

# **The Twelve Links of Dependent Arising**

**Geshe Tashi Tsering**

**Translated & Edited by Voula Zarpani**

© 1999 Chenrezig Institute, Geshe Tashi Tsering & Voula Zarpani  
Chenrezig Institute P.O. Box 41 Eudlo Qld 4554  
[www.chenrezig.com.au](http://www.chenrezig.com.au)



## **INTRODUCTION**

The present course is about the Twelve Links of Interdependence and the way that we cycle within samsara due to them.

For those of you who have studied the lam rim you would know that the Twelve Links are introduced in the middle scope. The middle scope is basically dealing with the development of renunciation; this is done either by means of the Four Noble Truths or by means of the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising. What we do is to look at the way we enter and remain cycling within samsara with the aim of generating some aversion towards the attachment we have for the pleasures of samsara.

When you engage in the study of such a course, you should be aiming at generating a definite understanding and conviction of the fact that the ignorance of self-grasping is the root of samsara. This is something that you might have heard or read about many times, but the initial contact with this idea is not sufficient. What you should aim for is to either generate this conviction here, during the course or, if you do not generate it in the course, then this should happen later when you go home and think about the teachings more.

Although the Twelve Links are presented at the end of the middle scope, they can be combined with all three scopes. In that way one can do the practices of the small, middle and great scope in relation to the Twelve Links.

In this course we will follow the presentation of the *lamrim chenmo*, the Extensive Graduated Path, composed by Lama Tsongkhapa.

What Je Rinpoche has stated when explaining the need to engage in the presentation of the Twelve Links is that it is important to understand that the ignorance of self-grasping is the root of samsara. What we need to know is the way of escaping from it which starts by recognizing afflictions as the enemy. Once we've understood that, we start suspecting what will be the way out. What is important is to examine how both ourselves and everybody else enters and cycles within samsara.

## **ADJUSTING THE MOTIVATION**

When you are adjusting your motivation for this study, examine the reason for dividing the world into friends, enemies and strangers and the reason for feeling that some sentient beings are close to you and others are distant. You are making a fundamental mistake the moment you divide the world into friends, enemies and strangers. This mistake together with many others, stems from the fact that you have self-grasping. Generate the thought that from now on you will try to see every sentient being as being equal and for their benefit you will try to develop love and compassion together with an understanding of how we all enter and eventually how we can all escape from samsara. For that reason and because you want to reach the state of a Buddha in order to benefit every sentient being, you will engage in the study of the Twelve Links. This should be your motivation.

## INITIAL PRESENTATION OF THE TWELVE LINKS

The **first** of the Twelve Links is ignorance; the **second** is formation (often translated as action) and the **third** is consciousness.

The **fourth** is name and form; the **fifth** is six bases; the **sixth** is contact and the **seventh** is feeling (sometimes translated as sensation).

The **eighth** is craving; the **ninth** is grasping and the **tenth** is existence.

The **eleventh** is birth and the **twelfth** is aging and death.

The reason for subdividing the Twelve Links in this way is because within the Twelve Links there are two rounds of causation. The first three (1,2,3), ignorance, formation and consciousness are causes. The results that come from them are the following four links (4,5,6,7), which is from name and form up to feeling. Then, again the following three (8,9,10), craving, grasping and existence act as causes that produce the final two (11,12), birth and aging and death as results.

### FIRST ROUND OF CAUSATION

<u>Cause</u>	<u>Result</u>
(1) Ignorance	(4) Name & Form
(2) Formation	(5) Six bases
(3) Consciousness	(6) Contact
	(7) Feeling

### SECOND ROUND OF CAUSATION

<u>Cause</u>	<u>Result</u>
(8) Craving	(11) Birth
(9) Grasping	(12) Aging and Death
(10) Existence	

## DETAILED PRESENTATION OF THE TWELVE LINKS

### 1. IGNORANCE

In the same way that everything that is not a lie is not true and everyone that is not dear to you is not an enemy, then everything that is not knowledge is not ignorance.



The reason for saying that everything that is not a lie is not necessarily truth is because there are things that are neither. If we had a scale, lie and truth would occupy the two extremes of the scale, but there would be things that would have to be classified in between these two. If we have an original statement that is true, if we reverse or negate the statement, we end up with a statement that is non-true, a statement that is a lie. But, everything that is not the original statement, is not necessarily a lie. For example, if the original true statement was "the cup is white", then the statement "the cup is not white" must be a lie. But, every statement that is not "the cup is white", for example "stone" is not a lie.

The same applies to friends and enemies. Although these two would occupy the two extremes of a scale, there are many beings who are not our friend but they are not enemies either, and would be classified somewhere in between the two ends of the scale. We might identify as a friend someone who benefits us and so we may develop a close relationship with such a person, and identify as an enemy someone who inflicts harm, but there are many people who, although they do not directly benefit us, do not go out of their way to harm us either.

These two examples are useful in trying to define the relationship between ignorance and knowledge. A definition of ignorance as the opposite of knowledge is a general one, but does not necessarily define ignorance as the first of the Twelve Links. According to the general presentation, if we eliminate ignorance we have knowledge, since ignorance is described as engaging an object in a wrong way, and knowledge is described as engaging an object in a correct way.

If we look, for example, at the Buddhist view in terms of defining what is ignorance and what is knowledge, we say that if one holds things to truly exist, then one has ignorance. The opposite would be to hold things to not truly exist; this is knowledge. Knowledge and ignorance have the same object, but they engage it in a completely opposite way. Here, ignorance is specified as the ignorance of holding the self to (truly) exist. This is the ignorance of self-grasping. When we define ignorance, we have to be very accurate because ignorance has to be defined in relation to one particular statement or one particular understanding of an object. To understand that the self does not (truly) exist, is knowledge, and to hold that the self (truly) exists, is ignorance.

Within the context of the Twelve Links, **ignorance is the particular ignorance of self grasping which is the opposite of knowing that the self does not truly exist**. It is not a general ignorance that could occur with respect to any other object. It is not the ignorance that we declare when somebody asks us, for example, the name of a street or a person and we say *I'm sorry, I don't know; I cannot give you an answer because, I am ignorant about the fact.*

According to Arya Asanga:

There are two ways of defining ignorance: either to say that we have ignorance because we engage a correct object in a mistaken way or because we are confused about that which is correct. From the two, I define ignorance as being the second.

So Arya Asanga defines ignorance in a slightly different way: he calls ignorance the state of being confused about what is correct. We should not hurry to reject or criticize this statement. There is quite a lot to be understood from it. When Arya Asanga was further debated on this point, he was asked what would he then posit as the antidote to overcome this confusion. To that he replied:

It is only the wisdom realizing selflessness.

From this answer we understand that actually he had a correct definition of what ignorance is, but he was expressing it in a different way. By positing the wisdom that realizes selflessness as the antidote to confusion, he is stating that the wisdom realizing selflessness, apart from being the direct antidote to the ignorance grasping at a self, it is also the antidote to all confusion. Since we can be confused about many things, Arya Asanga posits that once we realize selflessness, all various types of confusion will be eliminated. So, by his definition of ignorance and its antidote, he posits something wider than just the direct antidote to self-grasping.

Arya Asanga continues by saying:

I divide this confusion into two types, confusion with respect to the law of cause and effect and confusion with respect to emptiness.

What is expressed here is that the confusion we have about the law of cause and effect is the one that causes us to go into a lower migration and the confusion we have with regards to emptiness causes us to end up in a fortunate migration.

Let us look at the first type of confusion, confusion with regards to the law of cause and effect and the fact that Arya Asanga says that this is the one that causes us to go into lower migrations. This confusion refers to the basic misunderstanding that makes us think that the result of having the wish to harm sentient beings can be something pleasurable. In the past the view that the killing of animals or the making of animal sacrifices was held as a means for attaining liberation. Such a view is a clear case of confusion with respect to the law of cause and effect. In Tibet, many nomads, in the case where animals were sick, would take a knife and cut a bit the flesh of the animal so that they would have some blood and offer it to the gods. They would think that by making this offering of blood, the animals would recover from the sickness. At least in this case they were not killing the animals, but there were many cases of sacrificing animals in order to attain liberation.

There could be no greater confusion about the law of cause and effect than to think that causing harm to another sentient being can be the cause of liberation.

If you think that the attainment of liberation and one's well being are the result of having harmed sentient beings, that shows that you are confused about the law of cause and effect. This is how confusion with regards to the law of cause and effect becomes the cause for a lower migration.

The second type of ignorance, which is confusion with regards to emptiness, indicates self-grasping. The presence of this misunderstanding can nevertheless allow us to accumulate some virtue. Despite the fact that we do not comprehend emptiness, we are still able to engage in virtuous activities that can be the cause of a fortunate migration and some happiness. Since there is fundamental misunderstanding, this virtue would not be able to project us out of samsara, but it can still provide some contaminated happiness. This covers the different aspects of Arya Asanga's presentation.

According to our system, we **define ignorance as self-grasping, the root of samsara**. From the two types of self-grasping, the innate and the imputed, the one that is posited as the first of the Twelve Links, is the **innate** one. Although the imputed self-grasping is ignorance, it is not the ignorance of the Twelve Links.

If we were to give a definition of imputed self-grasping, we could say that it is the self-grasping that is developed in your mind through the interaction with some other conditions. Here, reading a book or listening to some teachings and trying to come up with your own interpretation and your own reasons for supporting your theory, would be an example of that. It is clear that it has come about through interaction with elements that are distinct from yourself. If you are studying the Mind Only view and by reading that all compounded phenomena are truly existent, you take it to be the truth because it is stated in the book, you have misunderstood a point that needs further interpretation. That would be a case of imputed ignorance with respect to self-grasping.

This type of intellectually acquired ignorance can of course act as the cause for the accumulation of negative actions, but it is not the ignorance of the Twelve Links. That ignorance is the root of samsara, and as such it is the root for everyone, starting from the insects and animals and eventually covering all types of beings. But insects and animals cannot read books, nor do they go to teachings or try to give interpretations of what they read and hear. This is why we say that the root of samsara has to be something else, something that does not come about through interaction with a book or a teacher. It has to be something that already exists within the minds of sentient beings and therefore, in that sense is common to everybody. This is the innate ignorance of self-grasping.

If you are looking for the range of the first of the Twelve Links, this innate ignorance of self-grasping that is the root of samsara, you would have to say it is so broad that it covers the whole of cyclic existence, and everybody in it.

If we try to explain what this innate self-grasping is, we could say that a good sign of possessing it is the fact that whatever appears to our senses, whatever we see, hear, smell, taste or whatever we come in contact with, we perceive to exist exactly the way it appears. Things appear to us in a certain way and that is due to innate self-grasping. Some people are grasping at these appearances, others do not, but the fact that we have these appearances and the fact that we have the tendency to believe them as they appear shows that we have innate self-grasping.

If we were to give an example of innate self-grasping with respect to the self, we would have to say that when we talk about *self*, *me* or *I*, it seems that there is an entity that exists as something distinct from the body and mind. It seems that there is an entity of my self on one side and the entities of my body and my mind on the other side. Such distinct entities appear and we grasp at these appearances. It is innate self-grasping that gives rise to these appearances.

As we meet with different objects and experience them, certain things appear to our senses continuously. In everything that appears there are two aspects: one that is assessed by valid cognition and one that is not. The first, valid part is useful to us, but the second one is mistaken. Innate self-grasping is what gives rise to the mistaken part that exists in every appearance. This second part needs to be negated because if we are not able to recognize the existence of two parts, we are mistaken in what appears to us.

We have to understand how extensive the innate self-grasping is. It has been with us since beginningless time, without any break. It is called innate because it has permeated our mind so much that it is with us all the time. When we sleep, innate self-grasping is there; when we wake up and engage in different

activities, innate self-grasping is there. When we die and our bodies are burned, innate self-grasping is still there following the mental continuum that moves in the next migration.

Milarepa has said that without understanding that your enemy has already entered into your heart, you keep pointing your finger to external enemies. As long as you do not realize that the enemy is within your own mind, as long as you do not realize that he has entered and melted into your heart, there will be no end to your external enemies. That is because as long as you have this prime one, you will always have attachment and anger and even if you get rid of one of them, there will be another one to take its place, very soon.

Arya Shantideva has said that if you were to walk barefooted, in order to avoid harming your feet you would have to make sure that you always walk on a path which is clean and well swept. Alternatively, you could place a good pair of shoes on your feet. In other words, what you have to do is to protect your own mind. Do not expect to get rid of all external enemies; instead protect your mind from your own mental afflictions. This is like having put a pair of shoes on your feet that will allow you to walk anywhere you like.

Once you understand that the enemy of the ignorance of self-grasping is already within your heart, you have to activate wisdom in order to arrest it. You have to arrest this enemy and throw at it a bag, made of wisdom and stitch it all around with the thread of love and compassion, in order to ensure that you will never be under its influence again.

