
Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

8 August 2017

As usual let us spend some time with our meditation practice. [Meditation]

It is important to generate a most positive motivation for receiving the teachings along the following lines: In order to benefit all sentient beings, to liberate them from all suffering and guide them to ultimate happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice well.

Presenting the characteristics of the being of middle scope (cont.)

Practices of a middle scope being

Continuing on from our last session the commentary presents:

According to Geshe Sharawa, the actual path of the person of middling scope is presented in the text by saying 'Turning away from worldly pleasures' which indicates true suffering and 'destructive actions' which indicates true origin; 'Those who seek peace for themselves alone' indicates true cessation and 'avoiding' indicates true path.

So as explained here, the verse on the medium scope from the root text i.e. verse 4, actually encompasses the four noble truths.

The sequence of the four noble truths in which the truth of suffering is presented first, followed by the truth of origination, and then the truth of cessation followed by the truth of the path, is said to be the sequence of how one meditates on them. So, one first meditates on the truth of suffering, followed by the truth of origination, and then the truth of cessation followed by the truth of the path. However, in the cause and effect sequence of the Four Noble Truths, the truth of origin comes first followed by the truth of suffering, and the truth of the path is followed by the truth of cessation.

Then the commentary further explains:

Indeed, the four noble truths are the main meditational objects for those seeking liberation, and also the main body of the path of the person of middling scope, as the twelve interdependent links are included in these as well.

It is appropriate here to understand why these truths are referred to as 'noble truths'. A simple way to understand this is that if they are truths for *noble beings* then it must mean that they are not truths for ordinary beings. Indeed, the four truths can only be seen directly by *arya beings*, whilst ordinary beings are unable to perceive them directly as truths. For *arya* or noble beings there is no discrepancy between the appearance and the actual mode of existence of phenomena, so what they perceive are called 'truths'.

This does not relate to grasping at true or false existence; they are called truths because they are perceived directly by noble beings. For example, in relation to the four attributes of the first noble truth, while the appropriated aggregates are impermanent, ordinary beings see them as permanent.

They don't see functional phenomena within their actual mode of existence, but rather as permanent phenomena. Furthermore, while contaminated phenomena are in the nature of suffering, ordinary beings see them as a source of pleasure and happiness. And while all existing phenomena are selfless and empty, ordinary beings perceive them as having a self and being inherently existent.

Although ordinary beings can gain an understanding of impermanence to a certain degree, they cannot see impermanence directly or perceptually. Similarly, ordinary beings can have an understanding of selflessness and emptiness, but they are not able to perceive it directly. Only noble beings have the ability to perceive the subtle attributes and ultimate mode of existence of phenomena directly. Using these examples we can understand what is being explained here. So, if someone were to pose a question such as, 'Isn't it true that whatever exists can be perceived by ordinary beings?' You need to be ready with the answer that it can be perceived, but not directly. This brings up many memories of the debates I did in my younger days. Of course, if we were to go into all the debates, we would spend a long time in debates.

Coming back to the main point, what is being explained here is that there is no other means other than meditating on the four noble truths in order to abandon cyclic existence and attain liberation. While there are extensive explanations on the twelve interdependent links, in this commentary it merely introduces it by saying that they are included in the four noble truths.

To understand how the twelve interdependent links become causes to be reborn in cyclic existence, they can be categorised into two: the twelve interdependent links which serve as a cause to be reborn in the lower realms, and the twelve interdependent links which are a cause to be reborn in the higher realms. Initially, to avoid being reborn in the lower realm, one meditates on the reverse order of the twelve interdependent links which are a specific cause to be born in the lower realm. In that instance, the twelve interdependent links that serve as a cause to be born in a higher realm are something that is to be adopted. For the small scope being, you need to understand that the twelve interdependent links to obtain a high status are something to be adopted, as they serve as a means to be reborn in the higher realms. But for a being of medium scope, the twelve interdependent links that serve as a specific cause to be reborn in higher realms, are considered an abandonment. Thus, by abandoning and reversing the twelve interdependent links, and developing renunciation and disenchantment towards the entire cyclic existence, the medium scope beings strive to achieve liberation.

Geshe Pujungwa is said to have incorporated the twelve interdependent links in all of his practices. Thus, it is said to be a unique presentation of this master where the practices of all the three types of beings are incorporated within the understanding of twelve interdependent links. In a text it explains Geshe Pujungwa's presentation. Through contemplation one can reverse the twelve interdependent links which serve as a cause to be born in the lower realms, which then becomes a means of practice that is in conjunction with the small scope. Contemplating the means to reverse the twelve interdependent links that are a cause to be reborn as a human or in the form and formless god realms, becomes a means of practice that is in conjunction with the medium scope.

From one's own experience of suffering and having contemplated the sufferings of cyclic existence, one relates to all other sentient beings, recognising how other sentient beings are also conditioned to experience the various types of suffering due to the twelve interdependent links. Then one will develop unconditional love and compassion for all sentient beings. Then by generating bodhicitta and engaging in the deeds of the six perfections, it becomes the practice of the great scope. These are very profound ways to relate to the twelve interdependent links. As explained in the teachings, when one develops love and compassion for sentient beings with the understanding of how they are caught in cyclic existence, the love and compassion one feels for other sentient beings is incredibly vast and profound.

Let us now list the twelve interdependent links; the older students can recall them for us:

- Ignorance
- Karmic formation
- Consciousness
- Name and form
- Six sources
- Contact
- Feeling
- Craving
- Grasping
- Existence
- Birth
- Aging and death

As mentioned earlier, the twelve interdependent links are subsumed into the four noble truths, so it is appropriate here to understand how they are included in the four noble truths.

They are firstly subsumed into two truths: the truth of origination and the truth of suffering. As a debate point, it is explained that if something is a truth of origination, it necessarily has to also be a truth of suffering, but if something is truth of suffering, it doesn't necessarily have to be a truth of origination. That is how it is explained.

How many of the twelve links are delusions? Is ignorance a delusion? Yes. The eighth is craving. Is that a delusion or not? Yes. Is grasping a delusion? Yes. So, within the twelve interdependent links there are three which are delusions.

The second link is karmic formation and the tenth is existence, which is also karma, right? So within the twelve interdependent links there are two which are karma. Now, altogether we have five which are included in the truth of origination. So the remaining links are subsumed into the truth of suffering. Is that clear? So, now we've understood how the twelve interdependent links are subsumed into the four noble truths: there are three causes which are delusions, and two which are karma, and the remainder are the truth of suffering.

What we need to understand is that the means by which beings circle in cyclic existence, are none other than by the conditioning of the twelve interdependent links. Rebirth in the lower realms is through a particular process within the twelve interdependent links that causes them to be reborn in the lower realms. Rebirth in the higher realms is again through the specific links which are causes to be reborn in the higher realms. The great master Nagarjuna confirmed that there is no other means to be reborn in cyclic existence other than relying on the twelve interdependent links.

This is also mentioned in the *Commentary on Bodhicitta*, which teaching many of you have already received. In terms of the karma created, the specific karmas to be reborn in cyclic existence are classified into three: meritorious karma, non-meritorious karma and non-fluctuating karma. Meritorious karma becomes the cause to be reborn in the human and desire god realms; non-meritorious karma is the cause to be born in the lower realms and non-fluctuating karma is the specific cause to be born in the form and formless god realms.

How do the twelve interdependent links serve as specific causes? The first link, **ignorance**, is the motivator. Then, once motivated out of ignorance, one creates **karma** - the second link. While the actual karma or action ceases the very next moment after it is created, the imprint of that karma or action is then stored upon the consciousness, thus forming the third link, **consciousness**.

When ordinary beings create karma they create either meritorious karma or non-meritorious karma which become a cause for being born either in the lower realms or the higher realms. Having created meritorious and non-meritorious karma, both are stored upon the consciousness as an imprint. Our rebirth is determined by whichever type of karmic imprints are the greatest in number.

When an individual comes to the end of this life and the death process starts, the virtuous or non-virtuous imprints earlier implanted on their consciousness are activated. **Craving** and **grasping** act as the main conditions to activate these imprints, followed by **existence**. For someone with more virtuous imprints, or who is more familiar with virtue, the craving and grasping activate the virtuous imprints in the mind prior to the final state of death, and this becomes the cause to be reborn in a higher realm. The main focus at the time of death seems to be a strong attachment to this life's body and fear of what is to come next life, which nurtures **craving** and **grasping**, activating the virtuous or non-virtuous imprints in the mind. More specifically, the craving relates to this life's existence and body, and the grasping relates more to the future life's existence, and these two nurture and activate the imprints. Again, if virtue is stronger in a person then the virtuous imprints are activated. This then leads to the next link, **existence**, which propels you to the next rebirth and then the link of **birth** takes place, with the rest of the links following from that.

In relation to one's own personal practice, the most important aspect of the twelve interdependent links is to have a virtuous mind at the time of death. As explained in the teachings, if one has a virtuous mind during the process of death, then that definitely secures a good rebirth in the next life. On a personal level, whenever we engage in a practice, such as meditation, prayers and so forth, we should ensure we are purposely generating a virtuous mind; as virtue is only accumulated when one is in a virtuous frame of mind. If we assume a meditative poise but our mind is distracted with non-virtuous thoughts, then that meditation pose will not be a means to accumulate virtue. At the time of death, one's future rebirth will not be determined by how many meditation poses you have held, but rather by how many virtuous states of mind you have generated. Therefore familiarising yourself with virtue is the essential condition for a good rebirth.

I have shared before with you a discussion I had with a young Geshe during teachings in India. When he asked me, I shared my understanding of what meditation means. I said it was to familiarise one's body, speech and mind with

virtue to ensure that whatever one does through one's body, speech and mind that it becomes imbued with virtue. That is what I consider to be actual meditation. The young geshe was very pleased and said 'Geshe-la, you have now given me unsurpassable instruction', which indicates that he considered it as really inspiring. Indeed, it all comes down to being familiar with a virtuous state of mind, which will then determine our good rebirth. Being familiar with a neutral state of mind doesn't do much to secure a good rebirth.

If one is able to apply a level of mental stabilisation during one's meditation that can maintain focus on the object without distraction, then this by its nature is virtue. If we have not achieved that, and are in either a neutral or distracted state during meditation, the practise does not become the means to accumulate virtue. Mental stabilisation falls within the class of determining mental factors, which means it is not a main consciousness. Some teachings explain that when the main consciousness is in a virtuous state there is a part of the mind which maintains that virtuous focus, and that is what is known as mental stabilisation. When it is explained as a mental factor then it is a state of mind which from its own side is able to maintain an unwavering focus on the object. These determining mental factors are understood to be subsumed into the virtues, which is why mental stabilisation is considered to be a virtuous frame of mind. We now understand how the twelve interdependent links are subsumed into the four noble truths.

The commentary further explains:

To elaborate on this further, the entire collection of topics for those seeking liberation are definitely included into the two classes of phenomena which are afflicted phenomena and enlightening phenomena. That is because, the first is included within the first two truths of the cause which binds that is true Origin and the result which is being bound that is true suffering. The second is included within the next two truths, true cessation which is to be attained and true path which is the means by which to attain.

We can see that the first class of afflicted phenomena includes the twelve interdependent links. The cause which binds is the true origin, and karma and ignorance are within true origin. So of the twelve interdependent links two are karma and three are delusions, and these five together are the truth of origination. The binding factor is the cause and what it binds to is suffering. This is the truth of suffering. The remaining twelve interdependent links (apart from karma and delusions) fit into this truth. On a personal level, the truth of suffering is the five contaminated aggregates and the truth of origination binds us to these aggregates which are in the nature of suffering. Based on that we experience the various sufferings in cyclic existence.

The second class of phenomena, enlightening phenomena, is included within the next two truths: true cessation (to be attained) and true path (the means by which to attain it). There is no other phenomena which would not be subsumed into this as a way to attain liberation.

The commentary continues:

With respect to the order of the presentation, true suffering is taught first so that those seeking liberation would initially think on the general and specific shortcomings of cyclic existence.

This infers that truth of suffering is to be understood or known.

