

Therefore it is very important to try to understand pervasive compounded suffering. It is the subtlest kind of suffering that we have to meditate on. Because pervasive compounded suffering is the root of the suffering of change, and the suffering of suffering it is very important to understand for generating renunciation. When we meditate trying to generate renunciation, what we try to generate renunciation for in the final analysis are the contaminated five aggregates. We should generate the motivation of not wanting to have the five contaminated aggregates even for just one second longer, definitely not in the next life.

So then, the three feelings of happiness, suffering and equanimity also become the cause for the generation of various delusions.

First of all the experience of happiness becomes the cause for the arising of attachment. Therefore by viewing the feeling of happiness as suffering we will be able to avoid generating attachment for the happiness. Otherwise, normally if we experience a feeling of happiness it will increase our attachment. If we experience suffering it increases our aversion and anger, and if we experience a feeling of equanimity or, for example, just the contaminated aggregates, that are neither happiness nor suffering but are the contaminated aggregates, the source for further suffering, then with regards to those we generate ignorance. Grasping at them as being permanent even though they are impermanent and forth. Attachment that is generated and increased by focussing on the experience of happiness is the cause for further rebirth in cyclic

existence, in such a way causes us suffering, future suffering. Of course attachment also causes lots of suffering in this life, there are various doors through which, various ways in which, attachment causes us suffering. Anger is very easily understandable how it can cause us suffering in this life and then also, by creating non-virtuous karma, causes us suffering in a future life. And ignorance just compounds those two delusions, and is the cause why we can not abandon those two delusions. Therefore by viewing our ordinary feeling of happiness as suffering, as suffering of suffering, sorry, by viewing our ordinary feeling of happiness as the suffering of change, as all pervasive suffering, we will not generate attachment. In such a way then the fault of attachment will be stopped.

And seeing that our feeling of suffering is generated because we have the contaminated aggregates, understanding the way the suffering is generated, will help us stop having aversion and anger, generating aversion and anger. And by viewing our aggregates as impermanent and as momentary we will oppose the ignorance that grasps at the aggregates as being permanent. Our experience of happiness is for the purpose of making us happy, that's why we seek happiness and happy feelings, happy experiences; because we want to be happy. But it will be impossible to experience perfect happiness without curing suffering. Without curing and eliminating suffering it will be impossible for us to experience real happiness, and our ordinary ways of generating happiness do not give true happiness.

The normal everyday happinesses that we are experiencing are only very temporary, and turn very easily into suffering, therefore they are not really true happiness. Happiness is true happiness if it continues to be happiness no matter how long we experience it for. In the same way we have true suffering, the suffering feeling will always be suffering no matter how long we experience it, it will never cease to stop being suffering. We just need to think about having a very bad toothache - not going to the doctor and enduring the toothache will make the toothache less? No, the tooth will continue to ache until either the nerve starts to rot that there can not be any ache any more, or we go to the doctor and cure it. That is why everyone talks about the truth of suffering, and true happiness should work also the same way. No matter how long we continue to experience it, it should continue being the experience of happiness. But our ordinary happinesses are not that way. If we continue to experience them they turn into suffering, it defeats our purpose because our purpose is wanting to be truly happy.



## CONTEMPLATING THE INDIVIDUAL SUFFERINGS OF CYCLIC EXISTENCE

### 2. CONTEMPLATING THE WAY ONE IS BEING KEPT IN SAMSAARA, I.E. THE TRUTH OF ORIGIN

#### 2.1. THE WAY THE AFFLICTIONS ARE GENERATED

##### 2.1.1. IDENTIFYING THE AFFLICTIONS

So then maybe much for the six, the eight, and the three sufferings. As we were mentioning at the beginning, when we try to generate true renunciation from cyclic existence, then first we meditate on suffering and then secondly we meditate on the truth of the origin. That is the point

where we have reached now, reflecting on the way one enters and wanders in cyclic existence by reflecting on the truth of the origin. Here we have three main outlines; the way delusions are generated, then the way one accumulates karma through the delusions and the way one dies and goes to a future life. The first outline, the way the delusions are generated, has three subdivisions. First of all, identifying the delusions, then the sequence in which they are generated, then the cause of the delusions and then the disadvantages of the delusions.

Within the truth of origin we have two classes. Basically we have the mental afflictions, delusion or mental afflictions, and we have karma. Out of those two the important one are the mental afflictions. The reason is that, as I mentioned already before, we might still have the cause of non-virtuous or contaminated karma within our mental continuum, but if the conducive conditions of the mental afflictions are missing, then those non-virtuous karmas can not ripen. While on the other hand, we might not have any non-virtuous karma in our mental continuum, but if we have mental afflictions, then we will create further new non-virtuous karma. Really the main cause of suffering to be dealt with are the delusions, or mental afflictions.

### **Definition of Mental Affliction**

So here we can first talk about what is generally meant by a delusion or mental affliction. The definition of mental affliction is ***a mental state that makes the mind very unpeaceful.***

So it is in the nature of causing the mind great disturbance. This disturbance that is caused within the mind through the arising of the individual mental afflictions is sometimes very easily recognizable in the case of anger, jealousy, pride etc and sometimes more difficult to understand in the case of afflictions such as attachment and desire. And in general a delusion, a mental affliction, is a mental state that makes the mind very unpeaceful. We have six root afflictions; we have anger, desire, ignorance, pride, afflicted doubt and wrong views and we can go now through each one of them individually.

### **The Ten Root Afflictions**

#### **1. Anger**

First of all, anger is ***the harmful intent that wants to harm or destroy its object.*** Here the object can be another person, can be an inanimate object such as a weapon or a sickness etc., and the motivation is wanting to harm or wanting to destroy what one identifies as the source of one's own problem or suffering. Quite often in the west we sometimes confuse having a very strong character, a very forceful character, with anger. That is not the case. Anger is specifically a type of emotion, a mental state, wishing to harm or destroy the object at which it is directed. That object may be another person or also inanimate objects; in fact quite often anger is also actually directed at oneself.

#### **2. Attachment**

Then we have attachment. Attachment is ***a desire for an inner or outer object after having mentally elaborated that object as being very beautiful and desirable.*** I am using the words desire and attachment interchangeably, as synonyms. That is the nature of attachment; desiring, wanting an object, an inner or outer object, after that object has been mentally elaborated as being very desirable and beautiful. Both anger and attachment arise in dependence upon what we call mistaken conceptions. In the case of attachment the mistaken

conceptions are elaborating the object as something very, very beautiful. Then, because the object appears to us as beautiful and desirable we crave that object, we want that object, we start to desire that object.

Quite often we can find that at one time that object appears to us very desirable and we experience very strong desire and attachment for the object nearly to the point where we might think 'I am not able to live without that object'. But then later, to our surprise, we find that if we look at that object again at a time when the very strong attachment and desire has died down, then we find that we can not even understand why we ever were attached to the object, how it could ever have happened that we had generated desire for that object.

That shows that the very strong beauty that we perceive is like a mental elaboration, a mental generation within our mind. Of course conventionally there can be a certain beauty to the object but then we elaborate that mentally strong that it then appears to us as if we couldn't live if we do not have that object.

And the same actually goes for anger. Anger is based also on the mistaken conception that particularly highlights the faults of the object. If we have very strong anger we are not able to see any of the positive sides of the object. If we would still remember all the positive sides, all the good things they did for us etc., then we would not get angry. Our mistaken conception highlights and focuses on the faults of the object and also completely exaggerates them, and in such a way we generate strong anger.

Actually in a teaching in a video by Lama Yeshe he says that actually because our mind is overcome by these mistaken conceptions we do not perceive reality at all. Whatever we see is exaggerated in one way or the other. It is very important to meditate on this discrepancy between what appears to our mind and what is there from the side of the object. I think that once we find how strong this discrepancy can be we will be very surprised.

### **3. Pride**

We had the mental affliction of attachment, the mental affliction of anger, then now we have the mental affliction of pride. Pride is considered as a state of mind where one focuses on one's attainment's, qualities, etc. and then thinks one is better than others are. Actually pride can be also generated by focussing on one's faults sometimes. But basically pride is in the nature of feeling very high. Like sitting on the top of a mountain and no matter in which direction one is looking one is high up that one can not see anyone below. Or even if one sees them they are sort of very, very tiny figures somewhere down below.

### **4. Ignorance**

Then we have the fourth, the root affliction of ignorance. Ignorance is a mental state, an affliction, that is unclear or confused about various aspects of our existence such as the four noble truths, cause and effect, the three jewels, etc.

### **5. Doubt**

And then we have the root affliction of doubt, which here refers specifically to afflicted doubt. Doubt tending towards the non-existence of the four noble truths or doubt tending towards the



non-existence of cause and effect, the law of cause and effect, or doubt tending towards the non-existence of the three jewels etc. Being a little bit doubtful in ones mind about whether the four noble truths exist or not, and then tending towards 'probably they do not exist'. That would be an example of afflicted doubt. Doubt that would tend towards the truth thinking, 'probably the four noble truths do exist, probably the four noble truths are correct', is not afflicted doubt. That is doubt that is tending toward the truth.

## 6. Wrong View

Those five delusions, those five afflictions we just went through, are called the non-view afflictions or the non-view delusions. Now we have the last root affliction, which is a wrong view. As you can already see here, it deals with a certain type of view, and actually within wrong view we have five types of wrong views. We have what is called the five afflicted views.

First of all we have **the view of the transitory collections**. The view of the transitory collections is the grasping at inherently existent "I" and mine after having focused on the aggregates, after having focused on the contaminated aggregates, then grasping at "I" and mine. Why is this view called the view of the transitory collections? Transitory means impermanent and collections means many. This is to show that there is no person that is permanent and singular<sup>13</sup>.

Then we have **the extreme view**. The extreme view can be either the view of eternalism or it can be the view of nihilism. The view of eternalism would be grasping at the self as being eternally existing. Existing eternally unchanging. That would be the eternalist point of view. Or we can have the nihilist point of view thinking that the self completely ceases to exist after death. There are two types of extreme view.

Then we have **the view holding views as supreme**. The view holding views as supreme is that, on top of having other wrong views such as the view of the transitory collections and the extreme view, we have a view thinking that those are very good views, that they are very good ideas. It's like we have a mistaken idea, a mistaken view, and on top of that we have the idea that we are completely correct, which is like adding ignorance to ignorance. The third one is holding wrong views as supreme.

The fourth one is **holding wrong moralities and disciplines as supreme**. There can be various types of wrong practices, such as various certain types of ascetic practices and forth, which we think are the path to liberation. That would be the view of holding moralities and disciplines as supreme. For example, previously in India there used to be certain sects that used to have the view that if one impales one's body on a spear in a certain manner then that would lead one to liberation. Holding that view would be an example of this view, holding wrong moralities and disciplines as supreme. And even though we might think it is maybe not applicable any more these days because that was during the old times in India, and now, these days we do not do that any more, actually there are quite a few strange sects who believe that if they kill themselves in a certain manner then they will obtain liberation and forth. We can read about them in newspapers from time to time.

And then last but not least we have **wrong view**. Wrong view refers to grasping at something that is existent as non-existent, grasping at karma as being non-existent, grasping at the three jewels as being non-existent. Wrong view doesn't just refer to not believing in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, but wrong view actually refers to the mental delusion that the Three Jewels do not exist or that karma does not exist.