If you were to ask somebody who has done a bit of study whether things actually exist the way they appear, they would give you a negative answer. This is the result of some study and a sign of not having imputed self-grasping. Nevertheless, this very person that verbally negates true existence, has the tendency to grasp and take things to exist the way they appear. At the very instant that we verbally negate it, we are also instinctively grasping it. This is a sign of innate self-grasping.

This becomes apparent when we examine the way we categorize people and the way we relate to them. We see a person and we decide that he or she is a nice person or a bad person. What we do not understand is that this appearance of a good person has two sides: one that is established by valid awareness and another one that needs to be negated. The same is true for the person that appears to be bad. As long as we can not see that there are two distinct parts in any appearance, we will always end up with grasping attachment towards one and hatred towards the other.

When we examine innate self-grasping we have to identify it as something that exists all the time and is the root of every possible motivation. Usually we identify, for example, anger, pride or attachment as possible motivations, but we have to know that behind any type of affliction, any type of thought or mental activity, there is always self-grasping. Self-grasping is established first and attachment, anger and the rest follow second, due to which, we then engage in various activities. When we try to identify what motivates any given action, we have to divide motivation into two parts. There is the root or causal motivation, which is the innate self-grasping, and then we have the motivation at the time when the action is committed, which can be any other affliction such as anger, jealousy, pride, attachment and so on.

<b>Root/Causal Motivation</b>	<b>Motivation at the time of the action</b>	<b>Action</b>
innate self-grasping	any other mental affliction: anger, jealousy, pride, attachment etc.	any physical, verbal or mental action

The same mechanism is at work when we engage in virtuous activities. Innate self-grasping is the root motivation that brings about the wish to meditate, pray, make offerings, do circumambulations etc.. This thought is the secondary motivation at the time of the activity and is a virtuous one. These actions, when performed, can lead to a fortunate migration. Still, this fortunate migration is not without suffering because, the root motivation is still innate self-grasping. It is only because we have innate self-grasping in our continuum when we prostrate, that we fail to understand that everything that appears to us has two aspects: one that is correct and one that needs to be negated.

Since the two motivations are always present in any activity and since the root one (self-grasping) is common to all, the one that actually defines an action as virtuous or not is the secondary motivation. If we look closer at the case of a person who is prostrating, self-grasping is always present. It is because the doctor has recently said to that person that they need some physical exercise to keep fit that they decided to take up prostrations. It is possible that at the time just prior to actually doing the prostrations, faith is generated. This faith is the motivation at the time of the action and is the one deciding that the activity is virtuous.

Another good example, is the motivation apparent at the time of requesting an initiation. Students come to the initiation with the root motivation that is common to all and this is why the lama conferring the initiation asks the students to *adjust* their motivation by explaining to them the meaning of the Great Vehicle practices. This is done in order to inspire them to generate bodhicitta, the wish to reach enlightenment for the sake of helping all sentient beings, so that the initiation will be taken from within this state of mind. The word *adjust* is used in order to indicate that the root motivation is something that can and should be influenced and changed so that the initiation is taken with the best possible motivation.

If you remember what Arya Asanga said about ignorance being confusion with respect to the law of cause and effect and confusion with regard to emptiness and it's antidote being the wisdom comprehending emptiness, you would see that we have arrived at the same conclusion. We identified that behind every action we do, there is innate self-grasping which relates to confusion with respect to the law of cause and effect. Also, with respect to emptiness, we make the mistake of not understanding that there is no self to be grasped. For both of them the antidote has to be the wisdom that realizes that there is no self.

If you thought that Arya Asanga's presentation was easier, you were mistaken! If you thought that there is an easier way that involves understanding of only the law of cause and effect, you were mistaken! Whichever presentation you follow, you have to induce comprehension of emptiness, you have to deal with the annihilation of ignorance and eventually you have to deal with the Twelve Links. There is no other way.

What is unique in Arya Asanga's presentation is that it emphasizes that it is only because of our ignorance of self-grasping, we are confused with respect to the law of cause and effect and that leads us to engage in many negative actions. This in turn, generates an excessive amount of further suffering that we will have to experience. This presentation draws our attention to the fact that extra suffering is accumulated. This explains the statement that innate self-grasping is the root of suffering, the root of the whole of cyclic existence.

Until we have a perceptual realization of emptiness through thorough familiarity, everything that we do, and everything that appears to us, will be generated and influenced by self-grasping. Without a thorough comprehension of emptiness and strong bodhicitta, not only the non-virtuous action we do will become the cause of samsara, but even the majority of virtuous actions that we have the opportunity to accumulate, will also become the cause for remaining within cyclic existence. This is how we have to understand self-grasping: not as something that exists in the minds of a few intellectuals who have misinterpreted what they have read, but as something which is innate, a sort of instinct that exists in everybody, since beginningless time.

### **When innate self-grasping stops being manifest and when abandonment begins.**

Perceptual realization of emptiness can eventually eliminate innate self-grasping, through a long process. On the path of accumulation, one develops calm abiding and special insight focusing on emptiness and following that, on the path of preparation one achieves the union of such calm abiding and special insight. At this level, despite not having perceptual realization, one's innate self-grasping is not manifest anymore. By attaining perceptual realization of emptiness one moves up to the path of seeing and from that point onwards the abandonment of non-manifest innate self-grasping begins. It takes a lot of effort to eliminate it completely and for that reason one gradually progresses through the training of the uninterrupted and liberated paths, going through different levels of grossness or subtlety of innate self-grasping and gradually eliminates it. Eventually, it is completely abandoned, but such a thing is never attained instantaneously.

We can get an idea of how complicated it is, and why it will never happen in one instant just because we obtained our first perceptual realization of emptiness, by looking at different examples. If we look at attachment, we see that it can be generated for various objects and reasons. It can be generated because we grasp at things wishing them to be permanent, and due to that we believe that the thing that is beautiful now will never change. Attachment can be generated due to self grasping or for many other reasons. For one affliction alone there are many causes and many degrees of grossness and subtlety. If we look at innate self-grasping, there are many types with regard to many different objects. For each type of object there can be grasping of varying intensity. Self-grasping habitually reinforced over time will be more intense. Self-grasping lacking such reinforcement will be less intense. That should give us an idea of how much work there is to be done.

All virtuous and non-virtuous actions are motivated by self-grasping. The virtuous ones can be either of the type of abandoning negativity or not. Exactly at the time that we engage in the action, we create something which is powerful enough to project us into another life. This powerful, projecting action is what the second link deals with.

There are virtuous actions of abandoning (non-virtue) and virtuous action that are not of the nature of abandoning because, actions are two types: the intentional and the intended. The first type, being mental, is considered as stronger than the second, which is verbal or physical.

We can look at the example of abandoning killing. There are people who live a quiet life, never killing any animal because they dislike the act and its results. However, there are others who decide to come

into the Gompa, on the occasion of a formal ceremony, kneel down and proclaim that from that day onwards, until the end of their lives, they will not kill any animal, including the smallest insect. In the second case there is quite a lot involved apart from the intention and the promise; there is physical as well as verbal activity that adds up. This is why for the Great Exposition school, vows are considered as subtle form, they are not just mental.

## 2. FORMATION.



The second of the Twelve Links is formation. **What is understood by this term is action.** Often the term *karma* is used as the Sanskrit term equivalent to the Tibetan word *las* which means action. What is important to understand is that this word refers to the action rather than the result. The Tibetan word that describes the second link is *du che* ('*du byed*) which means 'to form', to put things together and in that sense it is an activity.

The duration of the second link is very short, confined within a very short frame of time. In the case of abandoning killing, for example, this is done by making the promise not to kill again. The moment that the promise is given, either mentally or by completing the recitation of the vow of abandoning killing, the virtuous action is done and finished with. The opposite of it, the action of killing, is also something that lasts for a very short duration. It lasts only for as long as it takes you to give the poison or to strike with the knife. The second moment after that, when the animal has died, the action of killing is over. At that stage, the action is completed and what follows is the creation and placement in one's continuum of a certain seed. Later on, this seed will ripen as an experience.

Formation applies only at the time when the activity is happening. It should be expressed with an action verb that is indicating present continuous tense, such as acting. As soon as the action is completed, it becomes past tense. It is no longer *acting*; it has become *acted* and the seed has been created.

Actions are classified as virtuous, non-virtuous and unfluctuating. According to another presentation, they are only divided into virtuous and non-virtuous by including the third category in the first one. The reason for that is that if it is an unfluctuating action, it must be a virtuous one.

Unfluctuating actions are presented in a different class, despite being virtuous actions because, they are the particular actions that lead to a rebirth in one of the higher realms. Once you have engaged in certain actions, in this case developing certain types of concentration, this will definitely cause you to be reborn in a higher realm. This certainty is the reason for calling these actions unfluctuating. Other types of actions that can cause a fortunate or unfortunate migration within the Desire realm can be changed and altered by many conditions and in that sense they are fluctuating.

When we talk about actions as the second of the Twelve Links, we refer to **projecting actions**. These are actions that are powerful enough to project one towards the maturational aggregates. In other words, they are powerful enough to project us into another life which can either be a fortunate or an unfortunate migration.

We need to make the distinction between actions that are projecting and those that are not. Not every action that we do has the power to project us in a future migration. For example, when you spin a mani-wheel a few times or when you circumambulate a stupa reciting some mantras, these actions, virtuous as they might be, are nevertheless small in the sense that they cannot project you into another life. Such actions are not what is described in the second of the Twelve Links. Similarly, when you see an insect on

a path where there is danger of it being stepped on and killed, putting it aside is a virtuous act. There is no doubt that you have temporarily saved that being from fear and death, but still the action is not big enough to project you into another life.

Actions that project us towards fortunate migrations are virtuous ones and those that project us towards unfortunate migrations are non-virtuous ones. Actions such as killing, stealing and sexual misconduct, being non-virtuous project us to unfortunate migrations. Actions that project us to fortunate migrations are of two different types. The strongest ones are the ones that are in the form of abandoning negative actions. So, actions such as abandoning killing, stealing, sexual misconduct and the rest are classified as actions that forcibly project us to fortunate migrations. Apart from these powerful ones, there are others that are considered generally virtuous actions such as actions done out of love or compassion or meditation. They are still virtuous and they still project us towards a fortunate migration.

When we talk about projecting actions as the second link we have to understand that these apply only to ordinary beings. Aryas do not have projecting actions. This point is explained in Arya Asanga's presentation. According to that presentation, we can accumulate virtuous actions whilst being under the influence of ignorance of self-grasping. Alternatively, we can accumulate non-virtuous actions that will result in an unfortunate migration due to confusion with respect to the law of cause and effect. This is true for the type of being that can fall under the influence of self-grasping. Aryas though, do not make such mistakes since they are not grasping at a self. Whatever actions an arya will do can either be the cause for reaching liberation (if it is an arya of the Lesser Vehicle) or enlightenment (if it is an arya of the Great Vehicle). Such actions will never follow the cycle that Arya Asanga describes.

When we talk about self-grasping we should know that there are two types: grasping at the self of person and grasping at the self of phenomena. In our explanation we will follow the presentation of the Middle Way Consequence School regarding self-grasping. According to this school the only difference between the selflessness of person and the selflessness of phenomena is the basis rather than the actual thing that is negated. **Selflessness of person** negates that the person has a self that exists inherently and **selflessness of phenomena** negates that everything which is not a person, such as the aggregates, is empty and free of having a self that exists inherently. As we can see, the object negated is the same. The only thing that differs is the basis of negation, in one case being the person and in the other one, anything but the person.

According to the presentation of the Consequence school, anyone who is an arya must have perceptual realization of emptiness. Having this, they do not fall under the influence of self-grasping and thus do not accumulate any projecting actions. We can see from this point why it is stressed that a mere comprehension of emptiness is not enough to guarantee that one will escape from cyclic existence. What is needed is the perceptual realization of emptiness that comes as a result of long and sustained effort and thorough familiarity. This is the only one that allows one to see emptiness naked, without its generic image.

In the case of practitioners of the Lesser Vehicle who enter the path of seeing, they have attained perceptual realization of emptiness that classifies them as Lesser Vehicle aryas. Despite this, they can still be reborn in cyclic existence due to actions that were accumulated prior to the path of seeing, because the force of these actions can be quite strong. However, they will not be reborn due to any future actions done under the influence of self-grasping. Actions committed from that point onwards will not project them into another life.

The way Je Rinpoche describes the wisdom comprehending emptiness and the impact it has on self grasping is by using the metaphor of a fight between a heavy weight person and a small, weak person.

When self-grasping is attacked by the force of wisdom realizing emptiness it has to subside, the same way a weak boxer gives way to one of bigger stature and power.

Lets examine the case of an individual who has not been exposed to serious study, and therefore has neither a deep understanding of emptiness nor a sound generation of bodhicitta. Although it is quite possible that such a person puts a lot of effort in generating virtue, whatever they are able to generate is still the cause for them to remain in cyclic existence. No matter how hard and sincere the effort might be and despite the amount of virtue generated, if understanding of emptiness and bodhicitta are missing, it will remain the cause for samsara.