True suffering is taught first so that those seeking liberation initially think about the general and specific shortcomings of cyclic existence, by reflecting on the eight, six and three sufferings, and then generate an uncontrived aspiration to achieve liberation. The eight, six and three sufferings are presented in the lam-rim teachings on the different types of sufferings as humans and so forth.

The point to understand is *that those seeking liberation would need to initially think on the general and specific shortcomings of cyclic existence by reflecting on the sufferings*. So seeking liberation means seeking liberation from the sufferings of cyclic existence. If we wish to be free from the suffering of cyclic existence, we need to contemplate them; more specifically we need to contemplate the shortcomings of cyclic sufferings. Suffering here is not just the obvious levels of suffering that we experience such as physical and mental pain, but more on a deeper level. One needs to understand that.

The eight sufferings as presented in the lam-rim are:

- The suffering of birth
- The suffering of old age
- The suffering of illness
- The suffering of death
- The suffering of encountering what is unpleasant
- The suffering of separation of what is pleasant
- The suffering of not getting what you want
- The suffering of five appropriated aggregates

These are said to be the sufferings generally experienced by all beings in cyclic existence. When we contemplate on each of them individually, we can get a sense of how unbearable they are. Take the example of the suffering of birth. Although we cannot recall our own suffering of birth, by witnessing child birth, and how uncomfortable it is both for the child, who comes out crying, and for the mother who is in pain and tired, we can imagine how much suffering there was at that time. We may also not recall the suffering of our past deaths, as we are not experiencing that now, but we can see how much suffering there is for those on the verge of dying. We can relate to other levels of suffering like the suffering that comes with age and the suffering of illness, and the other types of sufferings listed here. Again, the sufferings explained here are not merely the first level of suffering, the suffering of suffering and suffering of change, but also include the all-pervasive compounded suffering, which is a much deeper level of suffering.

On a practical level, really contemplating these types of suffering can create a great source of endurance and inner strength. One is unfamiliar with the very nature of cyclic existence and contaminated aggregates, and that one is bound to experience sufferings at one time or another, then experiencing them when things go wrong it can become unbearable. If, however, one contemplates sufferings and relates them to one's own experience, then when one experiences some suffering like the suffering of encountering what is unpleasant, or the suffering of being separated from what we perceive as pleasant, and familiarises oneself with the natural consequences of being in cyclic existence, then one's mind will not be too disturbed when it experiences such suffering. There's also the suffering of not getting what you want, and those who don't see this as part of being in cyclic existence will be very disappointed when they don't get what they want.

Familiarity does not mean just being able to list them out; this alone is not sufficient. One needs to actually incorporate the understanding into one's life and contemplate on the nature of one's own existence. This can really help one's mind.

Shantideva's *Bodhisattva's Way of Life* presented the five virtues or qualities of thinking about suffering. A text lists these specific five qualities.

The first quality is contemplating suffering can become an impetus to **strive for liberation**. For those who have great pride, experiencing suffering can **reduce the pride**. It is very true that when someone who is normally quite pompous or proud gets ill, they don't retain a heightened sense of pride at that time. The third quality refers to when one experiences great agony from suffering, at that time one can recall that this uncomfortable and unwanted feeling one is experiencing is none other than **the result of creating non-virtue** in the past. This can become an impetus to develop a strong determination to refrain from committing non-virtuous negativities. This quality means that by training one's mind to think in this way, one engages in the main practice of taking unfavourable conditions upon the path. There is no other way to do this than to relate to one's immediate sufferings as being a result of non-virtues or negativities created in the past. Then one commits to refrain from negativity now and in the future. This is a very profound level of practice.

The fourth quality is that at the time one experiences great suffering one will **wish to be free from suffering**, and experience a happy state. As one wishes for happiness, and contemplates again the causes for happiness, one understands that accumulating virtue is the cause for happiness. One then develops a keen determination and joy to create virtue. The happiness of wanting to create virtue is one of the qualities of suffering presented here. There are many individuals who have honestly said that they find great impetus for their practice of Dharma when they are experiencing illness. Some comment that they hear the Dharma and think, 'Oh yeah it must be true', and take it lightly. But at the time of great difficulty, such as an illness, then it all becomes reality, a strong impetus to take the Dharma into account arises.

The fifth quality relates to one's own experience of uncomfortable suffering, and contemplating on how all other beings are also in the same plight. Then our suffering becomes a means to remind ourselves to think about the suffering of others, think about their plight and **wish all other beings to be free from suffering**. Then suffering becomes a great impetus to develop great compassion for others. We can now see how we can engage in profound practices through the experience of suffering.

Here we can quote this verse from Shantideva's text:

Furthermore, suffering has good qualities:
Through being disheartened with it, arrogance is dispelled,
Compassion arises for those in cyclic existence,
Negativity is shunned and joy is found in virtue.

This verse includes the five qualities of suffering mentioned earlier: refraining from negativities, being joyful about accumulating virtue, reducing pride and generating love and compassion for other sentient beings.

As presented here, if one really contemplates suffering, one can actually incorporate the practices of all three types of being: small, medium and great scope. If we take this into

account it becomes an incredibly profound practice. It helps us change our attitude towards the experiences we are having. Whether the actual suffering is lessened or not, when we have the proper attitude towards our experience we're better able to endure it. These points show that contemplating on suffering gives our mind the right perspective whereby the thoughts become the means to end suffering, not create more suffering. That is the significant point.

As the teachings present, when one reaches the level of being happy when one is suffering and unhappy when one is experiencing happiness, that is actually a great level of practice. Often we think that overcoming the eight worldly dharmas is a lower-level practice, but in fact if we have not incorporated the means to overcome the eight worldly dharmas, then our real practice hasn't yet begun.

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Edited Version*

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Homework

(8 August 2017) *Assigned:* 15/08/2017

1. Why are the Four Noble Truth truths referred to as 'noble truths'?

2. 'To understand how the twelve interdependent links become causes to be reborn in cyclic existence, they can be categorised into two: the twelve interdependent links which serve as a cause to be reborn in the lower realms, and the twelve interdependent links which are a cause to be reborn in the higher realms.'

Explain how the twelve interdependent links are meditated upon in relation to the lower, medium and great scopes.

3. List the twelve interdependent links.

4. How are the twelve interdependent links subsumed into the four noble truths?

5. Explain what happens when an individual comes to the end of this life and the death process starts.

6. Suffering here is not just the obvious levels of suffering that we experience such as physical and mental pain, but more on a deeper level. One needs to understand that.

List the eight sufferings as presented in the Lam Rim

Homework**Answers**(8 August 2017) *Assigned:* 15/08/2017**1. Why are the Four Noble Truths referred to as 'noble truths'?**

It is appropriate here to understand why these truths are referred to as 'noble truths'. A simple way to understand this is that if they are truths for *noble beings* then it must mean that they are not truths for ordinary beings. Indeed, the four truths can only be seen directly by *arya* beings, whilst ordinary beings are unable to perceive them directly as truths. For *arya* or noble beings there is no discrepancy between the appearance and the actual mode of existence of phenomena, so what they perceive are called 'truths'.

This does not relate to grasping at true or false existence; they are called truths because they are perceived directly by noble beings. For example, in relation to the four attributes of the first noble truth, while the appropriated aggregates are impermanent, ordinary beings see them as permanent. They don't see functional phenomena within their actual mode of existence, but rather as permanent phenomena. Furthermore, while contaminated phenomena are in the nature of suffering, ordinary beings see them as a source of pleasure and happiness. And while all existing phenomena are selfless and empty, ordinary beings perceive them as having a self and being inherently existent.

2. 'To understand how the twelve interdependent links become causes to be reborn in cyclic existence, they can be categorised into two: the twelve interdependent links which serve as a cause to be reborn in the lower realms, and the twelve interdependent links which are a cause to be reborn in the higher realms.'

Explain how the twelve interdependent links are meditated upon in relation to the lower, medium and great scopes.

To understand how the twelve interdependent links become causes to be reborn in cyclic existence, they can be categorised into two: the twelve interdependent links which serve as a cause to be reborn in the lower realms, and the twelve interdependent links which are a cause to be reborn in the higher realms. Initially, to avoid being reborn in the lower realm, one meditates on the reverse order of the twelve interdependent links which are a specific cause to be born in the lower realm. In that instance, the twelve interdependent links that serve as a cause to be born in a higher realm are something that is to be adopted. For the small scope being, you need to understand that, the twelve interdependent links to obtain a high status are something to be adopted, as they serve as a means to be reborn in the higher realms. But for a being of medium scope, the twelve interdependent links that serve as a specific cause to be reborn in higher realms, are considered an abandonment. Thus, by abandoning and reversing the twelve interdependent links, and developing renunciation and disenchantment towards the entire cyclic existence, the medium scope beings strive to achieve liberation.

Geshe Pujungwa is said to have incorporated the twelve interdependent links in all of his practices. Thus, it is said to be a unique presentation of this master where the practices of all the three types

of beings are incorporated within the understanding of twelve interdependent links. In a text it explains Geshe Pujungwa's presentation. Through contemplation one can reverse the twelve interdependent links which serve as a cause to be born in the lower realms, which then becomes a means of practice that is in conjunction with the small scope. Contemplating the means to reverse the twelve interdependent links that are a cause to be reborn as a human or in the form and formless god realms, becomes a means of practice that is in conjunction with the medium scope.

From one's own experience of suffering and having contemplated the sufferings of cyclic existence, one relates to all other sentient beings, recognising how other sentient beings are also conditioned to experience the various types of suffering due to the twelve interdependent links. Then one will develop unconditional love and compassion for all sentient beings. Then by generating bodhicitta and engaging in the deeds of the six perfections, it becomes the practice of the great scope. These are very profound ways to relate to the twelve interdependent links. As explained in the teachings, when one develops love and compassion for sentient beings with the understanding of how they are caught in cyclic existence, the love and compassion one feels for other sentient beings is incredibly vast and profound.

3. List the twelve interdependent links.

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- Consciousness
- Name and form
- Six sources
- Contact
- Feeling
- Craving
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- Birth
- Aging and death

4. How are the twelve interdependent links subsumed into the four noble truths?

They are firstly subsumed into two truths: the truth of origination and the truth of suffering. As a debate point, it is explained that if something is a truth of origination, it necessarily has to also be a truth of suffering, but if something is truth of suffering, it doesn't necessarily have to be a truth of origination. That is how it is explained.

How many of the twelve links are **delusions**? Is **ignorance** a delusion? Yes. The eighth is **craving**. Is that a delusion or not? Yes. Is **grasping** a delusion? Yes. So, within the twelve interdependent links there are three which are delusions.

The second link is **karmic formation** and the tenth is **existence**, which is also karma, right? So within the twelve interdependent links there are two which are karma. Now, altogether we have five which are included in the truth of origination. **So the remaining links are subsumed into the truth of suffering**. Is that clear? So, now we've understood how the twelve interdependent links are subsumed into the four noble truths: **there are three causes which are delusions, and three which are karma, and the remainder are the truth of suffering**.

5.Explain what happens when an individual comes to the end of this life and the death process starts.

When an individual comes to the end of this life and the death process starts, the virtuous or non-virtuous imprints earlier implanted on their consciousness are activated. **Craving** and **grasping** act as the main conditions to activate these imprints, followed by **existence**. For someone with more virtuous imprints, or who is more familiar with virtue, the craving and grasping activate the virtuous imprints in the mind prior to the final state of death, and this becomes the cause to be reborn in a higher realm. The main focus at the time of death seems to be a strong attachment to this life's body and fear of what is to come next life, nurtures **craving** and **grasping** that activate the virtuous or non-virtuous imprints in the mind. More specifically, the craving relates to this life's existence and body, and the grasping relates more to the future life's existence, and these two nurture and activate the imprints. Again, if virtue is stronger in a person then the virtuous imprints are activated. This then leads to the next link, **existence**, which propels you to the next rebirth and then the link of **birth** takes place, with the rest of the links following from that.

6.Suffering here is not just the obvious levels of suffering that we experience such as physical and mental pain, but more on a deeper level. One needs to understand that.