#### **ANTIDOTES AGAINST DELUSIONS**

We already talked about different types of delusions, we mentioned the six root afflictions, such as desire, anger, pride, ignorance, doubt, and then the five types of wrong views. I thought now to maybe explain a little bit more how we would meditate on the antidotes against some of those delusions.

#### **Basis, Path and Result**

The basis of our dharma practice is the two truths. Then on the basis of the two truths we practice the two aspects of the path, which are method and wisdom, or the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of wisdom, and then in dependence upon method and wisdom we attain the result of the two bodies of the Buddha, the form body of the Buddha and the truth body of the Buddha.

Actually a Buddha has what we call the four kayas, or the four bodies. We have the two types of form body, which are the emanation body and the enjoyment body. For example, Shakyamuni Buddha was an emanation body. Then we have the wisdom truth body of the Buddha, which is the enlightened mind of the Buddha and the svabhavakaya, which is the enlightened sphere of the enlightened mind of the Buddha. The pure enlightened sphere in the enlightened mind of the Buddha.

Those four bodies of the Buddha can also be condensed into the body for the purpose of others and the body for one's own purpose. The wisdom truth body and the enlightened pure sphere in the mind of a Buddha are what is called the body for one's own purpose. Why? By achieving them the practitioner will have completely realized his or her own potential, but they will not be able to directly benefit other sentient beings with the wisdom truth body and the enlightened sphere alone. What is needed are the various emanations, which are the various form bodies. That's why the form bodies are called a body for the purpose of others.

Those two basic types of Buddha body, the form body and the truth body, are realized in dependence upon the practice of method and wisdom. The practice of wisdom becomes the cause of the attainment of the truth body while the practice of method becomes the direct cause for the attainment of the form body of the Buddha.

The practice of method consists of the meditation on great compassion, bodhicitta, generosity etc. and the practice of the wisdom consists of the meditation on emptiness.

So then, the method aspect and the wisdom aspect of the path are practiced in dependence upon the two truths. The two truths are the ultimate truth and conventional truth. Conventional truth acts as the basis for the practice of method because bodhicitta and compassion have conventional objects as their focal point. And the ultimate truth serves as the basis for the practice of wisdom because ultimate truth is basically emptiness and the wisdom realizing emptiness focuses on emptiness as ultimate truth.

In such a way, by taking the two truths as a basis one practices the method and wisdom and then attains the two bodies of the enlightened being. Every sentient being has the potential for attaining the wisdom truth body of the Buddha. Every sentient being has what is called buddha nature, and buddha nature is that which transforms into the wisdom truth body at the time of enlightenment.

So what we need to do in order to make use of that potential is we need to transform our mind with meditation. We have two basic types of meditation, single-pointed meditation and analytical meditation. Basically single-pointed meditation deals with training the mind to remain focussed on one meditational object, while analytical meditation is more a contemplative type of meditation where we actually think about a certain topic. Even though our mind should be focussed on that particular topic of contemplation such as impermanence etc. the aim is not to remain thoughtless. The process is that one actually thinks, one analyses the object, hence it is a type of investigative meditation. While in single-pointed meditation the only thing one concentrates on is the object of meditation and if any other type of thought comes up in the mind one will just let it go and return to the object of meditation. During analytical meditation we will employ various types of reasonings in order to understand the topic such as emptiness, suffering, etc. more clearly. And also, practicing analytical meditation we practice the various antidotes against our delusions.

### **Antidote against Desire**

We can start with desire. Generally a very good meditation as an antidote against desire is the meditation on impermanence. Once we recognize the fleeting nature of the objects of our desire then automatically we will become much less attracted to those objects. And also, once we recognize more our own impermanent nature then we will have much less interest in following transitory pleasures and will automatically concentrate more on our own Dharma practice. There is nothing like meditating on death in order to overcome one's desires. Then also, as I already mentioned, if we have an obsession with the physical form of another person, then also we can focus on the impure aspects of the human body. We just need to mentally go through the various parts and organs that make up the inside of our body. Of course that is not a meditation many people like to do, but still, it is a meditation based within conventional truth and is very effective.

Basically attachment is a mistaken type of mind, which is based on what we call mistaken conceptions, we have this type of mind which is called mistaken conceptions. What the mistaken conception will do is it will exaggerate the beauty of the object up to such a point that it will seem an indispensable necessity for our happiness. I'm sure we are all very familiar with that process. But as an example, I am German, in Germany people like cars very much, I will just use the example of a car. First of all we might see some advertisement in the magazine

about the latest BMW or the latest Mercedes and then we might think 'oh yes, that looks like a nice car'. But then we read through the various features of the car, how many horse-powers it has, how fast it can go from zero to 100 in how many seconds and also its various safety features etc. etc., and the more we read about the car the more we generate this image of the car being desirable. The more we read about the positive aspects of the car the more the car will appear desirable to us. It is actually the same car but there is a difference in perception from when we first saw it in the picture, and then, when we think about it after we have read all the various positive features, all the qualities of the car. Depending on our mind we might be seduced by the advertising of the car. There are many various types of advertising's, promising to make one more free, promising freedom or promising strength and power, promising social status etc. etc. We start to impute more and more onto this car and finally the car appears to us in a completely different light.

We can see that nothing has changed from the side of the object, but what has changed is our perception. Actually the desirable aspect that now appears to us after we have read about all the benefits etc. is just a mental generation. If that desirable aspect would be there already, from the side of the car, then it would have to appear to us when we see the car the very first time. But that desirability that makes the car attractive to us that is something that is only being generated within our mind, it is nothing that is there from the side of the object. But because we believe in it then we generate very strong attachment.

First our mind works up this image of the car as being very desirable and then, because we believe in this image, we become very attached to the car, and generate very great desire for the car. And then of course we believe that all those qualities we impute on the car we will be able to receive when we buy it. But of course, when we buy the car, it will have those various features we read about, but the happiness, this ability to give us happiness that we impute on those features, that we will not find. Otherwise everyone who would buy his or her dream car would be perfectly happy. And then all those other qualities that we imputed such as freedom, power, etc., them we will not get because it is not possible to internalize, to generate some internal qualities through an external object.

This is of course only an example but it works like that in relation to all our objects of desire. And in such a way you can see that desire is not really based on reality, desire is not really based on conventional truth. It is certainly not based on ultimate truth, which's completely out of the question, but it's not even based on conventional truth. The object that appears to desire is not the actual object, but it is a greatly distorted object that we are seeing through the filter of our misleading, mistaken conceptions.

We can observe the same phenomena also in our day to day interactions with other people. I'm sure it has been the experience of everyone to generate very strong attachment for a certain person at a certain time and then at that time the other person seemed incredibly desirable. But then, if one didn't see that person for some time and one's attachment sort of died down and went away or the attachment got transferred onto another person, and one again meets with the first person after some time and one looks at the person and one sort of thinks 'I wonder how it was ever possible for me to be attached to that person?' The desirable aspect has completely gone.

Sometimes we even think, 'I didn't actually even know that person', the appearance within one's mind has completely changed. This again proves this appearance of desirability and this appearance of incredible beauty and attractiveness is something that is only made up within our mind. If it would be there from the side of the object it would have to be there all the time and also it would have to appear to everyone, everyone would have to find that person attractive and desirable.

Since attachment in such a way perceives its object only in a very distorted way it is not a mind that is based on reality and as such it can be opposed. We can lessen our attachment; we can oppose our attachment, because attachment is a wrong mind. A wrong mind is a mind that apprehends its object mistakenly, it is basically like a misunderstanding, a hallucination. Once we understand that the object of our desire is merely an appearance to our hallucinating mind than automatically we will not any more be driven towards that object.

In fact, by employing the wisdom that realizes the absence of the desirability of the beauty and attractiveness of the object, and that realizes all the faults and problems inherent in the object, we then have generated a mind that directly counteracts desire and attachment. This wisdom that realizes the absence of the attractiveness and desirability is based on reality, and the more we generate that wisdom the less our attachment will become, because this wisdom directly opposes the attachment in the way it apprehends its object.

Attachment apprehends its object in a very desirable way, which is a very mistaken way. We generate the wisdom that realizes that there is actually nothing to be desirable about the object, and that directly counteracts the attachment. In such a way one can slowly, slowly overcome one's attachment for any type of object.

The first meditation that is done in conjunction with the Four Noble Truths is meditation on impermanence. Why is that? Because the realization of impermanence counteracts the grasping at permanence. As we said before, our own aggregates are what we call pervasive compounded suffering - in such a way our own aggregates are actually the truth of suffering. We have various misconceptions with regards to the truth of suffering, such as that it is permanent, that it is happiness, that it is pure and that it has a self, an independently existing self.

So in order, for example, to overcome the first misconception of our aggregates as being permanent we have to meditate on the impermanence of our aggregates, because actually our aggregates are impermanent. The five aggregates we already mentioned at the very beginning. They are form, feeling, recognition, conditional factors and consciousness. There is one physical aggregate and four mental aggregates, mainly mental aggregates. Even though they are impermanent we grasp at them as being permanent. But then, by realizing that the grasping at the aggregates as being permanent is a mistaken mind, a misunderstanding, a misconception, we will realize that the actual nature of our aggregates is impermanent, is impermanence, being momentary changing. In such a way, realizing the aggregates as being impermanent directly counteracts the grasping at the aggregates being permanent. This is the very basic psychology

of how one counteracts the various delusions with a wisdom or mind that is directly opposite in its nature, in the way it apprehends its object, to the affliction.

Then also it can be very useful to think about the various disadvantages of desire. Even though they are not obvious to see, still the Buddha said there are many disadvantages to desire. We are actually also attached to our delusions, which is also quite interesting. We not only have desire for the objects of the five senses, we not only have attachment towards our own ideas, we are actually also attached to our delusions. We have very great attachment for attachment itself.

Because we have this great attachment for attachment itself we feel that attachment is necessary for our happiness. Because we think that attachment gives us happiness we become attached to attachment. Once we realize that attachment doesn't give us the happiness we are looking for, the more we understand that, the more naturally we will be able to let go of our attachment. Even though at the beginning one might think it might feel as if one would die if one would give up one's attachments, but there are many practitioners who have given up their attachment and they have not died. And even if you think about it from your own life, from our experience, we know that at certain times we have had very great desires, very great attachments, but then just because we had to give them up, just because they went away, didn't mean that we died. Maybe that much to attachment.

### **Antidote against Anger**

We can go on to the next delusion of anger. I already talked before about the nature of anger, that the nature of anger is to basically want to harm or destroy its object. Basically the best antidote against anger are meditation on love and compassion and patience. And this is of course a very elaborate subject, but I will try to give some examples how one can try to deal with one's anger.

#### Meditating on the Disadvantages of Anger

First of all it is important that we actually reflect on the disadvantages of our anger, and that we contemplate the benefits of practicing patience. Here there are some misconceptions. Quite often students think patience means keeping one's emotions and keeping one's anger bottled within one's mind. That is not what patience means. The definition of patience is **a mind that is undisturbed**. It is a mind that is not agitated; it is peaceful and undisturbed. A peaceful mind is the nature of patience.

A patient mind is a peaceful mind. And the practice of patience means being able to have a peaceful mind in the face of adversity, in the face of problems. Meditating on the benefits of practicing patience and the disadvantages of becoming angry is the very first step in the meditation on patience according to Shantideva. Actually I am not sure if it is the very first step but anyway it comes high at the beginning, and the reason for that is, I think, that we also have a very ingrained attachment towards anger; that we also think that anger is something useful.