There is no doubt that this virtue will result in a fortunate migration, but fortunate migrations are still within samsara. Even if this virtue becomes the causes for a rebirth in one of the higher realms, it cannot get us out of samsara. No matter how far it can project us, it will never be far enough. What we should understand from this is that what is worthwhile is to put effort into generating the realization of emptiness and bodhicitta.

### **How actions are accumulated.**

In examining the link of formation it is important to understand how actions are accumulated. There are people who have great attachment to the pleasures of this life and there are others who are not obsessed with the happiness of this life, but are seriously concerned with what will happen in their next lives. Those who are concerned with the happiness of this life accumulate a great number of virtuous and non-virtuous actions, in almost equal rates. Those mainly concerned with their next lives mainly engage in virtuous actions and seem to be avoiding non-virtuous actions.

Despite the fact that most of us understand how important it is to comprehend emptiness and to develop bodhicitta, we might not be able to achieve either of these two in this life. In such a case we should put a lot of emphasis in the accumulation of virtuous actions and make sure that in the next life we will enjoy some relative happiness and well-being. We recognize that, being in cyclic existence, we engage in various activities all the time, but the least we can do is to choose our activities wisely and aspire to liberation or enlightenment in the future. Even if these goals seem to be far in the future we should be determined to avoid falling into lower migrations again in the immediate future.

We define formation as action, and this action is really awareness at the time the activity is carried out. As soon as the activity is over, this awareness turns into the potential of a seed. This seed is placed upon a receiving medium which is also of the nature of awareness.

A plant seed is something that has the potential to give rise to new vegetation. If that potential is missing, what we have is not a seed. It might be husk, but it wouldn't have the energy and the power that makes sprouting possible. It is the same with mental seeds; they have the potential to bring about the generation of something else. Whilst this potential is placed in the mind, the mind is not the potential itself, but the receiver of this potential.



### 3. CONSCIOUSNESS.

So far we have explained how we start by being motivated by innate self-grasping, the causal motivation that gives rise to the specific motivation at the time of the action. Depending on the nature of this second type of motivation our actions can either be virtuous or non-virtuous. As soon as an action is completed, a seed is created and placed in our consciousness. This **consciousness that becomes the basis for placing the seed the moment after the action is completed** is the third of the twelve links.

When we talk about consciousness as the third link, we do not refer to the whole continuum of consciousness, the consciousness prior to the performance of the action or the consciousness two moments after the completion of the action. Rather, it is the consciousness upon which, one moment after the action is completed, a seed or an imprint is placed. It really refers to a very small fraction of the whole continuum of consciousness.

According to **Jetsun Chokyi Gyaltsen**, the definition of consciousness, as the third of the Twelve Links is:

**The primary mental consciousness at the moment when it is imprinted by the latency of projecting actions.**

Generally, consciousness is divided into two aspects: the consciousness at the time of the cause and the consciousness at the time of the result. When we talk about consciousness at the time of the result, we refer to the consciousness of the being that will enter the womb and the consciousness that will later develop out of this conception. Thus, consciousness at the time of the result occurs much later than the consciousness at the time of cause since it definitely occurs in another lifetime.

Within the frame of the Twelve Links, we can only identify the consciousness at the time of the cause as the third link. The consciousness at the time of the result, which describes the time of conception when consciousness enters the union of sperm and egg, is identified as birth, the eleventh link.

We say that consciousness is the stratum upon which the seeds are placed. This consciousness has the characteristic of being impermanent, but it retains the seed for many aeons if necessary, so that eventually result will come into fruition. This impermanence does not harm the ability to support the seeds for as long as necessary. It is like the case of a person who, despite being impermanent, can still live for 80 years.

Humans age because they possess parts that are physical and whatever is physical eventually wears out. This is how death eventually comes. But, since consciousness is not physical, we do not expect it to deteriorate.

The first three of the Twelve Links, ignorance, formation and consciousness, form a distinct sub-group of their own and for that reason, are examined together.

### The power of actions:

It is stated in the *lamrim* that if one offers a full prostration with sincere faith, the amount of merit one accumulates equals the merit it takes to be reborn as a Universal Monarch as many times as the atoms of earth covered by one's body. This is an example illustrating the power of certain actions. Although the example directly states the results of a virtuous action that is carried out with faith, indirectly it also draws our attention to the results of the opposite because, in a similar fashion, disrespect can have grave results. If the result of a single prostration done in the proper way can be so grand, we also have to consider the incredible amount of suffering that can result from a single, short action done with disrespect towards a wrong object.

There are many types of disrespect: one can be disrespectful to others' lives that can lead to killing; one can be disrespectful to others' possessions that can lead to stealing and so forth. Awareness that understands that there are many types of disrespect can make us careful and cautious.

Another important point is the fact that from a single action, an abundant result is generated. There seems to be a multiplying effect, since from one single prostration one creates the merit to be reborn as a Universal Monarch many times. The point is quite significant when it comes to applying the Twelve Links to a particular action. Should the action be considered as a single one with many branches? If that is the case, should the Twelve Links be applied to every branch? Is it the case that the result can be calculated only after having multiplied the original action with a factor, in this case equal to the atoms of the earth covered by one's body? Or is it the case that an action is only counted once? There is a lot of debate about these points and this is why they have to be considered carefully.

### The store house of the seeds.

We identified the third link as the consciousness upon which a seed is placed upon the completion of an action. Looking at the different types of consciousness, we see that we have a consciousness associated with each one of the senses, as well as a last one associated with the mind:

Type of Consciousness	Associated with
1. Visual consciousness	eye sense power
2. Auditory consciousness	ear sense power
3. Nasal consciousness	nose sense power
4. Gustatory consciousness	tongue sense power
5. Tactile consciousness	body sense power
6. Mental consciousness	mental power

In addition to that, the Mind Only school uniquely asserts that there is a type of mental consciousness called *the-mind-basis-of-all*, upon which all the seeds are placed.

Since we have all these types of consciousness, the question about the need to place the seeds specifically on a mental consciousness naturally arises. Why is it that we only posit these seeds on a mental consciousness? Why is it that we do not place imprints on the visual, the auditory or any other type of consciousness? The answer to that is because any consciousness that is associated with one of the senses has to depend on a physical basis. The visual consciousness has to depend on the physical basis of the eye and when this physical basis deteriorates, the consciousness that is placed on that also declines. It would make sense to place the imprints on something much more durable and stable, something that

keeps going from one life to another. This is why imprints are placed on the mental rather than on a sense consciousness.

An important point to define here is whether the mind or the heart are physical things or not. Many times we talk about the mind and we imply the physical substance of the brain; the same is true for the heart where many times we actually refer to the physical organ, the muscle. At other times although we use these words in a more abstract way, implying an attitude, a way of thinking, something mental rather than physical. We have to define these things with absolute clarity for the sake of this presentation and decide whether they should be classified as mental or physical entities, since they can not be both. The reason for this is that we have to investigate the number and types of consciousness present at the area where mental consciousness abides.

According to Tibetan Buddhism, the sixth type of consciousness, the mental one, abides in the area of the heart. The organ of the heart as part of our body has its own consciousness. This is the one that allows us to feel pain when a blade pierces our heart and it will be destroyed when the organ or the rest of the body is destroyed. Although Tibetans point at the area of the heart when they talk about mind, Westerners point towards the brain. Again, if mental consciousness were placed at the brain area, the consciousness of the organ of the brain would be something distinct and perishable, as in the case of the heart.

In Tibetan Buddhism, mind is synonymous with consciousness so, when we posit six types of consciousness we must also be able to posit six types of minds as well. Although we use the term visual consciousness, we do not use the term visual mind and although we use the term auditory consciousness we do not use the term auditory mind and so on. Despite the fact that we choose to use particular terms, each one of the senses, must have a mind if it has a consciousness.

The mental consciousness, despite the cultural dispute concerning its abode, has continuity, and exactly because it is not physical, exactly because it is so durable and reliable, all the imprints that are created have to be placed on it.

This is a very important point because imprints cannot be placed on something which is physical. Mental consciousness has a continuum that has always, since beginningless time, been mental, free from anything physical. It is a continuum that will remain purely mental until enlightenment is attained because its substantial causes are purely mental.

### **Characteristics of the seeds.**

When we introduce the term seed, we also introduce with it the ability for further generation. This refers to the possibility of developing name and form, the six bases, contact and feeling.

If we take a mango seed as an example, this seed has the potential to produce another mango fruit in the future. During this process of producing a new mango fruit, we know that a whole tree with a trunk, branches, leaves and flowers will also be established. What happens with a mango seed that can establish not only the ultimate result, but a variety of other results as well, also happens with the seed that is placed in our consciousness. Such a seed has the potency to bring about a future life, but that does not exhaust its potential. It can further bring about name and form, the six bases, contact and feeling. In that way it can establish not just one, but many results.

In the case of a mango seed, we know that sometimes the seed is not healthy. Although such a seed can germinate, the tree that will result from such a seed will not be a healthy tree with a strong trunk and many branches bearing an abundance of leaves and flowers. Eventually such a tree cannot produce a good and healthy crop of mangoes.

### **The role of completing actions and the quality of virtue.**

It is very important to examine the results of actions that, although virtuous, are not done properly. The most important thing when one engages in virtuous activities is to keep one's ethics pure. If the ethics are not pure, no matter how good the action might be, in the end the result will not be happiness. All those people who have practiced generosity with the wrong motivation, in an inappropriate way, have been reborn as Nagas. They might be reborn as very wealthy Nagas, but they are not reborn as humans, which is considered a fortunate migration. In any case we have to consider not only the projecting action, but the completing one as well. In this case, the projecting action is generosity which certainly is a good one, but the completing factors that accompany the projecting one are not as good as they could be. When the completing factors are not good ones, they can alter the result of the projecting action so that, despite the fact that one might start with an initial virtuous action, the final result might not be a fortunate one since the completing actions that add the details can bring about a considerable change.

When you start considering actions in their full detail, you begin to understand how important the preliminaries are. We say that in the beginning of a session one has to sweep the floor, arrange representations of Buddha's body, speech and mind on the altar and arrange offerings in a pleasant way. These are important steps that should not be omitted or rushed through. Following that, one has to show one's respect to the Three Jewels by offering prostrations and then begin one's session by examining one's mind, meditating on love and compassion and setting a proper motivation. Despite the fact that all these things are called preliminaries and are not counted as the main part of the actual session, unless they are done properly, the session is incomplete and not as it should be.

Another good example to consider is Mahayana Precepts. Taking these precepts is something extremely virtuous, but it also has to be done in a proper way. The vows have to be requested with the right motivation and then guarded in a proper fashion. If all this is in place, it is said the result is to be reborn in a fortunate migration with a precious human body. Despite the power of the virtue that is generated by refraining from killing, stealing etc, if the vows are not taken with proper motivation or not kept properly, one might end up with a human body, but not necessarily with a precious human rebirth. This would bring the result of a life in a human body with a certain amount of suffering to be experienced.

When we engage in virtuous activities it can be very difficult to get all the details right and this is why we hardly ever attain the best quality of virtue. In the case of non-virtue the opposite is true. When a mosquito is buzzing close to you, you should realise that you are seconds away from amassing all the parts of a complete non-virtuous action together. As the mosquito is buzzing next to you, you get annoyed and the thought of killing it comes into your mind. In a matter of a few seconds you have already crushed the mosquito and immediately you generate a thought of relief, thinking how nice it is now that the mosquito is not bothering you any more. This is rejoicing after killing.

It is indeed very easy to get all the parts of the actions together in non-virtuous actions that will make them perfect, but in the case of virtuous actions that seems to be almost impossible. Virtuous actions when performed, are very seldom perfect. There always seems to be something missing with virtuous actions, a little detail or more that we have omitted, some part or another that was not carried out with the right amount and type of effort. It is crucial when we engage in virtuous actions to always check in order to make sure that we make them as complete and as good as possible. That means that we have to make sure that not only the projecting action, but the completing ones as well are virtuous, in order to be sure of the end result.

### **How purification is possible with seeds that are durable.**

The mental consciousness that is going to hold and support the seed for many aeons if necessary is something that always remains mental. It can remain for so long, since none of its substantial causes are physical. As for the seed, it is not something physical either. It is of the nature of consciousness and for that reason it is not destroyed. Therefore, both the medium that supports the seed and the seed itself are not physical.