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These are said to be the sufferings generally experienced by all beings in cyclic existence. When we contemplate on each of them individually, we can get a sense of how unbearable they are. Take the example of the suffering of birth. Although we cannot recall our own suffering of birth, by witnessing child birth, and how uncomfortable it is both for the child, who comes out crying, and for the mother who is in pain and tired, we can imagine how much suffering there was at that time. We may also not recall the suffering of our past deaths, as we are not experiencing that now, but we can see how much suffering there is for those on the verge of dying. We can relate to other levels of suffering like the suffering that comes with age and the suffering of illness, and the other types of sufferings listed here. Again, the sufferings explained here are not merely the first level of suffering, the suffering of suffering and suffering of change, but also include the all-pervasive compounded suffering, which is a much deeper level of suffering.

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

15 August 2017

As usual, let us engage in our meditation practice.
[tonglen meditation]

We can now set our motivation for receiving the teaching along these lines: for the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment. So for that purpose I'll listen to the teachings and put them into practice well.

Generating such a positive motivation from the depth of our hearts is very meaningful.

Practices of a middle scope being

Contemplating the first noble truth of suffering (cont.)

In our last session, we discussed the way in which the first of the four noble truths, the truth of suffering, is to be understood. Based on that we can develop the strong intention of wishing to abandon the second noble truth, the truth of origination.

In relation to the truth of suffering, we went through the eight types of suffering that are explained in the teachings. As a way to contemplate these various types of suffering, a quotation from Shantideva's text was presented, which listed the benefits or qualities of suffering. These are important points to keep in mind.

Indeed, we need to ensure that we incorporate our experiences of suffering as well as happiness into our practice. If, when we experience various types of sufferings we can immediately relate that to how it is due to the effects of previously created negative karma, then this experience of suffering serves as a caution to not create further negative karma. Then we can learn from this experience of suffering. When we contemplate in this way, by relating it to the effect of our own previously created karma, it becomes a means to be able to accept and endure the suffering so that it doesn't completely overwhelm our mind and become unbearable. There is great significance and benefit in contemplating in this way.

It is the same when we're experiencing happiness, which we can relate to the positive effects of previously created virtuous karma. It is important to ensure that the happiness we experience doesn't become a cause to increase attachment. For example, when experiencing the joy of having a cup of tea, or a nice meal, then rather than just indulging in its pleasures, if we take a moment to first of all offer the tea and to then think about how even being able to enjoy this cup of tea is the positive effect of previously created virtuous karma, then that in itself becomes a very meaningful practice. Of course, when we are having a meal with others, it is difficult to find the time to do this practice extensively, but if we take the initiative to do this when we are alone, it is a great way of practising. This is how I go about my own personal

practice. In terms of studies, I can definitely say that I've done extensive studies, however when it comes to practice I start with simple practices. I find that starting with simple levels of practice and gradually building up from that is most effective for the mind.

Indeed, we should not underestimate the great benefits of engaging in simple practices such as making offerings and so forth. If we experience any kind of suffering, and we immediately relate that to the consequences of negative karma, then that will become an impetus to avoid creating negative karma in the future. And as the wish to avoid creating negative karma in the future is, in itself, a virtuous mind; generating this mind becomes another means to accumulate virtue.

Likewise, if we contemplate and relate our good conditions and happiness to being the result of virtue, then rather than mindlessly indulging in the good conditions, we can generate the wish to create more virtuous karma. In this way we accumulate more virtue as well. So we can see that acquainting our mind with accumulating virtue is a fundamental practice.

We need to relate our practice to our everyday life. There are many different ways we can incorporate our ordinary activities into our practice. If we were to think about Dharma practice as some big thing we have to do, involving restrictions or some really special practice, then we may end up not being able to engage in any practice at all. If in our everyday life we try to transform our everyday activities into a means of practice, then we will find that there are many opportunities to practise in small, but very significant ways.

As we become more adept in engaging in the Dharma it becomes quite normal to use the word 'karma' a lot, with respect to situations in our own life, and that of others. But just saying it is karma will not really have much effect unless we fully incorporate that understanding.

We need to understand how we actually create karma. We can do this by relating our experience of happiness to the consequences or effects of positive karma. How is it an effect of karma? What kind of activities or karma were the cause to experience this happiness? This is when we recall that the happiness we are experiencing now is a specific effect of virtuous activities created in the past. When we think in that way it becomes an impetus to accumulate more virtue. Thus, thinking of happiness as an effect of positive karma, is a significant way of encouraging us to create further positive karma. Likewise, when we experience suffering: rather than just saying 'it's karma', we need to understand what kind of karma was created to experience this effect. So identifying negative karma or non-virtue becomes an impetus to avoid creating future negative karma and non-virtue. Then thinking about karma will have served its purpose.

We all wish to experience happiness and we don't wish to experience any kind of misery or suffering, so using our experiences as a means to shun negative karma and adopt virtue, becomes an essential practice. Incorporating our understanding of karma into our everyday life creates an internal protection, which means that we won't have to rely entirely on external conditions as a guide to know what is proper and to be adopted, and

what is improper and to be abandoned. Whatever decisions we make or whatever activity we engage in, if we have a strong conviction in karma, then it will help us to make the right decisions. We will be inclined to avoid conditions that are harmful and negative, and adopt conditions that are beneficial, and inclined to be virtuous. This is how we benefit from a good understanding of karma.

The three results of karma

In the lam-rim teachings there are explanations of the specific consequences of karma: the ripened result, the results that are similar to their cause, and environmental results. By contemplating each of these points we can then assess the kind of results we are experiencing and relate them to the karma we created in the past.

On the positive side, having avoided the negative karma of killing in the past, for example, means we will have a long and healthy life now, as the conditions for having a long life will all be adequate. These are the positive results of having avoided the negative karmas of killing in the past. Contemplating the effects of karma is said to provide the greatest impetus to avoid creating specific negative karmas. If we were to engage, for example, in a negative act of killing, then we will definitely experience the three types of results of the negative karma of killing. If that negative karma is not purified then we will definitely have to experience the results. That is because the certainty of having to experience the effects of the law of karma is said to be incontrovertible.

‘Incontrovertible’ here means that it is definite. If one creates negative karma, then the effects will definitely be one of the three types of negative effects. If we create a positive karma of purposely abandoning killing, then we will experience the positive consequences of that virtue. That is also definite. Therefore, we need to understand that the incontrovertibility of karma means that the results will definitely be experienced. By contemplating this incontrovertibility we will develop a strong conviction in karma, and the more we contemplate it, the stronger our conviction in karma will become.

When we develop a strong conviction in karma then we will develop strong regret about the negative karmas we have created in the past. If we think in detail about the three types of negative consequences of the act of killing, for example, then that will instil a great sense of fear and anxiety. We won’t be able to rest peacefully knowing that we have created such a negative karma, as we will definitely have to experience those types of results.

When one develops very strong regret about having created those negative karmas, that regret will then become the impetus to generate a strong determination to purify the negative karmas that have been created. Then one will willingly and voluntarily engage in purification practices based upon the strong regret one has developed earlier.

Regret by itself is a very powerful remedy. As the great teachers of the past have explained, developing strong regret is, in itself, a means to purify half the negative karma one has created. However, we still need to engage in purification practices to further purify the negativities we have created. Then based on our strong regret and the

purification practice we have done, we will be better able to resolve to not create those negativities in the future.

We really need to engage in purification practices consistently, because after engaging in purification, we will soon still be creating more negative karmas. That is because for as long as we have not abandoned the self-grasping mind, we will inevitably create more negative karma. So we need to continuously engage in purification practices to purify the negative karmas that we create on a constant basis.

The order of the presentation

As mentioned in the commentary:

With respect to the order of the presentation, true suffering is taught first so that those seeking liberation would initially think on the general and specific shortcomings of cyclic existence by reflecting on the eight, six and three sufferings...

Put another way, those who are seeking liberation need to first contemplate suffering. This means reflecting on *the eight types of suffering, the six types of suffering, and the three types of suffering*. There are some levels of suffering that are so complex and obscure that we can’t find ways of describing them. However, we can all relate to the categories of sufferings listed here.

The main point is that contemplating these sufferings will become the impetus to develop a strong sense of renunciation. Without developing renunciation there is no way that one can enter the path to liberation. In order to develop renunciation, one needs to contemplate the various types of suffering so that one knows what it is that one wants to renounce.

If one does not bring to mind these forms of suffering, then one is not recalling what one is wishing to renounce. Therefore it is explained in the teachings that beings in the desire realm have a greater opportunity actually to develop renunciation because of the fact that they are experiencing suffering. Whereas in the god realms it’s much harder, if not impossible, to develop renunciation because of the lack of experience of the obvious levels of suffering.

Therefore there is a need to contemplate suffering, and that’s why suffering is taught first.

The eight types of suffering

Last week we listed the eight types of suffering which are:

- The suffering of birth
- The suffering of old age
- The suffering of illness
- The suffering of death
- The suffering of encountering what is unpleasant
- The suffering of separation from what is pleasant
- The suffering of not getting what you want
- The suffering of five appropriated aggregates

We can relate these eight types of suffering (the first four in particular) to all humans and animals. The suffering of **birth** is experienced by virtue of the fact that we come into this existence through birth. The suffering of **old age** is something that we experience gradually. We experience the suffering of **illness** at various times, while

the suffering of **death** at the end is inevitable for all of us. No- one is spared these four types of suffering; whether you are of high or low status, rich or poor, famous or of ill-repute, all equally have to experience these four types of suffering.

We have all frequently experienced the suffering of **encountering what is unpleasant**, and it is the same with the suffering of **separation from what is pleasant**. Likewise the suffering of **not getting what you want** is something that we can all relate to. The suffering of the **five appropriated aggregates** refers to our contaminated aggregates which are the basis of the suffering created through karma and delusions.

We will go into more detail on how our contaminated aggregates are a product of delusions and karma further on in the text.

The six faults of cyclic existence

These six types of suffering are listed in the lam-rim teachings as faults. That is because we relate to suffering as being an immediate uncomfortable personal experience, but here we are referring to the faults of being in cyclic existence. The faults are:

- The fault of uncertainty
- The fault of insatiability
- The fault of casting off bodies repeatedly
- The fault of repeated rebirth
- The fault of repeatedly descending from high to low
- The fault of having no companions

The **fault of uncertainty** is a form of suffering that we all experience. For example, in the morning we might be feeling quite happy and everything is fine, then towards the afternoon we start feeling uncomfortable or melancholy. So we can see that even in the one day there's no certainty about how we will feel. Likewise, with friends: someone who is a friend earlier may later turn into an enemy.

As its name suggests, the **fault of insatiability** refers to never being able to feel satiated with whatever pleasures we may experience. This is something we can all relate to. As far as we are concerned, we can safely say that we have experienced most of the pleasures that are possible in our human existence. Yet we are still not satisfied. No matter how much we indulge in pleasures we are never satiated. It is the same with wealth: no matter how much wealth we have, it never seems to be enough, and we want to have more.

On this point, we need reflect on contentment which is really a great virtue. As Nagarjuna mentioned, the purpose of wealth is to be content. If one does not practise contentment then no matter how much wealth one has it doesn't serve its purpose; if the purpose of wealth is to feel content and yet we are not content, then the wealth we have hasn't served its purpose. Therefore, we need to reflect on how we need to develop contentment for our own benefit.

It is good to reflect upon the faults of uncertainty, and insatiability, because they can be a great impetus for helping to transform our mind.

Next is the fault of **casting off bodies repeatedly**. No matter how sound our body may be now, no matter how well our body serves us right now, we cannot hold onto it. We cannot cling to it saying, 'I like this body, so I'm never going to give it up'. That is impossible. No matter how well it may serve us right now, we will have to discard this body, and this situation will occur again and again. So although we may have some degree of ownership of our body now, ultimately we don't own our body because we will have to discard it.

The specific benefit we can derive from contemplating this fault of casting off bodies repeatedly is that as we familiarise ourselves with this reality, our mind becomes more acquainted with the fact that we will ultimately have to separate from our body. The specific suffering of death is said to be the agony of the unavoidable prospect of having to discard our body. Not being able to bear this separation of mind and body is said to be the actual suffering of death.

If one has acquainted one's mind with this fault, then one will have become familiar with the fact that one has to discard one's body again and again. Through familiarity with that fault, when the time comes to separate from it, it will not be a great surprise or shock because we will already understand that this is a natural outcome. Contemplating this fault can definitely help at the time of death.