As we will see later a little bit more clearly, and as I have already explained a little bit before, if we look at the development of our delusions, then first of all we have self-grasping, the view of the transitory collections that grasps at the self, at I and mine. Then from grasping at I, once

one grasps I, automatically we already discriminate also into other. We have made this division into I or self and other. And then we become attached and crave at the I, at the self, we grasp at the I, the self, and we generate aversion towards other.

And then we generate attachment to that which benefits the self and we generate aversion to that which harms the self. That is a very deep, a very ingrained, psychological trait that we have, which comes about through the psychological development of the delusions.

Therefore, automatically we think that if we generate aversion that aversion can somehow protect our happiness. Otherwise, why generate aversion against something that would harm us? Aversion is based on the attachment towards the self and the happiness of the self, and we generate aversion towards that which threatens the happiness of the self. This is very, very ingrained, in some more, and in some less of course, according to how much Dharma practice we have already done in past lives and in this life.

And then also there can be a cultural conditioning for thinking that we have to become angry in certain situations. That can be because of our upbringing, our culture, etc. In order to overcome this, I might nearly say like a sub-conscious view that anger is beneficial, we have to contemplate the disadvantages of anger. By contemplating the disadvantages of anger automatically we will reduce our anger, because our mind has a certain natural intelligence that we do not want to do something that harms us. Once we understand that generating anger brings more harm to us than benefit, automatically there is less willingness in our mind to become angry, and because there is less willingness we will be less angry. Then also at the time of anger, if we remember the faults and disadvantages, the problems that our anger brings with it, then automatically we will think, 'it's not worth it to get angry, it's better not to get angry'.

Then on the other hand, we should meditate on the advantages of the practice of patience, so that we become more and more inspired to practice patience.

Of course one can explain the disadvantages of anger in very great detail, but that might take too much time and not be within the scope of this class. Very basically, anger destroys both one's happiness of this life and one's happiness of future lives. Anger completely destroys one's happiness.

First of all, how anger destroys the happiness in this life we can actually see. A person who has anger in their mind is not a happy person.

As Maitreya said in the Uttaratantra, 'the mere presence of anger brings pain in the heart'. An angry mind is not a happy mind. It is a mind that has fire burning within it, it is consumed by the flames of anger. And then, if we act out that anger and attack others physically or verbally, then also we cause unhappiness to others. In such a way our anger has made both ourselves and others miserable in this life. This is the effect we can observe directly in this life. This is one harmful effect of anger we can observe in this life.

And then also, anger of course destroys our happiness in future lives. How? Because anger destroys our virtuous karma. In order to experience happiness in future lives we need virtuous karma. Those virtuous karmic potential's that have the power to produce happiness in future lives will be destroyed by anger, it is explained in the sutras. Even if we engage in dharma

practice in this life the fruits of that dharma practice will be harmed by our anger. And we will be able to enjoy them less or not at all in a future life.

And then also of course, if we are angry it just reinforces our mental conditioning to be angry. It places a mental seed on our mental continuum to become angry again and again in the future. Patience on the other hand is the cause for both happiness in this life as well as in future lives. If we are patient we have a peaceful and happy mind in this life. And if we have a peaceful and happy mind then also our actions of body and speech will be peaceful, will be beneficial to others, and we will be able to make others happy. Then also, through the practice of patience we accumulate great merits, and those merits will ripen as happiness in a future life. And also our dharma practice will not be harmed if we practice patience. We will be able to continue with our dharma practice, and we won't have anger destroy the karmic seeds of our dharma practice.

Even though this is now just very brief, the more elaborate and wide one can reflect and contemplate on the disadvantages of anger and the benefits of patience, the better. I met once one student on a course, who actually wrote all the benefits of anger down, and then reflected on them on a day to day basis.

### Meditation on Patience

There is a very easy meditation we can do that will very greatly help us to reduce our mental agitation and anger. First of all it is very important to meditate on a happy mind. Shantideva says that the root of anger, among others, is an unhappy and uptight mind. This we can confirm through our experience. Meditation on patience is actually also a meditation on mental happiness. The more we are mentally happy the less likely we are to become angry. People who are mentally happy will not become very easily offended. People who are very uptight will explode just because of the slightest provocation.

In order to be able to keep a happy and peaceful mind in the face of adversity and problems one can do a very simple reflection on the two lines mentioned by Shantideva where he said, 'if there is something that I can do about the problem then there is no need to get upset and if there is nothing that I can do about the problem then there is no purpose in getting upset'.

This is a very pragmatic approach to our life. If we have certain problems, but we can do something with those problems, then there is no need to get upset, depressed and angry. In fact there is no benefit, no need and no benefit. What is needed is that we do something to change the problem, to overcome the problems that we are experiencing, and this we can do much better with a happy, joyful mind than with anger and an upset mind.

And then further, if there are problems against which we can not do anything, then also there is no purpose in becoming upset. What is the purpose of becoming upset if the weather is very bad? We will not harm the weather. The only thing that gets harmed is oneself and maybe others, if one gets angry also at others. But the weather will not think 'Oh my god. That person is upset. I better start to send them a little bit of sunshine'. That's not going to happen.

Here, what I find very inspiring is His Holiness, who has many, many more problems than I do, or than as many others do obviously. His Holiness says with that very simple meditation, reflecting on those very simple two lines, he is able to keep a happy mind. Also my teacher once told me that after the Chinese had destroyed the house of his family and had killed or imprisoned his



brothers, sisters and parents etc. then in his own mind he also said to himself that there is no benefit in becoming angry. He said, 'getting angry wouldn't bring any of his relatives back to life, it wouldn't benefit them, getting angry certainly wouldn't hurt the Chinese, wouldn't change the situation, and also it wouldn't benefit himself. Therefore getting angry doesn't have any slightest benefit'.

Then there are also various other meditations we can do at the time of confrontation etc. Maybe I just also want to further say those very simple two lines, we have to reflect upon them again, again and again in our daily life, applying them to the various situations in our life. At the beginning it will be just a superficial thinking, it might not give us an actual feeling. But by applying them again and again, because our mind has this natural intelligence and natural wisdom, slowly, slowly our understanding of those two lines will become more and more deep. One day it will really click. We will really think 'oh yes it's true, there's really no need to become angry', 'I'm actually my own greatest enemy by making myself angry all the time', 'I could have the greatest life but I make myself angry all the time for no purpose'. That can happen through continued meditation on those two lines.

But then also there are some other techniques we can employ in order to meditate on patience and compassion. One also as I mentioned previously, we reflect on how the other person who is harming us is overcome themselves by his or her delusion, by anger. If there is another person that is angry at us, and is maybe verbally abusing us or trying to start a fight, provoking us, then if we can reflect on the situation of the other person's mind, how the other person is overcome by anger and understanding all the implications. That a mind that is overcome by anger is, first of all, not a happy mind. That the person is actually suffering and also that that person actually doesn't have much choice. It is not as if people choose to be under the control of their delusions, we are born under the control of our delusions.

This is my own experience. Quite often we say we do not want a particular harmful pattern to arise, but that mental pattern still arises. We can reflect on the helplessness of the other person, being overcome by their own delusion, by their own mistaken conception. In such a way we generate compassion for the other person. If we generate some type of aversion then at least it should be for the anger of the other person, not against the other person. But of course actually one shouldn't generate any anger at all.

Then also, one can reflect on how one's own experiences are the result of one's own karma, relating the meditation on compassion to the meditation on karma.

Also, we can reflect on how the other person is lacking happiness. Everybody is looking for happiness, everyone wants happiness, and nobody has ever enough happiness. Certainly a person who is angry is not a happy person. In fact, they have exactly the opposite of what they want, because anger is suffering, but they want happiness. In such a way we reflect on the way the other person lacks happiness and generate some type of affection and love for that person, wishing that person to be happy. That also counteracts the anger.

These were just some very brief examples of some very, very few possibilities of how one can deal with anger. If you want to know more about the techniques for dealing with anger then you should study the \*\*\* teachings such as the transforming problem section of this course, the

discovering Buddhism course. Or you can also try to study the patience chapter of Entering the Bodhisattvas Way of Life by Shantideva and forth.

### **Antidote against Pride**

Then the next delusion is the delusion of pride. We already said that since pride is a mind that puts oneself very high up and focuses on one's own qualities, one of the best ways to overcome pride is to reflect on all the things that one doesn't know. There are many, many subjects and topics that we have not understood, and in such a way we can very easily overcome our pride. There are probably very few people in the world from whom we couldn't learn absolutely anything. There is probably one tiny thing that we can learn from anyone we meet in the streets, we see in the streets. Only a Buddha has nothing left to learn.

Quite often we also maybe generate pride in our faults. As I said the other day, our mind can be very funny sometimes. We might generate some type of perverse pride into our faults, where we think, 'I'm the worst'. We might claim the title, 'I am the worst of all', which is sort of some type of inverted pride. If we practice humbleness then also we might get the idea that we are the most humble of all, we might generate pride in our humbleness. To overcome pride takes quite a lot of practice. And again, it is also very useful to reflect on the disadvantages of pride in order to become motivated to overcome it, in order to overcome our attachment towards pride.

### **Antidote against Ignorance**

Then the next delusion is ignorance. Ignorance is overcome by generating wisdom and in order to overcome the ignorance that is the root of cyclic existence we need to generate the wisdom realizing emptiness.

Then also, in order to overcome doubt we need to generate wisdom and the same goes for the various wrong views. It is said that when we practice meditation we can choose the meditational object according to our own mental state. If we are in doubt which meditation to practice we only need to analyze our own mind and find out what our most predominant affliction is, and then meditate on the antidote of that affliction. Choose the meditational object according to which type of affliction is most strongly in your mind, and in such a way become your own psychologist.



### **2.1.2. THE SEQUENCE THE AFFLICTIONS ARE GENERATED**

Then I go on to the next outline, which is the sequence the afflictions are generated. Here first of all, the view of the transitory collections is the root of all afflictions and contaminated karma. As we were already saying, ignorance is the root of samsara, and which ignorance is that? The ignorance that is the view of the transitory collections. This view of the transitory collections we can observe in action quite well during the process of our daily lives, at times when there is a very strong sense of self and I.

The view of the transitory collections has two divisions, the intellectually acquired view of the transitory collection and the innate view of the transitory collection.

The innate view of the transitory collections is a type of self-grasping that arises naturally within our mind, and only the innate view of the transitory collection is the root of cyclic existence. An intellectually acquired view of the transitory collections is not the root of cyclic existence. Within that innate view of the transitory collections we have grasping at I and grasping at mine.

Out of those two views, the grasping at I and the grasping at mine, the innate view grasping at I is the root of samara<sup>14</sup>. The innate view of the transitory collections that is grasping at I is the root of samsara.

At a time after the 'I' has been praised and one thinks 'that was good to talk to me like that' a vivid appearance of 'I' can be observed in the depth of one's mind. At a time when the 'I' is praised, at a time when we are praised, then we will start to think 'that was very nice for that person to say like that', 'that actually was very well said by that person' and we generate a very strong sense of 'I am good', 'I am nice'.

The 'I' will be very vivid, and the stronger the emotion the more vivid it will be. It will be very vivid appearance of 'I' or self within the depth of our mind. It will be almost as if there is some kind of tangible sense of self and 'I'.

