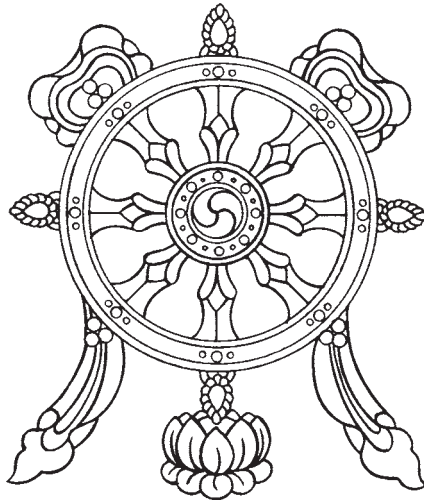


Discovering BUDDHISM *at Home*

*Awakening the limitless potential of your mind,
achieving all peace and happiness*



SUBJECT AREA 9

Samsara & Nirvana

Readings

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Further required reading includes the following texts:

The Wish-Fulfilling Golden Sun, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche (pp. 84–105)

Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand, 1997 gold edition (pp. 473–543) or 2006 blue edition (pp. 427-95)

The Meaning of Life, by His Holiness the Dalai Lama

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The Four Noble Truths

by His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama

From the Second Dharma Celebration, November 5–8, 1982, New Delhi, India. Translated by Alex Berzin, clarified by Lama Zopa Rinpoche, edited by Nicholas Ribush. First published by Tushita Mahayana Meditation Centre, New Delhi, 1982.

When the great universal teacher Shakyamuni Buddha first spoke about the Dharma in the noble land of India, he taught the four Noble Truths: the truths of suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the path to the cessation of suffering. Since many books contain discussions of the four Noble Truths in English, they (and the eightfold path as well) are very well known. These four are all-encompassing, including many things within them.

Speaking of the four Noble Truths in general, and considering the fact that all of us want to have happiness and to eliminate suffering, we can speak of an effect and a cause on both the disturbing side and the liberating side. The true sufferings and true causes of suffering are the effect and cause on the side of things that we do not want; the true cessation and the true paths are the effect and cause on the side of things that we desire.

The truth of suffering

We experience many different types of suffering. All are included in three categories: the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change and all-pervasive suffering.

Suffering of suffering. This refers to things such as headaches and so forth. Even animals can recognize this kind of suffering and, like us, want to be free from it. Because beings have fear of and experience discomfort from these kinds of suffering, they engage in various activities to eliminate them.

Suffering of change. This refers to situations where, for example, we are sitting very comfortably relaxed and at first everything is all right, but after a while we lose that feeling and get restless and uncomfortable.

In certain countries, like India, we see a great deal of poverty and disease: these are sufferings of the first category. Everybody realizes that these are suffering conditions to be eliminated and improved upon. In many Western countries there may not be so much problem of poverty, but where material facilities have been highly developed there are different kinds of problems. At first we may be very happy, having overcome the problems that our forefathers faced, but as soon as we have solved certain problems, new ones arise. We have plenty of money, plenty of food and good shelter, but by overestimating the value of these things we render them worthless. This sort of experience is the suffering of change.

A very poor, underprivileged person might think that it would be wonderful to have an automobile or a television set, and should he acquire them, at the beginning he would feel very happy and satisfied. Now, if such happiness were something permanent, since he had the car and the TV set his happiness should remain forever. But it does not; it goes. After a few months he wants another kind of car; if he has the money he will buy another kind of television set. The old ones, the same objects that before gave him so much satisfaction, now cause dissatisfaction. That is the nature of change; that is the problem of the suffering of change.

All-pervasive sufferings. Because it acts as the basis of the first two categories of suffering, the third is called, in Tibetan, *kyab.pa.du.ched.kyi.dug.ngel* (literally: the suffering of pervasive compounding). There may be those who, even in developed Western countries, want to be liberated from the second suffering, the suffering of change. Bored with the defiled feelings of happiness, some seek the feeling of equanimity: this may lead to rebirth in, of the three realms, the upper realm that has only the feeling of equanimity.

Now, desiring liberation from the first two categories of suffering is not the principal motivation for seeking liberation (from cyclic existence); the Bhagawan Buddha taught that the root of the three sufferings is the third: all-pervasive suffering. Some people commit suicide; they seem to think that there is suffering simply because there is the human life, and that by cutting off the life there will be nothing. This third, all-pervasive suffering is under the control of karma and the disturbing mind. We can see this without having to think very deeply that this is under the control of the karma and disturbing mind of previous lives: anger and attachment arise just because we have these present aggregates. The aggregate of compounding phenomena is like a helper for us to generate karma and these disturbing minds; this is called *ne.ngen.len* (literally: taking a bad place). Because that which forms is related to taking the bad place of disturbing minds and is under their control, it supports our generating disturbing minds and keeps us from virtue. All our suffering can be traced back to these aggregates of attachment and clinging.

Perhaps, when you realize that your aggregates are the cause of all your sufferings you might think that suicide is the way out. Well, if there were no continuity of mind, no future life, all right—if you had the courage you could finish yourself off. But, according to the Buddhist viewpoint, that's not the case; your consciousness will continue. Even if you take your own life, this life, you will have to take another body that again will be the basis of suffering. If you really want to get rid of all your suffering, all the difficulties you experience in your life, you have to get rid of the fundamental cause that gives rise to the aggregates that are the basis of all suffering. Killing yourself isn't going to solve your problems.

Because this is the case, we must now investigate the cause of suffering: is there a cause or not? If there is, what kind of cause is it: a natural cause, which cannot be eliminated, or a cause that depends on its own cause and therefore can be? If it is a cause that can be overcome, is it possible for us to overcome it? Thus we come to the second Noble Truth: the truth of the cause of suffering.

The truth of the cause of suffering

Strictly speaking, Buddhists maintain that there is no external creator. According to Buddhists, a buddha is the highest being, but even a buddha does not have the power to create new life. So now, what is the cause of suffering?

Generally, the ultimate cause is the mind; the mind that is influenced by bad thoughts such as anger, attachment, jealousy and so forth is the main cause of birth and all such other problems. However, there is no possibility to cut the mind, the stream of consciousness itself. Furthermore, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with the deepest level of mind; it is simply influenced by the bad thoughts. Thus the question is whether or not we can fight and control anger, attachment and the other disturbing negative minds. If we can eradicate these, we shall be left with a pure mind that is free from the causes of suffering.

This brings us to the disturbing negative minds, the delusions, which are mental factors. There are many different ways of presenting the discussion of the mind, but, in general, the mind itself is something that is merely clarity and awareness. When we speak of disturbing attitudes such as anger and attachment we have to see how they are able to affect and pollute the mind; what, in fact, is their nature. This, then, is the discussion of the cause of suffering.

If we ask, “How do attachment and anger arise?” the answer will be that they are undoubtedly assisted by our grasping at things to be true and inherently real. When, for instance, we are angry with something, we feel that the object is out there, solid, true and unimputed, and that we ourselves are likewise something solid and findable. Before we get angry, the object appears ordinary, but when our mind is influenced by anger, the object looks ugly, completely repulsive, nauseating; something we want to get rid of immediately—it appears really to exist in that way: solid, independent and very unattractive. This appearance of truly ugly fuels our anger. Yet when we see the same object the next day, when our anger has subsided, it seems more beautiful than it did the day before; it’s the same object but it doesn’t seem as bad. This shows how anger and attachment are influenced by our grasping at things as being true and unimputed.

Thus, the texts on the Middle Way (Madhyamaka) philosophy state that the root of all the disturbing negative minds is the grasping at true existence; that this assists them and brings them about; that the closed-minded ignorance that grasps at things as being inherently, truly al is the basic source of all our suffering. Based on this grasping at true existence we develop all kinds of disturbing negative minds and create a great deal of negative karma.

It explains in the *Madhyamakavatara* (*Entering the Middle Way*), by the great Indian pandit Chandrakirti, that first there’s attachment to the self, and then grasping at things and becoming attached to them as “mine.” At first there is a very solid, independent I that is very big—bigger than anything else; this is the basis. From this gradually comes “this is mine, this is mine, this is mine.” Then “we, we, we.” Then, because of our taking this side, come “others, our enemies.” Towards I or mine arises attachment; towards him, her and them we feel distant, and anger, jealousy and all those competitive feelings arise. Thus ultimately, the problem is this feeling of “I”—not the mere I, but the I with which we become obsessed.

This gives rise to anger and irritation, along with harsh words and all the physical expressions of aversion and hatred. All these actions (of mind, speech and body) accumulate bad karma. Killing, cheating and all similar negative actions also result from such bad motivation. So, you see: the first stage is solely mental, the disturbing negative minds; in the second stage these negative minds express themselves in actions, karma. Immediately, the atmosphere is disturbed. With anger, for example, the atmosphere becomes tense, people feel uneasy. If someone gets furious, gentle people try to avoid him.

Thus he, too, gets disturbed. And later, the person who got angry himself feels embarrassed and ashamed for having said all sorts of absurd things, whatever came into his mouth. When you get angry there's no room for logic or reason; you become literally mad. So later, when your mind has become normal again, you feel ashamed. There are no good points about anger and attachment; nothing good results from them. They may be difficult to control, but everybody can realize that there is nothing good about them. This is the second Noble Truth. Now the question arises whether or not these kinds of negative mind can be eliminated.

The truth of the cessation of suffering

The root of all disturbing negative minds is our grasping at things as truly existent. Thus we have to investigate whether this grasping mind is correct or whether it is distorted and seeing things incorrectly. We can do this by investigating how the things it perceives actually exist. However, since this mind itself is incapable of seeing whether or not it apprehends objects correctly, we have to rely on another kind of mind. If, upon investigation, we discover many other, valid ways of looking at things and that all these contradict, or negate, the way that the mind that grasps at true existence perceives its objects, we can say that this mind does not see reality.