Reflecting on the fault of **repeated rebirth** is done by reflecting upon the fact that after death we won't have any choice over our rebirth. For as long as we are influenced by delusions and karma we have no choice over our rebirth. It is not as if we can make the conscious choice, 'I'd like to be reborn in a nice area where things are very favourable, and there are no problems'. We may wish for that, but if we have not created the causes, then we are completely at the mercy of the delusions and karma that will determine our future life and rebirth. So the fault of repeated rebirth is a fault that is specifically conditioned by delusions and karma.

The use of 'repeated' indicates that it is not just a matter of being reborn once or twice; in fact for as long as one is subject to cyclic existence one will have to repeatedly experience rebirth. The implication here is that until one is free from cyclic existence, one will have to repeatedly take rebirth in cyclic existence again and again due to the power of the conditioning of delusions and karma. If we really take the time to contemplate this, it can be a great source of inspiration that will enable us to withstand suffering whenever it occurs. So this contemplation is of great significance.

Here it is appropriate to mention a discussion that I once had with a businessman. He told me he had done quite well in his business, but although he had been able to accumulate quite a bit of money he said, 'I can't seem to be able to quit my business. I don't know what it is but I still feel like I have to keep on going. But even when I'm engaged in the work of the business it doesn't give me any real pleasure. I seem to be facing the same problems again and again'. As he spoke to me, whether it was something that he had understood on a profound level, and instilled some sort of realisation or not, I'm not sure.

However it was indeed a great point of instruction for me. Here was someone who we would consider as being a successful businessman with everything supposedly going well for him, but when he shared his plight about not feeling content, and not feeling really happy in his lifestyle, it was a reminder that this is exactly what cyclic existence is about – having to go around and around again and again, seemingly not being able to free oneself from this plight.

Next there is the fault of **repeatedly descending from high to low**, which is again something that everyone experiences at different times in their life.

The fault of **having no companions** is another form of suffering that we all experience.

The three types of suffering

These three are:

- The suffering of pain, or the suffering of suffering
- The suffering of change
- The suffering of conditionality, or all pervasive compounded suffering

The **suffering of pain** is something we can all relate to – we all understand that headaches, stomach pains, and other forms of physical and mental pain are a form of suffering.

Although the **suffering of change** is a bit more obscure, we can all relate to that as well. For example, when we feel too hot, we move into a cool place, and there is an immediate experience of pleasure, but after some time it becomes too cold and then we go back into the heat, and feel pleasure before feeling discomfort again and so on. So what is initially experienced as a bit of pleasure changes into discomfort and the suffering of pain again. We can all recognise this as being a form of suffering.

However, there are slightly more obscure forms of the suffering of change. There are some texts that assert that all contaminated pleasures are in the nature of the suffering of change. Initially we might experience something as being pleasurable, but gradually that experience of pleasure begins to wane and we start to feel uncomfortable. This is how we start to experience the suffering of change. As mentioned earlier, when one is feeling quite hot and then goes into the shade, there is an initial experience of pleasure. That pleasure is, in fact, the suffering of change.

That initial experience of a pleasant sensation when going into the cool shade, is, by its very nature, in the nature of suffering, because after a period of time it will become too cold and therefore unpleasant. If that initial experience of pleasure were to be true happiness, then the longer we experience it, the more happiness we should feel. The pleasant sensation or the happiness that we initially experienced would have to increase. But rather than increasing it actually decreases, and becomes unpleasant. That is the true sign that it is in the nature of suffering.

All-pervasive compounded suffering¹ is said to be the most difficult to recognise as being in the nature of

suffering. That is because it is very difficult to actually recognise it and understand it as being suffering.

It is said that it is crucial to understand that all-pervasive compounded suffering is a form of suffering, as it is the main impetus for generating renunciation. It is said that without recognising this third level of suffering as being suffering one cannot develop disgust and disenchantment with cyclic existence. So it is essential to recognise and understand all-pervasive compounded suffering.

All-pervasive compounded is a literal translation of the Tibetan word *khyab-pa du-byed*. *Khyab-pa* has the connotation of being pervasive, and *du-byed* has the connotation of compounded. An example of all-pervasive compounded suffering is the appropriated contaminated aggregates. As mentioned earlier, the appropriated contaminated aggregates are the aggregates that we possess as ordinary beings, i.e. the aggregates of form, feeling, discrimination, compositional factors, and consciousness. These five aggregates are a product of our delusions and karma.

It is said that in the desire and form realms we have five aggregates, whereas in formless realms there is no physical aggregate, so beings there have only four of the five aggregates. Regardless of whether it is five or four aggregates, these aggregates are contaminated because they are a product of delusions and karma.

Earlier I explained why they are called the appropriated aggregates: appropriated has the connotation that it is something that is taken up through delusions and karma. As mentioned previously, they are an effect, and so the name of the cause is given to the effect. Although the appropriated aggregates are an effect of delusions and karma, the term 'appropriated' has a connotation of being causal. So 'appropriated' also serves as a cause for future contaminated aggregates as well. Basically, the twofold meaning of 'appropriated aggregates' is that the aggregates are the product of delusions and karma, while also being the condition to obtain further contaminated aggregates and suffering.

In etymological terms 'all-pervasive' relates to the fact that this level of suffering pervades all beings in samsara. There are no beings in samsara who do not have this level of suffering. This relates back to the earlier explanations of the twelve interdependent links: beings are born and reborn in cyclic existence through the operation of the twelve interdependent links.

The term 'compounded' has the connotation that the aggregates compound or cause future delusions. All beings in samsara or cyclic existence are born with all-pervasive suffering, which compounds or becomes the cause for future delusions. This shows how all-pervasive compounded suffering is the cause of cyclic existence.

This third level of suffering is explained as being the basis for the two previous types of suffering, the suffering of suffering and the suffering of change. Relating this to ourselves we can see how our form

suffering the suffering of conditionality. Other translations use the term all-pervasive compounded suffering.

¹ Translators note: The translation of *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* or *Lam Rim Chen Mo* calls the third type of

aggregate, or physical body is the basis for both pain and pleasure.

So we need this understanding of how, for as long as one has the appropriated aggregates, which are an example of all-pervasive compounded suffering, we will be bound to have to experience the suffering of pain (or the suffering of suffering) and the suffering of change. That understanding should instil the more profound understanding that, without abandoning these contaminated appropriated aggregates there is no way that we can stop our own personal cyclic existence. It will continue for as long as we adhere to the appropriated contaminated aggregates that serve as a basis for experiencing suffering now, and serve as a basis to compound further delusions and karma and suffering in the future. And so the cycle continues.

Thus, we begin to develop an understanding that without developing a strong determination to overcome all-pervasive compounded suffering, there is no way that one can develop genuine renunciation. One may have glimpses of renunciation, or momentary feelings of renunciation, but developing real renunciation requires the development of the determination to overcome all-pervasive compounded suffering.

The commentary refers to reflecting on:

*...the eight, six and three types of sufferings,
and then generate an uncontrived aspiration
to achieve liberation.*

Here uncontrived means a wish that develops effortlessly and spontaneously. The commentary then indicates that by contemplating the various shortcomings and sufferings of cyclic existence, one develops a disenchantment with, and disgust for, cyclic existence.

Contemplating the various types of sufferings that have been explained here, and the cyclic existence that is the condition for us to experience this suffering, naturally elicits the question as to the reasons for that. This is true for anyone who contemplates the nature of our existence; it implants questions about the causes of that existence. Every tradition has an explanation of this cause. Those who believe in God would say that God is the creator. They don't come to the conclusion that there was no cause, or that it is a random event that comes out of nothing. Rather they attribute the cause to God; for them God is the cause. Whereas in Buddhism we say karma is the cause: there are individual karmas motivated by specific delusions that are the cause for individual suffering.

Through this contemplation of cyclic existence, suffering, and the twelve interdependent links, one comes to the understanding that the immediate cause is contaminated karma, and that what motivates those contaminated actions or karma are the delusions.

Therefore the root cause of cyclic existence is the delusions. So through the explanation of the twelve interdependent links one comes to understand the causes for cyclic existence.

As the commentary further explains:

The *Beu bum* scripture says 'we perpetually wander in cyclic existence due to its root cause which are delusions'. The primary delusion is ignorance and

from this (ignorance) arises the twelve links. This is how we are continuously subject to cyclic existence.

Contemplating the process of how one enters cyclic existence through ignorance instils the determination to be free from cyclic existence, and thus the determination to abandon the truth of origination.

The commentary further mentions:

One meditates on true origin to understand the means by which beings enter into cyclic existence.

This is another significant point. By meditating on true origins one understands how beings enter cyclic existence. Having first explained that sufferings are to be recognised, we have come to the point of abandoning true origins. These are points we need to really contemplate.

*Transcript prepared by Mark Emerson
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Edited Version*

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Homework

(15 August 2017) *Assigned:* 22/08/2017

1. How we benefit from a good understanding of karma.

2. a) In the lam-rim teachings there are explanations of the specific consequences of karma. What are they?

b) What does 'Incontrovertible' mean here?

3. a) When one develops very strong regret about having created those negative karmas, that regret will then become the impetus for what?

b) Why do we really need to engage in purification practices consistently?

4. In the order of presentation suffering is taught first. Why?

5. List: a) The eight types of suffering,

b) The six faults of cyclic existence

c) The three types of suffering

6. One may have glimpses of renunciation, or momentary feelings of renunciation, but developing real renunciation requires the development of the determination to overcome all-pervasive compounded suffering. Explain this All-pervasive compounded suffering

Homework

Answers

(15 August 2017) Assigned: 22/08/2017

1. How we benefit from a good understanding of karma.

We need to understand how we actually create karma. We can do this by relating our experience of happiness to the consequences or effects of positive karma. How is it an effect of karma? What kind of activities or karma were the cause to experience this happiness? This is when we recall that the happiness that we are experiencing now is a specific effect of virtuous activities created in the past. When we think in that way then it becomes an impetus to accumulate more virtue. Thus, thinking of happiness as an effect of positive karma, is a significant way of encouraging us to create further positive karma. Likewise, when we experience suffering: rather than just saying 'it's karma', we need to understand what kind of karma was created to experience this effect. So identifying negative karma or non-virtue becomes an impetus to avoid creating future negative karma and non-virtue. Then thinking about karma will have served its purpose.

We all wish to experience happiness and we don't wish to experience any kind of misery or suffering, so using our experiences as a means to shun negative karma, and adopt virtue, becomes an essential practice. Incorporating our understanding of karma into our everyday life creates an internal protection, which means that we won't have to rely entirely on external conditions as a guide to know what is proper and to be adopted, and what is improper and to be abandoned. Whatever decisions we make or whatever activity we engage in, if we have a strong conviction in karma, then it will help us to make the right decisions. We will be inclined to avoid conditions that are harmful and negative, and adopt conditions that are beneficial, and inclined to be virtuous. This is how we benefit from a good understanding of karma.

2. a) In the lam-rim teachings there are explanations of the specific consequences of karma. What are they?

In the lam-rim teachings there are explanations of the specific consequences of karma: the ripened result, the results that are similar to their cause, and environmental results. By contemplating each of these points we can then assess the kind of results we are experiencing and relate them to the karma we created in the past.

b) What does 'Incontrovertible' mean here?

'Incontrovertible' here means that it is definite. If one creates negative karma, then the effects will be definitely be one of the three types of negative effects. If we create a positive karma of purposely abandoning killing, then we will experience the positive consequences of that virtue. That is also definite. Therefore, we need to understand that the incontrovertibility of karma means that the results will definitely be experienced. By contemplating this incontrovertibility we will develop a strong conviction in karma, and the more we contemplate it, the stronger our conviction in karma will become.

3. a) When one develops very strong regret about having created those negative karmas, that regret will then become the impetus for what?

When we develop a strong conviction in karma then we will develop strong regret about the negative karmas we have created in the past. If we think in detail about the three types of negative

consequences of the act of killing, for example, then that will instil a great sense of fear and anxiety. We won't be able to rest peacefully knowing that we have created such a negative karma, as we will definitely have to experience those types of results.