The same also happens when we will be for example criticized or blamed and abused. For example, if somebody accuses us that we stole something even though we have not, then we will very strongly think, 'how dare that person say that to me. 'I' didn't steal anything'. There is very strong 'I' within the mind, 'I', me, me. At such a time this vivid appearance of 'I' can be observed in the depths of one's mind. This vivid appearance of 'I' one grasps to be the self. First we have this vivid appearance of I; it's a sort of solid appearance of 'I' within the mind. Sort of concrete, the appearance has some sort of concreteness, we have this feeling that some very, very concrete 'I' is somewhere, which has been hurt or that has been praised. That appearance we grasp at as being our actual self, we believe that appearance and grasp at it, grasp at what appears to be the actual self or 'I'.

And in such a way we generate the appearance of ourselves as being a user, meaning being someone who is experiencing the various types of feelings, who is experiencing the various types of happiness and sufferings etc. And because of that then one generates the craving, grasping for the 'I', and aversion for others. When the view of the transitory collection grasps at self it makes a division between self and other. After the division into self and other one generates attachment for self and aversion for other. Focusing on the self by the view of the transitory collections also gives birth to pride. Together with this sense of self, this very concrete sense of self, also comes a certain pride, which is associated with that sense of 'I'. When we think 'I', it comes together with a certain pride. Here already we have that pride based on this view of the transitory collections. Because of the craving for self and the aversion for other one then generates desire for what benefits the self, anger towards what harms the self and ignorance to what is neutral.

It is as it is explained in the *Introduction to the Middle Way*, where it says that once a self exists one knows other, one grasps at self and rejects other, and in strong relation to that all faults arise. In the same line it also mentions that the seed of all afflictions and faults arise from the view of the transitory collection.

Further, the *Introduction to the Middle Way* states,

Initially starting grasping at self naming “I”  
Generating attachment for phenomena named “mine”  
Praise to whatever becomes compassion for migrators  
Traversing without freedom like a bucket in a well.

Here it is basically saying the same. That first one starts by grasping at the self naming ‘I’, then after grasping at self one starts to grasp at various phenomena as mine, belonging to the self. From ignorance, which is the root of the six afflictions, of the six root afflictions desire, aversion and doubt etc. are generated. In dependence upon them one accumulates karma and in dependence upon that one circles in samsara. One views this self either with an eternalistic or nihilistic view, thinking it either to be permanently truly existing or thinking that it ceases to exist after death. Also one generates the view that holds views such as the view of the self etc., and the associated negative behaviors to be supreme.

We mentioned before the various wrong views, we had the extreme view. Extreme view is either eternalistic or a nihilistic point of view regarding the self and then also we have the wrong view that holds wrong views, other wrong views and the associated negative behaviors as being supreme, superior. One would not only have a nihilistic point of view, but one would also think that nihilistic point of view is supreme. And then also all the behavior that is based on the nihilistic point of view to be also superior to the behavior of others. One might think, ‘after death I am anyway going to cease to exist’, which is a nihilistic point of view, ‘and then therefore now I can do whatever I like and in such a way then I am actually more free in my way of action than others, who are inhibited by their thoughts of ethics, morality, etc. Having this type of attitude, this type of view, is an example of the view that holds other negative views as being supreme. One holds the nihilistic point of view and the behavior that is based on it as being supreme.

In the same way one then generates also the wrong view holding the teacher that taught selflessness, his teachings on karma, the Four Noble Truths and the Three Jewels to be non-existent. That is a wrong view, or one generates doubt regarding them. Then based on the root of self-grasping one generates wrong view regarding the Buddha who taught selflessness or the law of cause and effect, the Three Jewels etc., or one generates doubt regarding those.

Since the innate view of the transitory collections is the root of all affliction and faults one needs to train in the wisdom realizing selflessness in order to overcome and abandon the delusions. As we already said before, the only way to overcome the delusions from the root, to completely overcome them, is to meditate on selflessness and emptiness. The wisdom realizing emptiness is the medicine that will help one to overcome all afflictions.



### 2.1.3. THE CAUSES OF THE AFFLICTIONS

Now we can talk about the six causes of the delusions. The six causes of the delusions are,

1. **The latent afflictions within our mind.** The afflictions are not necessarily always manifest within our mind. Sometimes they become more, I do not know if becoming subconscious is the right term, but one can sort of say that the delusion goes to sleep. Sometimes we talk also about the seed of the affliction. Having this latency for affliction, the latent affliction, is one of the causes for the generation of affliction
2. Then we need also **the object** of the affliction,
3. Then we need to have what is called the **mistaken conception** as a cause for the generation of the affliction.
4. Then also having a **very strong habit** or familiarity with the affliction is one cause.
5. Then we have **distractions**, which refers to misleading friends
6. And **speech - listening to wrong teachings**.

#### Latent Afflictions

We know through our own experience that our mind at a certain point in our day might be calm and peaceful, but then by meeting with a certain object, all at once, a certain disturbing emotion arises in our mind, such as anger or very strong attachment, pride or jealousy etc. We can see that at one time it wasn't there and then all at once it was there. What this shows is that we hadn't actually abandoned these delusions. The delusion was still latently there within our mind stream, it just wasn't manifest. There is this division of consciousness into those types of awareness that are manifest within our mental continuum and those that exist in the form of latency.

#### Object

If we have this latent afflictions, and if we have the cause of the mistaken conception, then if we come close to the object, we meet in some way with the object of that delusion, then the delusion will arise regardless of whether we want it or not. Sometimes it is enough just to remember the object of one's anger for anger to arise. One doesn't even need to meet directly with the object. Same with the object of one's attachment, one can just reflect on the mental image of the object of attachment for desire to arise. Once one has all the other causes and conditions together within one's mind, then if one meets with the object, definitely the delusion will arise.

And because, on the very beginners level, we still have the other various causes and conditions for the generation of afflictions within our mind, it is often recommended to try to keep one's mind separated from the object. Only after one has overcome the other causes in one's mind, then if one encounters the object one will not generate a very strong affliction. For example in the case of anger, as long as we have in our mind the seed of anger and as long as we have in our mind what is called the mistaken conception, then if we meet with the object of our anger, anger will definitely arise. At such a time, as long as we have not got our mind under control, it can be better to avoid the object of one's anger.

To purify the mind from the seed of the delusion is a very high realization that happens only when we reach the path of seeing, actually even then only to a certain degree. Finally it only happens if we either have reached the eighth bodhisattva ground or have become Arhats. In our case, since we are trying to follow the Mahayana path, once we have reached the eighth bodhisattva ground then our mind will be free from the seeds of delusions. Up until then, what we have to do is, we have to try to control the delusions by overcoming the other causes, by trying to minimize the other causes for the generation of afflictions.

### **Mistaken Conception**

One important cause one should work with are the mistaken conceptions. The mistaken conception in the case of anger is the kind of thinking that focuses and exaggerates the negative aspects of the object of one's anger. For example, if we are angry at another person, instead of seeing the good sides of that person, instead of remembering all the times that person was kind to us, we just focus on the negative aspects of that person and then exaggerate those aspects in the mind. And then through that, because the person appears to us only in the negative light, and a very exaggeratedly negative light, then we generate very strong anger for that other person.

It is important that we do not let our mind be controlled by those misleading conceptions, but that we also reflect on the good aspects of the other person, we reflect on all the times the other person has been kind to us, for example. We should question the validity of our thinking, because very often there is a very big discrepancy between what we think is actually true and what is actually true. How do you think it can happen that a person who one day is our worst enemy can become our best friend. This is not necessarily because the other person changes greatly, but is for the most part because of our way we perceive the other person.

Once we have overcome this mistaken conception through analytical meditation, remembering the positive aspects of the person, remembering their kindness. Also by remembering that even though the other person might have acted as the cause as a condition for our misfortune, for our problem, that the actual main cause for our misfortune is our own karma that we have created in a previous life. That will also greatly help to reduce this mistaken conception, making the person appear in not such a bad light, or reflecting on how the other person is actually controlled by their delusions. Then in such a way one would generate compassion for the other person. We generate compassion for someone who doesn't have any freedom of action but is controlled by his or her own disturbed mental state. Then after we have dealt with the mistaken conception, even if we meet the object, and even though there might be the seed for mental afflictions in our mind, for anger in our mind, anger won't arise. Then even though ultimately we have not abandoned anger temporarily we have been able to eliminate anger from our mind.

The same also goes for attachment, it works the same way with attachment. As long as we have the other causes for our attachment and desire then as soon as we will meet with the object of our desire, strong desire will inevitably arise within the mind. Therefore, until one has these other causes of desire under control it is much better to avoid the object of one's desire. Of course quite often you might think 'I want to meet the object of my desire', but anyway, try to apply it at least to those desires that you actually feel are harmful to yourself at the present time.

And then by reflecting on the disadvantages and faults of desire in general, then maybe also slowly, slowly you can relate it to other attachments and desires.

### **Familiarity**

Also a very important condition, a very important cause for the generation of afflictions, is our familiarity with the particular affliction. As we already mentioned at the beginning, our mind is a creature of habit and as such follows what it is familiar with. If our mind is very familiar with anger for example, or any other affliction, then even though we might meet only a very small object of our anger, very strong anger arises. Then there are such people that have so strong anger, they are habituated to being angry, that all it takes to set them off is to look at them in a particular way or to look at them in a strange way. Or if your mind is very acquainted with attachment, even a very, very small insignificant object of attachment will set off very great generation of desire within our mind. Here, by analyzing our mind, we can see how much dharma we have practiced in past lives. If you practiced dharma already well in past lives, then even though we might meet with very great objects of desire, little or no desire will arise in our mind. If we were medium types of practitioners then some medium type of anger will arise but it will also only stay for so long. If we didn't practice the Dharma at all or very badly, then even if we meet with very small causes for anger or with very small causes for desire, a very strong anger and desire will arise within our mind and they will abide for a very long time. Therefore it is very important that even though we might not be able to abandon the afflictions completely from our mind right now, it is very important that we reduce the afflictions as much as possible, gradually. Even though we cannot become arhats straight away, at least we can become a little bit less deluded.

Because also on the other hand, even though there is this western idea that everyone should just follow one's delusions and indulge in one's delusion, but that will not get rid of the delusion. To get rid of the delusion we have to pacify the delusion back into its original source. By meditating on the various antidotes of the delusions the delusion will be pacified back into its original source. Those mental states are not called delusion for nothing, they do make our mind sick, afflicted, and the more we follow them the more our mind will receive harm. We can observe this all around through our own personal experience all the time. If people do not work with their anger but indulge their anger, get more and more angry, then their minds degenerate more and more and also they inflict a great harm on themselves and others. If we have a problem with jealousy and we do not deal with it, then it can make our lives very miserable. Also very strong pride can provide the cause for one's own downfall. But anyway, we eventually will get to the disadvantages of the delusions.

### **Distractions**

Now we have completed four causes for the generation of afflictions; the seed or latent affliction, the object, the mistaken conception and the familiarity with the particular delusion. Another cause is what is called 'distractions'. What it refers to is misleading friends. Our friends, the circle of people we surround ourselves with, they have a very great influence on our lives, and can actually change our life for the good or the bad.