Thus with the mind that can analyze the ultimate we must try to determine whether the mind that grasps at things as truly findable is correct or not. If it is correct, the analyzing mind should ultimately be able to find the grasped-at things. The great classics of the Chittamatra and, especially, the Madhyamaka schools contain many lines of reasoning for carrying out such investigation. Following these, when you investigate to see whether the mind that grasps at things as inherently findable is correct or not, you find that it is not correct, that it is distorted—you cannot actually find the objects at which it grasps. Since this mind is deceived by its object it has to be eliminated.

Thus, through investigation we find no valid support for the grasping mind but the support of logical reasoning for the mind that realizes that the grasping mind is invalid. In battle, the mind supported by logic will always be victorious over the mind that is not. The understanding that there is no such thing as truly findable existence constitutes the deep clear nature of mind; the mind that grasps at things as truly findable is superficial and fleeting.

When we eliminate the disturbing negative minds, the cause of all suffering, we eliminate the sufferings as well. This is liberation, or the cessation of suffering: the third Noble Truth. Since it is possible to achieve this we must now look at the method. This brings us to the fourth Noble Truth.

The truth of the path to the cessation of suffering

When we speak of the paths common to the three vehicles of Buddhism—Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana—we are referring to the thirty-seven factors that bring enlightenment. When we speak specifically of the paths of the bodhisattvas' vehicle (Mahayana) we are referring to the ten levels and the six transcendent perfections.

We find the practice of the Hinayana path most commonly in Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka and so forth. Here the practitioners are motivated by the desire to achieve liberation from their own suffering. Concerned for themselves alone, they practice the thirty-seven factors of enlightenment, which are related to the five paths: the four close placements of mindfulness, the four miraculous powers and the four

pure abandonments (which are related to the path of accumulation); the five powers and the five forces (the path of application); the seven factors of enlightenment (the path of seeing); and the eightfold path (the path of meditation). They are able to manifest thereby a cessation of the disturbing negative minds alone, attaining nirvana, individual liberation. This is the path and the result of the Hinayana.

The primary concern of followers of the Mahayana path is not merely their own liberation but the enlightenment of all sentient beings. With this motivation of bodhichitta—their hearts set on attaining enlightenment as the best means of helping others—these practitioners practice the six transcendent perfections and gradually progress through the ten bodhisattva levels until they have completely overcome both types of obscurations and attained the supreme enlightenment of buddhahood. This is the path and the result of the Mahayana.

The essence of the practice of the six transcendent perfections is the unification of method and wisdom so that the two enlightened bodies—rupakaya and dharmakaya—can be attained. Since they can be attained only simultaneously, their causes must be cultivated simultaneously. Thus together we must build up a store of merit, as the cause of the rupakaya, the body of form, and a store of deep awareness, or insight, as the cause of the dharmakaya, the body of wisdom. In the Paramitayana, we practice method grasped by wisdom and wisdom grasped by method, but in the Vajrayana we practice method and wisdom as one in nature.

Colophon:

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Renunciation

by *Tsenshab Serkong Rinpoche*

Tsenshab Serkong Rinpoche, the only one of the seven spiritual assistants of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to escape from Tibet after the Chinese invasion, is the highest incarnate lama of the Ganden Jangtse monastery. Having complete knowledge of all the sutras and tantras, he kindly gave the following teaching at Tushita on December 7, 1979. He passed away in 1983.

The Sanskrit word *Dharma*, *chö* in Tibetan, means to hold, or to uphold. What is upheld, or maintained? The elimination of suffering and the attainment of happiness. Dharma does this not only for ourselves, but for all beings.

The sufferings we experience are of two types: those immediately visible to us as humans, and those we cannot see without psychic powers. The former include the pain involved in the birth process, the unpleasantness of occasionally becoming sick, the misery experienced with growing old and aging, and the terror of death.

The sufferings that come after death are not visible to an ordinary person. We might think that after we die we will probably be reborn as a human being. However, this is not necessarily the case. There is no logical reason for us to assume that such an evolution will occur. Nor is it the case that after we die we will not take rebirth at all.

As for the particular type of rebirth we will take, this is something very difficult to know, something not presently within our sphere of knowledge. If we generate positive karma during this life, it will naturally follow that we will take happy forms of rebirth in the future. Conversely, if we create mostly negative karma, we will not take a happy rebirth, but will experience great difficulties in lower states of being. This is certain. Rebirth functions that way. If we plant a seed of wheat, what grows is a wheat plant. If we plant a seed of rice, a rice plant is produced. Similarly, by creating negative karma we plant seeds of rebirth in one of the three lower states as a hell creature, a hungry ghost or an animal.

There are four different states or realms of hells: hot, cold, neighbouring and occasional hells. To further subdivide these, there are eight different hot hells. The first of these is known as the Reviving Hell. This is the one of least suffering, relatively speaking. To understand the extent of the misery experienced here, the pain of a person caught in a great fire would be very slight in comparison with that of beings in the first hot hell. Each hell below the Reviving Hell has an increasingly intense degree of misery.

Although the sufferings of hell creatures and hungry ghosts may not be visible to us, those of the animals can be seen with our eyes. If we wonder what would happen if we ourselves were to be reborn

as animals, we can just look at those around us and think what it would be like to have their conditions. Dharma is what holds us back and protects us from experiencing the suffering of these lower rebirths.

The entire wheel of rebirth, the whole of cyclic existence, has the nature of suffering. Dharma is what safeguards us from all samsaric suffering. Moreover, the mahayana Dharma, the teachings of the great vehicle, brings protection not only to ourselves but to all living beings.

In Buddhism we hear a lot about the three jewels of refuge—Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. The first of these includes all the fully enlightened beings who teach the Dharma. Buddha Shakyamuni, who first turned the wheel of Dharma at Varanasi by teaching the four Noble Truths, is most significant to us. The last of these four truths—the truth of the path—is the Dharma to be practised in order to achieve liberation. This is the refuge object called the Dharma jewel.

Dharma practice entails two things: recognizing the root of samsaric suffering and eradicating this root. What is the root of cyclic existence? It is the grasping for a truly existent self and for the true existence of phenomena. We need to develop a repulsion for this grasping which brings us all our sufferings. We must develop an understanding of the antidote to grasping at true existence. This antidote is the wisdom of selflessness or identitylessness. It is this understanding of selflessness which will bring us liberation from suffering.

The sufferings we experience in cyclic existence do not occur without a cause. They are caused by the delusions and the karma created by the delusions. The root of all delusion and karma is the grasping for a self. When we understand this, we aspire to obtain the antidote to this grasping for a self. Why have we not yet developed the antidote in our mindstream? Why don't we understand selflessness? One reason is that we are not sufficiently aware of death and impermanence.

The only possible outcome of birth is death. We are inevitably going to die. There is no living being whose life did not end with death. People try many methods to prevent death's occurrence, but it is impossible. No medicine can cure us of death.

Just to think, "I'm going to die," isn't really the correct way to contemplate death. Of course, everyone is going to die, but merely thinking about this fact is not very powerful. It is not the proper method. In the same way, just thinking of the fact that one is going to disintegrate and degenerate, that one's body is going to decompose, is not enough. What we have to think about is how to prevent our downfall.

If we think about the fear that comes at the time of death and about how to eliminate that fear, then our meditation on death will be effective. People who have accumulated a great deal of negative karma during their lives become very frightened at the time of death. They cry, tears run down their cheeks, their mouths dribble, they excrete in their clothing and are completely overwhelmed. These are clear signs of the suffering that occurs at the time of death because of fear caused by negative actions performed during life. Alternatively, if during our lifetime we withhold ourselves from committing negative actions, the time of death is very easy for us to face. The experience is one of joy, like that of a child going home to its parents. If we have purified ourselves, we can die happily. By refraining from the ten negative ways and cultivating their opposites, the ten virtues, our death will be easy and as a result we won't have to experience rebirth in a condition of suffering. We can be assured of rebirth in more fortunate states. By planting the seeds of medicinal plants we obtain trees with medicinal powers,

by planting the seeds of poisonous trees we produce only harmful fruits. If we plant the seeds of virtuous actions on our consciousness we will experience happiness in future rebirths. We will have fortunate situations both mentally and physically. This basic teaching of the Dharma—avoid the ten non-virtuous deeds and cultivate the ten virtues—is given not only in Buddhism but also in many other religions, including Christianity.

How should we contemplate death and impermanence? As mentioned previously, just thinking, “I’m going to die,” is not very beneficial. We should think, “If I have created any of the ten non-virtuous actions, at death I will have a great deal of fear and suffering to face, and as a result I will evolve to a rebirth of intense misfortune. On the other hand, if during my life I have created virtues, at death I will not experience fear or suffering and will be reborn in a more fortunate state.” That is the correct way to contemplate death.

This meditation should not be merely the gloomy, pessimistic thought, “I’m going to die and there is nothing I can do about it.” Rather we should think in terms of what will happen when we die. “Where will I go after death? What sort of causes have I created? Can I make my death a happy one? How? Can I make my future rebirths happy? How?”

When contemplating future rebirths we should remember that there is no place in cyclic existence which is reliable. No matter what body is obtained, it must eventually pass away. We read in history of people who have lived for a hundred or even a thousand years. Yet no matter how fantastic these accounts are, there is no case of a person who did not eventually have to die. Any type of samsaric body that we gain is subject to death.

Nor is there a place to where we can go in order to escape death. No matter where we are, when the time comes, we will have to die. Then no amount of medicine, mantras or practice will help. Surgical operations may cure certain types of diseases within our body, but there are none that can prevent death.

No matter what type of rebirth we gain, it will be subject to death. The process is ongoing. Contemplating the long-range effects of our actions and how the process of birth, life, death and rebirth is continuous will help us generate much positive karma.

Even though we sometimes plan to practise the Dharma, we usually plan to do so tomorrow, or the day after. However, no-one can tell when we will die. If we had a guarantee that we definitely had one hundred years left to live, we would have free space in which to arrange our practice. But there is not the slightest certainty when we will die. To put off our practice is very foolish. Some humans die in the womb even before they are born, others die as small babies before they learn to walk. It doesn’t follow that you are going to live a long life.