When one develops very strong regret about having created those negative karmas, that regret will then become the impetus to generate a strong determination to purify the negative karmas that have been created. Then one will willingly and voluntarily engage in purification practices based upon the strong regret one has developed earlier.

Regret by itself is a very powerful remedy. As the great teachers of the past have explained, developing strong regret is, in itself, a means to purify half of the negative karma one has created. However, we still need to engage in purification practices to further purify the negativities we have created, and then based on our strong regret and the purification practice we have done, we will be better able to resolve to not create those negativities in the future.

b) Why do we really need to engage in purification practices consistently?

We really need to engage in purification practices consistently, because after engaging in purification, we will soon still be creating more negative karmas. That is because for as long as we have not abandoned the self-grasping mind, we will inevitably create more negative karma. So we need to continuously engage in purification practices to purify the negative karmas that we create on a constant basis.

4. In the order of presentation suffering is taught first. Why?

The order of the presentation

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Therefore there is a need to contemplate suffering, and that's why suffering is taught first.

5. List:

a) The eight types of suffering,

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- The suffering of five appropriated aggregates

b) The six faults of cyclic existence.

The six faults of cyclic existence

These six types of suffering are listed in the lam-rim teachings as faults. That is because we relate to suffering as being an immediate uncomfortable personal experience, but here we are referring to the faults of being in cyclic existence. The faults are:

- The fault of uncertainty
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c) The three types of suffering.

The three types of suffering

These three are:

- The suffering of pain, or the suffering of suffering
- The suffering of change
- The suffering of conditionality, or all pervasive compounded suffering

6. One may have glimpses of renunciation, or momentary feelings of renunciation, but developing real renunciation requires the development of the determination to overcome all-pervasive compounded suffering. Explain this All-pervasive compounded suffering

All-pervasive compounded suffering¹ is said to be the most difficult to recognise as being in the nature of suffering. That is because it is very difficult to actually recognise it and understand it as being suffering.

It is said that it is crucial to understand that all-pervasive compounded suffering is a form of suffering, as it is the main impetus for generating renunciation. It is said that without recognising this third level of suffering as being suffering one cannot develop disgust and disenchantment with cyclic existence. So it is essential to recognise and understand all-pervasive compounded suffering.

All-pervasive compounded is a literal translation of the Tibetan word *khyab-pa du-byed*. *Khyab-pa* has the connotation of being pervasive, and *du-byed* has the connotation of compounded. An example of all-pervasive compounded suffering is the appropriated contaminated aggregates. As mentioned earlier, the appropriated contaminated aggregates are the aggregates that we possess as ordinary beings, i.e. the aggregates of form, feeling, discrimination, compositional factors, and consciousness, and these five aggregates that are a product of our delusions and karma.

It is said that in the desire and form realms we have five aggregates, whereas in formless realms there is no physical aggregate, so beings there have only four of the five aggregates. Regardless of whether

¹ *Translators note:* The translation of *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* or *Lam Rim Chen Mo* calls the third type of suffering the suffering of conditionality. Other translations use the term all-pervasive compounded suffering.

it is five or four aggregates, these aggregates are contaminated because they are a product of delusions and karma.

Earlier I explained why they are called the appropriated aggregates: appropriated has connotation that it is something that is taken up through delusions and karma. As mentioned previously, they are an effect, and so the name of the cause is given to the effect. Although the appropriated aggregates are an effect of delusions and karma, the term 'appropriated' has a connotation of being causal. So 'appropriated' also serves as a cause for future contaminated aggregates as well. Basically, the twofold meaning of 'appropriated aggregates' is that the aggregates are the product of delusions and karma, while also being the condition to obtain further contaminated aggregates and suffering.

Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

22 August 2017

As usual we can engage in our regular meditation [*tong-len meditation*].

We can set our motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: 'For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, so for that purpose, I will engage in listening to the teachings and putting them into practice well'. If we can generate this motivation from the depth of our hearts, it will make our practice really worthwhile.

The suffering of cyclic existence

In our last session, the truth of suffering was presented in the context of contemplating the eight types of suffering, the six faults, and the three sufferings.

As mentioned in the Medium Scope teachings, when we contemplate these various levels of suffering, it creates the impetus for us to long for liberation. Based on having developed disenchantment with cyclic existence, we generate renunciation through the very strong determination to be free from it. With this understanding, we then focus on other sentient beings, contemplating how they too are experiencing the various types of suffering. This then becomes the impetus for us to develop compassion. I will present this in more detail later.

Thus, we need to develop a strong conviction that the very fact that one is born in cyclic existence means that one is born into the nature of suffering. Being born into the nature of suffering doesn't necessarily mean that it has to be a feeling of suffering, but rather that samsaric existence invariably leads to dissatisfaction. This discussion will most likely have come up in your recent seminar. Whatever is a product of karma and delusions is necessarily in the nature of suffering; thus all results of karma and delusions are in the nature of suffering. That is one way of understanding it.

Another way of explaining it is that, for any being reborn in cyclic existence, the very fact they are born in cyclic existence means they have to undergo various types of suffering, such as the eight types of suffering presented earlier. In particular, all beings in cyclic existence have to experience the four types of suffering of birth, ageing, sickness, and death. There is no being born in cyclic existence who is spared from these four types of suffering, which inevitably have to be experienced.

As mentioned earlier, contemplating the nature of cyclic existence is what impels us to develop the strong determination to be free from cyclic existence. The commentary mentions that one contemplates the various types of suffering again and again. The examples given are of the eight types of suffering, the six faults of suffering, and particularly the three types of suffering. By

really contemplating these, one naturally develops a strong sense of wanting to be free from them.

The commentary further presents another approach to recognising the pitfalls of cyclic existence, which is based on contemplating the twelve interdependent links in accordance with Chandrakirti's tradition. It is said that contemplating the twelve interdependent links is a much more profound way to develop the wish to be free from cyclic existence because it gives a very detailed description of how beings are born in cyclic existence. Thus, when we contemplate the twelve links in their reverse order, we will be able to see the way to free ourselves from cyclic existence. The incomparably kind teacher Trijang Rinpoche emphasised that thinking about the twelve interdependent links is a more profound way to develop renunciation and the wish to be free from samsara.

When we apply our understanding of the process of entering into samsara to other sentient beings – who are also caught in cyclic existence by way of the twelve interdependent links – the compassion we develop for them becomes much more profound. It's relatively easy for us to develop compassion when we see the obvious levels of suffering that other sentient beings undergo. But if we do not understand the process of how beings enter cyclic existence, it will be harder to develop compassion for those who are seemingly enjoying the pleasures of samsara, and not undergoing any obvious level of suffering. Therefore, contemplating the twelve interdependent links is also a profound way to develop compassion for other sentient beings.

Most people can relate to the obvious levels of suffering and develop a sense of compassion for others who are experiencing it. In fact, the common basis for developing compassion in all religions is recognising the obvious levels of suffering that others experience and wishing them to free from that.

However, here we develop compassion by recognising the main cause of sentient beings being caught in cyclic existence is ignorance. The ignorance of grasping at the self is the root cause for beings to enter cyclic existence and experience the shortcomings of various levels of suffering. This explanation is unique to the Buddhist teachings. This is how we can see that the development of compassion here is on a much more profound level.

Indeed, when we think about it, while we are now experiencing the results of previous karma that is not yet exhausted, we are constantly creating more karma. When we create karma out of ignorance, that becomes the cause to be reborn in cyclic existence, and thus the cycle is further perpetuated. When we think in this way, it can appear that there is no end to our cyclic existence.

Yet, while we are still under the influence of ignorance and compelled to create karma, if we can ensure that we at least create positive karmas, which are a cause for a higher rebirth, then that is worthwhile. While we are not yet able to completely free ourselves from cyclic existence, the next best thing is to create the karma for obtaining a higher rebirth, such as a human rebirth in the next life. If we could secure a good human rebirth, it would then become the basis for us to further engage in

the practices and free ourselves from cyclic existence. In this way, we can see that there is some hope.

As humans, we have the great potential to be able to create the causes for a good future rebirth. If we don't use that potential, it would really be a great pity, and this human life would be no different from an animal's rebirth. An animal doesn't have the understanding or capacity to create virtuous karmas for a good rebirth in the next lifetime. They have no choice, because they have no understanding. In such circumstances, it is hard to see how they could create the causes to be free from cyclic existence. Whereas as humans, we have the potential to create the causes for a higher rebirth.

Contemplating these points becomes a great comfort for us. By contemplating the pitfalls or disadvantages of cyclic existence, we can develop a sense of disenchantment for its pleasures. This in turn benefits us greatly, because it reduces our strong attachment to the pleasures of cyclic existence. Contemplating this definitely helps the mind to become calmer and more relaxed. We will have less anxiety, along with a sense of purpose and the knowledge that we can free ourselves from cyclic existence. If, on the other hand, one has strong attachment to, and longing for, the pleasures of cyclic existence, it will be hard for the impetus or wish to be free from cyclic existence to arise.

As presented in the teachings, the definition of cyclic existence is: 'the factor or part which connects one to rebirth again and again through karma and delusions.' The Tibetan term *cha*, which is translated as 'factor' or 'part', might have a slightly ambiguous meaning. I personally understand it as 'continuum'. So the continuum that connects one's rebirth again and again through delusions and karma is cyclic existence. When I presented it in this way, Lama Zopa Rinpoche commented, "Oh, that's a very good meaning. That's a more profound understanding of what 'cyclic existence' is". In any case, we can understand it as the factor that connects one again and again to rebirth through delusions and karma.

When the teachings present an ambiguous passage, I often apply a certain understanding and interpretation myself. Of course, I could be wrong at times, but it is good to find logical ways to understand a point.

I used to also wonder why there were slightly different ways of presenting the meanings of the teachings by great scholars and masters of the past. Now, having contemplated them for many years, I can see that there are profound reasons for those seemingly different presentations. Their presentations come from their own thorough investigation and experience. For example, there are seemingly different presentations of the ultimate view of emptiness. But the different ways of explaining it come from the thorough investigations and experiences of individual masters and scholars. They might have slightly different ways of expressing their experiences. However, we need to understand that, when they come from great masters and scholars, all these teachings are presentations based on a profound and thorough understanding. That's how I understand these differences, and it is good for you to also keep this in

mind, so that you do not develop doubts about different presentations.

In summary, by contemplating suffering, the nature of cyclic existence, and particular types of suffering in detail, one then comes to the point of wondering whether there is a cause for these sufferings or not. Do these sufferings occur randomly without cause? Or do they have a cause? That's the next contemplation we undertake.

The cause of suffering

It's essential for us to investigate whether there is a cause for suffering or not, rather than just following the outline of the teachings and thinking, "The teaching presents the causes as delusions and karma". If we just resort to that explanation, we won't develop a personal understanding of whether or not there is a cause of suffering. We need to use our own initiative and really investigate whether there is a cause of suffering or not. While some levels of understanding may not be immediately obvious to us, if we really think about the cause of suffering and contemplate it, it will start to become clearer and clearer to us.

Through logic, it would become clear to us that suffering must have a cause. If it didn't have a cause, then when suffering was experienced, it would have to be experienced perpetually, at all times, because it doesn't depend on a cause. It would either have to occur at all times or, when it ceased, it would have to cease altogether. Why would it occur again if there were no causes?

We can also contemplate how suffering itself is by nature impermanent. Whatever suffering one experiences, it does not last for ever, it actually changes. The moments of experiencing suffering can later change into a feeling of relief from that suffering. However, due to causes and conditions, one can experience that suffering again.

When we contemplate the impermanent nature of suffering, we can also incorporate an understanding of how, depending on causes and conditions, we experience the result of suffering. When the causes and conditions cease, the experience of suffering ceases as well. This is how we acquire a deep understanding and insight into the causes of suffering.

In relation to the **four attributes of the truth of suffering**, when we contemplate suffering, we contemplate that it is: impermanent; in the nature of suffering; empty; and selfless. In this way, we get a more profound understanding of the nature of suffering within the context of cyclic existence.