Since the seed is so durable the question arises as to whether it will ever be possible to get rid of it. With such stability is purification possible? The answer to that is that **change is possible by changing not so much the seed as the basis that carries it**. When change occurs in our minds, it actually occurs in our consciousness. Change comes about by recognizing that we have done something wrong in the past, by generating compassion for all sentient beings and by wishing that they be free from all the suffering we have created. Change comes about by generating strong regret for the action and by promising not to repeat the action in the future. This is a confession that is not a mere recitation; it is something that is felt deep in the mind and in that way brings about the change of the consciousness upon which the seeds are placed. When this consciousness changes, the power of the seed to bring a certain result in the future also changes. In that way, the seed of a non-virtuous action is not able to bring along suffering in the future. The same thing happens with a seed of virtue. When for some reason the consciousness that acts as its basis changes due to anger or regret, then the potential for future happiness is also destroyed.

It is important to understand how anything can change in your mind and how a change in the consciousness can neutralize the power of the seed. The mind does not change on its own. If you just sit and wait for it to change naturally, it will never happen. The way to do it is to influence the mind by certain mental factors. You have to generate the mental factors of regret, of promise (which states that you will never engage in that action again), of love and compassion. These virtuous mental factors can influence and change your mind. If you do not put any effort into generating these mental factors, it is pointless to sit and wait for a change that will happen naturally, on its own. This is why it is so important to meditate and familiarize your mind with compassion and love: to consider every sentient being and the suffering they have been experiencing since beginningless time and to sincerely wish that they become free from suffering and experience happiness. Only by generating such types of mind can you clear away negativity that has been accumulated over many aeons.

Similar things can happen to the seeds of virtue that you have accumulated with respect to the sentient beings or the Three Jewels, over many aeons and with a lot of effort. When you get angry, when you generate wrong views, when you generate the intention to harm the lives or possessions of others, the seeds of virtue that were created from virtuous projecting actions, will not be able to bring about happiness as a result because, there has been a change of mind. The mechanism is the same for both types of seeds and the potential they carry.. It is not just the potential for future suffering that is cleared away by confession; it is also the potential for future happiness that is destroyed by anger.

#### 4. NAME AND FORM



Name and form are the fourth of the Twelve Links and can either be presented as one or two subjects.

If we try to describe the five aggregates as name and form we would say that the aggregate of form is what is implied by the term form and the other four aggregates (feeling, discrimination, compositional factor and consciousness) are implied by the term name.

Aggregates	4 <sup>th</sup> Link
1. Aggregate of form	form
2. Aggregate of feeling	name
3. Aggregate of discrimination	name
4. Aggregate of compositional factor	name
5. Aggregate of consciousness	name

For beings of the Desire Realm like us, the aggregate of form as well as the remaining four aggregates are necessary. Beings of the Higher Realms, do not need to rely on all five aggregates since they do not necessarily need to have a physical body. Therefore, the term *name and form* does not always include all five aggregates.

This should be clear also from the definition of a person as that which is imputed upon the basis of four or five aggregates. The definition is broad enough to represent beings from all three realms. In fact, whether or not one is a person is decided from whether or not one has feeling, discrimination, compositional factor and consciousness.

In the case of a being possessing five aggregates, the aggregate of form is their physical body. Together with it, the person must possess the remaining four aggregates which allows them to experience or enjoy different objects.

In the case of beings of the Formless Realms, although they do not have form, they still possess the seed of form. According to sutra, that should be taken to mean that although they do not have gross form they nevertheless have subtle form. If the explanation was given according to tantra one would have to mention the presence of subtle winds, because the presence of consciousness is impossible without the support of wind. This brings us closer to the idea of a subtle body.

For beings who possess body and are born through a womb, name and form are established at the time of conception. The case of miraculous birth will not be examined here.

Prior to conception, a being is in the *bardo*, the intermediate state. There, it abides in a subtle body made of wind. For as long as the bardo body exists, conception has not taken place and name and form have not yet been established. The bardo being is attracted to the area where the future mother and father engage in intercourse, and it generates a series of wrong views that lead to strong anger. As a result it loses its consciousness and passes away. At that point, its subtle body is destroyed and its consciousness

enters the mixture of sperm and egg. You can find a more detailed presentation of this in the text *Death, Intermediate State and Rebirth in Tibetan Buddhism*. Technically, the moment that consciousness enters the union of sperm and egg, conception occurs and a person is established. Should you terminate at this or any other stage of pregnancy, you accumulate the negativity of having killed a human being and if you were someone who had the vow of not killing, you have lost the vow.

Although name and form are established as early as the moment of conception, at this stage they are very subtle and not fully established. In the case of beings of the Formless realm, where only the seed of form is present, the aggregate of form is not established at the time of conception. In such a case what is established are the remaining four aggregates.

A good way to generate some further understanding of name and form is to look at the Wheel of Life. The way that name and form is represented is by the picture of a man in a rowing boat. The boat is the means by which you can be carried to your destination and it has enough space for yourself as well as for the things that you need to take with you. The boat represents our body and the rest of our contaminated aggregates. These are the things that carry us through our life, but they also provide a basis with the capacity to carry all our experiences of happiness and suffering. Since we have created the causes for these experiences there should also be a basis which will experience the results of these causes. All the suffering and happiness that we have, travels with us in this body. This body, this set of contaminated aggregates, is the basis for experiencing different sensations, be they pleasant or unpleasant. In other words, we experience happiness and suffering exactly because we have this body.

Another way to describe this body and the suffering that is associated with it is to use the term *world of suffering* (jigten gyi dugnel, 'jig rten gyi sdug sngal) in Tibetan. The first word, *world*, refers to contaminated aggregates. In Tibetan this word is made up of two syllables: destruction and basis which imply that it is a perishable basis that is eventually destroyed. What we have to understand from that is that we experience happiness and suffering upon a basis that is impermanent. The second word, *suffering*, refers to all the types of suffering that we experience during our life, from birth to death, as we age and get sick, including every other possible type of suffering that is experienced in between.

**Our five aggregates constitute a basis that is impermanent and of the nature of suffering.** What is implied by this is the fact that one of the characteristics of this basis is to make us experience suffering. The common type of suffering that we all experience is that of lacking control, since we do not have control over the process of taking a set of aggregates or the arising of any form of suffering.

Lama Tsongkhapa leads us to understand that we have a world of suffering and urges us to investigate the origin of it all. The answer is that, in the past we have completed an action that has created a certain potential that was seeded in our mind. As for what motivated us to do the action, the answer is ignorance. This is how we come to the conclusion that this world of suffering comes from ignorance.

Eventually, whatever is established as name and form goes through a process of development, where it becomes grosser and easier to recognize. This leads into the establishment of the six bases which is the next link.

## 5. SIX BASES



The six bases (sources) are the bases of the six powers. They are: the eye base, the ear base, the nose base, the tongue base, the body base and the mind base. When we use the term eye base we do not refer to the eye. Although it is something physical, it is much more subtle than the actual organ. It is subtle form that exists within the relevant organs and is called sense power (*wang po*, *dbang po*). There is no consciousness present in them yet. From among the six bases, the mental one exists in an uninterrupted manner at all times, but the other ones have to be newly established with each life. The eye base is the subtle form upon which the physical organ, the ball of the eye will develop and will be inhabited by consciousness. This is represented in the Wheel of Life by a house with (usually) five windows and one door.

The fifth link of the six bases lasts until consciousness enters the bases. With the presence of consciousness we move into the next link of contact.

## 6. CONTACT



The sixth link is characterized by the presence of consciousness. In order to have the development of consciousness, we need to establish a few things. First of all, we must have established the substantial cause of consciousness, at a prior state. At the time when we were engaging in actions that would eventually project us into this new life, we were also creating the potential to develop the six different types of consciousness. This potential has been laying in a dormant state as a seed and when aggregates and bases were developed, it was reawakened. Following that, we need to establish a number of conditions, the main one being the sense powers and the secondary ones being different objects.

If we take as an example the case where we see something with our eyes, first of all we must have eye consciousness whose causes have been established in the past. Together with that we must have the eye sense power established, as well as an object of observation. **Contact is established when three things are present: consciousness, sense power and object.**

At this point we have just established the initial contact, but we do not have sensations or feelings that would allow us to experience objects as pleasant or unpleasant. This happens at the next link.

It is not known how quickly the individual consciousness, such as the eye consciousness, the ear consciousness etc., are established. Perhaps scientists can provide a more accurate answer to that. At this point it would be interesting to examine if the link of contact occurs within the womb. At that time the aggregates have been established which means that the aggregate of consciousness is present. The question really is whether that consciousness can engage an object or not. Since at that time the sense powers are not fully developed we have to say that contact does not occur. The way that grown individuals engage objects is different from that of a foetus due to the fact that the sense powers of grown individuals are fully developed. Whilst still in the womb, what is established is mental consciousness; the sense powers are developed at a later stage.



## 7. FEELING

It is explained in the *lamrim chenmo* that at the time of contact we are able to engage an object, but are not enjoying it yet. At the time of feeling, we experience and enjoy the object. This is where we perceive an object and we make up our mind on whether we find it attractive or not.

**Feeling as the seventh link is different from the aggregate of feeling.** The aggregate of feeling refers to something which is much more subtle than the link of feeling. The link of feeling is grosser because it has to accompany the union of consciousness, sense power and object.

Between contact and feeling there shouldn't be too much of a gap or a delay. Remember how it feels when you go to the dentist and they inject you with a sedative substance: your whole chin goes numb before the dentist starts working on your teeth. For as long as the sedative is active you do not have any feeling, but as soon as its effect wears out, you start feeling the pain. We are able to say that feeling comes very quickly after contact is established, but as to how quickly, we are not able to posit a definite answer.

## 8. CRAVING



What follows after feeling is craving. It is easy to understand how a sense of attachment would be generated after a pleasurable feeling has been experienced and in that sense we can say that we are **craving for a non-separation from a pleasant object**. The same term is also used to describe the urge to be separated from an object that has led to the feeling of suffering. In such a case we talk about **craving to be separated from the unpleasant**.

Once we understand how craving is generated, we start reversing the order. Once we understand that craving comes from feeling, we can trace the origin of feeling which is the meeting of consciousness, sense power and object. This was established because the six bases were established and they came about due to name and form. Name and form were established from the seed of an action that was performed out of ignorance. It is very helpful to meditate like this, reversing the order and tracing back all the steps in order to remind ourselves why and from where everything started.

As we trace the origin of all these things, it is very important to identify innate self-grasping as the ultimate source because the term ignorance is too broad. Since most of us do not have the opportunity for extensive study, it is important to be very clear about the few things that we know and in that sense it is important to be accurate and specific with the terms that we know.

Having traced craving back to innate self-grasping we must affirm the conclusion that if we didn't have innate self-grasping, we wouldn't have craving either.

### Different types of craving.

According to the *lamrim chenmo*, there are three types of craving, since there is the craving of the Desire realm, the craving of the Form realm and the craving of the Formless realm. There are differences of subtlety and differences of nature among these three types of craving: craving of the Desire realm is classified as non-virtuous, while the craving of the Form and Formless realms are classified as neutral. This is because all of the ten mental afflictions, the five related to views and the five which are not, are classified as non-virtuous in the Desire realm.

The great master Vasubandu states that if it is craving of the Desire realm it must necessarily be non-virtuous. The reason is that behind every gross affliction there is the intention to cause harm. Although it might not be so obvious, it is always mixed with a gross affliction. For example, when we have strong attachment, we can see how we recognize the situation or the people involved as pleasant and how craving comes from that. The fact that we actually like the situation camouflages the intention to harm that hides behind it. In the case of anger, the presence of this intention is clear as it is in the case of jealousy. Still, we should investigate if the intention to cause harm is always mixed with subtle afflictions. Whilst it is easy to establish that this is the case with gross afflictions, it is more difficult to posit that this is the case with subtle ones.

As for the Form and Formless realms, the wish to harm others is not present. Since this harmful intention is missing, there is no feeling of suffering either. Another thing that is missing from the higher realms are the faults of the Desire realm. This is due to the fact that someone attains birth in the higher realms by developing high states of concentration meditating on seeing the attributes of the Desire realm as gross. Since the harmful intention, the faults of the Desire realm as well as wrong conceptions are not present, any craving is classified as neutral. In the Desire realm, the presence of harmful intention and wrong conceptions renders craving non-virtuous.

Investigating this statement of the great master Vashubandu further, we might wonder if it is actually possible to generate any virtue in the Desire realm. If harmful intention is always present and mixed with

whatever we do, how could we ever establish virtue? We have already talked about the difficulty of engaging in an action that is perfectly virtuous. We should be aware that it is almost impossible to establish good quality virtue and for that reason, we should be extremely careful with our actions and practices.

The way that the link of craving is represented in the Wheel of Life, is by a man drinking alcohol. We can interpret this scene by keeping in mind that craving comes from feeling. The person tasted alcohol and finding the taste pleasant, does not want to stop drinking: he needs to have a second and after that a third drink. This is exactly what craving is: depending on whether you experienced a pleasant or unpleasant feeling, you either want to repeat the experience again and again or you try to avoid it as much as possible.

### **Craving at the time of death.**

Craving at the time of death is very important. Most people generate the strong wish not to be separated from the life of a human or a god. If this strong craving with regards to future migration is coupled with activating virtuous states of mind at the time close to death, then it is quite possible that one will be propelled towards a fortunate migration.