Our bodies are very fragile. If they were made of stone or iron perhaps they might give some feeling of stability. But if we investigate we will see that the human body is very weak. It is very easy for something to go wrong with it. It is like a delicate wrist-watch made from countless tiny and fragile parts. It is not something to be trusted. There are many circumstances which can cause our death: food which has become poisonous, the bite of a tiny insect or even the prick of a poisonous thorn. Such small conditions can kill us. The food and liquid that we use to extend our life can become the circumstances

which end it. There is no certainty at all as to when we will die, or what circumstances will cause our death.

Even if we feel certain that we will live for a hundred years, many years of that span have passed already and we haven't accomplished much. We approach death like a man sleeping in a railway carriage, constantly getting closer and closer to the destination yet unaware of the process. There is little we can do to stop this process. We just constantly come ever-closer to death.

No matter how much money, jewelry, houses or clothes we have accumulated during our life, it will make no difference whatsoever at the time of our death. When we die we will have to go empty-handed. Not even the tiniest material object can be taken with us. The body itself must be left behind. The body and the mind separate and the mindstream continues by itself. Not only is it impossible to take a possession with us, we cannot even take our body.

What accompanies the consciousness after death? If we have to leave our body, our friends and all our possessions, is there any helper or anything which accompanies our consciousness to the future life?

There is something that follows the consciousness after death: the karmic imprints that we have accumulated during this lifetime. If we have committed any of the ten negative karmic actions, a black karmic debt will accompany the mindstream as it evolves into the future rebirth. By killing other beings, stealing others' possessions or indulging in sexual misconduct, black karmic debts from these negative actions of the body are placed on the mindstream. By lying, slandering others, causing disunity amongst people, speaking meaninglessly or harming others with words, the black karmic debts of these negative actions of speech will travel with us at the time of death. If we have had many covetous thoughts, often wishing to have the possessions of others; if we have had ill-will towards anyone, wishing that they be harmed or that something bad would happen to them; or if we have held distorted views, such as 'there are no past or future lives,' 'there is no such thing as cause and effect,' 'there's no such thing as refuge,' these non-virtuous actions of mind will generate a black karmic debt which travels with and directs our minds into future rebirths.

The reverse is also true. If we have performed virtuous actions and turned away from creating negativity, the karmic seeds of such positive energy will travel on our mindstreams and produce better circumstances in our future lives.

When we really think about the situation we are in, we will resolve to try in every way to generate positive karma and eliminate its opposite. We should try to cleanse ourselves of as much negativity as possible, not leaving even the smallest karmic debt to be repaid in our future lives.

We need to look at what type of reactions can happen within the law of cause and effect. There is a story of a person who had very many good qualities, but was harsh in his speech. He abused another, saying, "You talk like a dog." As a result he himself was reborn as a dog five hundred times. A seemingly small action can have a very large result.

Similarly, a very small positive action can produce a great result. There is the story of a young child who made a humble offering to the Buddha and as a result was reborn as the great king Ashoka, who built thousands of Buddhist monuments and performed countless sublime activities.

Contemplating the various types of non-virtue that we have committed and their results is a very effective way of ensuring our welfare and happiness. If we think of the suffering we ourselves will have to experience as a result of our negativity and thus give birth to a very strong wish not to have to experience this type of misery, we have developed what is called ‘renunciation.’

Acquainting ourselves with this type of thinking in itself is a form of meditation. First we should develop mindfulness of our own suffering; then we should extend this mindfulness to all living beings. Consider how all beings do not wish to have any suffering, yet are caught in a suffering predicament. This type of thinking leads us to compassion. If we do not develop the wish to be free from all our own suffering, how can we develop the wish for other beings to be free from theirs? We can put an end to all our own suffering, yet this is not ultimately beneficial. We should extend this wish to all living beings, who also desire happiness. We can train our mind and develop the wish for everyone to be completely parted from their sufferings. This is a much wider and more beneficial way of thinking.

Why should we be concerned with other living beings? Because we receive so much from others. For instance, the milk that we drink comes from the kindness of the cows and the buffaloes, the warm clothing that protects us from the cold and wind comes from the wool of sheep and goats, and so forth. These are just a few examples of why we should try to find a method that can eliminate their sufferings.

No matter what type of practice we do—the recitation of mantra or any kind of meditation—we should always retain the thought, “May this benefit all living beings.” This will naturally bring benefit to ourselves as well. Our ordinary life situations can give us an appreciation of this. For example, if someone is very selfish and always works for his own gain, he will not really be liked by others. On the other hand, someone who is kind and always thinks of helping others is usually liked by everybody.

The thought to be developed in our mindstream is, “May everybody be happy and may nobody suffer.” We must try to incorporate this into our own thinking through recollecting it again and again. This can be extremely beneficial. Beings who in the past developed this type of thinking are now great buddhas, bodhisattvas or saints; all the truly great men of the world based themselves on it. How wonderful if we could try to generate it ourselves!

Questions and Answers

Q: Are we advised not to defend ourselves when somebody tries to harm us?

A: This question introduces a very extensive subject. If someone hits you over the head with a club or stick, the best response is to meditate that you are experiencing this because of your own past negative actions. Think how this person is allowing this particular karmic debt to ripen now, rather than sometime in the future. You should feel gratitude that he has eliminated this black karmic debt from your mindstream.

Q: What if someone attacks my wife or child, who are under my protection? Should I not defend them? Would it be a negative action to do so?

A: As it is your duty to protect your wife and child, you must try to do so in as skillful a manner as

possible. You must be clever. The best is to protect them without harming the attacker. In other words, you need to find a method of protecting them whereby you do not inflict any harm.

Q: He can harm my children but I cannot harm him? Is it not our duty to defend our children against barbarous and cruel acts? Shall we just lay down our lives?

A: In order to handle this situation skillfully you need a great deal of courage. There is a story about a previous life of the Buddha, in which he was a navigator who went to sea with a group of 500 people in search of a buried treasure. There was one man in this party who had very greedy thoughts and, in order to steal all the jewels for himself, was plotting to murder the 500. The bodhisattva (Shakyamuni Buddha in a previous life) was aware of this and thought that to let the situation develop was incorrect, as one man would kill 500. Therefore, he developed the very courageous thought to save the 500 by killing this one man, willingly accepting upon himself the full responsibility of killing. If you are willing to accept having to be reborn in a hell in order to save others, you have a greatly courageous thought. Then you can engage in these acts, just as the Buddha himself did.

Q: Under such circumstances is killing still considered to be a negative action?

A: Nagarjuna says in his *Friendly Letter* that if one commits negativity in the name of protecting one's parents, children, Buddhism, or the Three Jewels of refuge, one will have to experience the consequences. The difference is in whether or not you are aware of the consequences and are willing to take them upon yourself in order to selflessly protect your wife and child. If you harm the enemy, you are going to experience a suffering rebirth. However, you should be willing to face this by thinking, "I will take that suffering on myself and then my wife and child won't suffer."

Q: Then according to Buddhism it would still be a non-virtuous act?

A: To protect your wife and child is a virtuous action, but to harm the enemy is non-virtuous. You have to be willing to accept the consequences of both.

Q: You said that if one creates negative karma one will suffer in the future, but if one does good, happiness will follow. Can these good actions lead to complete salvation, in the sense of not having to experience rebirth?

A: If you wish to achieve salvation, you have to follow the teachings completely and precisely. For instance, if you are following the Christian path, you must follow the teachings of Christ perfectly. Then Christian salvation is possible. Jesus alone cannot save us from our sins; we ourselves have to do something. Otherwise, why would Jesus have said not to sin? If we ourselves follow correctly what Jesus taught, I think that Christian salvation is possible. If we follow correctly the teachings of Buddha, Buddhist salvation is possible.

Colophon:

From *Teachings at Tushita*, edited by Nicholas Ribush with Glenn H. Mullin, Mahayana Publications, New Delhi, 1981. A new edition of this book is in preparation. [Tushita Mahayana Meditation Centre](#) is the FPMT centre in New Delhi, India. Originally edited from an oral translation by Dr. Alex Berzin. Reprinted with permission from Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive.

The Cause of Suffering

by Geshe Rabten

All suffering has a cause. If the cause is not removed, escape from suffering is impossible. If rain is coming in through a hole in the roof, there is no use sweeping the water out of the house without blocking the hole as well. If we are sick and take medicine for the symptoms alone, we may be able to stop them for a time, but we cannot be sure they will not recur. But if we eradicate the cause of suffering we can prevent its recurrence forever.

Although we can do nothing about the suffering of the past, we must close the door of future suffering. If a thorn tree outside our house pricks us every time we pass, it is no real solution to cut off odd branches; we must uproot the tree completely. We need to find the real cause, not an illusory one. If we make a mistake about the cause of suffering, real progress will be impossible. So we must know the second Noble Truth, the cause of suffering. The cause of suffering has two divisions: karma (action) and klesha (mental defilements).

At this time we are experiencing much suffering, whose cause we ourselves created in past existences. Therefore we ourselves have to do the work to escape from it. A teaching about the cause of and escape from suffering is useless if we do not practice it. If we are sick and go to the doctor, who gives treatment, we must follow the doctor's instructions in order to be cured. In school a student needs the teacher's instruction, but the most important thing is the student's own work. Up to now we have never practiced the path, so we are still in samsara.

Escape from samsara depends on ourselves alone; if it depended on only the Buddha, there would be no one in samsara, because that was his great wish. As a good mother loves her children, he has equal love for all beings. He can not give wisdom to beings if they do not practice. The Buddha's responsibility is to show the true path. In another sutra it says: "I am my own lord and my own enemy." "Lord" because if we practice Dharma, we can look after ourselves and bring ourselves much happiness; "enemy" because if we do not practice properly, we build up more and more suffering for ourselves. The Buddha teaches the way; we practice it. This combination brings happiness.