This is a story of two people in Tibet who came from the same village. One used to drink a lot of alcohol while the other used to be more a dharma practitioner, trying to be a good person, trying

to practice the Dharma etc. Then one of them, the dharma practitioner went off to Lhasa and the other person who drank alcohol went to a place where there were many Kadampa geshe, where he met with kadampa geshe, very good, pure dharma practitioners. Later, when those two met again, then they found that the person who used to be the one who drank alcohol had actually reformed by meeting the kadampa geshe, had given up his ways and become a dharma practitioner. While the Dharma practitioner, after having gone to Lhasa, had fallen into bad company and had acquired all kinds of destructive habits, had started to drink alcohol and so forth. Of course in our daily lives it will be very difficult to avoid what we call misleading friends, especially since the majority of people are deluded in one way or another, have various mental afflictions predominant in their mind. It will be very difficult to find as a friend someone who is a very pure dharma practitioner.

But at least what we should do is, we should try to be aware and not be influenced by misleading friends. We should be able through our own wisdom to recognize what is good and what is bad, and then follow our own wisdom, instead of being talked into something by our friends. If through our own wisdom we have understood that smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol is harmful, then we should stick to that even if other people do smoke cigarettes and drink alcohol, and try to induce us to do so. If we have been able to lessen our mental afflictions somewhat, then we shouldn't be inspired by the example of others, who might to the outside appear very happy by sort of living out their desires and delusions, but we should understand that both in the short and in the long term that person doesn't have much happiness.

In short, we should take our own wisdom of what is right and what is wrong as our friend, and even though we are in contact with people who follow various non-virtuous ways we should inside hold our own, do our own thing and not be influenced by them. Also, we might feel that because we are practicing Buddhism that this could be quite difficult if our friends etc, are non-Buddhist practitioners and of course it is very difficult having contact with non-Buddhist practitioners, quite often even with one's own family and forth, but again here as long as we know for ourselves what we do is right, that is the most important. Then also, in relation with other people, we should just focus on their qualities, we do not focus on their faults, and by looking only on their qualities, we generate those qualities ourselves and then later when you part ways, then one got benefit at least. And when we see that other people have certain faults we do not follow them - we can adopt their qualities but we do not adopt their faults. And in such a way we avoid this fifth cause of the generation of afflictions, misleading friends.

### **Speech - Listening to Wrong Teachings**

Then we have the sixth cause for the generation of afflictions, which is listening to wrong teachings. Of course Buddhism is a very non-sectarian type of religion. I think here wrong teachings refers to very clearly misleading teachings. Such as teachings that say it is ok to kill and steal. For example the various many different types of sects that are operating all over the world. If we follow their teachings then quite often it will just increase our anger, our attachment or our ignorance.



Also here in this context, apart from following philosophies that would increase our afflictions, idle gossip, talking with one's friends, about objects that cause the afflictions to rise such as war, who such and such is married to, what this and this movie star is doing.

We have those six causes for the generation of afflictions, and the most difficult one to purify from ones mind are the seeds or latent delusion. They are like a latent sickness that will spring up when it meets with the necessary causes and conditions. And that will only be purified once we reach the eighth bodhisattva ground. Before then we have to try as much as possible to avoid the other causes for the generation of afflictions.

What we have to do in order to practice antidotes against the afflictions is that we have to practice analytical meditation. Analytical meditation we can practice in all situations of our life; while we are going to work by train, bus, while sitting in front of the TV, while walking, shopping etc. By combining our various activities with various analytical meditations our mind becoming more and more familiar with those analytical meditations and the delusions will arise less and less. Of course, sitting down regularly to meditate in a formal meditation session every day is extremely important.



#### **2.1.4. THE FAULTS OF THE AFFLICTIONS**

Next we come to the faults of the afflictions. As you can imagine, the afflictions have a great variety of faults and it is very important to reflect upon the disadvantages of the afflictions because when we become aware of the faults of the afflictions then we stop seeing them as friends and start seeing them as enemies, something that harms us. Then we will engage in some method to overcome them, and actually also automatically they will arise much less.

Usually we regard as an enemy someone who threatens or takes away our happiness. Here, in the case of the delusions we are not actually aware of the various ways and the extent of the harm that our afflictions afflict on us. And sometimes our afflictions even appear to us as friends even though they actually give us harm.

We need to become aware of the various ways in which afflictions harm us, both on a temporary as well as an ultimate basis. First of all, if afflictions are generated within the mind, then one's own mind will become afflicted. That means first of all, from the point of view of someone who is enlightened, an afflicted mind is an unhappy mind. That's good to keep in mind. If our mind is afflicted it prevents us from seeing reality clearly. Then also, the more the afflictions arise the more they will reinforce the mental pattern of the afflictions. They will just reinforce the seed or the latency of the afflictions within our mind. Afflictions harm both oneself and others, and they both harm the happiness of this life as well as the happiness of future lives. By causing us to engage into non-virtuous actions the afflictions cause harm both in this life and also in future lives, and because our non-virtuous actions also harm others it also gives harm to others not only ourselves.

For example, if we let our mind be controlled by ill will and anger, and then we say something out of the control of ill-will and anger, at that time our own mind is not a very happy mind. Then also it disturbs the mind of the other person, it hurts the other person, and also it reinforces our familiarity with ill will. If we become angry at someone and then we do not choose not to follow our anger and act out of that anger, that just reinforces our habit of anger. As long as we continue to act in that way we will not get rid of our anger. That's why screaming at trees and pounding into cushions might bring some temporary relief of the tension, but ultimately it will not reduce the affliction of anger. In the same way if we feel very angry at someone and then we just let it all out, that will not reduce the affliction of anger. It might bring about some momentary relief of the tension we feel, but actually it is just like pouring oil onto our own afflictions.

Every time we follow an affliction we are just reinforcing our own samsara. And also, by following anger we cause non-virtuous karma that then ripens in the future as a suffering result. In such a way the affliction of anger has caused us both unhappiness in this life and in future lives. In such a way all the afflictions have the potential to cause us unhappiness in this life as well as in future lives.

By following the afflictions it also takes us further away from liberation and enlightenment. It will harm the realizations that we already have generated and it will take us further away from realizations that we are just about to generate. In such a way the afflictions harm both self and others, because if our afflictions take us further away from enlightenment then they also extend the time we are unable to really help other sentient beings. And it just prolongs the time oneself has to remain in cyclic existence.

Then also, because of strong afflictions we will not listen to the advice of others. For example, because of very strong pride and very strong anger we might say 'I'm never going to listen to others, no matter what they say, I will never listen to them. I will just do my own thing and I alone know what is right'. Therefore it says in the Ornament of Mahayana Sutras that afflictions harm self, they harm sentient beings, harm our morality, we will have less gain and profit, we will not listen to advice being reborn without freedoms and afflictions degenerate our attainment's and pushes attainment's further away.

Because of very strong attachment and desire we will actually have less gain than more. Even though on a very short basis, from the point of view of this life, it looks as if someone with lots of attachments and desire will have more riches, actually that is a misconception. If someone becomes very rich in this life it has very much to do with his or her karma to be rich. Of course all the other conditions need to come together. For example one needs to work hard and diligently, but then how many people are there who work hard and diligently who do not become rich but who remain poor? And then, how many are there who become rich without having worked very hard? Whether one will be rich or poor depends very much on one's karma. If we are very greedy and stingy because of very strong desire and attachment, then that creates the cause to be poor in a future life. In a future life, regardless of how much we work we will always remain very poor. For example, sometimes we think that we are very stressed out because we have to go to work five days a week from nine to five, and we complain about our work load and

of how tired we are. But actually there are many people all over the world who work much, much longer hours much, much more hard and physically demanding work, who are much, much poorer than us.

Whether one is rich or poor is not proportional to the amount of work one is doing necessarily. One has to have the karma to be materially well off and that karma is only generated through generosity. Therefore, if one is wise then one should use one's present good material situation to practice generosity as much as possible. By practicing generosity then one will increase one's wealth over lifetime, over lifetime, one will increase one's capital. But if we now, in this lifetime, just use up the profit and interest that we have accumulated over past lives, and then not create any further wealth through further investments of generosity, through further practice of generosity, then once we have used up all our good karma, then it will be very difficult to again in the future create more good karma.

And then also, delusions have the power to destroy our realizations and to prolong our spiritual path. Actually we want to become enlightened very quickly, but the more we follow the delusions the longer our path will be. It is explained that, for example, by generating anger, first of all you can destroy realizations that we already have generated. But then also, let's say we have the karma, we had reached the stage in the path, where maybe next year we would have made some significant progress in our dharma practice, that progress can be postponed for a long time because of strong anger. Because of a short instance of strong anger we can postpone our spiritual development significantly.

Then also, the afflictions harm our concentrative meditation, the calmness of our mind. If we sit down trying to meditate, trying to have a certain calm mind, if we investigate what actually prevents us from having a calm mind and stable mind then we will find that it is mostly the various types of afflictions that are disturbing our mind.

Both temporarily and ultimately afflictions have more faults than qualities, in fact afflictions have only one quality. The one redeeming feature of afflictions is that they can be abandoned and purified. Apart from that afflictions they do not have any redeeming features. We can just investigate in our own lives which mental states are the mental states that make our mind happy and which are the mental states that bring suffering to our mind. The dharma mind, dharmic mental states, virtuous and wholesome mental states, they are the mental states that make our mind happy. And the afflicted mental states: anger, attachment, jealousy, competitiveness, pride they are the mental states that make our mind unhappy. This is something we can confirm through our experience in our daily lives. And then we should act according to our wisdom that we have generated in such a way, and try to reduce the afflictions as much as possible - since we want to attain inner happiness.



## 2.2. THE WAY ONE GENERATES KARMA THROUGH THE AFFLICTIONS

Then we come to the next outline, which is the way karma is accumulated. We are now presently talking about the second noble truth, the truth of the origin. We said that there are two origins, there is the karmic origin and the origin of the afflictions. The origin of karma and the origin of the afflictions. Now we go on to how karma is generated from the afflictions. And before we do this we talk first about what karma actually is and a little bit about the various delusions regarding karma.

### Definition of Karma

First of all, karma really is ***the mental factor of intention***. The mental factor of intention that makes the rest of our mind engage into either virtue, non-virtue or neutral actions and states. The intention is the mental factor that directs our mind to virtuous, non-virtuous or neutral objects and to virtuous, non-virtuous or neutral states. It is like the horse that is pulling the carriage. That is why, if we reflect very much on the faults of the delusions and generate a very strong intention not wanting the delusions to arise, then automatically less afflictions will arise within our mind.

### Divisions of Karma

#### Intent and Intended Karma

We have a very basic division of karma into what I call intent, the karma of intent, and intended karma. The way this works is that the karma of intent is the karma that we generate before the action of body and speech. For example, harmful intent would be one of the ten non-virtuous karmas.

Harmful intent then is actually also karma. It is the karma of intent. Then out of that intent if we say something non-virtuous, if we say something harmful or we engage into harmful physical action, then the mental factor of intention that is existent in our mind at the time of the action that is called intended karma. We have the karma of intent and intended karma, and they refer to the state of the motivation, the karma at the time of the motivation, and then the karma at the time of the action. And since all our verbal and physical actions are proceeded by motivation of one type or the other it is very important that we take great care of our mind and our motivation.