Arya beings, despite lacking craving, at times might have to take uncontrolled rebirths.

There are two types of aryas: the aryas of the Lesser vehicle and the aryas of the Great vehicle. For aryas of the Lesser vehicle, it is possible to have an uncontrolled rebirth due to past actions. Stream Enterers' are such beings, who come back for another life and bear subtle attachment. Still, they do not have the initial three links of ignorance, formation and consciousness. When we posit that these Lesser vehicle aryas do not have the first three links, what we assert is that they do not engage in non-virtuous projecting actions, they do not create seeds and they do not have the consciousness upon which these will be embedded, anew. That doesn't mean to say that they don't have any seeds at all. They have old seeds, but they do not accumulate new ones after the attainment of perceptual realisation of emptiness. For aryas of the Great vehicle, it is impossible to return in an uncontrolled birth.

## 9. GRASPING



What follows after craving is grasping. Grasping is of the nature of craving, but is a different link. When the imprints and seeds that have already been placed in our mind become activated through craving, we use the term **grasping**. It is likened to the situation of watering some seeds: moisture activates the process of germination. The turning point that takes us from craving to grasping is exactly this activation.

### Grasping at the time of death.

At the time of death you generate craving, strongly wishing to be reborn as a human again. The more this craving desire increases, the closer you get to the point of being almost ready to take an other human rebirth. Keep in mind that grasping can also be translated as taking. When you reach grasping, you have the ability to reach out and take the thing you crave for. This is represented in the Wheel of Life by a monkey picking fruits.

Some feel cold at the time of death and wish to be in a warm place. When the dying person has little virtue, great familiarity with non-virtue and the seeds for a possible rebirth in a hot hell, if craving and grasping for a hot place is generated at the time of death, in effect that person is looking for a hot place. When they meet with a range of possible rebirths, they will reach out and grasp for the hot hells. Similar things happen with regards to grasping and taking a rebirth in the cold hells as a hungry ghost. The same thing would happen with the cold hell, the hungry ghosts and all the other instances.

### Human rebirth: craving and praying for it.

It is very important to generate virtuous states of mind at the time of death because there is always craving at that time. The mind of love and compassion, as well as bodhichitta, are excellent to generate since they are respectful towards all sentient beings. Refuge is also very important since it is a mind that is respectful towards the Buddhas. If we are able to generate both refuge and bodhichitta, then we can be sure that we are respectful towards everybody. If at that time we make the sincere prayer to be reborn as a human, in a good family that will provide all the necessary conditions, we have already generated strong craving for a human rebirth and when it increases enough there will come a time where we will actually reach and take such a rebirth.

As we said, grasping is depicted as a monkey picking fruit. You can be sure though that it is not picking any sour ones! In the same way that the monkey is picking the most ripe and sweet fruit, we also want to pick the best rebirth. This is why we make specific prayers. Our prayers should not be exhausted just by wishing to be reborn as a human. We have to go into greater detail, describing the type of family that we want to be part of. After all, who wants to be reborn in a family with short tempered, quarreling parents who do not have the right values? Not just any family, but the best possible family is what we should be wishing for.

In the Indian society there is the tradition that if the father is a butcher or a fisherman, the son also has to follow in his steps. Specific prayers are very important because most of us would not want to be in a situation where we would have no choice other than to depend on killing and selling that which is killed for our day to day survival. Similarly, if we were born in a family with no belief and respect for the law of cause and effect, our education and up-bringing would not include any instruction on cause and effect.

### Choices.

If there was ever any question of choosing between a rebirth in the hell realms or in the family of a butcher we would have to consider the results of these two lives in the future. There is no doubt that the actual life in a hell would be much more difficult than that in the family of a butcher. However, once

reborn in the family of a butcher we would be creating causes for many more lives in the hells, every day. If we were in a hell realm at least we would not be killing sentient beings. All we would have to do is endure our own suffering, but at least we would not be creating more causes for suffering. So, if we were to choose between a rebirth in the hell realms or a rebirth in a butcher's family, we would have to choose the hell. The same choice would have to be made if we were presented with the option of choosing between a rebirth in hell or a rebirth in a family that has no belief or respect for the law of cause and effect.

Another thing to consider is whether it would be better to be reborn as an animal or to go straight to hell. There is nothing worse than to be reborn as a carnivorous animal such a lion or a tiger or even a big fish that needs to eat smaller ones. Imagine being an animal that 24 hours a day is thinking how to catch and devour it's prey. During such a life you would develop and reinforce very strong habits and instincts and you would also kill an incredible number of other beings. As this animal life finishes and you die, you would proceed to the hells for a great number of times due to the heaviness of the actions done. However, if you were in the hell in the first place, at least you would have endured the suffering of the hell and be done with it. You would have also avoided the situation of engaging in more negative actions everyday. It is important to consider the consequences of being born as a carnivorous animal even once. It is important to see that you would be in a situation where you would have very little freedom for your choice of food and livelihood necessary to support such an appetite. It is important to consider that if you fall into the hells from an animal life there would be very little to do apart from falling into the hells again and again. If you were to fall into the hells from a human life, at least you would know that you carry in your mind a variety of virtuous seeds and imprints which would make it possible for you to get out of there eventually. As an animal who has fallen into the hells, it would be very difficult to see the end of it.

Look at birds such as the kookaburra or the butcher bird. They seem lovely sitting on a branch. But when you see how they react as soon as they spot their pray, how they attack, kill and devour what was another living being a few seconds away, there is not much left to admire.

When you realize how much craving and grasping we have established up to now and what it can lead to, you must be careful with the generation of any more.



## 10. EXISTENCE

Existence is the link present right at the time of death, when the birth existence is coming to an end, just prior to establishing the bardo body. It is the state prior to establishing the bardo existence. It is represented in the Wheel of Life by a pregnant woman ready to give birth. It is a stage where although the birth has not happened yet, we know that the child, with all its main and secondary limbs, is developed. We are in a similar situation just before the bardo body is established when we are just ready to take birth in the intermediate stage.

The seed that we have has the potency to establish two results: bardo existence and the birth existence. At this point this potency is ready to be actualized, but it hasn't happened yet. Once the potential is actualized, the subtle bardo body will be established.

We can use the example of a seed and its stages of germination in order to understand the links of craving, grasping and existence. When we start watering a seed bedded in the soil, we are at a stage similar to the link of craving. As we keep the seed in favourable conditions of moisture, a series of changes are initiated inside the seed since the potency of germinating is reawakened. This is similar to the link of grasping. Finally, there is a last stage where so many changes have happened that the seed is ready to open and germinate. This is similar to the link of existence. As soon as the first green part emerges we have a stage similar to that of the bardo existence.

Although the tenth link is called existence, it is prior to both the bardo (existence) and birth (existence). It is a case of giving the name of the result to the cause.

It is clear that at the time of death of a human being there would be craving, grasping and existence. Similar stages would have to be followed during the bardo death. What is interesting to examine is whether the craving, grasping and existence that occur at the time of death, at the end of birth existence and those occurring at the time of death at the end of bardo existence come from the same seed.

If we look at the case of the planting of an apple seed, we can see that from a little seed we get a sprout. That sprout develops to the tree trunk and gives branches, leaves, flowers and eventually apples as well. All these things came from the initial seed and in that sense, they are related to each other. Their relation is a causal one.

### Fluctuation in the bardo of the Desire realm.

In the initial presentation of actions we identified three main categories, namely virtuous, non-virtuous and unfluctuating actions. Since unfluctuating actions are strictly associated with establishing a rebirth in the higher realm, we understand that fluctuating actions are the ones associated with the Desire realm. The term *fluctuating* implies possible change. It is mentioned in some texts that despite the fact that one might have established the bardo of a hell being, it is possible to change the duration or the heaviness of suffering in the hell existence. There is some degree of change since we are still in the Desire realm, but the change will not be as radical as moving into a human or a good existence after having established the bardo of a hell being.

In *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* and other texts it is mentioned that if the relatives of the deceased person use his or her wealth to make generous and sincere offerings conjoined with prayers for the deceased, this can act as a way to close the doors leading to migrations as an animal, a hungry ghost or a hell being. This would then leave only the possibility for a fortunate migration. Here, we are hoping that the craving, grasping and existence that will occur at the time of the bardo death will be influenced by the power of pujas and prayers, and this will allow the dying bardo being to aspire strongly to be reborn

as a human. All this should be carefully examined in order to know how much could be changed, and how.

This point highlighted by Pabongka Rinpoche, is an exceptional one. According to the standard presentation, if one is to be reborn as a human one must establish the bardo of a human being. The bardo that is established should be of the same type as the existence that will follow. Yet, in this example, a being who established the bardo of a hell being was reborn as a human again. The case is exceptional in the sense that a human being was born without the bardo of a human having been established. This point could lead to debate. The question is: *Does human birth exist without the establishment of a human bardo?*. The best thing here is to say that: *Things beyond the range of ordinary thought can happen!* It is the same as the debate concerning the definition of fire. The definition of fire is that which is hot and burning. Still, there are hungry ghosts who feel cold when they meet with fire. Does that mean that we have to change the definition of fire? This is not necessary, but the only answer we can give is that extraordinary things do happen and the experiences of hungry ghosts are extraordinary.

As we say this is an extraordinary statement by Pabongka Rinpoche. Once you understand the greatness of the author, your doubt and confusion should be dispelled. Pabongka Rinpoche was a great figure, well known even before his Geshe degree. He completed his Geshe studies early and had a vast number of students. His students were also well known. Reading such a statement should make you feel relieved that although you might establish the bardo for a lower migration you can end up as a human. This is also a very important piece of information for the relatives and friends of the dead person. As soon as death occurs, they should find out what are the best pujas and prayers to be done in this case and use the money of the deceased or even their own money for sponsoring whatever is necessary.

Another way that fluctuation manifests in the Desire realm is evident in the case of establishing the bardo of a type of a being, such as the horse type, but eventually being reborn as a donkey. This type of fluctuation is quite common in the Desire realm, but the one mentioned above despite being possible, is really rare.

As for the unfluctuating actions, they will establish a bardo and a consequent rebirth that are unfluctuating. For example if one establishes the bardo of the First Concentration of the Form realm, it will be impossible to alter the result by being reborn in the Second Concentration.

As a rule we have to say that the bardo existence and the birth existence after that are produced from the same projecting action, and in this sense, these two have a common origin.

We have mentioned the death existence, the bardo existence and the birth existence, but at times a fourth type of existence is posited as the one occurring at the time where the baby is actually emerging from the mother's body. This is called the direct or actual existence. **Existence as the tenth of the Twelve Links refers only to the death existence since it is restricted to the time of death.**

At the time of death existence, gross breathing and all gross sense awareness have stopped. At such a time all that is left is very still, subtle mind that carries the persons imprints and predispositions. As soon as this mind moves slightly, one moves into the bardo as the bardo body is established. The bardo body, made from wind, is very subtle. This birth into the bardo is a type of miraculous birth since the being does not pass through the womb of a mother. In this case of miraculous birth, the links of name and form, six bases, contact and feeling are established simultaneously instead of serially.

For beings of the Desire realm there is a gradual progression from the death existence to the birth existence, with the bardo existence being the in-between step. For beings of the Formless realms such an intermediate stage is not necessary and they pass from death straight up to birth existence.

Consequently, when humans die, we loose their tracks for a while. This is because they have to move into the bardo. The same thing is true for animals, hungry ghosts and all other beings of the Desire realm. When beings of the Formless realm die, they do not need to move into a bardo. In the next moment after death they establish a new name (from among name and form). Having established name, they have feeling, discrimination, compositional factors and consciousness. With these established, they are already a being of the Formless realm, established at the same place where the previous one died.

As we look at the three realms and the characteristics of the beings in each of them, we can see that the classification is based on the grossness or subtlety of the mind. As we progress from the Desire to the higher realm, mind and body become more and more subtle and refined. Beings of the higher realms do not have to rely on the gross substances of food to sustain themselves: they are sustained by the concentration induced during meditation. In the Formless realm such a degree of subtlety is achieved that no (gross) form is present. Although we talk about higher realms, we have to understand that beings of these realms do not have to abide on the space above ours. There is nothing to prevent them from being right here, in this very room.

The last three links, craving, grasping and existence, are called the establishing links.

## 11. BIRTH

The way that the Twelve Links are presented in the sutras, the speech of Buddha, is:



From ignorance, formation; from formation, consciousness; from consciousness, name and form; from name and form, six bases; from six bases, contact; from contact, feeling; from feeling, craving; from craving, grasping; from grasping, existence; from existence, birth; from birth, age and death. From that trouble, suffering and crying.