Karma

What determines our next rebirth — which of the six realms we will be born into? It is our karma. The word karma means action. It means that when we do an action, we will experience results of that action. The law of karma is also known as the law of action and result, or the law of cause and effect. In brief, the law of karma is that if we do good, or virtuous actions, we will experience good, or happy, results, and when we do bad, or non-virtuous actions, we will experience bad, or unhappy, results.

The law of karma is not like the law of a country — it was not invented by Buddha or anyone else. It's a natural law, like the law of gravity, which Buddha came to understand and then explained to us. So when we “break” the law of karma by doing something non-virtuous, the problems and suffering we experience as a result of that action happen naturally. It's not that we are punished by anyone! Also, the law of karma works for everyone, whether or not they believe in it.

There are 4 GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS of the law of karma:

- 1) karma is definite: good actions bring good results and bad actions bring bad results, in the same way that rice seeds bring rice and chili seeds bring chili;
- 2) karma multiplies: one karmic action will bring many results, in the same way that one apple seed brings many results: leaves, flowers, fruit, etc.;
- 3) we will not experience the results if we didn't create the cause — we won't experience problems if we don't do anything bad, and we won't experience happiness if we don't do anything virtuous;
- 4) karma doesn't disappear, even after many lifetimes — we carry karma from one lifetime to the next, until the right conditions come together for that karma to ripen and bring its results. However, it's possible for non-virtuous karma to be purified by doing purification practices, and for virtuous karma to be destroyed by anger.

Which actions are good, and which actions are bad? Good actions are those that produce happiness for oneself and others, and bad actions are those that produce unhappiness for oneself or others. An action is therefore good or bad according to the result it brings in the future. Most of us can't see the future to know the results of our actions, so Buddha explained to us which actions are good and which ones are bad.

Karma and the Ten Non Virtues as Causes of Suffering

There are many kinds of karma, but all are included within the categories of karma of body, karma of speech and karma of mind. Each of these categories includes actions of that particular faculty. Generally, karma is divided into skillful and unskillful, but here we are concerned only with unskillful karma—the karma that produces suffering. Unskillful karma is produced by practicing the ten non virtues.

The Ten Non-Virtues

Unskillful karma of body

(1) **Killing**

Killing is the action that destroys the life of any being. It is the greatest malpractice of the present time. No one wants suffering, but by fighting to avoid it people create it. This action has the opposite effect to that which is desired. The action need not be done by physical attack with sword, gun, etc.; the person who gives the orders (the president or the general) also acquires the karma-fruit. When a person orders a bomb to be dropped and a thousand people die, though their deaths have roots in their own past karma, the person giving the order is the immediate cause. That person acquires worse karma-fruit than those who actually drop the bomb. If a hundred people are killed by a hundred

soldiers, each soldier may receive the karma-fruit of one death, but the person who gave the order receives the fruit of the one hundred deaths. Such people may think themselves very great, but they do not realize the suffering that they are bringing upon themselves.

When the world is in peace, deep as well as immediate benefits result. But to be really peaceful we must decide by ourselves to be peaceful by practicing Dharma. Even if a person does not actually kill anyone or order anyone to be killed, if one approves of killing as a good thing or rejoices in it, the karma-fruit is also acquired.

(2) **Stealing**

Stealing is taking anything belonging to someone else that has not been given. It can be done secretly, by force, by cunning words, by cheating, and so forth. It includes laying claim to something that does not really belong to one, as when a country lays claim to another. If the stealing is done indirectly through someone else, it has the same karma-fruit. Its object can be any property, any people, and so forth, taken by any means. If we mistakenly take something that belongs to someone else, it is not stealing. Stealing requires not only the action but also the intention to take something that is not our own. Our mind must be aware that we are stealing.

(3) **Sexual misconduct**

This action occurs when a married person goes after another sexual partner. Whereas killing and stealing, even when performed indirectly, have the same karma-fruit, this is not the case with sexual misconduct. The first two actions harm others who are innocent; sexual misconduct concerns the people involved. For bhiksus and bhiksunis (Buddhist monks and nuns) any kind of sexual indulgence is forbidden.

Beating other people, attempting unsuccessfully to steal, putting people in prison for the wrong reasons, improper behavior on holy days, and any other bodily deeds that are harmful or provoke mental defilements are also unskillful karma of body.

Unskillful karma of speech

(4) **Lying**

Lying includes anything spoken with the intention of deceiving others, with selfish motivation.

(5) **Slander**

Speech that creates enmity between friends, out of some motive such as jealousy of their relationship, is slander. The speech may be either true or false, but for it to be slanderous the desire to bring discord must be in the speaker's mind. Slander can take place between countries as well as between individuals. If a person says something false in order to break up a friendship, this is both lying and slander.

(6) **Harsh words**

This includes angry words against another, or swearing by the name of some holy person or object for evil ends such as the reinforcement of a lie, or the use of words to make people sad or angry. The Tibetan for this is *zig.tsup* meaning "rough word." Just as a rough stone rubbed against the body creates pain, so harsh words hurt the mind.

(7) **Irresponsible talk**

Any kind of talk that provokes delusion—talk of violence, pornography, and so forth—is considered irresponsible or gossip.

Unskillful karma of mind

(8) **Greed**

This term refers not to desire for beneficial things such as knowledge or wisdom, but to the insatiable desire for illusory possessions and sensory experiences. Greed is seen in the poor person who sees big, shiny cars and expensive possessions, and is always running after them, or in the rich person who is surrounded by possessions yet wants even more. Greed is born from desire. Other unskillful actions of body and speech, such as stealing, cheating, and so forth result from the mental action of greed.

(9) **Malice**

This wish to harm others includes taking pleasure in their misfortunes. It can apply to all categories of life, from nations to small insects. At first glance this action of mind may appear more harmful than greed, but in fact greed is more harmful because it does not apply to just a single situation; greed is persistent and brings no satisfaction.

(10) **Wrong views**

Any kind of thinking that denies the truth of Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, rebirth, the law of karma, nirvana and so forth constitutes wrong views.

Unskillful karma of mind is the worst kind of karma because actions of body and speech arise from mind. For instance, to kill an animal, first the wish to do so must arise in our mind. After so wishing, we may do the action on our own (body), or tell someone else to do it (speech). All actions of the body and speech must be preceded by the wish of mind. The mind forces body and speech to follow it; if we can control the mind, then other kinds of bad action can be avoided. Mind is very difficult to control, because its actions are so quick—many unskillful actions of mind are possible in one minute. For instance, if we want to harm someone else we can think of many different ways of doing so in one brief moment. Unskillful actions of mind happen so quickly that they cannot be counted; unskillful actions of speech are slower, and unskillful actions of body are the slowest of all. The first essential is to practice control of the mind. If we don't control our minds and just follow desires and instincts, we will not lead a good life.

All the sufferings of all beings in samsara are produced by mind. Beings out of samsara, in permanent bliss, are in that state because they developed their minds. Body and speech are only servants of the mind.

Klesha (mental defilement)

Karma results from klesha; mental defilement. Karma and klesha are both considered avarana. Avarana literally means “covering” — an avarana covers the mind, obscuring the realization of nirvana. Karma and klesha together make up kleshavarana. There is also another kind of avarana, which remains even in the arhat stage after karma and klesha have disappeared. This is called jneyavarana, “the covering of what can be known,” or obscuration to omniscience.

Klesha is the immediate cause of karma; karma causes suffering. If we can remove klesha, we can stop the flow of karma, prevent suffering from arising, and reach nirvana—though not the ultimate nirvana. Jneyavarana still remains in varying degrees in both arhats and bodhisattvas, and is finally removed only when the Buddha stage is attained.

In the scriptures, kleshavarana is said to have eighty-four thousand different forms. They can be simplified into three main categories, from which the others come or in which the others are included: desire, aversion, and ignorance.

Desire

Desire is easily distinguishable from aversion. Desire must have an object and it makes the object seem more beautiful and attractive than it really is. Desire causes unskillful karma in any of the following ways. If we desire to eat meat, we kill animals; if we desire property, we are inclined to steal it; if we desire intercourse, we may commit sexual misconduct. In the desire to create a false impression, we may lie; to obtain a desired object or goal, we may slander others; although aversion is more usually the cause, desire too may cause us to speak harsh words; in the grip of attraction to foolish things, we waste ourselves in irresponsible talk. Desire is the direct cause of greed; desire for the possessions of others can produce harmful thoughts. In brief, then, if any being, from a human down to the smallest insect, desires something and this desire produces an unskillful action, that action has arisen from the klesha of desire.

Aversion

Aversion is the opposite of desire: it makes its object seem worse than it is. Aversion can easily produce killing, and out of spite or the wish to deprive someone, it can cause stealing or sexual misconduct. Lying and slander are commonly caused by aversion, and harsh words usually arise from it. Irresponsible talk too can be the result of aversion, as when a person talks at length in a derogatory manner about another. Although greed is not produced by aversion, malice usually is.

When we have desire it is not as painful as aversion. It can bring temporary happiness with it, and this makes us want to be very close to the object. Aversion always produces pain immediately; we want to be very far from its object. In the scriptures, desire is likened to a flower, which is very beautiful at first but soon changes and becomes ugly, while aversion is likened to a wasp, which only stings. The face of a person filled with desire is bright and shining; the face of a person filled with aversion is grim and dark.

Ignorance

All unskillful actions except wrong views, which are always produced by ignorance, can result from desire and aversion. Although we can be misled by the ignorance of our teachers, wrong views are, fundamentally, the result of our own ignorance. Desire and aversion are active, making things seem better or worse than they are; ignorance is the failure to realize the nature of things. If we kill, not out of aversion or desire, but because we don't think it wrong or perhaps even think it good, this is the direct result of ignorance. Any unskillful act that arises from not knowing that it is unskillful is partly rooted in ignorance. For instance, people who make animal sacrifices think that they are doing something good—they have no ill-will toward or desire for the animal; they simply believe that killing the animal will please their god.