That's also why it is important to meditate on love and compassion. Sometimes people have this obstacle thinking that meditating on love and compassion is not necessary, that it is much more important to actually help the other person. This is a little bit tricky because we actually will only help another person if we have love and compassion. And the more love and compassion we have the more we will help the other person. And the less love and compassion we have the less we will be able to help the other person. We might actually come into a situation where we would like to help the other person but because of a lack of love and compassion we are not able to and give up then. While someone who has meditated very well on love and compassion, and has very strong love and compassion, will never get tired and do whatever it takes in order to help others.

Once we have very strong love and compassion, the love and compassion of a buddha, then we engage into the actions of someone like the Dalai Lama or Lama Zopa Rinpoche, who never get

tired of working for others. We have now a very limited and compartmentalized love and compassion. For example, we might have a little bit of love and compassion for those we feel attachment to, but we do not have any love and compassion for strangers or for enemies. That's why we find it very difficult to actually help someone that we dislike, and why we can remain inactive even though we perceive great suffering, because it is maybe somewhere far away.

Since the action of body and speech is always preceded by mental motivation, by the karma of intent, one should take very great care of one's mind. And even if we find that we have the intent to engage into some harmful action, then at least we should exert enough control of our body and speech not to act on that motivation. And even though we might feel if we do not act on our strong anger that would be like suppressing that anger, that is not true. Not acting on something doesn't mean that we suppress it. What we have to do is we do not act on it and then we deal with the anger with various antidotes, meditating on love and compassion, mahayana thought transformation, etc. In such a way the anger will die down, it will be pacified into its own natural place. We do not need to think that we always exist in a certain concrete way. We have been many times very angry in the past, but now this anger has died down. That shows that the mind does change, that the various mental states are not always concretely existing within our mind.

### **Meritorious Karma, Non-Meritorious Karma and Immovable Karma**

Then also there are various other divisions of karma, such as the division into meritorious karma and non-meritorious karma and immovable karma. Non-meritorious karma is karma that will cause us to take rebirth in any one of the lower realms, it is basically non-virtuous karma. Non-meritorious karma is non-virtuous karma that results in suffering. Then we have meritorious karma. Meritorious karma is karma that results in happiness; it's contaminated virtuous karma that results in happiness, in samsaric happiness within the desire realm. Without getting too technical, meritorious karma is the karma that causes happiness one can experience in the desire realm, and then immovable karma is the virtuous karma the result of which one experiences in the form and formless realm.

### **Throwing Karma, Establishing Karma and Completing Karma**

Then also we have the division of karma into throwing karma, establishing karma and completing karma. Throwing karma are karmas that are generated on the basis of delusion that cause a particular rebirth, that have the power to throw us into another rebirth. Establishing karma is actually the interdependent link of becoming, which we will talk about more in a special section on the twelve interdependent links.

There is first the throwing karma that has ripened at the time of one's death, and then we have the completing karma that completes the situation of the particular rebirth into which one's throwing karma has thrown oneself. One might have a very good throwing karma because one is reborn as a human but then, because of non-virtuous completing karma one might remain very poor, or one might experience lots of sickness while being reborn as a human. While sometimes one can observe that non-virtuous throwing karma throws a sentient being into a rebirth as an animal, such as a dog or a cat, but then because of good completing karma they

experience a very nice situation in their life as a dog or as a cat. Being kept by a very rich nice owner who treats them better than human beings are treated somewhere else, and always have very good food, nice place to sleep etc.

### **Virtuous Karma, Non-Virtuous Karma and Neutral Karma**

Then we have also a division of karma into virtuous, non-virtuous and neutral. Virtuous karma is karma that has a white ripening result, non-virtuous karma is the karma that has a black ripening result, neutral karma is that which has neither.

Also within here we have contaminated karma and uncontaminated karma. Contaminated karma can be both virtuous as well as non-virtuous. Of course all the non-virtuous types of karma will be contaminated because they will be generated through the force of the afflictions. Through any affliction, such as desire or ignorance, we then engage in non-virtuous action such as killing, and then that will cause us to experience a black ripening result, a suffering result in the future. For example, if we are bothered by mosquitoes and then because of our anger and aversion and maybe because of our ignorance thinking that it is ok, then we kill the mosquito. That act of killing the mosquito is the non-virtuous karma of killing, being generated through the cause of aversion and then results in a future suffering ripening result.

And then we have contaminated virtuous karma. Contaminated virtuous karma is the karma that is generated in dependence upon the delusion of self-grasping, but is still virtuous. Any type of virtue we engage in that is done on the basis of self-grasping, the view of the transitory collections, will be contaminated virtuous karma, and the result of contaminated virtuous karma is samsaric happiness. In such a way contaminated karma is the karma that is generated through the force of affliction and the result of contaminated karma is experienced within cyclic existence.

In order to create karma that leads us away from cyclic existence we need to generate renunciation and the wisdom realizing emptiness. It is when we generate renunciation and then engage into an action on the basis of renunciation, for example we meditate, or we recite mantras on the basis of renunciation, even though of course we still have ignorance and the view of the transitory collections, but it is actually turning us away from samsara. Therefore it is something very worthwhile to achieve.

So meritorious karma is basically contaminated virtuous karma, non-meritorious karma is basically non-virtuous karma and immovable karma is also contaminated virtuous karma. For our actions to start to lead us to true inner happiness liberation and enlightenment we need to meditate on the lam-rim, generate renunciation and bodhicitta.



### 2.3. THE WAY ONE DIES, TRANSFERS AND TAKES REBIRTH

Today we are going to talk about the twelve dependent links of origination or the twelve links of dependent origination. What we do now is talk about the way one circles around in the cyclic existence because of karma and delusion. Before we talked particularly about the various problems we experience in cyclic existence, in order to generate renunciation. Now we come to the second method for generating renunciation, which is meditating on the dependent links.

Meditating on the dependent links is particularly for practitioners of greater intelligence, what it means I guess is that it is difficult to understand, and that we shouldn't worry if we do not get it immediately. To understand the dependent links completely can take many many years of study and meditation.

I'd like to call the twelve dependent links the "Samsaric Chain Reaction", because they explain in greater detail how one is circling inside cyclic existence. Before I talk about the twelve dependent links, I will talk about the foundation, talk about the process of death and rebirth in general.

#### 2.3.1. CONDITIONS CAUSING DEATH

First of all, we come to the conditions of death. There can be three conditions for death.

- First of all - the life span runs out;
- Secondly - the merits run out;
- Thirdly - one has what's called 'untimely death'.

So **first of all**, that death occurs because the life span runs out refers to the death that occurs naturally because the life span with which one was born, the prescribed life span, has run out.

Then we have the **second** cause of death – one dies because the merit has run out. Here one dies even though the life span, from the point of view of life span it would still be possible to have a longer life, but because one doesn't have any more merits to support one's life, then one dies. That would be like because of food shortage, etc.

**Thirdly**, we have untimely death. Untimely death refers to accidents, eating the wrong things, taking the wrong types of medicines, etc.

#### 2.3.2. THE MIND DURING DEATH

When one dies, through any of those three conditions, then one goes through a gradual process. This is the most crucial time of one's life, because the state of our mind at the time of our death determines which type of rebirth we are going to take in the next life.

Here we have three possibilities.

- We can die with a virtuous state of mind,
- We can die in a non-virtuous state of mind,
- We die in a neutral state of mind.

Regarding the first state of mind, the **virtuous state of mind**, it can be induced either through one's own mindfulness, or through the condition of others. Meaning if one is able, through one's own practice, to remember virtuous objects, to remember virtuous states of mind while one dies, or one is able to do through the condition of others – by people being able to recite mantras through one's ears, or talking about the dharma etc.

For example, if one has practiced during one's lifetime, one might find it easier to practice some type of meditation during one's death process. For example, one meditation that is very good to do is to remember the qualities of the Buddha, dharma and sangha, and to meditate on those qualities while one is going through the death process. It is said that if one can meditate on refuge while going through the death process, then it is definite that one will not go into the lower realms in the next life.

But then again, if one is not able through one's own power to remember some virtuous practice at the time of death, then mainly through the condition of others reciting some mantras one can be able to induce or remember some virtuous state within one's mind.

The virtuous state that we have generated lasts until coarse perception fades when then the mind turns to neutral. Here for this to make more sense, maybe I should give an explanation of the various levels of consciousness and also the absorption process at the time of death.

### **The Death-Absorption Process**

Yes, you know this is going a little bit away from the topic 'virtuous state of mind (at the time of death)', but it is important as a foundation to understand it better. As I had already mentioned at the beginning of this series, we have various levels of consciousness. In the tantric system it talks about the

- coarse level of consciousness,
- the subtle level of consciousness
- and the very-subtle level of consciousness.

The **coarse level of consciousness** refers to primarily our sense consciousnesses – the eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness etc.

Then we have the **subtle level of consciousness**, which refers to our various conceptions. The emotions would be included, such as the various types of feelings, etc.

Then we have the **very-subtle level of consciousness**, which refers to the consciousness of clear-light.

At the time of our death our consciousness is not just leaving the body all at once. Where, in one moment we are talking and then the next moment, our consciousness has left the body. There will be a little bit of time in between, even though the time spent may be very very brief, even maybe just a short moment, just an instant, there is a time period when we go through a, what we call, the death process, or death absorption process. The coarse consciousnesses absorb into the subtle consciousnesses, and then the subtle consciousnesses absorb into the very-subtle consciousnesses called clear-light.



While one goes through this death process, one experiences a series of internal visions, and also a series of external signs.

### **The Four Outer Dissolutions**

So, here very briefly, at first, **the first vision** one experiences is **a mirage-like vision**. This mirage-like vision occurs when the internal energies that support the earth element will become non-manifest and then the wind supporting the water element become more manifest. This causes the earth element to be absorbing into the water element and at that time one experiences the internal vision of a mirage.

Then, **secondly**, the wind supporting the water element becomes non-manifest and the wind supporting the fire element becomes more manifest. This is called the water element absorbing into the fire element, and one experiences **an internal vision of smoke**.

Then **the third vision is the fire-sparks vision**. This vision happens when the fire element becomes non-manifest, meaning the internal subtle energies supporting the fire element become non-manifest, and the subtle elements supporting the wind element become manifest. This is called the fire element absorbing into the wind element, and the internal vision is one of fire-sparks.

Then we have **the fourth vision** that is **like the glow of a candle flame**. This vision happens when the wind element becomes non-manifest because the subtle energies that support the wind element become non-manifest. So, these four steps mark what is called the outer dissolution.

There are eight steps all together in the dissolution process and the first four steps are associated with the dissolution of the four elements, and this is called the outer dissolution. Actually there is much much more to be said about how the different types of consciousnesses absorb with the different elements at the different stages, we could go on for years. But we will just say that once the outer dissolution process has finished, clinically speaking, the person has died, because once the wind element has become non-manifest, then also the outer breathing has ceased. At that time the coarse consciousness has also been absorbed, meaning that the sense consciousnesses have all become non-manifest, and as such the person has no contact any more with the outside world, but is still not dead, even though clinically-speaking they are dead. But they are not dead because of consciousness residing within the body - there are still four more visions to come.

### **The Four Internal Dissolutions**

After the vision that is like the glow of a candle flame we then have the vision of white appearance, red-increase, dark-vision, and then clear-light.

At the time of **white-appearance** thoughts belonging to the family of anger subside. Then, at the vision of **red-increase**, thoughts belonging to the family of desire subside; then at the time of **the dark-vision**, thoughts subside all together. So, you can see how the various subtle consciousnesses absorb.