The word that is repeated and is connecting the links is *from*. This word posits a causal relationship between the links, implying that the latter is the result of the former, its cause. The last thing that is mentioned is trouble, suffering and crying. What is implied by that is that all the suffering that we experience in our lives, the fact that we age, the fact that we get sick, the fact that we die, the fact that our relatives and friends are saddened and cry as we experience all this - all this has happened because we experienced birth. All this suffering would not have happened unless we were born. All this suffering would not have happened unless we had ignorance, in the past. By following these steps, we can see why it is said that self-grasping is the root of all suffering, why it is the root of samsara.

Birth is a state experienced after the intermediate bardo state. In this presentation we will not elaborate more on the state of bardo, since it is not one of the Twelve Links.

**Birth as the eleventh link is the state of conception in the womb of a mother.**

In general there are four different types of birth:

- womb birth, which is the case of humans and mammals
- egg birth, which is the case for birds and most of the reptiles
- heat birth, which is the case for microorganisms such as bacteria who reproduce themselves when the levels of heat and humidity are appropriate and
- miraculous birth, which occurs when one is reborn as a hell being, as a god and as a bardo being. In the case of a miraculous birth, links 4 to 7 (from name and form up to feeling) are established simultaneously rather than serially.

## 12. AGE & DEATH



What follows after birth is aging and death. When we talk about aging we should examine both its every-day and its specific meaning. The way different societies define an old person do differ, but we all, more or less, agree that there are some external signs indicating old age - grey hair and wrinkles being the most common ones. When we look at humans we can distinguish various age groups such as infants, young children, teenagers, adults and old people. As we said, different societies tend to have different age limits for each of these groups. More specifically though, **aging as part of the Twelve Links, begins from the second moment of conception (birth).**

Aging in its specific explanation is linked with the word crossing, such as crossing a street or crossing a river. This is because we posit that there is a threshold after the first moment of birth and after it is crossed, one is no longer one moment young, but one becomes two moments old. From that point onwards one becomes three moments old, four moments old, etc. This can help us to understand that a life of 100 years is made up of moments and in every step we move and cross from one moment to the next. The process of aging is exactly this crossing of moments, this moving ahead.

In that way, the first moment of birth is established as the eleventh link and from the second moment onwards, aging as the first part of the twelfth link is established.

The second part of the twelfth link is death. Although aging and death are presented as one link, there is one major difference between them: whilst aging is a process that happens over many years, death happens in an instant. The next moment, you don't exist anymore.

While we are alive we have life-force. That which has the potential for the continuation of life-force is called life. As long as we are connected with our life-force we are alive. There are many factors that interfere and can either shorten or cause the life-force to cease and when we are separated from our life-force, we are dead.

For a being of the Desire realm, death occurs when the mind is separated from the body. This description does not explain what happens for beings of the higher realms. **The definition of death, as found in the lamrim chenmo, is the end/destruction of the continuum of similar types of aggregates.**

If we try to apply the definition of death in the case of a being of the Formless realm that is getting a rebirth in the Desire or Form realm, the case is easy: as soon as the consciousness of the Form realm stops, because its ability to remain is exhausted, the being establishes a new set of aggregates. That is easy to posit because there will be the intermediate state of a bardo. But, in the case of a being of the Formless realm being reborn in the Formless realm again, it is more difficult to posit the ending of one life and the beginning of another since there is no bardo. We can still give a general explanation by saying that that being had put in place a projecting action which caused them to establish name and form, six bases, contact, grasping, craving and so on and so forth. This series of results had a limited duration and when that was exhausted, a projecting action similar to the previous one must have caused them to establish a new set of similar aggregates.

## TWO ROUNDS OF CAUSATION: AN ALTERNATIVE PRESENTATION

Another way to examine the Twelve Links would be to break them up into four sub-groups: the projecting, the projected, the establishing and the established.

The **projecting** refers to projecting causes, namely ignorance, formation and consciousness (links 1, 2 and 3). The **projected** refers to the results that are projected by the projecting causes, namely name and form, six bases, contact and feeling (links 4, 5, 6 and 7). Despite the fact that something is projecting and something is projected, it is not definite that the final result will be established. In order to ensure the **established** results, namely birth, aging and death (links 11 and 12) we must have their **establishing** causes, namely craving, grasping and existence (links 8, 9 and 10). In that manner, the Twelve Links can be presented as two sets of causation. The first sub-set includes the projecting and the projected and the second includes the establishing and the established.

In the *lamrim chenmo* the question is posited as to whether a person needs to have both sets of causation in order to have a whole set of Twelve Links. The answer to that is that both sets are needed. A mere set of projecting causes and projected results does not establish all the links. The same is true for a set of establishing causes and established results only.

Cause	Result
<b>projecting:</b> (1) ignorance (2) formation (3) consciousness <b>example:</b> initial mango seed	<b>projected:</b> (4) name & form (5) six bases (6) contact (7) feeling <b>example:</b> future mango crop
<b>establishing:</b> (8) craving (9) grasping (10) existence <b>example:</b> earth, fertilizer and water	<b>established:</b> (11) birth (12) aging & death <b>example:</b> mango tree that grows out of the initial seed

### The growth of a seed.

We can look at the example of a mango seed in order to illustrate the function and the order of establishment of these two rounds of causation. If you pick a ripened mango fruit from a healthy mango tree, you would find a mango seed inside the fruit. This mango seed is the projecting cause that has the potential to project many mango fruits in the future. This seed on its own cannot establish any results. The seed needs to meet with earth, fertilizer and water which are the establishing causes. These establishing causes establish as their result a tree with branches, leaves, and flowers. Once the established result is in place, the projected result, which is the new crop of mango fruits will also come.

In the example given above, we started by saying that we can find a seed inside a mango fruit. What we need to consider is that this particular fruit and the seed that it bears must have been established from a previous seed. This implies that the **ignorance that is in the beginning of a set of Twelve Links, must have been created from a previous set of links**. Having posited innate self-grasping as the actual root

and beginning, we have to admit that this innate self-grasping must have been produced from innate self-grasping, or seeds of innate self-grasping, that existed in a previous moment of the continuum.

Ignorance can motivate us to engage in different actions and those actions create the potential to obtain name, form, bases, contact and feeling either in a fortunate or in an unfortunate migration, but unless we have the craving, the grasping and the existence, this fortunate or unfortunate migration will never be established. It is the same with the seed of the mango, which has the power to create a whole crop of mangoes. This crop will never be actualized unless the seed is put in the earth, is watered and fertilized.

Knowing that we have an abundance of seeds in our minds, it becomes very important to avoid careless actions. Taking care of the conditions is a very important thing and by doing so we can bring a small or a significant change to the result. The first step would be to intervene at an early stage by avoiding the establishment of any causes. If causes are established, we can bring some change to the final result through confession and purification. Those are not practices that need to be done in relation to any particular links. They can and should be practiced at any time, during our whole lives.

Imagine being aware that in a part of your garden you have the seed of a poisonous plant. If you consider the poisonous plant as something which is unwanted, you do not go around watering, weeding and applying fertilizer in its area because you know that these activities encourage the growth of plants. If in another part of the garden you have planted a mango seed and you are really looking forward to having a crop of mangoes, you spent a lot of time and effort watering, weeding, applying fertilizers and doing anything else you can to ensure the growth of the tree. We have to apply a similar strategy with our mind.

Bearing this in mind we have to look at our practices, such as the effort to generate love and compassion, the effort to abandon killing, stealing and other non-virtuous actions, prostrations, circumambulations, recitation of mantras, the practice of generosity etc., and consider what it is that all these activities encourage and what it is that they discourage. We know that in our mind we have both virtuous and non-virtuous seeds and if we generate the mind that, for example, decides to abandon killing, that mind definitely does not encourage the seed of killing, but if we generate the mind that considers stilling a right activity, we are in fact encouraging a bad seed. For that reason, we try to generate types of mind that encourage only virtuous seeds.

This advice of generating thoughts that support virtuous seeds is very important to be carried through the whole of one's life, but it becomes crucial at the time of death. It would be very dangerous for someone to abandon the effort of generating the right type of thoughts at the time of death, even if they had spent the whole of their lives with conscious effort towards the generation of thoughts that encourage virtuous seeds.

### **Unwanted seeds.**

Going back to the analogy of the poisonous seed in one's garden, we know that an immediate measure for avoiding the germination of the seed would be to deprive it of moisture, in other words stop watering it. If we look at the self-grasping that we have, listening to teachings on selflessness, examining and contemplating those would be equivalent to depriving the seed of moisture. At times we might decide that we need to do something much more drastic, such as digging out the seed. In such a case, although we might be sure that the seed is separated from favorable conditions, if we store it, we know that it is still there, always posing a threat. Eventually we might decide to destroy the seed by burning it. This would be equivalent to realizing emptiness perceptually.

The question eventually arises as to how many more lives one would have to take, within cyclic existence, after attaining perceptual realization of emptiness. It is impossible to give an answer to such a question.

All we can say is that after this level of comprehension, one sees that it is possible to reach an end. It is the same with the seed: once you have a seed, there is no beginning and no end to the number of seeds that you can get from that one, but if you burn it, you can see that there will be an end to the production of new crops. This is expressed in the following lines:

**I cannot see the end of the seeds; I can only see it if I burn the seed.**

**I cannot see the end of cyclic existence; I can only see it if I see selflessness.**

When it says *I can see selflessness*, it is to be understood as realizing selflessness perceptually in a meditation session.

#### **The role of completing actions: how the final details are defined.**

When we examine the projected results, we see that they describe the body (name and form and six bases) and the ability to use and experience certain things (contact and feeling).

From our experience with plant seeds we know that not all seeds are healthy and that various things can be wrong with a seed. Despite the fact that a seed might have the potential to bring about a future crop, sometimes the fruits that are produced are sour, small in size and of inferior quality. This makes us think that we have to consider the role, not only of projecting, but of completing actions as well. Completing actions can significantly change the final result by filling in all the details.

To illustrate this with an example, suppose we have a person who is engaging in a serious virtuous action. The action might be left incomplete, something might be wrong with the motivation, the application, or even the dedication of the action. Although this activity might have the power as a projecting action to establish a body and senses of a human in a following rebirth, at times there might be problems with the eyes, the ears, the brain and the way the person experiences different objects. Although there is enough virtue established to ensure the attainment of a human body, the function of this body might be less than perfect. It is for that reason that when we engage in a virtuous activity, we have to give full attention and all possible effort to make sure that we have it as complete and as perfect as possible.

#### **The substantial cause of suffering.**

It is very important to be able to make the distinction between that which is a substantial cause and that which is a condition. Many times when someone uses rough language we get hurt and annoyed and consider that person as the sole cause for all the suffering and distress that we experience. In reality, neither the person nor the abusive words can possibly be a cause of suffering.

**The substantial cause of our suffering, which is the seed of suffering, can only be inside our own mind.** As for the person and the words, they can only be conditions. If we can understand that we bear the main cause of suffering, we will not hold so strongly anymore to the thought that blames the other person and their language for the distress we experience. This reduces the amount of anger we experience. Still, we might become angry because the conditions are there, but at least we are not fooled into believing that the other person has caused our suffering.

What we need to understand is that harsh words have the potential to generate both happiness and suffering. However, since we are more familiar with suffering, this is the one we keep generating. We could very well generate joy, if only we had greater familiarity with it. It is as if we have two wheels, one representing happiness and the other suffering. The wheel of suffering keeps spinning all the time whilst the wheel of happiness stands still. After a while the wheel of happiness turns rusty becoming overgrown and blocked by grass and it becomes immobilized. We couldn't get it running even with a motor! If we

had familiarity with joy, those harsh words could make us happy, but we just don't know how to start the wheel.

### **Some general advice.**

Following this presentation you should have an initial understanding and be almost convinced by now, but this is not yet at the state of having generated a valid cognition. Valid cognition is a mind of absolute conviction and in order to reach this definite understanding you must use a lot of examples. Use your own examples or think over the examples given to you already. On top of the examples, use also valid reasoning. Try to defend the extreme position that nothing of what has been presented to you was true and use arguments to do so. Make sure that your reasons are clear and solid. Once you have gone through the process of using examples and reasoning, you reach the point of definite conviction which is called valid cognition.

This total and valid cognition brings stability with regards to the law of cause and effect and after that is established all else will follow, including renunciation and other realizations. The ultimate goal of this course is to induce some understanding that you will have to carry further by practicing it and enhancing it every day. If you can generate such a full understanding and conviction of the Twelve Links, whatever you try to meditate on will be easy, be it renunciation, be it love and compassion for sentient beings or anything else.

There are many ways to understand the dependent origination of the Twelve Links. It is definitely very useful to think of it as a means for understanding selflessness and emptiness, but the main thing to understand is how happiness and suffering arise. The main aim of this course is to draw our attention to the matter of happiness and suffering: how the first is established and how the second is avoided.

### **How a person moves from one life to another.**

If we present the Twelve Links in their usual order moving from the first to the second, all the way down to the twelfth, we have to keep in mind that there are two sets of causes and results. Following that order, the projecting causes are the first ones presented, followed by the projected results. After that, the establishing causes are presented, followed by the established results.