More particularly, when we contemplate the causes of suffering, we can understand that we create karma as a result of an initial cause, which is the delusions, particularly ignorance. Through the combination of delusions and karma, one individual being creates the causes to be reborn in cyclic existence, and then experiences the various levels and types of suffering. The great master, Lama Tsong Khapa, says in one of his works: "Without thinking about the process of how one enters samsara, there is no way that one will be able to reverse the process and thus be free from samsara". This is very profound. It encompasses the main points that we

need to contemplate – the process of how an individual being enters samsara. We have to relate to these causes for samsara as not being physical causes, but rather causes within the mental continuum – specifically, the delusions, of which ignorance is the very root cause of samsara; and then the karma created out of those delusions.

As the commentary explains here:

Following the recognition of the delusions and contaminated action as being the cause of cyclic existence, one will generate a thought of getting rid of the true origin. Therefore, after that (true suffering) is presented, true origin is presented.

So thus:

One meditates on true origin to understand the means by which beings enter into cyclic existence.

This is exactly the point I was explaining earlier. That is why one meditates on the truth of suffering first, as a way to develop the impetus to understand the causes of suffering and contemplate them.

On this point of *meditating on true origin to understand the means by which beings enter into cyclic existence*, at a practical level, we can all relate to this notion of this very strong sense of ‘I’ that we have within us. The stronger this sense of ‘I’, the more likely it is that we will have strong feelings of ‘like’ and ‘dislike’ in relation to different objects. We think: “I like this so I want this” and “I don’t like that so I want to get rid of it”. That strong sense of ‘I’ itself is not specifically identified in the teachings as the ignorance of grasping at a self; it is, however, a major factor for generating attachment and aversion to particular objects. The stronger that sense of ‘I’, the stronger the sense of attachment we develop towards certain things we like and want, and the stronger our aversion towards certain things that we don’t like and wish to avoid. This is how we can relate it to ourselves on a practical level.

By relating it to our own experience, we can get a sense that, for as long as we are under the power of the three primary delusions of attachment, anger and ignorance, there is no real opportunity for us to be free. We need to really think about whether that is a good situation for us to be in or not. Would we rather be free from the dominance and influence of the three poisons, or would we rather be under their dominance? We can all relate to the fact that, if we were free from these three poisons or primary delusions, it would indeed be a great relief from our agony, and that a great sense of peace and calmness would prevail within us.

Having identified the causes of samsara as karma and delusion, it is appropriate to get some further understanding of what this means. Karma here particularly relates to contaminated karma. There are some karmas classified as uncontaminated, and the karmas that are a cause for cyclic existence are said to be contaminated karma. The general **definition of karma** is ‘the mental factor of intention’. The **definition of delusion** (or affliction) is, ‘a mental factor which, from the moment it is generated, causes unrest and disturbance in one’s mind’.

As presented previously, we come to understand the process of entering cyclic existence through contemplating the twelve interdependent links. The first, ignorance, is specifically the ignorance of grasping at the self. Due to grasping at the self, one creates a karma, which is the second link, karmic formation. That karma then leaves an imprint upon the consciousness, which is the third link, which further connects to the remaining links. This is the process of entering cyclic existence.

A point to note here is that karmic formation, the second link, is a particular type of karma known as throwing, or propelling, karma and is so-called because it has the potential to propel or throw you into a future existence – that is, it has the potential to bring about the effect of a ripened result within cyclic existence. The term ‘potential’ is used here because the karma need not be definite; once a karma is created, whether positive or negative, it can be counteracted. For example, when one engages in purification practice, certain negative karmas can be exhausted or purified. Also, the imprint of positive karmas can be cancelled due to generating anger afterwards. Therefore, the definition of karma includes potential: karma has the full potential to bring about a ripened effect. The tenth of the twelve interdependent links, existence, is said to be the completing karma of the causes that were created before. So completion takes place at this stage.

Another point to understand here is that the grasping at the self as presented in the twelve interdependent links is said to be the **grasping at the self of a person**. When the teachings on the twelve interdependent links say that the first link is the cause of cyclic existence, we need to understand that ‘the first’ here relates to the first link of the twelve interdependent links. It does not relate to the very root cause of all cyclic existence, because that is said to be **grasping at the self of phenomena**. These explanations need to be understood when the twelve interdependent links are presented.

So, when the commentary says, *meditating on the true origins to understand the means by which beings enter into cyclic existence*, it really means to contemplate how, out of ignorance, we create the causes, the karma, and how all the rest of the experiences of cyclic existence follow from that. By contemplating the causes of cyclic existence, such as ignorance, in depth, we next contemplate whether ignorance can be abandoned or not. When we contemplate the possibility of abandoning ignorance, we get an inkling of how it is possible to abandon the sufferings of cyclic existence.

As mentioned earlier, true origin is identified as afflictions or delusions and karma. The three root delusions (anger, attachment and ignorance) are the causes of the suffering we experience. Of those three delusions, it is particularly ignorance that serves as the main cause. When we see that the very root cause of our all our suffering can be abandoned, then we can develop the profound understanding that cyclic existence can be abandoned.

The commentary explains:

Ignorance which is the primary true origin refers to a mistaken view with respect to the way things exist. Seeing the possibility of eliminating it will entail the

knowledge of the possibility of attaining true cessation.

As presented here, we need to really contemplate how ignorance is a mistaken view. To understand the possibility of abandoning ignorance, we need to first identify ignorance, and understand whether it is a correct view or an incorrect view. As mentioned, the term ignorance here specifically refers to the ignorance of grasping at the self. How does the self appear to an ordinary conceptual mind? How does the self appear to us? Does it appear to be autonomous? Does it appear to be independent? If that is how it appears, then is that true or false? Is the self independently, autonomously, and substantially existent or not? Contemplating how the self does not exist in the way it appears shows us how the ignorance of grasping at the self is a mistaken view: it is based on falsity. If it is a mistaken view and based on falsity, then it cannot hold its true identity. Thus it is possible to overcome it, because it does not hold its true identity: it does not exist in the way it appears.

By contemplating in this way, again and again, we come to the realisation that ignorance is something we can abandon or overcome. This realisation does not come about naturally, by itself, but rather through a lot of contemplating and meditating.

Of course, at our level, we have to use many different reasonings to prove that the self does not exist in the way it appears. The various logical reasonings that prove selflessness have to be employed here, such as the reasoning of 'dependent arising', which is said to be one of the most profound reasonings. Based on the misconception or wrong view of perceiving a self that is not dependent on any causes, conditions or parts, we perceive a self that appears to have its own independent existence. It appears to be independently existent, without depending on causes and any parts. So while the 'I' or self appears in this way, we need to investigate whether it actually exists in that way or not. We contemplate how a self that does not depend on causes or parts, and exists in a unitary way, independently, by itself, cannot possibly be true.

True cessation

When one contemplates like this – using the reasoning of dependent arising, that the self is dependent on causes and conditions and parts, and is thus an imputed phenomenon – one gains an understanding of selflessness through reasoning. Although one may not have had the direct realisation of selflessness or emptiness yet, even the understanding gained through reasoning is said to be very profound. Actually, some teachings explain that a profound understanding of selflessness and emptiness can be gained through reasoning alone.

Thus, we need to employ such methods to gain the profound understanding of selflessness and emptiness. When one gains the understanding of selflessness – realising that the self does not exist independently, without depending on causes and parts – we will have shattered the wrong view of grasping at a truly existent or inherently existent self. Thus we will have begun to shatter the very cause of cyclic existence. This is in line

with the commentary where it says that ... *seeing the possibility of eliminating ignorance will entail the knowledge of the possibility of attaining true cessation*. This is the point I am emphasising here.

The commentary then mentions:

Therefore, at the third time, true cessation is taught.

... *at the third time* ... refers to the sequence of the four noble truths, when true cessation is presented. Then quoting from the *Bei-bum* scripture, the commentary further mentions:

As it follows that the attainment of true cessation is dependent upon the realisation of true path, so at the fourth time the true path is taught.

So, in relation to the path, *cessation is dependent upon the realisation of true path*. The true path, as presented previously, relates to the three higher trainings (morality, concentration and emptiness), the main practices to be adopted here. Emptiness is the direct antidote that overcomes the ignorance that grasps at a self, because it leads to the realisation that there is no truly or inherently existent self. When one further meditates on that, and develops calm abiding focusing on emptiness, that is further enhanced through the development of special insight. When one achieves calm abiding, one obtains physical and mental pliancy. Then, based on physical and mental pliancy, one experiences physical and mental bliss. It is from within that state of physical and mental bliss that one is able to investigate the meditational object, which is emptiness. Then one obtains the union of calm abiding and special insight.

After thorough investigation, when one gains the realisation of emptiness directly, one obtains the path of seeing; at the first moment one obtains the uninterrupted meditative equipoise on emptiness. Then, when one obtains the liberated path of seeing, one obtains cessation. So first one realises the actual path, then cessation is obtained when one attains the liberated path. This was presented in more detail previously; here it needs to be understood and incorporated with an understanding of the true path.

After having obtained the path of seeing, when one further meditates on emptiness, one gains the path of meditation and develops the antidote for overcoming the subtler levels of the imprints of the delusions. Then, once one overcomes the actual root of the delusions within oneself, one obtains liberation. One obtains liberation when the roots of the delusions are completely abandoned. Of course, more profound details are explained in the teachings, but we can broadly understand how one obtains liberation in this way.

At that point on the path of meditation, when one completely abandons the root or seed of the delusions, one obtains liberation. However, although one has abandoned the seed of the delusions, the imprints are still within one's mental continuum. Hence there is still the appearance of a mistaken view, a dualistic appearance; this is the sign that one has not yet overcome the imprints of the delusions.

The analogy used is that dualistic appearance at this level is like a dream. Although the dream appears to be true, it is actually mistaken. That is why the analogy of a dream

is often used in the teachings – because things in a dream are an illusion. The reason why dreams appear real to the mind is because it is affected by the mind of sleep. Similarly, for sentient beings who have not yet abandoned the imprints of the delusions, there is still the mistaken view of the appearance of inherent or true existence due to those imprints affecting the mind.

It is good to understand how the example fits the meaning. Normally, we would just say, “Oh, it’s like a dream or an illusion”, but it’s good to understand how the mind is affected in this specific way. Many have commented that it is useful to understand how this wrong consciousness affects our perception. I have also explained in recent teachings the story of how having that understanding really helped one geshe’s mind. So it’s good to understand how we possess a wrong consciousness.

It’s because we don’t recognise wrong consciousness that we fall prey to always engaging in wrong deeds. In those situations, we follow appearances, we believe in them, and thus engage in wrong deeds. But if we had that proper understanding, it would prevent us from following the wrong consciousness that propels us towards non-virtuous deeds; we would hesitate and avoid that. So it’s meaningful for us to have that understanding.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Mary-Lou Considine
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Edited Version*

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Homework

(22 August 2017) *Assigned:* 29/08/2017

1. What are the four attributes of the truth of suffering?

2. Give:

a) the general definition of karma

b) The definition of delusion.

3. Talk about throwing and completing karma in relation to the twelve links.

4. How do we come to the realisation that ignorance is something we can abandon or overcome.?

5. How does one obtain the union of calm abiding and special insight?

Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

29 August 2017

As usual let us devote some time to our meditation practice. [Meditation]

PRESENTING THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A BEING OF MIDDLE SCOPE (CONT.)

In the commentary, at the conclusion of the section on the person of middling scope, there is a quote from Maitreya Buddha:

The illness is to be recognised; the causes of illness to be abandoned; the cure is to be attained; and the medicine to be taken. Likewise suffering, cause and cessation of the path are to be recognised, abandoned, attained and undertaken.

This quote from Maitreya relates to the four noble truths. Just as an *illness is to be recognised* or understood, suffering also needs to be recognised and understood; just as one needs to understand *the causes of the illness* that have *to be abandoned*, likewise the cause of suffering, or true origination, is to be abandoned; just as the *cure* for a particular illness *is to be obtained*, the truth of cessation is to be attained; and just as the medicine to cure that illness is to be taken, the truth of the path is also to be practised and undertaken. This presents the way the four noble truths are to be practised.

As presented in the earlier sessions, the way to overcome cyclic existence is through understanding and meditating on the four noble truths, which I have already explained extensively. One needs to understand that by generating disenchantment with the excellences of samsara, one develops a yearning to be free from cyclic existence, and the way to do this is by means of the four noble truths. It is good to really understand and contemplate these points and try to put them into practice, which will definitely help to subdue and overcome our unruly minds.