Yes, can see here that the various subtle consciousnesses, subtle thoughts, are absorbed one after the other, become non-manifest, and finally one arrives at the very subtle consciousness of **clear-light**.

The death process is something that all people go through when they die, it can happen very quickly – in the case of a car accident, but it can also be more prolonged in the case of more peaceful death. It can also last very long in the cases of people able to recognize all those signs and then use them for meditation. But of course, even though we all experience those signs at the time of our death, we are not actually able to perceive them, for they are too subtle and happen too quickly.

But through the process of meditation one can train one's mind, and then one is able to recognize those signs, and follow them through, one to the other, until one arrives at the clear-light mind of death. Then one can use the clear-light mind of death for one's meditation, and there have been reported many instances of practitioners who have been able to remain in that clear-light state for many days or even weeks at a time.

Many occurrences have been reported of advanced meditators who have been to do that. For example, Ling Rinpoche, the senior tutor of His Holiness the Dalai Lama was a famous case, and a monk on the border of Nepal remained in that state for a certain number of days after he was clinically dead, and was actually examined by a doctor of the Canadian Civic Clinic in Kathmandu, who said in an interview that he had never seen anything like it. This is definitely something that exists, when one investigates it, one will find it confirmed.

So, the reason I said that was because we were starting to talk about the virtuous and non-virtuous states of the mind when we die and that they only last as long as we have the coarse perception. At a certain stage in the death process we leave what we call the coarse perception phase, and from then onwards our mind will journey to a neutral state, and it will be too late to try and induce a virtuous state in the person's mind because we will not be able to influence our future rebirth in any way. Only if we are a very highly advanced meditator, can we go through the process aware. Otherwise, once coarse perception has faded, then one's dice has been thrown, one could say.

If the person is more acquainted with a virtuous state of the mind, then at the time of death, their mind will automatically turn towards virtue and will forget about non-virtue - if we have practiced the dharma very well. And for serious practitioners, their life time practice is done with an eye on death, with eye on the preparation for death.

You may have gathered by now, death is the only thing that is certain in our life, and if we die in a virtuous state of mind, then that will cause the karma to ripen and we can go to a happy future rebirth. If we die in a non-virtuous state, that will cause negative karma to ripen, and we will go to a lower rebirth. Death is a very important time in our lives, and if you practice very well, then because our mind is a creature of habit, at that time we will find it very easy to meditate on a virtuous topic - we can meditate on refuge, or renunciation or compassion or bodhicitta, etc.

If our familiarity with virtue and non-virtue is 50-50, or if our dharma practice in our life time has been 50-50, then the mind will draw towards the state that we remember first and will not reverse from that state. But if our mind remembers very strongly, a virtuous state because we practiced dharma a lot during our life time, then automatically we will turn to virtue at the time of our death, to a wholesome and positive state. But if our practice was 50-50, then it will be again a 50-50 chance and will depend on what we remember first at the time of death. If we are able to be mindful of something virtuous at the time of death, then the mind will turn towards that. It just depends on what we remember first.

We can also die in a **non-virtuous state**, which is less desirable – in fact not desirable at all. This is induced either through one's own mindfulness or through others. Mindfulness here refers to remembering something non-virtuous. That means we are unfortunate and remember something unpleasant at the time of our death, or we remember someone we dislike and generate anger, or we remember some grudge we had in life that will generate anger and induce some non-virtuous state of mind.

Or, it can be a condition of others, some of the people around us who say something that causes anger to arise, that can induce a non-virtuous state of mind. Also at the time of death, if we remember the objects of our attachment or we have a very strong craving, then that will cause non-virtuous karma to ripen.

Finally, one can also die in a **neutral state of mind**. This is the state of mind that is neither virtuous nor non-virtuous.

During the death process, for as long as coarse perception is active, because of strong familiarity during a lifetime, the person has a strong attachment for the self. This attachment to the self causes increasing fear of annihilation for the dying person because the death process happens and the various type of consciousness absorbs. One becomes further and further removed from one's physical body. And then one starts to think that one is becoming non-existent –that the 'I' becomes extinct. Because of that the person generates craving for the body and that is the cause for establishing the bardo.

How does it come that the mental state at the time of death determines where we go in the next life? This is because craving and grasping at the time of our death activate throwing karma, which propels us to our next life. Because we are in a certain state of mind at the time of death, then the particular craving and grasping, which are two of the dependent links we are talking about, become active and they then activate a particular karma. For example, the craving is for the body, as already explained, because of the strong attachment for the self. Because of one's strong self-grasping, where one has a strong feeling of annihilation when one dies. This generates a very strong craving for a body, and then the grasping could be the grasping for heat. This indicates rebirth in the lower realms.

For someone who has realized emptiness directly it is different. This can be of course at various levels, but at the very minimum, the smallest direct realization of emptiness of a practitioner of the lower stream-enterer, even though the stream enterer will also generate this very strong grasping of self at the time of death, he will be able to overcome it. The same way as a stronger

person is always able to overcome a weaker person, in the same way the stream enterer can subdue the self-grasping that arises at the time of death, through his realization of emptiness. And then, in such a way craving and grasping are not generated and the person doesn't take rebirth under the control of karma and delusions – and in such a way has cut the samsaric chain reaction!

If you manage to die in a virtuous state of mind, then some virtuous karma will be activated and you will have a human or higher rebirth. This is the case even if we have spent most of our life accumulating non-virtuous karma. Even if we spent all of our life accumulating non-virtuous karma, creating non-virtuous karma, harming sentient beings, if we are somehow able to manage at the time of our death to die in a virtuous state of mind, then we will not immediately go to a lower rebirth. Of course that doesn't mean that all the karma created has been lost – it just doesn't ripen immediately!

But in my personal opinion, this is extremely unlikely to happen, because the mind is a creature of habit and as such will follow its old ways at the time of death. I think it could only happen if a person has generated sincere regret and somehow is able to die in a virtuous state of mind. A person has had a sincere change of heart before they die. But if one has lived all one's life harming sentient beings, indulging in this and that, being selfish, then it is extremely unlikely that one will die in a virtuous state of mind or a positive state of mind. But it could still happen that one could die in a virtuous state of mind if for some reason, maybe the fear of death, the person has had a sincere change of heart. That is one way I could envision it.

Therefore from my point of view, this is also the cause for great hope.



#### **2.3.4. HOW THE INTERMEDIATE STATE IS ESTABLISHED AFTER DEATH**

As we said before, while coarse perception is active, the mind can fall into virtuous and non-virtuous states as explained above. But once coarse perception has subsided, the mind reverts to a neutral state and then no outer minds can change that.

What that means is that if we have had/gone through a certain state in our death process, either virtuous or non-virtuous states, which have then activated either virtuous or non-virtuous throwing karmas, then once we have come to that state where the coarse perception has ceased, it is too late to change. Then the dice are cast, so to speak, and one goes through the rest of the death process, to the clear-light and then when the clear-light mind leaves the body, then the person is actually finally dead.

Immediately afterwards the bardo is generated – the intermediate state, one takes rebirth as an intermediate state being. The bardo is the word for the intermediate state. A bardo being is generated in dependence of virtuous and non-virtuous karma as well as desire for a body. The bardo beings have the five sense powers, but they also have various powers because they have to be able to see the karma of sentient beings, to see where they can take rebirth. And they are not obstructed by solid objects, they can travel through solid objects at great speed, but I do

not think the bardo beings are just wandering around very leisurely, while taking their pick of parents. The bardo is actually I think, quite, how you say, sort of stressed out, zooming around looking for a new body. If it hasn't found a new body in seven days, then the bardo being dies and is born again, again has a life span of seven days and again dies if it hasn't found suitable parents; and this cycle can repeat itself seven times.



### **2.3.5. HOW ONE TAKES REBIRTH FROM THE INTERMEDIATE STATE**

The bardo being can live seven times seven days, but then after those 49 days have passed, the bardo being will have definitely found suitable parents. In the case of human rebirth, the bardo being will see the future parents in sexual union<sup>15</sup> and will generate anger. I think if the future rebirth is supposed to be a male rebirth the bardo being will generate anger to the male partner, and if the future rebirth is to be female, the bardo being will direct its anger to the female. This acts as the cause for the bardo being to die, and for its mind to take place on the fertilized egg.

Then, once consciousness has taken place on the fertilized egg, those eight steps of dissolution we talked about before happen in reverse. Of course, there is much more to be learned about the death process and going through the bardo, but maybe for now we will just leave it here.



## **CONTEMPLATING THE TWELVE DEPENDENT LINKS OF ORIGINATION**

### **1. The Individual Links**

Okay then, after talking about the process of dying, bardo and rebirth very briefly, we can come now briefly to the topic of the twelve links, or the twelve links of dependent origination.

They are:

1. Ignorance
2. Karmic formation
3. Consciousness
4. Craving
5. Grasping
6. Becoming
7. Name and form
8. Six sources
9. Contact
10. Feeling
11. Birth
12. Aging and death

You see, the very first link is the link of **ignorance**. This ignorance particularly refers to the innate ignorance grasping at an inherently existing. This ignorance acts as the motivation for the creation of karma, which is the second link, karmic formation.

**Karmic formation** doesn't refer just to any karma, but it refers to throwing karma, those karmas with the power to throw us into a future life.

Then we have the third link – the link of **consciousness**. First of all, at the root is ignorance, being ***the opposite of the transcendental wisdom realizing emptiness***.

Generally there are different types of explanations regarding ignorance – sometimes it is said that ignorance refers to a cloudy not knowing state of the mind; and another explanation that says ignorance is actually a misconception or misunderstanding, a misconception regarding the reality –misapprehending reality. And here, a misconception regarding the reality of the self. As we have already explained previously, the misconception regarding the ultimate reality of the self or in other words, the grasping at the inherent existence of the self is at the root of all our problems. Grasping of “I” or mine is generated and from that grasping at the “I” and mine, attachment for self and aversion for others is generated. It generates attachment for the happiness of self and anything that falls in the category of self or mine. And anything that falls into or harms the happiness of self or friends etc, then that would be regarded with aversion.

Then, because of those three delusions within ones mind – anger, attachment and delusion, one creates non-virtuous karmas of body and speech. Actually by creating aversion one generates karma, just by generating attachment one creates karma, so, out of ignorance one generates mental, verbal and physical karma – the karmic formation, one generates throwing karma. Karma, as we have already mentioned before, refers more to the mental factor of intention. We were talking before about the mental factor of intention. Motivation time at the time of the cause, and also the motivation at the time of the action.

Then, in the next moment that karma disintegrates – it becomes non-existent – how you say – obliterates. It transforms into a potential. The karmic factor of intention transforms into karmic potential, which is placed on the third link - **consciousness**.

We can also add here that when you are going to read about the twelve links in the Lam-rim texts such as Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand, or the great Lam-rim by Lama Tsong Khapa, you will find the sequence is slightly different from this sequence that I am following here. In the Lam-rim after consciousness, the dependent link of name and form, then the six sources, contact, feeling are listed, and then comes craving, grasping, becoming and then comes birth aging and death.

The system used in the Lam-rim combines links belonging to two different sets of twelve links. The way I am doing it now is talking about the twelve links from the point of view how they would happen if they all belong to the same set.