This order of presentation is helpful in understanding how every link is generated in dependence on the previous one. However, if we want to present the Twelve Links in relation to the way that a person moves from one life into another, we have to follow a slightly different presentation. Although we start with the three projecting causes, their projected result will not be actualized unless the establishing causes are in place. In that way we start with the projecting causes, we move to the establishing causes and then we have the projected and established results together in one group. A person cannot be reborn without having both the projecting and the establishing causes. This is why craving, grasping and existence have to come prior to name and form, six bases, contact and feeling. After all in order to get a crop of fruits, we need not only the seed, which is the projecting cause, but we also need earth, water and fertilizer, which are the establishing causes.

<b>Presentation of the 12 Links in order to understand how each link arises in dependence on the previous one.</b>	<b>Presentation of the 12 Links in relation to the way that a person moves from one life to another.</b>
1. Projecting causes	1. Projecting causes
2. Projected results	2. Establishing causes
3. Establishing causes	3. Projected results
4. Established results	4. Established results

### How many lives does it take to complete a full set of Twelve Links?

If we examine how long it takes in terms of lives to complete a whole set of links, we see that it is possible to do it in either two or three lives. It is mentioned in the *lamrim* that we can't do it in less than two lives and it is not possible to do it for more than three.

#### Completing in three lives:

The first three projecting causes, ignorance, formation and consciousness, must be established at the same time, so they definitely happen in one lifetime. After these three are established, they can remain for aeons without anything more happening, until one day the establishing causes of craving, grasping and existence are present.

Therefore, in the first life we establish ignorance, formation and consciousness and in the second one, which might be aeons latter, we have craving, grasping and existence. Once the establishing causes are in place, in the life immediately after that the results are manifest. There is no gap between the projected and established results after the establishing causes have been completed.

<b>1st life</b>	<b>2nd life (might follow aeons after the 1st one)</b>	<b>3rd life (follows immediately after the 2nd one)</b>
projecting causes: links 1, 2, 3	establishing causes: links 8, 9, 10	projected & established results: links 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12

#### Completing in two lives:

In the first life we would have to put together all the causes, projecting and establishing. In effect that means that during the first life we have ignorance, formation and consciousness and at the time of death of this first life, we would generate craving, grasping and existence. In the life that will follow after this one, the second life, we will have all the results.

<b>1st life</b>	<b>2nd life (follows immediately after the 1st one)</b>
projecting & establishing causes: links 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 10	projected & established results: links 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12

We can see from this presentation that the shortest possible time to complete a set of the Twelve Links is two lives. Although it is impossible to amass all the links of one cycle together in one single lifetime, it is possible that links of other cycles can be present in one single lifetime and definitely it is the case that many new cycles begin during the length of one lifetime.

In the case of completing within three lives, we have said that there might be a long time in-between the occurrence of the projecting and the establishing causes. We can understand this with the example of the mango seed again. Having consumed the flesh of the fruit, we are left with the seed, but we might decide not to plant it straight away. We might be left with this seed of ignorance, formation and consciousness stored away, in a cupboard, for many years. Despite the fact that the seed has not met with earth and water yet, it remains viable if it is not eaten by an animal, rots or is otherwise destroyed. Despite not sprouting, it doesn't go to waste either. There is always the possibility that many years later somebody might take the seed and plant it. As soon as this seed is placed into the ground and meets with the right conditions, it starts to swell and gets ready to germinate and give rise to a sprout. When things reach this stage it is very difficult to suppress the progress unless a serious obstacle is present.

Similarly, it is possible that we manifest ignorance, formation and consciousness in one life without generating craving, grasping and existence in the same life. Many years later we might generate them. Once we generate them then, in the life that will follow straight after the generation of craving, grasping and existence we will get the results of name and form, six bases, contact, feeling, birth, aging and death.

### **The criteria for the maturation of the seeds.**

We have to be very cautious because we carry in our minds hundreds of thousands of seeds. We have all the seeds for every possible migration and every possible difference in terms of variety in the length, intensity and heaviness of different experiences. Having all these seeds we must be careful to avoid the condition that can activate seeds of suffering. At the time of death some seeds will come to maturity. Those seeds which are stronger have greater chances for maturation. For those who have equal strength, the time of establishment is very important. The seeds that are established first will also mature first. It is very crucial to be aware of the conditions that are present at the time of death, since they are the ones that will determine which of those seeds will be nurtured and supported.

### **The reverse process.**

We have explained how we enter into samsara by following the forward order of the links, moving from the first to the second, from the second to the third and so on until we reach the twelfth link.

Practitioners of the Great Vehicle who are Arya Bodhisattvas, have to follow the training of the ten grounds. When they reach the fifth ground they excel in the effort for developing their concentration by meditating on the way to enter into samsara and the way to reverse the process. A very good presentation of this repeated meditation that is done by Arya Bodhisattvas in order to sharpen their concentration can be found in the *fifth chapter* of the *Ornament of Realization*. If Bodhisattvas on the fifth ground go over this meditation again and again then, we, ordinary beings, should not neglect this practice. A short and sporadic interest in these subjects cannot bring about substantial results.

### **The forward order.**

In studying the forward order of the links, in order to understand how they are derived, it is important to see that formation comes from ignorance. This is equivalent to saying that actions were done due to ignorance. When we look at actions we are not able to identify the real, the root motive. We can go as far as saying that what motivated us was perhaps anger or attachment, but we cannot see that there is always something subtle and innate hiding behind this anger or attachment. Attachment and anger might be easy to identify since they are obvious motivations, but innate self-grasping is hidden behind them. Every time an action is carried out there is a conception of *I* dictating *I need this*. Every time that we think *I need this*, we do not understand that this *I* has two facets: one that exists only as an imputation and another one that exists conventionally and as such has to be recognized. Our mistake is that we never make the distinction between the two and by not recognizing the difference in their validity, we

continue to mix them together. It is our innate self-grasping that does not allow us to see the existence of these two facets of the *I* and it is due to this that we remain confused.

### **What is formation and why consciousness has a narrow definition.**

The interesting thing about formation is that it is, in reality, awareness rather than action. It is awareness because it creates a certain potential and unless the second link was awareness, the third one could not be consciousness. Since what is created by formation is a potential in the nature of awareness and not physical, consciousness can be the following link. If we did not have the creation of the seed on the second link, the third link could not be defined as consciousness upon which the seed is posited. It would have to be consciousness in general.

Consciousness as the third of the Twelve Links can be explained with the use of an example. Imagine that you stand beside a flowing stream. If you were to place your hand on the water, this action would last for a moment. A moment later, the water upon which you placed your hand, is no longer there, in front of you. It has been carried away and the water that is now flowing in front of you is not the water that you placed your hand upon. Therefore, although the stream is a continuum of water, it is only a fraction, a particular moment of this continuum that made contact with your hand.

### **The substantial cause of name and form.**

Since we posit name and form as a projected result, its substantial causes must be one of the projecting causes of ignorance, formation and consciousness. When we examine form, we are looking at the physical aggregates, something material that would also need to have material substantial causes. We posit the union of the substances of mother and father, the egg and the sperm, as the substantial cause of form. However, there should be no confusion in this area. When we talk about name and form, we talk not only about the aggregate of form, which is matter, but of the other aggregates as well, which are non physical. A person is not created just by the union of sperm and egg. A person is created by the entrance of consciousness in the union of sperm and egg. Together with the sperm and egg we must have a continuum of consciousness carrying certain seeds. In order for a person to arise we need more than physical substances, and those non-physical substances are expressed by the word *name* in the term *name and form*. Therefore, when we are looking for the substantial causes of both name and form, we cannot posit them to be something physical. This is how we can posit one of the projecting causes, consciousness, as the substantial cause of name and form. Unless there is consciousness, there will never be name and form.

Apart from the Great Exposition school which has a different presentation of this subject, all the other schools talk about maturational aggregates that have a special connection with name and form, six bases, contact and feeling. Maturational aggregates are more than just form.

Once name and form are in place, the six bases follow. It is because we have the first that the second follows. It is impossible to develop the six bases unless we have name and form because, unless we have the five aggregates, it is impossible to develop sense powers and the bases for them.

Unless we have the six bases, we cannot have contact. This is because contact is the union of three things: sense power, consciousness and object. Unless we have the bases for sense powers, there is nothing into which consciousness can move in and therefore the meeting of the three will not take place. If those three do not meet, it is impossible to have pleasant or unpleasant feelings.

Continuing from that, once we have generated a certain pleasant or unpleasant feeling, craving will be generated either as a strong wish not to be separated, or as a strong wish to be separated.

From craving we generate grasping which is an intensified craving. If the original craving was not there, there would be no increase of it either. This is like the seed that started swelling up and is getting closer to sprouting. The process of swelling that started with grasping is reaching its final stage with existence. Here we are reaching out to get something and we are very close to obtaining it. Once existence is established one must necessarily move quickly into the next life. This is why what follows is birth in the womb of the mother. Due to birth, we age. And due to aging we reach death.

This is the way to contemplate the way of entering samsara and the way that the links are derived from each other.

### **The reverse order.**

Once we have uncontrolled birth, uncontrolled aging and uncontrolled death together, a great variety of suffering is experienced. When we look for the origin of suffering, when we ask where does suffering come from, we have to say that it was derived from birth.

As for birth, that was derived from existence; existence was derived from grasping; grasping was derived from craving; craving was derived from feeling; feeling was derived from contact; contact was derived from the six bases; the six bases were derived from name and form; name and form were derived from consciousness and consciousness was derived from formation.

When we reach the point of formation we have to say that seeds were created due to the fact that actions were carried out. As for the actions, they were done due to ignorance. In that way we see that the original source of it all is ignorance. As for this ignorance, it really is the innate self-grasping.

It is very useful to do this exercise of going through the forward and the reverse order of the Twelve Links many times over because the more you do it, the clearer your understanding becomes.

### **Who is the Lord of Death?**

We define death as the time when body and mind are separated. As for beings who do not have bodies, death is defined as the time when the continuum of the remaining four aggregates is stopped.

When we look at the Wheel of Life, we see that the wheel is between the fangs of Yama, the Lord of Death. The question here is who is this Lord of Death? Who is it that brings this end to the continuum of aggregates? Who or what is it that brings about the separation of body and mind? What is it that causes consciousness to leave the body? What is it that brings about the dissolution of the elements of the body?

The answer to this question comes from understanding that the elements that make up the body become exhausted. This exhaustion comes about naturally, since the elements are established to abide for a certain limited duration. When their potential to abide comes to an end they also come to an end. Functioning things come to exist, they have the ability to abide for a while and at the end they are destroyed. Destruction happens exactly because there is production and abidance. All three of them, production, abidance and destruction, have a common cause. This common cause is ignorance, followed by actions and consciousness. The cause of death is the same as the cause for birth; and it is also the same as the cause of abidance; in all cases, it is ignorance.

Another similar answer to the question of the identity of the Lord of Death, is to define him as contaminated actions and afflictions. Contamination and afflictions are present due to ignorance. **The Lord of Death is ignorance.** As for his fangs, amongst which the Wheel of Life is stuck, they have to be identified as contaminated actions and mental afflictions. It is due to contaminated actions and mental

afflictions that we come into life; we spend our whole lives in a state of confusion caused by them and eventually we also die in this confused state.

The ignorance that we talk about is that of self-grasping. This is what is in control and leads us everywhere. We are born due to this ignorance. A minute after our conception we start aging and we are led to successive experiences of suffering. At the end it is this ignorance that brings us to death by killing us. If somebody was arrested and dragged to prison, tortured and finally executed, the relatives of this person would be angry and sad. They would direct their anger towards the one who captured and later tortured and killed their relative. In our case, it is ignorance that captures us; at times it throws us to the hell realm, at times it throws us to the human realm, at times it throws us to the animal realm; finally, it is the one that brings the end to our life. For us, it is always the ignorance of self-grasping. This explains why this ignorance is given many names and epithets in various texts: it is called the enemy, the bully, the destroyer.

### **Reversing the process.**

What we need to find is how to reverse this whole process so that we can escape samsara. If we didn't have self-grasping, we would not have this type of ignorance that causes us to engage in action in an uncontrolled way. If actions were not done in an uncontrolled way, there would be no need for consciousness to receive the seeds of uncontrolled action.

Without self grasping, seeds of uncontrolled actions and the consciousness receiving these seeds, there would be no projecting causes. Without projecting causes, there would be no projected results.

Without projecting results there would be no feelings and without feelings there would be no attachment towards them, so there would be no craving. Without craving, there would be no grasping and without grasping, there would be no existence. Without existence there would be no birth and without birth there would be no uncontrollable aging and death. We could be without all this; we could be in a state of unchanging happiness.