Fear can be good, bad, or indifferent. If we have done a bad deed and repent out of fear of the karma-fruit, the fear is reasonable and wholesome in its effects. That very fear can lead us to practice Dharma and thence toward enlightenment. If we are afraid to practice Dharma because we are afraid that the practice will prove harmful in some way, this fear is the fruit of ignorance. When children are afraid of the dark, fearing ghosts and so on, this is neither good nor bad. Similarly, while the fear of death is produced by our desire of clinging to life, the fear itself is neither good nor bad.

Desire and aversion are both produced by ignorance. We experience them because we do not know the real nature of things.

The reason for practicing meditation is to overcome suffering; to overcome suffering we must overcome karma; to overcome karma we must overcome desire and aversion; to overcome desire and aversion we must overcome ignorance. Meditation overcomes ignorance.

No beings want suffering; they all want to remove it. Most do not know how to, and some even create suffering in their efforts to remove it. People take medicines that cure sickness temporarily but cannot remove it forever. To remove suffering permanently, we must find its cause—karma; we must remove the cause of the cause—desire and aversion; we must remove the cause of these — ignorance. Ignorance is the deepest root of all suffering. If ignorance is removed, all that stems from it will automatically disappear. Escape from samsara is impossible unless ignorance is removed. If we sit in meditation without understanding the real reason for doing so we will achieve only limited results.

If we want to remove ignorance, we must first discover its nature and that of its opposite, shunyata (emptiness). Then, through meditation on emptiness, we have to remove ignorance.

Colophon:

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Samsara and Nirvana

by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Excerpt from a teaching given by Lama Zopa Rinpoche in September 1983 at Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa, Italy.

Evolution of samsara

When we do meditation on shunyata and we do the four-fold analysis using different reasons to see the object of ignorance, the truly existent I, as empty, after we have used logic, if there is still something left, if somewhere inside there is an I left: the observer, the examiner, the seeker; if the I is left way inside and appears to be truly existent, then that is not meditating on shunyata. Even if you are not seeing any substantial thing, you are not meditating on shunyata. It is like looking at space, like looking through the window into space.

In that kind of meditation you are still clinging to the I as truly existent. You are meditating on the I as an illusion but still thinking that it is true. After you have used the logic, when you place the mind on emptiness it should appear as though the I does not exist; the seeker, the self does not exist.

That is why one great yogi, Changya Dorje, advised, “You don’t need to seek the I. What you have to seek is yourself.” He is saying that you don’t need to seek the I as an object—you the subject seeking I the object. That is what this great yogi is saying. You don’t need to seek the I as an outside object, what you have to seek is the seeker—that means the refuting object, the I, the truly existent I. You are seeking that in order to realize it as empty.

Normally, as I mentioned yesterday, the I that is merely labeled on these aggregates appears as though it were not merely labeled from its own side and you cling to that appearance. It is similar with the aggregates, they appear to us as though truly existent and because of this so do all the five sense objects. The formless and the touchable objects, everything appears to be truly existent and we cling to that.

So you see, according to how things appear and we believe in them, all our life is illusory! Our whole life—happy or suffering—is all a complete hallucination. You remember, yesterday, that I gave many examples of how things are merely labeled, how things exist by merely labeling. In reality, that is how things exist, how everything exists.

With this ignorance holding the I as truly existent as one meets with different objects different delusions arise. When one meets desirable objects attachment rises, with undesirable objects anger rises, and with indifferent objects ignorance rises.

With regard to karma, there is no way that an action performed with anger and ignorance of true existence can be virtuous. It cannot be a virtuous compounding action, only a non-virtuous compounding action. But the karma of actions performed with attachment and ignorance of true existence can be virtuous and non-virtuous.

This can be related to the evolution of samsara where so many problems come from. In our case, at the time of death, before this life, the virtuous positive result manifested, so we were born as human. The compounding virtuous action comes from practicing moral conduct. This can be done out of ignorance or attachment. Then the virtuous compounding action leaves a seed on the consciousness.

There are many details about karma. I am not going to talk about these details.

Amongst the virtuous actions, there are different kinds of virtue: there are virtuous deluded and non-deluded actions. Then there are immovable actions which are virtuous. Immovable karma causes birth in the state of the four stable concentrations. With regards movable karma, there is virtuous and non-virtuous.

One example of movable karma is a person who has created much negative karma in this life and that karma is very strong at the time of death. By the power of the lama who has high attainments, tantric realizations, and also, of course, by the power of his karma, even if he is in the process of being born in the realm of the suffering transmigrators the consciousness can be transferred while he's in the intermediate state. He may have the body of an intermediate state being that would lead to an animal or preta rebirth but still the consciousness can be transferred to the upper realms or maybe also to a pure realm. There are also other examples.

So in the past life one did virtuous moral actions, such as practicing moral conduct, things like that, making prayers to receive this human body, and that left seeds, the potential, on the consciousness. Then whatever the rebirth was just before this, whether it was a human being or a suffering transmigratory being, at the time of death the seeds ripened.

So much karma has been collected, it is uncountable. There can be so many virtuous and so many non-virtuous karmas. So at the time of death, if there is so much karma to be experienced, so many potentials of karma, then how is the rebirth decided?

It is like this: when you plant a seed in the garden, which one will grow first? It is quite similar to a garden. Whichever seed has more minerals, more perfect conditions, that will grow first. Amongst all these karmas there are many virtuous ones and many non-virtuous ones. Whichever is stronger, heavier, that will ripen first and bring the rebirth.

If all these karmas are equally heavy, which will be experienced first? Whichever is closest to fruition, that will be experienced first. If those karmas are all the same, being equally close to fruition, which karma will be experienced first? The one which is more habitual, that will bring the result first.

If those karmas that are habitual are equal, which will bring the result first? Then, it is like planting seeds for flowers, whichever is planted first will sprout first. Of all these karmas, whichever was created first, that will be experienced first. (First does not only mean in this life.) Amongst these karmas, whichever was accumulated first will bring the result first.

So whatever rebirth we may have had just before this life, at the time of death it was the virtuous karma to be born as a human being that was strongest and ready to be experienced.

The potential of the virtuous karma is experienced because of the two disturbing thoughts, craving and grasping. An example of the difference between craving and grasping is when you go shopping. First you have the intention to buy something, the desire to buy it, then if you are able to afford it and you like it you put your hand in your pocket and make the determination to get it. The stronger desire to get it is the grasping. It is these two, wishing and desiring the human rebirth, that ripen the potential for human karma.

When the karma is ready to be experienced, like a child that is ready to come out of the pregnant mother, one is reborn into the intermediate state of the human being. When the time for staying in the intermediate state is finished you find a place to be reborn and the consciousness transfers to the fertilized egg.

There are seven results to be completed: *Rebirth*—the consciousness taking place on the fertilized egg is one result. Then, *name and form*. Name means the formless aggregates, the aggregates of feeling, the compounding aggregates and recognition. They are formless so they are called name. Form is the physical part which can be seen by the eye. Name is the other formless aggregates, not including the consciousness. Then the *six sense bases* are actualized. After that there is *contact*. After contact, as a result *feeling* is actualized.

Rebirth occurs when the consciousness takes place on the fertilized egg. Rebirth is not when the baby comes out.

All these have been experienced. *Rebirth* has already been experienced, *old age* is being experienced, so of these seven results the only one left for us to experience is *death*.

The conclusion is that as you can see now, we have created this human condition. The fact that we suffer from hunger and thirst, hot and cold, that we have to worry, that we keep the body so busy, that we have to study for many years to take care of our bodies and that we have to be busy day and night, all these problems come from having taken this samsaric rebirth and this was created by oneself.

You remember now that over the last three or four days I have been talking about the ignorance of true existence and the truly existent I? We talked and meditated on this. You see, the reason why we have created this samsara, this suffering realm, is because we have been following this ignorance of true existence, clinging to the I that is empty of true existence as though it were truly existent. That is the whole mistake.

So now you can see how harmful it is, this ignorance that clings to the I as truly existent. This is our greatest mistake, it is the very root of our problems.

Now you can see how incredibly important it is to work day and night this year, this month, this week, even today, within this hour, within this second to cut off this ignorance, to realize the object of ignorance as empty.

All the other things that we normally worry about and think of as important are nothing, they are lost in comparison.

Please meditate on shunyata.

(Saturday, 10 September)

Yesterday, when I was talking about karma I left one out. There is virtuous, non-virtuous and also indifferent karma. There is indifferent karma because there is the indifferent mind. Indifferent feeling is also possible. There are suffering, happy and indifferent feelings. Indifferent feeling can be the result of indifferent karma.

Yesterday, I explained the twelve links of dependent arising, the twelve branches of these present samsaric aggregates, so you got some idea of how these samsaric aggregates, this suffering realm, came from the ignorance; not understanding the absolute nature of the I, the hallucinated I. Ignorance clings to the I as truly existent and from this comes the evolution of the twelve links: craving and grasping, then compounded action and ‘becoming’—when the potential that is left on the consciousness is ripened by craving and grasping at the time of death. There are two karmas, two actions and three delusions.

I explained yesterday how the seven results are actualized from this, so these aggregates, this samsara, is caused by the disturbing thoughts and karma.

This is one way to understand how these aggregates are under the control of the disturbing thoughts and karma. Not free. They are under the control of the disturbing thoughts and karma, so the result is suffering. The aggregates are impure and their origin is also impure. Not only are they caused by the disturbing thoughts and karma, but they are also contaminated with the seed of disturbing thoughts.

Because the aggregates are contaminated with the seed of disturbing thoughts, even if we don’t have anger now, at this moment, still if I were to say something suddenly that might hurt the self-cherishing attitude, anger could come. Even if there is no anger now, if somebody were to come along after the session and say something in front of you that was not nice, anger could suddenly arise.

Similarly, even though now, at this moment, there is no attachment rising, suddenly, when you meet the object, attachment rises. It is the same thing when you meet the indifferent object, ignorance rises. This shows again how the aggregates are under the control of the disturbing thoughts and karma.