Actually, over the course of our life there are many many sets of twelve links interacting with each other. They are not all of one set. The way it is outlined in the Lam-rim is 2 sets of twelve

links interacting with each other. I am now doing it in the sequence, which is outlined in the textbook on the twelve links in Sera Monastery, which is according to one set of twelve links. It does actually mention that in the Liberation in the Palm, when it talks about how one places the twelve links in 1 or 2 or 3 lifetimes. It mentions that it is in a different order. It is good to know how they work in one sequence and how they work if they are interacting, if 1 or 2 sets of links are interacting with each other. Now we will look how the twelve links would occur sequentially if they all belonged to the same set.

So, if they belong to the same set, then craving, grasping and becoming would come after the link of consciousness. Because the karmic seeds have been placed on the consciousness, and they go with the consciousness to our death. Then, at the time of our death, **craving** is generated within the mind. We can have different types of craving – craving for happiness, craving for non-existence of suffering, even craving for equanimity. We have to avoid generating the various types of craving.

Craving first activates the karmic seed. Then the craving becomes **grasping**, which completes activating the karmic seed, and then that karmic seed becomes the dependent link of **becoming**. Becoming, the dependent link of becoming, is the activated throwing karma. It is sure that once this throwing karma has been activated will throw us to this particular type of rebirth.

We shall just go over this again. Craving is that one doesn't want to be separated from happy feelings and one wants to be separated from suffering and one clings, craves or grasps at that separation. Craving is generated in dependence on the dependent link of feeling. We crave for happy feelings, we crave for the absence of suffering, then as the craving increases, it becomes grasping.

There are different type of grasping, such as grasping at the objects of the senses, nice sounds, nice smells, nice tastes, nice touch, nice shapes and colors. There are also some more subtle type of grasping such as grasping at the person, grasping at different types of wrong view etc etc. So, once through craving and grasping, the karmic link has been activated, then it has become possible for that karma to throw us into a future life.

All of this happens at the subtle level during our death process. Once it has gone to that stage, as ordinary people there is not much we can do about it any more. The only thing we can do about it is to try to, how we said, induce a virtuous and positive process by dying in a virtuous and positive mind.

Then once one has gone completely through the death process, as explained before, and has gone through the bardo, and through the bardo has found suitable parents, then one takes **rebirth**. The consciousness takes rebirth on the fertilized egg and the link of **name and form** is established. The dependent link of name and form refers to the five aggregates. The first is the form aggregate, and name refers to the four mental aggregates of feeling, recognition, compositional factors and consciousness. At this very early stage of development, the six sense powers have not been developed yet. The mental sense power and the body sense power are there, but the other four sense powers – the eye sense power, ear sense power and the smell and taste sense powers have not been developed yet. As long as those six sense

powers, also referred to as the six sources, have not been developed, one refers to the five aggregates as the dependent link of name and form.

Here it would be good to mention that to be correct it is the 'dependent link of various names and forms', including 'various' because not all sentient beings have five aggregates. For example, sentient beings in the formless realms only have four aggregates, they do not have the form aggregate. But we normally talk about the human realm that have name and form.

Once the six sense powers have been developed, the dependent link of name and form stops, and the dependent link of the **six sources** starts. As I said before the six sources are the six sense-powers.

Once the dependent link of six sources is fully developed it lasts for as long as the person cannot discriminate objects even though object consciousness and sense power meet. For consciousness to perceive an object, what needs to happen is the sense power, the object and the consciousness need to meet. But here at this stage, even though they meet, the person cannot yet discern or discriminate objects into pleasurable, non-pleasurable or neutral.

Again literally, 'the dependent link of various six sources', because beings in the formless realm won't have all the six sense powers. Beings in the formless realm only have the mental sense power, and beings in the form realm do not have the power of smell or taste if I can remember correctly.

Then, once the consciousness becomes able to discriminate the various objects into pleasurable, unpleasurable and neutral, then the dependent link of the six sources subsides and the dependent link of **contact** starts.

The dependent link of contact starts through the meeting of object, consciousness and sense power, once one is able to discriminate into pleasurable, unpleasurable or neutral, but one doesn't yet experience any type of feeling with regard to those objects.

The dependent link of feeling will act as the cause for generation of craving and grasping. But that generation of craving and grasping will belong to a different set of twelve dependent links. Then after that we also will have the dependent link of birth aging and death.

The dependent link of birth starts simultaneously with the dependent link of name and form, but is only the very first instant that is called the dependent link of birth.

Then we have the dependent link of **aging and death**. First we start to age and then death is the final result of the aging process.





## 2. CONDENSING THE LINKS

If we condense those twelve links into 4 then we have what is called the projecting links, the establishing links, the links of the projected result and the links of the established result.

Ignorance, karmic formation and consciousness would be what we call projecting links; craving, grasping and becoming would be what we refer to as establishing links; name and form, six sources, contact and feeling would be the projected result; and birth, aging and death become established result.

As we have said before, because of the motivation of ignorance karma is generated. Then that karma is placed as a potential on our stream of consciousness, these three are called the projecting links – they project a particular type of rebirth, but it is not sure yet as whether they will experience that particular rebirth or not – it is just a projection.

But once that potential has been activated, through the 3 establishing links of craving grasping and becoming, once that throwing karma has been activated, then it is sure that one will experience that result in the next life. That is why the craving, grasping and becoming are called the establishing links.

They establish the result of the projecting links of ignorance, karmic formation and consciousness.

The projected result is name and form, six sources, contact and feeling; and the established result is birth, aging and death.



## 3. HOW THEY ARE COMPLETED OVER MULTIPLE LIVES

We can have a look at how they expand over the lifetimes, we have two possibilities. Either we have them expand over two lifetimes or expand over three lifetimes.

### Over Two Lifetimes

In the first case, let's say this life, we accumulate the karma to be reborn as a god in the god realm. As a result of ignorance one generates the virtuous karma, which is the contaminated virtuous karma, and then that karma continues as potential karma in our mind-stream. Then at the end of this life it will be activated through craving and grasping, until the throwing karma actually becomes the dependent link of becoming. Then in the following life we will have the six resulting links of name and form, six sources and feeling, birth, aging and death.

### Over Three Lifetimes

In order to ripen, the minimum life that is needed for one set of twelve links is two lives. One set of twelve dependent links can be spanned over 3 lifetimes. How that would happen is one would accumulate karma in this life, - ignorance, karmic formation and consciousness. But then the karmic imprints continue in the storehouse consciousness, they would not get activated at

the end of this life. What gets activated at the end of this life is a throwing karma that belongs to a different set of twelve dependent links.

That particular set of twelve dependent links just now used as an example has not been activated as the cause of another life. It doesn't even have to be activated in the following life – it can be activated in any future life, it can go on for many many lifetimes – karma never gets lost by itself.

If it is non-virtuous karma, it continues as long as it is not purified. And if it is virtuous karma, it continues for as long as it is not harmed by anger, it's potential not harmed by anger. The karma will just continue, going from life to life, together with our consciousness, until in one life the craving, grasping and becoming belonging to that set of twelve dependent links becomes activated.

Once they have become activated, their throwing karma has been activated, and that would be the second life. The first life would have been when they were accumulated, then in another life, which is the second life, they have been activated and then there would be the third life, when one experiences the results of name and form, six sources, contact and feeling, with birth, aging and death.

So, one set of twelve dependent links spans even over 2 lifetimes or 3 lifetimes – we cannot have less and we cannot have more.



By the merits of this commentary  
May all our teachers such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama,  
Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Lama Ösel Rinpoche, Khenrinpoche Lundrub Rigsel  
and so forth  
remain immutable with us like a vajra, brimming with health,  
And continually turn the wheel of Dharma of Sutra and Tantra,  
Especially Lama Tsong Khapa's teachings.

The qualities of the Buddha are inconceivable  
The qualities of the Dharma are inconceivable  
The qualities of the Sangha are inconceivable  
The ripening result, brought about through  
Faith in the inconceivable, is also inconceivable.

May all sentient beings immediately  
Attain the supreme state of enlightenment.

<sup>1</sup> And to give up grasping at the happinesses of this life, i.e. the eight worldly dharmas.

<sup>2</sup> Higher training of morality, concentration and wisdom.

<sup>3</sup> Perfection of generosity, morality, patience, enthusiasm, concentration and wisdom.

<sup>4</sup> 1. Cleaning the room and setting up representations of the Buddha's body, speech and mind; 2. Arranging the offerings; 3. To sit comfortably on a comfortable meditation cushion in the eight-point posture and to adopt the right state of mind, i.e. Refuge & Bodhicitta; 4. Visualising the Merit-field; 5. Accumulation of Merits and purification of negativities; 6. Making requests.

<sup>5</sup> See beginning of CD 2

## <sup>6</sup> **Feeling**

*From the Compendium of Knowledge<sup>6</sup>: What is the definition of feeling? The definition of experience. The nature of experience through which the ripening of the results of virtues and non-virtues karmas are individually experienced.*

- Feeling has the threefold division into happiness, suffering and equanimity. *From the Clear Exposition of the five Aggregates: What are feelings? The three kinds of experience, happiness, suffering and that which is neither happiness nor suffering. Happiness is that which we wish to meet (miss) when stopped; suffering is that which we wish to separate from when it arises, that which is neither happiness nor suffering is that to which neither wishes are generated when it arises.*
- Those three feelings have a sixfold division by way of the base, i.e. body and mind: three physical feelings and three mental feelings.
  1. The three physical feelings: physical feeling of happiness, physical feeling of suffering, physical feeling of equanimity.
  2. The three mental feelings: mental feeling of happiness, mental feeling of suffering, mental feeling of equanimity.

The difference between physical and mental feeling: The feelings that arise as the entourage of the five sense consciousnesses are called physical feelings. The feelings that arise as the entourage of mental consciousness are called mental feelings. Then, what is the reason for calling the feeling that arises as the entourage of eye consciousness physical feeling? From *The Four hundred verses: like the body sense power (faculty) in the body, ignorance abides everywhere*. As the body sense power pervades the whole body from the crown to the soles of the feet, whatever feelings arise as the entourage of eye and the other four sense perceptions are also called physical feeling.

## <sup>7</sup> **Recognition**

- *From the Compendium of Knowledge: What is the definition of recognition? Having combined, the definition of generating understanding. Whichever identity of apprehending characteristics and apprehending patterns that labels the way we see, hear, categorize and the meanings (objects) of consciousness. As such: A knower apprehending the uncommon characteristics of the object after (through) the coming together of object, faculty (sense power) and consciousness.*

<sup>8</sup> Having understood suffering one investigates whether it has a cause or not, which leads to the truth of origin.

<sup>9</sup> The minimum benefit of reciting mantras is that it purifies the karma of idle gossip.

<sup>10</sup> Might say 'appearing' in the audio version, but should be 'apprehended'.

<sup>11</sup> This meditation is to understand that even the experience of the highest happiness in samsara is still worthless and without essence. Even being reborn in the form or formless realm doesn't mean anything because one is definitely going to fall down again to the lower realms.

<sup>12</sup> Except in the formless realm where one has only four aggregates because there is no form aggregate.

<sup>13</sup> Lack of a permanent, single, independent self.

<sup>14</sup> Correction: Since the innate grasping at 'mine' is regarded as grasping at 'I', it is also the root of cyclic existence.

<sup>15</sup> It actually just a vision of the parents having intercourse, even though the parents have no intercourse at that time.