It is important to see that it is possible to stop this process and distance ourselves from uncontrolled suffering. What has to be stopped is uncontrolled birth. Uncontrolled birth can only be avoided if its causes, craving, grasping and existence, are avoided. Craving, grasping and existence would be avoided if name and form, six bases, contact and feeling were not derived in an uncontrolled way. Although it is feeling that directly gives rise to craving, grasping and existence, never the less feeling depends on the links preceding it, so the rest of the projected results are also mentioned. Projected result can be avoided if the consciousness which is the recipient of the seed was missing. The seed would not have been created unless we were involved in actions due to our ignorance. So if we did not have ignorance, we wouldn't have all the other causes and results.

### **Contaminated happiness.**

When we look at the happiness we experience in this life, we can see that it is contaminated. It is contaminated because it is unstable and it is unstable because it is under the influence of contaminated actions and afflictions. Actually, it is not just that happiness is under the influence of those two things: it is also suffering, as well as the whole of our lives.

The happiness we experience in this life is as short-lived as a lightning in the sky. Some times when the sky is dark and clouded by thick clouds we can see lightning. When it flashes in the dark, we can see our path, but it is only for a split second and then we are in the dark again. Our happiness is like this: it flashes for a second before it disappears again.

### **The Twelve Links and the Three scopes.**

We can see how ignorance can lead us to engage in actions that create the seeds that can eventually project us to the set of aggregates of a hell being, a hungry ghost or an animal. When we consider the types and heaviness of suffering that characterize these states of existence we have to generate the sincere aspiration to avoid them, the sincere prayer to never enact the type of activities that can project us to the three lower migrations. This is how we can combine the study of the Twelve Links with the practices of the small scope.

We can also see that, due to our ignorance, we can engage in actions that have the power to project us towards being born as a human, a demi-god or a god. However, even if we are reborn as a human, in a fortunate migration, we know that there is a lot of suffering to be experienced and despite the fact that we might be temporarily saved from the lower migrations, the chances are that we will fall there again. By contemplating in this way, we combine the understanding of the Twelve Links with the practices of the middle scope, which can help in generating renunciation.

Finally, we come to understand that sentient beings end up in any of the six types of migrations by following all the steps of the Twelve Links. Understanding the suffering this involves, we can generate the wish *I will be the one who will free them from their suffering; I will be the one who will place them in happiness*. Once we generate this particular mind that says *I will do it and for that reason I want to reach the perfection of my wisdom, my compassion and ability to help others*, we have reached the point where we are combining the Twelve Links with the motivation and the practices of the great scope.

It is stated in the *lamrim chenmo* that it was Geshe Pungchuwa who combined the Twelve Links with the Three Scopes and practiced accordingl**Overlap and non exclusion**.

We live our lives surrounded by many sets and cycles of links. The Twelve Links do not exclude each other. For example, when we are at the twelfth link, as we are aging, we are also ignorant, we engage in formation and in creation of consciousness. Also, within the same set of links, at the time of birth, we also establish name and form. In reality, name and form follow a moment after conception, when the development of the embryo begins, but we can say that they happen together and in any case, one does not exclude the other. Birth as well as name and form are results that are established in a second life. If we start looking for their causes it would have to be consciousness and whatever precedes it, and from that it is obvious that name and form relate to another cycle of twelve links.

We have already explained that we can see the Twelve Links in a forward sequence in order to understand how every link is derived from the one proceeding it, but if we want to see the way that a person experiences the links, we have to break them up and spread them over two or three lives. This is because the causes have to be established first and after they are in place, the results will follow.

### **Overlap and non exclusion.**

We live our lives surrounded by many sets and cycles of links. The Twelve Links do not exclude each other. For example, when we are at the twelfth link, as we are aging, we are also ignorant, we engage in formation and in creation of consciousness. Also, within the same set of links, at the time of birth, we also establish name and form. In reality, name and form follow a moment after conception, when the development of the embryo begins, but we can say that they happen together and in any case, one does not exclude the other. Birth as well as name and form are results that are established in a second life. If we start looking for their causes it would have to be consciousness and whatever precedes it, and from that it is obvious that name and form relate to another cycle of twelve links.

We have already explained that we can see the Twelve Links in a forward sequence in order to understand how every link is derived from the one proceeding it, but if we want to see the way that a

person experiences the links, we have to break them up and spread them over two or three lives. This is because the causes have to be established first and after they are in place, the results will follow.

## MEDITATION on the forward process

I will try to explain how all suffering comes from a single cause, ignorance. This is something that needs to be investigated further, so try to engage in analytical meditation on all the points. The more you look at and investigate these matters, the more questions and doubts will arrive. As they arise you will have to clear them away by asking questions, reading a book or talking to someone with greater familiarity with the subject than you. Once all these doubts are cleared away, valid cognition will be generated. This valid understanding of these matters induces wisdom.

The scripts of the Buddha declare that:

From ignorance, formation; from formation, consciousness; from consciousness, name and form; from name and form, six bases; from six bases, contact; from contact, feeling; from feeling, craving; from craving, grasping; from grasping, existence; from existence, birth; from birth, age and death. From that trouble, suffering and crying.

When we hear the way this is phrased, we should understand that formation is created by depending on ignorance; consciousness is created by depending on formation etc.. all projecting actions are created due to ignorance.

Everything starts with self-grasping because due to its presence we are not able to recognize the ultimate mode of existence of things. For that reason we cannot make the distinction between the way that things exist and the way things appear. This is how we start grasping at the idea of the *I*. Once we establish the *I*, we have certain expectations, and we start thinking *I want happiness, I do not want to have any suffering and in order to ensure this I will engage in such and such an action*. Due to all this concern about the *I*, we engage in virtuous or non-virtuous actions. All these actions are accumulated because we have innate self-grasping.

When an action is performed, a seed is created. The seed is placed on our consciousness, the third link. Such a seed has the power to create name and form, six bases, contact and feeling.

The first one is name and form. Due to the presence of name and form and by depending on it, the six bases are established. Due to the fact that there are six bases, contact is established and due to that, feeling.

When we have pleasurable feelings, we generate the wish to remain always experiencing these types of feelings and when we have unpleasant feelings we generate the wish to be separated from them. In this way, from feeling we have craving.

Once the craving is intensified and it has the power to be able to bring about some results, we have grasping.

Grasping is like watering a seed, craving is like the re-activation of the seed and existence is the state just prior to germination.

From existence we either have to go through the bardo or not. If we are to be reborn from the womb, there will be a minute where conception will happen. This is posited as birth.

From the second moment, the second instant of birth we have aging and when eventually the destruction of the continuity of the similar types of aggregates comes about, we have death.

Contemplate how it is possible to be engaged in many cycles and sets of the Twelve Links repeatedly engaging in actions through ignorance, establishing new bodies, aging and dying.

Think how the projecting causes, ignorance, formation and consciousness, project the projected results, name and form, six bases, contact and feeling.

Together with the projecting causes we also need to have the establishing causes of craving, grasping and existence that act as the earth, the water and the fertilizer that enable results to come. The established result that eventuates is birth and then aging and death.

### **MEDITATION on reversing the process**

What we need to discover is how to reverse this whole process so that we can escape samsara. If we were without self-grasping, we would not have this type of ignorance that causes us to engage in action in an uncontrolled way. If actions were not done in an uncontrolled way, there would be no need for consciousness to receive the seeds of uncontrolled action.

Without self grasping, the seeds of uncontrolled actions and the consciousness receiving these seeds, there would be no projecting causes. Without projecting causes, there would be no projected results.

Without projecting results there would be no feelings and without feelings there would be no attachment towards them, so there would be no craving. Without craving, there would be no grasping and without grasping, there would be no existence. Without existence there would be no birth and without birth there would be no uncontrollable aging and death. We could be without all this; we could be in a state of unchanging happiness.

It is possible to stop this process and distance ourselves from uncontrolled suffering. What has to be stopped is uncontrolled birth. Uncontrolled birth can only be avoided if its causes, craving, grasping and existence, are avoided.

Craving, grasping and existence would be avoided if name and form, six bases, contact and feeling were not derived in an uncontrolled way. Although it is feeling that directly gives rise to craving, grasping and existence, nevertheless, feeling depends on the links preceding it, so the rest of the projected results must also be considered.

Projected results can be avoided if the consciousness, which is the recipient of the seed, is missing. The seed would not have been created unless we were involved in actions due to our ignorance. So if we did not have ignorance, we would not be subject to the other links.

## QUESTIONS

1. Are the Twelve Links associated with one particular scope?
2. Give the names of the Twelve Links.
3. Identify which of the links are causes and which are results.
4. How is ignorance defined within the context of the Twelve Links?
5. What is the definition of ignorance as posited by Arya Asanga ? What are the two types of confusion posited by Arya Asanga ?
6. Explain how confusion with regards to the law of cause and effect can be the cause for a rebirth in the lower migrations.
7. Can ignorance with respect to emptiness be the cause for a fortunate migration? Can it be the cause for reaching liberation?
8. What is the relationship between ignorance, self grasping and the root of samsara ?
9. How many types of self-grasping are there ?
10. What is the definition of imputed self-grasping ?
11. Is imputed self-grasping the root of samsara ? Why ?
12. What is the range of the first link, ignorance ?
13. What type of appearances does the innate self-grasping give rise to, with respect to the self ?
14. What are the two sides of every appearance ?
15. Why is the innate self-grasping called *innate* ?
16. Is there such a thing as a good person ?
17. What are the two main types of motivation ?
18. What is the root motivation for any activity ?
19. Can we perform a virtuous action with self-grasping? What would be the result of such an action?
20. Which of the two motivation decides whether an action is virtuous or not ?
21. When does innate self-grasping stop being manifest ? Is this the time when its abandonment begins ?

22. Is innate self-grasping abandoned instantaneously ?
23. How many types of virtuous actions are there ?
24. How is the second link, formation, understood ? What is its duration ?
25. What is a projecting action?
26. What is the selflessness of a person and what is the selflessness of phenomena according to the Middle Way Consequence school?
27. What is the definition of consciousness as the third link?
28. Are both types of consciousness contained within the third link?
29. How is it possible for consciousness which is impermanent to have the necessary stability for carrying the seeds for many aeons?
30. Could imprints be placed on any consciousness?
31. How completing actions can influence the final result?
32. How purification of durable seeds is possible?
33. What is the relation between the five aggregates and name and form?
34. What does *a world of suffering* refer to?
35. Name the six bases.
36. Is the eye base the same as the eyeball?
37. Do the six bases have to be newly established at each life?
38. What needs to be assembled in order to establish contact?
39. Is the link of feeling the same as the aggregate of feeling?
40. Can the wish to be separated from something be classified as craving?
41. What is the difference between the craving of the Desire realm and the craving of the Form and Formless realms ?
42. Does the lack of craving guarantee that aryas will not have any more uncontrollable rebirths ?
43. What is the difference between craving and grasping ?
44. When does the link of existence occur ?

45. Does death at the end of birth existence and death at the end of bardo existence come from the same cause ?
46. What is the meaning of unfluctuating and fluctuating actions ?
47. How does fluctuation manifest in the Desire realm ?
48. Is it possible to establish a human birth without the establishment of a human bardo ?
49. How many types of existence are there and which one represents the link of existence ?
50. How is the link of birth defined ?
51. Name the different types of births and give an example of each.
52. How does the miraculous birth differ from the other types of birth ?
53. When does the link of aging begin ?
54. What is the definition of death according to the *lamrim chenmo* ?
55. When does death occur for beings of the Desire realm and when for beings of the Formless realm ?
56. Explain the two rounds of causation within which the Twelve Links are presented.
57. Does the presence of projecting causes and projected results ensure the presence of the final result as well ?
58. Where is the substantial cause of our own suffering found?
59. Is anything other than ourselves a cause or a condition for our suffering ?
60. Is it possible that insulting words, directed towards us, could make us happy ?
61. What is the order of the presentation of the Twelve Links when we explain how a person moves from one life into the other ?
62. How many lives does it take to complete a whole set of the Twelve Links ?
63. Explain how a set of the Twelve Links can be completed in two lives.
64. Explain how a set of the Twelve Links can be completed in three lives.
65. In the case of completing a set of the Twelve Links in three lifetimes, does the second life follow immediately after the first ?
66. Can there be a considerable gap between the occurrence of the establishing causes and the results that follow after them?
67. What determines which seeds ripen first?

68. What is the substantial cause of form, from within name and form ?
69. What is the substantial cause of name and form ? Why is it different from the substantial cause of form ?
70. Who is the Lord of death?
71. Is the cause for creation, abidance and destruction the same?
72. Why is the Wheel of Life stuck between the fangs of the Lord of Death ?
73. Why is the happiness in our life described as contaminated happiness ?
74. Describe how the Twelve Links can be combined with practices of the small, middle and great scope.
75. Is it possible that different links (of the same set) are present at the same time ?

## Dedication

*To His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet  
and all the Holy Masters of the Buddhadharma,  
May they have long and healthy lives.*

*To the Teachings of the Buddha  
May they endure for a very long time.*