I don’t know how Western scientists explain why, when you meet different objects, different disturbing thoughts arise. Do they say that it has something to do with the different atoms in the body? That the father has anger and attachment and all these things so it comes from him? And the mother has anger and attachment and all these things, so you get them from your mother? You get your body from your father and mother along with the atoms of anger and attachment?

Does anybody here know how they explain why when you meet an object these different disturbing thoughts arise? How do they explain that? Since there is no reincarnation, the only thing you have to blame it on is the parents!

George : Some come from the environment, some are genetic. Some people say it is mainly genetic,

some say it is mainly environmental, so then they say it is both.

Rinpoche: They won't accept that a being exists apart from its genetic structure? Then what if the parents don't have that type of gene?

Neil: Some cells may come from grandparents' grandparents. Even if it is from thousands of generations back, there is still a chance for it to come out.

Rinpoche: I see—somebody started it!

George: Or it may come about because some chromosomes or genes have changed due to heat, cosmic rays or mutation. I think they say that most factors come from the environment, how we grew up and the experiences of this life on the one hand, and on the other hand, from the genetic structure that we inherited.

Neil: I think genetic malfunctioning is also another explanation for some diseases. There is a certain lack of this or that in the chromosomes, certain factors missing and this causes certain mental diseases and problems.

Rinpoche: In this case, it looks like the best solution is death! (laughing) Do the scientists give any explanation of how to live life without being confused by attachment, anger and ignorance?

Sylvie: A few years ago there was a program on television. It reported the case of a woman who had incredible anger. She used to go around smashing shop windows, etc. So the doctors decided to do lobotomy, to operate on the spot in the brain where anger arises. They observed her for a long time to find the spot and then they operated on it. After the operation she no longer did such angry actions, but the program finished by saying that although she could not manifest these physical actions of anger, she was still getting incredible emotional feelings. She could not be violent, but something was still coming back to her.

Rinpoche: That is like trying to stop the physical appearance. There was no change in the person's mind, so still there is a problem, some force comes that is not happiness, that is not peacefulness.

It seems that even though they talk about genetics and many other things, there is something contained in this genetic structure that is continually there, even if many people do not experience it in between.

George: They have explanations that when the mother's egg and the father's sperm unite they react in some way to give slightly different combinations, so the child has a different body and a different brain.

Rinpoche: So what? You are not talking about anger and those things. Is there a particular gene that causes them?

George: I don't know if they are actually saying that.

Neil: I said that it can be carried on from the grandparents even if in between generations it did not show.

George : They say that if someone has much anger it may be because the brain has a certain shape or the blood-vessels are a certain way or there is some malformation. Those things may be the seeds, the potential, for anger from very far back. It may be that anger changes the brain and then the person has the potential, the personality, to get angry. I think that is one explanation, but there are others.

To Western people it sounds quite plausible that some seed for the physical change is in the chromosomes and can be a contributive factor to how our mind works.

Rinpoche: Then isn't it possible to have a physical reaction without always becoming anger, without anger rising?

George : They would say yes.

Rinpoche: Sometimes there is anger, sometimes there is no anger, and still those physical changes are happening?

George : It is also due to environmental things. What you see, what you have learned, and also the way that you eat—chemicals, LSD, and aspirin all have an effect on the nervous system.

Connie : They also say that the experience of being born is so traumatic, especially in hospitals, that because of this traumatic experience many negative energies are generated in the person that later result in much anger and other mental problems.

Rinpoche: So everyone has anger? Everyone has the seed of anger? Do they say that everyone has the seed of anger?

George : I think they would not use that term, but they would say that everyone could get angry.

Rinpoche: (laughing) Can get angry...!

George : Probably people think it is healthy, a natural response.

Rinpoche: Do they accept cessation of anger? That you can make it impossible for anger, attachment, and ignorance to arise?

(No answer.)

The suffering nature of samsaric life

We are under the control of the disturbing thoughts—attachment, ignorance, and anger—because there is the seed of the disturbing thoughts. Even though there is no anger now, even though there is no attachment, none of those disturbing thoughts, when we meet the disturbing objects, suddenly pride arises, suddenly the jealous mind arises, suddenly attachment rises.

When we meditate we do not have the freedom to use the mind and the body as we wish to create virtue. Even if we wish to have five minutes quiet, five minutes realization, not to have any distractions in the mind but to have single-pointed meditation, still when we do the meditation or recitation on

Chenrezig or watching the mind, this does not happen. Although we wish to have five minutes without any sinking thought, scattering attachment or any hindrances like this, we cannot concentrate continuously. We are disturbed. Even if we are doing lam rim, the analytical meditation, at first we can do maybe one minute or five minutes, but then the mind is disturbed. One is unable to continue, unable to keep the mind in virtue.

It is the same with the body. Even if we wish to sit for a long time and meditate, or to do purification practice, doing prostrations, the virtuous physical action, after half an hour or an hour, sooner or later, pain comes. One can't stand sitting, and can't stand doing prostrations, the virtuous physical actions.

This shows that we are under the control of the disturbing thoughts and karma. These experiences of ours show that we are under the control of the disturbing thoughts and karma. They are the signs that we have not yet been liberated from karma and disturbing thoughts, from their bondage. Therefore, in the teachings these aggregates are called the deluded aggregates—the deluded aggregates of craving and grasping.

Why are they called the deluded aggregates? Because they are contaminated with the seed of the disturbing thoughts: craving and grasping. They come from the disturbing thoughts of craving and grasping so they are called the deluded aggregates of craving and grasping.

Of the three types of suffering in samsara, these deluded aggregates of craving and grasping are the fundamental suffering, the pervasive suffering of compounded action. Normally, I think, one says 'pervasive suffering,' just that. The pervasive suffering of the compounded action.

Since we have these aggregates, when we meet with different objects we experience the three types of feeling: the suffering, indifferent, and happy feelings.

Even if one has not studied the Dharma, does not practice meditation, and does not understand Buddhadharma, one can still understand suffering feeling. Even animals wish to be free from the suffering feeling, pain. The suffering feeling is the suffering of suffering. Even if one has not studied Buddhadharma, one is able to recognize this.

Then there is the happy feeling. Most of the happiness in samsara is in the nature of suffering. Most samsaric pleasures are in the nature of suffering. Guru Shakyamuni taught his younger brother that eating, walking, sitting and sleeping, each of these should be understood separately as being in the nature of suffering.

When the meditator is only performing the action of eating, not doing any other actions like sitting, walking or sleeping, that action makes the person suffer. They experience great pain, great discomfort. It is very rough, the opposite of smooth, not beautiful. It brings unceasing pain.

You see, when we take the first spoonful of food, there is the experience of pleasure. When we are hungry, it appears to be pleasure. That happens because the suffering of hunger starts to decrease from great to small as soon as you take some food. But another discomfort now starts from very small.

Right after you have taken some food for the very first time, the discomfort starts—the discomfort of

having taken food in the stomach. Then, as you keep on eating, taking more and more food, the discomfort gradually increases from small to great. After some time you cannot stand any more eating! So, as the suffering of hunger from being great becomes small, the suffering of eating, of having food in the stomach, starts, and on that feeling we label pleasure.

On that feeling we label pleasure, so pleasure is labeled on a base that is suffering. If the base on which you label pleasure were not suffering, if that were pure happiness, ultimate happiness, then when the other heavy suffering stopped, started to decrease, another suffering would not have started from small.

If that feeling was really pure happiness, then if you kept on eating from morning until night, after twenty-four hours there would be incredible pleasure. And if the person carried on eating for one year, then imagine, you cannot figure out how much pleasure there would be!

You see, at the beginning, when we started to eat the discomfort of eating is so small that we are not aware of it. But as we carry on the action of eating the discomfort builds up, and as it builds up we become aware of it. The whole point is that we are not aware of it as discomfort, and while we are not aware of this we call it pleasure. So in fact it is like that. (laughing)

Similarly, after we have been sitting down for a long time we become tired of sitting so we stand up. But when we stand up the same thing happens. The discomfort of standing starts from very small and the tiredness of sitting decreases from great to small. So that again we label pleasure.

Then similarly when we feel hot and we enter a cold place. To begin with the heavy suffering of being hot decreases and the discomfort of being cold starts from small. When your body is feeling burnt, as soon as you enter cold water the discomfort of cold starts from small— and you call that pleasure.

If that were pure happiness, if it were not labeled on the base that is suffering, then if you lived in the water for one year with your naked body, it would be unbelievable, incredible bliss. However, that does not happen. That is not the reality. The reality is that there is more and more discomfort. The more we stand, the more we sit, the more we eat, the more we walk, the more we keep our body in the water, in reality, is more and more discomfort. This shows, experience proves that what we label pleasure is not pure happiness.

All samsaric pleasures are called the suffering of change. The suffering of change does not mean that happiness is something that is labeled on the base of suffering and after some time stops, so it is the suffering of change. Not only that! You see, while it is changing, while you are experiencing the pleasure, if you analyze, if you think about the base on which you are labeling the pleasure and you check up, you will see that it is decreasing. The pleasure itself is suffering. All samsaric pleasures are suffering. It is not that those pleasant feelings, the samsaric pleasures, are suffering feeling. They are not suffering feeling.

There are three feelings: suffering feeling, happy feeling, and indifferent feeling. The samsaric pleasures are not suffering feeling, but they are suffering.

Rinpoche : What do you say George? Are the samsaric pleasures suffering?

George : They are in the nature of suffering.

Rinpoche : Are they suffering or not?

George : They are in the nature of suffering.

Rinpoche : They are in the nature of suffering, but they are not suffering? Are they not suffering? When you experience the suffering of change, when you experience samsaric pleasure, are you not experiencing suffering? If something is in the nature of fire, should it be fire or not?

George : A fire bar, an electric fire bar, is in the nature of fire, but it is not fire.

Rinpoche : Okay, electricity is not in the nature of fire, it is not the nature of burning?

George : If it was fire then there would be smoke.