The Buddha's presentation of the four noble truths is that suffering is to be recognised, true origins are to be abandoned, cessation is to be attained and the path is to be meditated on. It is said that when the Buddha first gave his teachings on the four noble truths to his retinue of five excellent disciples, they all gained spontaneous realisations of these truths. That is because they were beings of pure stainless karma and were able to fully understand the meaning of the teaching the Buddha presented.

That is the reason why we don't find any further commentary on the Buddha's original teachings that are recorded as the sutras. The Buddha did not need to give any further commentary because his disciples were all perfect recipients who were able to understand and actualise every word of the Buddha as it was being taught. The commentaries of the sutras came only much later, after the Buddha's passing.

For example, when the Buddha presented the truth of suffering to his disciples, indicating that 'suffering is to be understood', he did not need to give any further extensive explanation, as his disciples developed renunciation spontaneously just by listening to his words. The Buddha didn't need to give specific details about suffering, such as the six types of suffering, the eight types of suffering, and so forth. Because the minds of the disciples were ripened, they were able to understand and actualise the teachings with the mere mention of few words such as 'suffering is to be understood', and thereby developed these realisations spontaneously.

It is good for us to be inspired by this account. If we put some time and effort into understanding the teachings now, a time will come when, by merely hearing these teachings again, we will develop spontaneous realisations. That is definitely possible.

When the Buddha taught in this world, it was in the aspect of a supreme emanation, which only beings with pure karma are able to receive teachings from. So his disciples were not mere ordinary beings, but beings with pure karma, who had created the particular causes to be living at the time when the Buddha presented the teachings, and were able to hear them directly and develop spontaneous realisations. This was a result of the causes and conditions that they had previously created.

As presented in the teachings, the supreme emanation body can only be seen by beings with pure karma. As older students will recall from previous teachings, only bodhisattvas can see the **supreme enjoyment** body of the Buddha. So when we hear these accounts of the Buddha's teachings and how his disciples developed spontaneous realisations, we can gain a sense of how wonderful it would be if we could also gain spontaneous realisations whilst listening to the teachings. If we aspire to gain spontaneous realisations, then we need to create the causes, by putting time and effort into study and practice now.

It is good to understand how the different types of the Buddha's bodies are continuously benefiting numberless sentient beings. In summary, the Buddha's body is of two types, the **truth body**¹ and the **form body**².

The **truth body** is further subdivided into the **nature truth body**³ and the **wisdom truth body**⁴. These two truth bodies are the highest levels, which can be only seen and understood by other enlightened beings.

The next level is the **form body**, which is divided the **complete enjoyment body**⁵ and the **emanation body**⁶. As explained previously, the complete enjoyment body can only be seen by higher level bodhisattvas who reside in a pure land. So we ordinary beings cannot see the complete enjoyment body. The emanation body is divided into three types: the **supreme emanation body**, the **emanation by birth body**, and the **artisan emanation**

¹ Skt: *dharmakaya*

² Skt: *rupakaya*

³ Skt: *svabhavikakaya*

⁴ Skt: *janakaya*

⁵ Skt: *sambhogakaya*

⁶ Skt: *nirmanakaya*

body. As mentioned earlier the supreme emanation body can only be seen by beings with pure karma. Therefore, in order to interact with ordinary beings, the Buddha takes the aspect of the emanation by birth body, which is an emanation that has taken birth in an ordinary form.

When presenting the topic of how to rely on a spiritual teacher, the lam-rim explains how one needs to regard one's teachers as an emanation by birth body. The teachings explain that one regards a spiritual teacher as an emanation of the Buddha in the aspect of an emanation by birth. In this way, we can get some understanding that amongst one's teachers, there can definitely be an emanation body of the Buddha. It is in this way that one can generate stronger faith in one's spiritual teachers. In summary, the Buddha benefits an infinite number of sentient beings in various ways by means of these different aspects.

At our level, even if the Buddha were to be here in his actual form, we would not be able to see him because of the obscurations that have defiled our minds. Once our obscurations are purified, then we will be able to see and recognise the Buddha.

At our level, the best we can do to receive direct blessings from the Buddha is to develop the strong conviction that the Buddha is actually present in the aspect of our teachers and other representations, such as statues and so forth. We need to view the statue in front of us as if the Buddha was actually present, then although we might not hear direct teachings from the statue, we will definitely receive blessings. It is said that with strong faith and by envisioning the Buddha as actually being present, you will definitely receive blessings.

This reminds me of a comment that Casper made when he was barely three years old. At that young age, he asked his mother, 'If the Buddha doesn't speak to us, then how can we know that we are receiving his blessings?'. Even at that young age, he was wondering how it was possible to receive blessings from an image of the Buddha? It was a significant doubt, which his mother did not have a ready answer to.

Indeed, the purpose of having statues or images of the Buddha and other enlightened beings is to make offerings and do prostrations as a means to engage in purification practices and gain merit. The way to understand how these offerings and prostrations become effective is by generating the conviction that the buddhas are actually present. This is done by visualising statues of the buddhas as being actual representations of the buddhas. Then, as mentioned earlier, when one engages in practices, one will definitely receive blessings.

As I have mentioned in the past, by doing practices relating to enlightened beings in the form of a deity, one can definitely receive great benefit. I have shared with you some simple, regular practices in connection with deities such as Tara. Recite the mantra, and whilst reciting the mantra, visualise that Tara is actually present, and as you recite the mantra, visualise receiving enlightened nectar and light from her that descends through your crown, filling you up completely. Then, as the white light and nectar fills your body, it simultaneously expels all negativities and obscurations,

and thus your body is filled with pure nectar and light. This symbolises receiving the blessings of the enlightened body, speech and mind of the deity.

There are great benefits from engaging in this practice with strong conviction and faith, and you will definitely make a strong connection with deities such as Tara. People have confided in me that when they do this practice, they feel a transformation taking place in their mind, which is a great source of solace for them, especially in times of difficulties and strife.

We recently did the tenth chapter of the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*, so you may recall the aspiration that, due to a connection with Manjushri, for example, may the denizens of the hell realms and the hungry ghosts and so forth actually see Manjushri in the space before them, and receive his blessings, so that all their sufferings will be completely alleviated. As presented in the teachings, it is possible for beings to be benefited by Manjushri by having made a connection with him. This is how we need to understand the significance of these practices.

Not too long ago, when Susie Coates was going through the last stages of her illness, I sent a message via Sandra to keep her mind steady and focus on White Tara, and develop an unwavering faith in White Tara, and that would be all that she needed to do. When she heard that message, she immediately smiled in recognition and understanding, and soon after that, she passed away.

Indeed, this practice is said to be of the greatest benefit for people at the time of death.

We might have side-tracked a bit but these are all significant points to keep in mind. As the great master Gyaltsab Dampa Rinchen said in one of his works on valid cognition, one does not know where a great supreme being might be, so one needs to be very careful when encountering others, because they might be a supreme being. The point is that one needs to be very careful of being critical of others.

PRESENTING THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A BEING OF THE GREAT SCOPE

We have come to the third type of being, the being of the great scope. However, it is also important to keep in mind the description and definitions of beings of the small scope, and beings of the medium scope that we have just covered. The text explains what a great scope being is with a brief explanation and an extensive explanation.

BRIEF EXPLANATION

The commentary begins by quoting this verse from the *Lamp of the Path* which reads:

5. *Those, who through their personal suffering
Truly want to end completely
All the suffering of others
Are persons of supreme capacity.*

We first get a general understanding of beings of the great scope from the literal meaning of the verse itself. *Those who through their personal suffering* refers to gaining a thorough understanding of one's own suffering. Then, as a result, they *truly want to end completely all the*

sufferings of others, and thus such beings are, as identified here, *persons of supreme capacity*.

As the commentary explains:

The person of great scope is explicitly mentioned here.

It goes on to say:

Having fully trained in the paths of the small and medium scope...

This part clearly explains that one needs to have first fully immersed oneself in the trainings of the small scope, which then leads one to engage in the practice of the medium scope. Training in the practices presented in the small scope, and the medium scope, in particular, is essential. The essence of the practice of the medium scope is to renounce cyclic existence: without developing renunciation and the determination to be free from cyclic existence, it will be impossible to do the same for others.

As Shantideva clearly mentions in *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, without generating the wish to develop renunciation even in a dream, how could one possibly develop the compassion that wishes for others to attain liberation? Thus, without first developing renunciation oneself, one cannot possibly develop great love and compassion for other sentient beings, wishing them to be free from cyclic existence and suffering. On the path of the great scope, that wish for others to develop renunciation has to be preceded by seeing the possibility that one can, in fact, be free from cyclic existence. Through seeing that possibility and yearning to be free from the sufferings of cyclic existence, one can then relate that to other beings who are also suffering in cyclic existence, and generate love and compassion for them.

We need to understand that all of these practices – the development of the states of mind of renunciation, bodhicitta, and love and compassion – fall within the category of analytical meditation. Without engaging in analytical meditation, it is impossible to progress along the path. As I have mentioned previously, feeling content with just focusing on an object and keeping your attention on that, thereby developing some mental stabilisation is not, in itself, any great achievement. Getting carried away with and dwelling on that sort of meditation would be a great loss, because one would not be progressing along the path.

There is a danger of just being satisfied with stabilising meditation, without really contemplating other aspects of the path. If one is not careful, instead of the mind becoming clearer and brighter, there is a danger that the mind will become duller and duller. So one needs to apply some cautionary measures against thinking that just being able to develop one's attention and focus on one object is sufficient.

Some have commented that having meditated over some period of time, their mind just seems to be getting darker and duller. That is, in fact, proof of this danger. You can end up in a state of stupor rather than a state of clarity, and we need to be careful about that.

The commentary further explains:

...that person who has trained, then recognises how they themselves have been tormented in samsara from the beginning, middle and end.

Having recognised this, they also see how mother sentient beings are aimlessly wandering, lost in the ocean of samsara and how, just like themselves, are burning in the blazing fire of cyclic existence.

As presented earlier, contemplating and meditating on the plight of having to experience suffering is an impetus to develop renunciation. When we see other beings having to experience exactly the same suffering, that becomes an impetus for us to develop love and compassion for other sentient beings.

In presenting its description of great scope being, the commentary further explains that:

Inspired by this 'unbearable compassion', they generate the aspiration to seek others' benefits that all the suffering of others together with its causes, two obscurations and their latencies, are all completely purified without anything left to be extinguished.

The *two obscurations* are the deluded obscurations, and the obscurations to omniscience, which are the *latencies*. So the great scope being aspires to that state of enlightenment.

This, conjoined with the aspiration to seek complete enlightenment, is the precious mind of bodhicitta.

Aspiration refers to the aspiration for other sentient beings to be free from suffering and its causes. What is being clearly identified here is the meaning of the mind of enlightenment, which some translations call the awakening mind. That mind of bodhicitta or the awakening mind is the aspiration that consists of the two aspirations: wishing to free others from all suffering; and, in order to achieve that, wishing to achieve enlightenment oneself. The mind of bodhicitta is, as indicated here, the gateway for entering the great path.

Furthermore, as explained in the commentary:

From that bodhicitta mind one then engages in all of the bodhisattvas' deeds. This is what is explicitly described here as the great scope person.

What is clearly presented here is a description of a great scope person as one who has developed the mind of bodhicitta, and who, on that basis, engages in the bodhisattva's deeds. As I regularly tell you, a bodhisattva is defined as a being who has the mind of bodhicitta, or the mind of enlightenment, and the deeds that they engage in are the bodhisattva's deeds, such as the six perfections.

When a bodhisattva is explicitly presented as a great scope being, as is the case here, we can get a sense of how precious such a being is, and thus develop a strong sense of admiration for, and faith in the bodhisattvas. Indeed, as presented here, the very term 'bodhisattva' refers to a being who has a twofold aspiration. One aspiration is to solely benefit sentient beings by alleviating all their suffering, so their intention is without any ulterior motive. They are completely dedicated to benefiting sentient beings by alleviating their suffering and leading them to complete happiness. With that aspiration, they then aspire to achieve enlightenment themselves to achieve that goal.