Rinpoche : If the electricity is in the nature of burning, isn't it fire? Isn't that the definition of fire?

George : Hot and burning.

Rinpoche : Yes, hot and burning.

George : The electric bar is hot but it is not burning.

Rinpoche : It does not burn.

George : It is not burning. It burns the hand but it does not burn.

Rinpoche : It does not burn? It burns the hand then it is okay, then it burns.

George : If it burns the hand then it does not necessarily have to be burning itself.

Rinpoche : I see, then the fire is also not fire. Fire is not fire because fire does not burn fire.

George : It's nature is burning.

Rinpoche : We go back, you said that the suffering of change has nature of suffering, and you said that the nature of suffering is not suffering.

George : It is not suffering feeling.

Rinpoche : It is not suffering feeling, but it is suffering?

George : It is not suffering feeling.

Rinpoche : It is not suffering feeling? It is not suffering?

George : It is in the nature of suffering.

Rinpoche : It is the nature of suffering?

George : It has the nature of suffering.

Rinpoche : It has the nature of suffering, but that is not suffering?

George : It is not suffering feeling.

Rinpoche : Okay, that is not suffering. Then, is that happiness? So that is happiness? Suffering? You said it is not suffering? Isn't that samsaric suffering? The suffering of change, isn't that samsaric suffering?

George : It is called samsaric happiness, but it is in the nature of suffering.

Rinpoche : It is not samsaric suffering, so it is in the nature of what? If it is not in the nature of suffering, it is in the nature of happiness.

George : Jeffrey Hopkins calls the relative truth 'truth for a jerk.' For a jerk or a samsaric person it appears to be and it is experienced as happiness. In reality it is constant suffering. It is only called happiness because one suffering is going down and is not as great as the other.

Rinpoche : So that is samsaric suffering or not? Is that samsaric suffering and samsaric happiness? Both?

George : It is not called samsaric suffering.

Rinpoche : It is not? It is not samsaric suffering?

George : It is not called samsaric suffering?

Rinpoche : It is samsaric suffering but it is not samsaric suffering? That is dependent on the labeling, on how it is labeled.

Guru Shakyamuni Buddha said this, that when one suffering stops another suffering arises, and we label that 'pleasure'. You see, when we stop one action and start another action, at that time, even though there appears to be some pleasure, that is actually only merely labeled on the base of suffering. In fact, as one suffering stopped, another suffering began. It arises in the nature of compounding and it stops in the nature of compounding—compounding action.

When you sit down after a long time of standing, the action of standing compounding the suffering stops. Now, when you are sitting down, the action of sitting compounds and builds up the suffering. When the action stops, that stops the compounded action, and when it starts, when it arises, it arises in the nature of compounded action. Compounding what? Compounding suffering. So, all these actions are compounding suffering. All these actions: eating, working, sitting—all these.

Whatever we do is suffering. Even if we eat, it is suffering; even if we sit, it is suffering; even if we stand, it is suffering; even if we walk, it is suffering; even if we sleep, it is suffering. Whatever we do, until we are liberated from samsara, is suffering.

Awareness of this suffering of change is very good for controlling attachment. This does not mean that one should not experience pleasure. The problem is that we cling to that pleasure, that is the problem.

It is very good to be aware of how samsaric pleasures are in the nature of suffering, it is very helpful for controlling the dissatisfied mind. It is the dissatisfied mind, attachment, that ties us to samsara, causing us to be born and to die, to experience all these problems.

So, if it is suffering, it does not have to be suffering feeling because the connotation of suffering feeling and the feeling of pleasure is different.

(Sunday, 11 September)

What makes actions “Dharma”

As I explained over the last few days, the happiness that we wish and the suffering that we do not wish are not created by others but only by one’s own mind. They come from one’s own mind.

I often use the example advised by Phabongkha Rinpoche. Rinpoche was a great yogi who completed the experience of the whole graduated path to enlightenment, he was the root guru of His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche— one of His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s root gurus. Rinpoche gave an example of four people who recite the Tara prayer, to show which actions become the cause of happiness and which actions do not become the cause of happiness; which attitude makes the action become the cause of happiness and which attitude makes the action a cause for suffering.

The first person recites the Tara prayer with worldly concern. He is concerned just for this life which may only last a few months or a few years, he wants to have a long life or to have powers or something like that. He is only just concerned with the comfort of this life, clinging to this life.

The second person recites the prayer with the attitude wishing not for this life’s comfort, but for the happiness of future lives. With that attitude he recites this prayer.

The third person recites the prayer not just to have happiness in future lives, not only that, but to achieve ultimate happiness, the everlasting happiness, liberation from the bondage of karma and disturbing thoughts that bind us to these aggregates, to samsara. He wants to be liberated from the deluded aggregates of craving and grasping.

The fourth person recites the prayer with the attitude wishing to achieve the state of omniscient mind, to free all the sentient beings from suffering and to lead them to the peerless happiness.

So the fourth person’s action of saying the prayer becomes the cause for achieving peerless happiness, the omniscient mind, because the action is possessed by the most pure attitude, the thought of bodhichitta, the altruistic mind of enlightenment.

The third person's action of saying the prayer is not possessed by the most pure attitude—the altruistic thought of enlightenment, the peerless happiness, which means the thought to benefit all sentient beings. It is not possessed by that, the action is possessed only by the thought of liberating himself from karma and disturbing thoughts that bind him to samsara. So his action of saying the prayer only becomes the cause for him to reach liberation—liberation from samsara—just that.

Then the second person. His action of saying the prayer is not possessed by the altruistic mind of enlightenment, so it does not become the cause of enlightenment. The action was not even possessed by the thought of renouncing samsara, so it does not become the cause of liberation. As the action is only possessed by the attitude wishing to have happiness in future lives, it only becomes the cause for the happiness of future lives.

Now the first person. His action of saying the prayer is not possessed by the altruistic mind of the omniscient mind, so it does not become the cause for the peerless happiness, the omniscient mind. It is not possessed by the thought of renouncing samsara, so it does not become the cause for achieving liberation from samsara, everlasting happiness. The action is not possessed by the Dharma attitude, not even possessed by the virtuous attitude, seeking at least the happiness of future lives, so it does not become the cause for happiness in future lives. That person's attitude does not become Dharma.

Because of their attitude, the actions of the three others become Dharma, but the first person's action does not become Dharma. Even though the prayer that he is reciting is Dharma, his action of saying the prayer does not become Dharma. The attitude is non-virtuous, so the action becomes non-virtuous. It does not even cause the happiness of future lives.

Reciting mantra and saying prayers is like taking medicine. Normally, when you take medicine you recover from the disease. That is what is supposed to happen because mantra and those texts like the teachings on Prajñāparamita on shunyata, those profound teachings of Buddha, the tantra teachings have much power. So, even if the person's action does not become Dharma, the power of the mantra and scriptures prevents hindrances to life, such as untimely death, and stops diseases when medicine does not help. Things like that happen due to the power of the teachings. In a similar way, when you get diarrhea you take medicine and it stops.

Fasting is similar. People think that when someone fasts for a long time—one week or something like that—that it is a great, special Dharma practice. This is the same as the example with the prayer: it is all dependent. Whether or not that fasting is spiritual practice, whether it becomes Dharma or not is dependent on the attitude.

Again, you can take the example of four people. One person fasts just to be healthy in this life, to have a long life, just for his own happiness, not even for the happiness of future lives. He does not have the skillful selfless attitude, wanting to practice Dharma to be free from samsara, from karma and disturbing thoughts. He only has the unskillful selfish attitude that doesn't even allow the action to become virtue, leading to happiness beyond this life up to enlightenment. He only wants to have a long life and happiness for just these few months, or these few years—such a short time. This kind of fasting does not become Dharma, it does not become spiritual practice, it becomes worldly practice. When the attitude is one of worldly concern, the action becomes a worldly action, the practice of worldly dharma.

Lama Atisha—one highly realized pandit who reestablished Buddhadharma in Tibet—was asked by his closest disciple Dromtonpa, who was the embodiment of Chenrezig, “What will be the result of an action done with worldly concern?” Lama Atisha answered, “The result will be rebirth in the preta, narak, or animal realms.” That means ultimate actions that are not possessed by worldly concern result in happiness in the upper realms.

Whether a worldly action is spiritual, whether it is Dharma and whether it is the cause of happiness or not, is all dependent not so much on what the action looks like from the outside, but merely on the attitude. It is dependent on the kind of attitude.

From the morning when we get up until night when we go to bed, whether we are working in the kitchen, cleaning the toilet, going somewhere, sitting down, all these things, normally, whatever we are doing, if all these actions are done with the thought of bodhichitta, the altruistic mind, then all these actions become the cause for enlightenment. All actions, from the morning when we wake up until we go to bed, even sleeping, whatever we do in those twenty-four hours, no matter what it is, whether in the city or at home, if they are done with the thought of bodhichitta they all become the cause for gaining the peerless happiness, the omniscient mind, for the sake of the sentient beings.

If those actions were done with the attitude wishing to be free from samsara, then they all become the cause to achieve liberation from samsara, cessation of those disturbing thoughts and karma, the true cause of suffering and all the true sufferings.

If the actions were done with the attitude seeking the happiness of future lives, then all those activities of body, speech and mind become the cause of happiness in future lives.

So, all those actions become Dharma, from the time that we get up to the last one—sleeping—they all become the cause of happiness.

If all those actions are done without being possessed by the thought of benefiting other sentient beings, the person does not create good karma or fortune. As they are done only with the non-virtuous attitude they become non-virtue and cause only suffering.

Whether the person is leading a spiritual life or not does not depend on how they look from outside—whether he is keeping silence, or saying many prayers, or always living in a cave, not seeing people. Those actions do not define practicing Dharma or leading a spiritual life, leading a pure life. The definition comes from the attitude.