Here, we can also get a sense of how, in order to actually engage in the practices of a bodhisattva, one cannot have any self-cherishing in one's mind. We have to overcome

our self-cherishing mind, and solely dedicate our actions and thoughts to the benefit of all sentient beings. With this aspiration and this state of mind, bodhisattvas engage in the practices of the six perfections, such as generosity and morality. So, while they are striving to achieve the ultimate state of enlightenment, their actions benefit sentient beings. Here, we can get a sense of the kind of mind that a bodhisattva possesses, what kind of practices they engage in, and the ultimate goal that they seek to achieve. This is all encompassed in this definition of a great scope being.

The commentary concludes by saying:

In brief, the great scope person who is explicitly described here primarily refers to those who engage in the unmistakable Mahayana path.

As the commentary explains, *the great scope person who is explicitly described here primarily refers to those who engage in the unmistakable Mahayana path.*

Then the commentary presents different ways in which a great scope being can be categorised.

Here the great scope person can be subdivided according to:

- View: There are two subdivisions: the Madhyamika view and the Cittamatrin view.

This refers to the *view* of proponents of the *Madhyamika* and *Cittamatra* (or Mind Only) schools of tenets.

- Vehicle: There are two subdivisions: the sutra and mantra or tantra vehicles

In terms of *vehicle*, there are two subdivisions: those who follow *the sutra* vehicle and those who follow the *tantra* vehicle.

The commentary further explains:

Relating to the explanation of the great scope the *Tantra of the Enlightenment of Mahavairocana* (*Abhisambodhi* of Vairocana) says,

The all-knowing exalted wisdom of the secret lord arises from the root of compassion, and the cause of bodhicitta is the perfection of the method.

What is being explained is that the ultimate state of enlightenment arises from the basis of compassion, which is the immediate cause of bodhicitta.

As said above, the complete unmistakable Mahayana path refers to the combination of these three: great compassion, mind of bodhicitta and the method of generosity and so forth. The same meaning is also mentioned in the *Three Stages of the Meditation* by Kamalashila.

What is further presented here is also presented in the Madhyamaka teachings. Also Chandrakirti in citing (Nagarjuna's) *Precious Garland*:

If you and the world wish to attain unsurpassable full awakening,
The root is the awakening mind
That should be as stable as Mt Meru, king of the mountains:
(Comprised of) compassion extending to all quarters, and discriminating wisdom which does not rely on duality.

This explanation was also presented during the Middle Way or *Madhyamakavatara* teachings, and also the teachings on *Precious Garland*.

Then the commentary further presents:

By citing that text also,

All the bodhisattvas' paths are condensed into these three - compassion, non-dual wisdom and bodhicitta.

Also Chandrakirti said in his text *Supplement to the Middle Way*:

The mind of compassion, non-dual understanding and the mind of enlightenment, are the causes of children of conquerors.

This, of course, was presented in more detail in the Middle Way teachings. *The mind of compassion, non-dual understanding and the mind of enlightenment, are the causes of children of conquerors* indicates that the mind of enlightenment or bodhicitta is not actual bodhicitta, but the bodhicitta that is like bark of the sugar cane. It is this contrived bodhicitta that is developed before developing actual bodhicitta.

The point to understand here is that if this bodhicitta is one of the causes of conquerors' children, then it cannot also be resultant or actual bodhicitta. That is because if actual bodhicitta has already been developed, it cannot be a cause. It is only when actual bodhicitta is developed that one becomes a child of the conquerors, which is the term for bodhisattvas. That which serves as a cause to become a bodhisattva cannot be the actual result. Therefore, one needs to understand that the bodhicitta referred to here is the contrived bodhicitta (which is explained using the analogy of the bark of sugar cane) that is developed prior to developing the actual awakening mind of bodhicitta.

The *mind of non-dual understanding*, which is emptiness, explicitly refers to the causes for the bodhisattva of sharp intellect. Bodhisattvas who have a duller intellect don't need to realise emptiness in order to develop bodhicitta. For them, the causes are love and compassion alone.

The main point here is that compassion, the non-dual understanding of emptiness, and the mind of enlightenment or bodhicitta, are the essence of the Mahayana path.

Then the commentary presents some further quotations from other great masters:

As stated in the *Essence of The Middle Way* by Bhavaviveka:

Do not give up the mind of bodhicitta and perfectly follow the austerities of the Able One, and seeking the wisdom of suchness, these are the practices which accomplish all purposes.

According to the *Ornament of the Middle Way* by Shantarakshita:

The mind of enlightenment, the austerities of the bodhisattva and the view of suchness, these three are the summarised teaching. As it says,

Then Shantarakshita gives this quotation:

The followers of faith generate the mind of complete enlightenment and then take upon the austerities of the Able One and strive to seek the wisdom of suchness.

This refers back to the point about those of duller faculties. *The followers of faith* refers to those of duller intellect who, without depending on many reasons, first

generate the mind of bodhicitta, then take up the austerities or practices of the Able One, and finally strive to develop the wisdom of suchness. So, for those who are not of sharp intellect, emptiness is realised after having developed bodhicitta.

From this explanation, we can see that bodhisattvas don't necessarily have to have the realisation of emptiness. There are bodhisattvas who, at the outset, have gained the realisation of emptiness, and there are those who may not have gained the realisation of emptiness when they enter into the bodhisattva path. This is asserted by the Mind Only point of view, as well as the Prasangika Middle Way view.

The commentary further explains:

The Great Teacher Shantideva mentioned in *Compendium of Practice*,

By reflecting on the great meaning and rarity of the life of leisure and endowment, we generate the wish to take its essence and faith in the general teaching and especially conviction faith and appreciation of the qualities of the great vehicle. As a result, we hold wishing bodhicitta and engaging bodhicitta [wishing bodhicitta is developed before engaging bodhicitta]. We then engage in giving, protecting, purifying and increasing of the three – body, wealth and root virtues.

This implies that all the bodhisattvas' deeds are included in the six perfections.

As mentioned here, the quote from Shantideva implies that all bodhisattva deeds are included within the six perfections. In another teaching on the lam-rim there is an explanation of protecting, purifying and increasing the three deeds, so we need not to go into detail about them now.

Further down, the commentary explains:

Moreover, the summary of the practices of the Great Vehicle is condensed into three: in the preliminary generate the mind of enlightenment, then the actual practice is the training in the six perfections and the conclusion is the dedication to enlightenment.

This really summarises the main points of practice.

In relation to our own daily practices, this again reminds us that we first engage in some *preliminary practice*, part of which is engaging in generating the bodhicitta motivation. Then we engage in the *actual practice*, and finally we conclude with a *dedication*. This, as I regularly emphasise, essentially encompasses our practice.

The part at the beginning is very important, the middle or the actual practice is very important, and the end is also most beneficial. So, at the beginning, we generate the intention that our practice is for the benefit of sentient beings, then we engage in the practice, which will become a cause to benefit sentient beings, and finally we dedicate our practice towards that end.

Then the commentary further explains:

Here in the *Lamp of the Path* these four are taught.

(First) That generation of the mind of enlightenment is the entrance door to all the paths of the great vehicle

(Second) The means of generating that mind

(Third) From having generated this mind how to train in the deeds

(Fourth) Identifying the results of the training.

This is the main content of the text.

The **first** is presented in the four lines (Verse 5) beginning with

Those, who through their personal suffering

And the two lines beginning with (Verse 6) *For those excellent living beings*

The **second** is presented in the lines beginning with (Verse 7)

Facing paintings, statues and so forth

And other verses which present about taking the aspiring bodhicitta by ritual, as well as the associated precepts with it. To train in the deeds we must hold the engaging vow. The method of taking that, is presented beginning with (Verse 19)

Without the vow of the engaged intention

The **third** is (from having generated this mind what are the trainings in the practice). To quote the Gyaltsab Dampa in relation to all the deeds of a bodhisattva

The Buddha well explained the six perfections from the perspective of the threefold trainings, the first (training of morality) includes the (first) three (of the six perfections). The last two of both (threefold training and six perfections) match. Then one (joyous effort) is included in all (three trainings).

Henceforth all the bodhisattva deeds are included in the threefold uncommon trainings.

The morality of restraint from negative actions, the gathering of virtuous Dharma, acting to benefit sentient beings. The training in these three moralities are included in (Verse 32)

Which causes purity of body, speech and mind

It is also said,

The training in concentration, is described in (Verse 34)

whose nature is merit and exalted wisdom.

It is also said, the training in wisdom, is described from (Verse 41) *but without the practice of the perfection of wisdom.*

The **fourth** is (Identifying the results of the training)

From (Verse 59) *having thus meditated on suchness*

EXPLAINING THE SUPREME BEING EXTENSIVELY

Here there are two parts:

Elaborate presentation on the paths of perfection vehicle; and a mere portion of how to enter into the mantra vehicle.

The indication of 'a mere portion' suggests that entering the mantra vehicle is not explained in great detail.

Elaborate presentation on the paths of the perfection vehicle

This is divided into two: presenting the system of the paths; and presenting the system of the result.

Presenting the system of the paths

This is divided into the pledge, and presenting the actual path .

THE PLEDGE

The pledge is presented with the next verse, but we can leave that for our next session.

Next week will be a discussion week, and it is good for you to engage in discussion on the topics presented thus far in the text. The significance of engaging in discussion is that it allows you to refresh and bring out whatever you have learnt and understood before. Otherwise, whatever you have learnt may just lie dormant.

We didn't have time to go through the twelve links of dependent origination in much detail, so it will be good for you to go over them in more detail in your discussion session. More specifically, try to get a clear understanding of how many lifetimes it takes to complete one round of twelve interdependent links. They are said to be completed either in two or three lifetimes; they cannot be completed in just one lifetime. So, it is good to develop a good understanding of these important points.

As mentioned previously, it is through these twelve interdependent links that one understands how oneself and other beings enter into cyclic existence. The forward presentation of the twelve interdependent links shows how beings enter into the cyclic existence, beginning with ignorance, leading on to compositional factors, consciousness, and so forth. When the reverse order is presented, one then understands how to end the process of cyclic existence. Through ensuring the cessation of ignorance, compositional factors cease, then the imprints left on the consciousness cease, and so forth. This is how to understand the reverse order of the twelve interdependent links.

The most important thing is to recognise the cause for the ignorance of grasping at a self and identify it within oneself. It is important to really be able to identify that self-grasping on a personal level. Identifying the self-grasping of others won't, in itself, contribute much to freeing ourselves from cyclic existence. We need to focus on overcoming the self-grasping in relation to oneself right from the beginning.

In order to overcome the wrong conception of grasping at a self, one needs to see how that mistaken view is based on falsity and how it can be completely eradicated. In order to achieve liberation oneself, one has to eradicate grasping at one's individual grasping at the self, rather than focusing on the self of others.

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Discussion 5.09.2017

1. List and explain each of the twelve interdependent links.
2. 'More specifically, try to get a clear understanding of how many lifetimes it takes to complete one round of twelve interdependent links. They are said to be completed either in two or three lifetimes; they cannot be completed in just one lifetime.' Explain.

Week 1, 8.08.17

3. 'To understand how the twelve interdependent links become causes to be reborn in cyclic existence, they can be categorised into two: the twelve interdependent links which serve as a cause to be reborn in the lower realms, and the twelve interdependent links which are a cause to be reborn in the higher realms.' Explain the forward and reverse order of the twelve links.
4. How are the twelve interdependent links subsumed into the four noble truths?
5. Explain what happens when an individual comes to the end of this life and the death process starts.

Week 2, 15.08.17

6. List:
 - a) The eight types of suffering,
 - b) The six faults of cyclic existence.
 - c) The three types of suffering.
7. One may have glimpses of renunciation, or momentary feelings of renunciation, but developing real renunciation requires the development of the determination to overcome all-pervasive compounded suffering. Explain this All-pervasive compounded suffering

Week 3 22.08.17

8. Give:
 - a) The general definition of karma
 - b) The definition of delusion.
9. Talk about throwing and completing karma in relation to the twelve links.
10. How do we come to the realisation that ignorance is something we can abandon or overcome?