The importance of right attitude

Our mind has the potential: our mind is not oneness with anger, not oneness with attachment—those disturbing minds—not oneness with ignorance. In the same way that a white cloth is not oneness with dirt, so can be washed and separated away from the dirt, from the individual’s side, like washing cloth, if one tries to practice Dharma, if one tries to develop the pure mind and to protect the mind from the disturbing thoughts which bring unhappiness and problems in everyday life, definitely it gets developed. If you leave the cloth unwashed then it stays dirty, if you try to wash it, then it becomes clean. This is similar.

People think good luck is something independent, that success is independent, and that fortune is independent. Actually, if it were independent you would not experience it. Because it is dependent we experience it.

Thinking that it is independent—not dependent on cause, condition and creator/the doer—is like thinking that nothing depends on others. If luck and fortune did not depend on others at all, then how could we experience them? No way. That luck would be like a penniless person who does not have one lira having a million dollars? Do you understand? You did not understand?

If luck and fortune were independent—not dependent on cause, condition and the doer—if fortune did not at all depend on others...

The flower is dependent on the stem and the sprout, the sprout is dependent on the seed, the seed is dependent on other things, on minerals and conditions—it grows by depending on others, it exists by depending on others. The house exists by depending on others—the causes and conditions, the people who built it. It is all dependent on others. By depending on others it exists.

Then, as we recited many times before, it exists by depending on the base, the thought which labels, and the label. It depends on other things so it is dependent, it is not independent. If it were independent, not depending on others at all, then our experience of good luck would be like a penniless person who does not have one lira having a million dollars. Is that possible? No! No, so (laughing) that is not possible, so independent luck or fortune are impossible to experience. If they were independent, it would be impossible for us to experience them.

Our success, our luck and our good fortune are dependent on our attitude, on our mind. How much good luck, how much fortune, how much success and how much happiness we have is dependent on our everyday life attitude. However much we have had is already finished. How much we are going to have is dependent arising. It is dependent on our everyday life attitude—as I explained just now—on our attitude twenty-four hours of the day. It depends on the different types of attitude and ways of thinking. One way of thinking disturbs our happiness, one way of thinking becomes the cause of happiness.

The whole point is to study these subjects, to know these things and always watch the mind, always correct the mind. Try to correct wrong thinking which disturbs the happiness, which brings suffering and confusion, and practice the correct way of thinking.

If luck and fortune were independent, as people normally believe, and just happen without cause, then you would have no choice, no freedom. That is a wrong conception, and only makes you more upset because you have no freedom. However, in reality it is not like that. They are dependent on your attitude, on your everyday attitude. Therefore, you have much more freedom for the preparation of happiness, to create good karma and fortune. Knowing this, instead of being depressed we can always be happy.

Understanding our suffering nature

Continuing with yesterday's subject—the samsaric pleasures I think personally it is very effective for

the mind to think of samsaric pleasures as the suffering of change. That is very good for controlling the dissatisfactory mind.

Samsaric suffering is suffering but does not have to be the suffering of suffering. Samsaric pleasure is samsaric suffering because it is the suffering of change. The suffering of suffering and the suffering of pleasure are contradictory, but they are both samsaric suffering.

So, what do you think? Samsaric pleasure is contradictory to the suffering of suffering but is not contradictory to samsaric suffering? George?

George : According to that, samsaric pleasure is samsaric suffering. That is not sensible.

Rinpoche : Is it not samsaric suffering? Then what is it? Is it not suffering? Is it not samsaric suffering? Is it not the suffering of changes? You cut off the suffering and it changes.

George : You said, samsaric pleasure is samsaric suffering.

Rinpoche : Yeah, is it not? If it is not, then is it the object of renunciation? Isn't samsaric pleasure the object of renunciation?

Anyway, as I mentioned yesterday when talking about the suffering of changes, as long as we are not liberated from samsara, whatever we do—even if we sit, even if we walk, even if we eat—it is suffering. Even if we sleep, it is suffering. It is like that. Similarly, even if we live in city it is suffering, even we are going to live in the countryside it is suffering, even if we live on a high mountain it is suffering, even if we stay at home it is suffering, even if we go to the beach it is suffering. Even if we live a business life it is suffering, even if we live a farmer's life it is suffering. Whatever lifestyle you have; as a president it is suffering, even if you are a beggar it is suffering, even if one is of high rank it is suffering, even if one is a lower person it is suffering—it is all suffering.

It is the same thing when you are watching television: the people who are playing football are suffering, the people who are watching are suffering. I heard also that the people who make jokes on television have much worry if people do not laugh, if they do not become successful.

Wherever we look, whatever style of life we live, even we live a high society life, even we live a hippie life, it is suffering. You want to become a pilot, “Oh, I want to become a pilot, then I will be very happy” But then again there is the same problem, it is the same thing. Then, maybe you want to get involved with the circus—again it is the same, again it is suffering.

A water bubble comes from the water, from the lake, without the water there would not be the bubble. In a similar way, without these things that I have been describing since the beginning of the course: the evolution of samsara, the deluded aggregates of craving and grasping, the pervasive suffering of compounding action, it would not be possible to experience suffering.

Sometimes ‘pervasive suffering of compounding action’ is also translated as ‘compounded pervasive suffering.’ The pervasive suffering of compounded action is a more correct way of translating the Tibetan. Compounding suffering, pervasive compounding suffering makes sense. It shows that this

suffering does something, compounds something, it has meaning.

Without this pervasive suffering of compounded action, the deluded aggregates of craving and grasping, samsara, there would be no way of experiencing the suffering of suffering, the suffering of death, rebirth, all the suffering of depression, aggression and all those problems. There would not be the problem of meeting with the undesirable object, not finding the desirable object, and all the fears, worries and dissatisfaction. There would be no way of experiencing all these things. This pervasive suffering of compounded action becomes the base for the suffering of suffering.

It is the same with the suffering of change. Without this suffering of compounded action, the deluded aggregates of craving and grasping, there would be no way of experiencing the suffering of changes.

Suffering feeling is the suffering we know. The feeling of pleasure, that is the suffering of change, as I explained yesterday. The third one, the one that is left, is indifferent feeling—even that is suffering. Even if we don't have the feeling of suffering or the feeling of pleasure, there is indifferent feeling, and even that is suffering. As long as there is the seed of disturbing thoughts, as long as we have these aggregates that are under the control of the disturbing thoughts and karma, there is contamination of the seed of disturbing thoughts.

Now you understand why suffering is pervasive: these deluded aggregates of craving and grasping become the base for the other sufferings—the suffering of suffering and the suffering of changes—that's why it is called pervasive.

And why is it compounding action? Because it comes from ignorance, holding the I as truly existent, and the compounding action is the one that creates the seed of samsara, that leaves the seed on the consciousness. So that is compounding, the cause of samsara—the pervasive suffering of compounding action. This samsara came from that compounding action—like fire comes from a husk. This pervasive suffering of compounded action is the fundamental suffering of samsara, this is the one that we should make all effort to be free from, to liberate ourselves from this.

(Monday, 12 September)

Generating renunciation

I am going to continue with yesterday's subject using it as a motivation. As long as one is not liberated from samsara, the deluded aggregates of craving and grasping, then one has to continuously experience the sufferings of samsara—the dissatisfaction, that nothing is definite and having to take these deluded aggregates of craving and grasping again and again. As the continuation of these deluded aggregates did not have a beginning, from beginningless lifetimes you are caught in this samsara.

As the great bodhisattva Shantideva said in the *Bodhicaryavatara*: “Flesh and bone, though born together get separated. When one is born one is born alone. When one dies, one dies alone. What is the use of the disturbing friend? Even this body has to be left. It is not definite that we will always have this body, it has to be left. When one is born in the lower realms, friends do not come to share the suffering of negative karma collected for them. When one dies, one cannot share that suffering with others.”

Nothing is definite, neither surroundings nor friends. Even if two people seem inseparable in the

beginning, sooner or later they become enemies, distant. Even if in the beginning you feel inseparable and cannot stand, cannot bear to be parted from that friend, the longer you continuously stay with that person, the more you come to dislike him. Although initially you were so afraid of losing him, and didn't want to be apart even for one second, when you actually stay together, sooner or later, gradually you find all the faults, all the bad habits, all the garbage of that person, your friend. The appearance changes, the friend becomes more and more disgusting. Sooner or later you are completely repulsed to see him, it makes you completely vomit. He is an object of complete aversion. You can find no beauty left. He is completely ugly. In the end, it is the complete opposite of how you saw things in the beginning.

It is a shortcoming of samsara that nothing is definite. Even within one day, even within one hour the friend can change and become an enemy. Also, possessions are not definite; it is not definite that you will always possess something, that it will always last.

As Guru Shakyamuni explained in the sutra teachings: The end of meeting is separation; the end of having a high position is to fall down; the end of collecting is to finish collecting; after you become alive, the end is death.

There was a king, or a business leader... There was a group. In that group, one's main interest was to meet friends. Another's main interest was to collect material as much as possible. Another one's main interest was to get a high position. Another one's main interest was to live a long life by doing certain practices—either by taking pills or taking the essence. They had different interests.

Gradually, the one who liked so much to collect material possessions was completely separated from all his possessions. He became poor, his wealth was exhausted. The one who liked so much to meet friends was completely separated from them in the end. The one who liked very much to have a high position fell down lower. The one who's main interest was to have a long life, he was dead. All this happened gradually in a place called Nye-yü. These different changes gradually happened. That is what Guru Shakyamuni Buddha said.

There is no advantage in clinging to the body, no advantage in clinging to surroundings and possessions. Our greatest disease is dissatisfaction.

Lama Tsongkhapa explained in the great *Commentary on the Lam-rim*, “The purpose of enjoying happiness is to get satisfaction, but the more we follow desire, seeking samsaric pleasure, instead of receiving satisfaction one experiences suffering in samsara much longer. That is the result.”

The purpose of following desire, experiencing the sense pleasures, is to get satisfaction. But what actually happens is that the more we follow desire, the more we seek sense pleasure, the more it increases the craving. The pleasure that you get and the suffering that you get are incomparable.

There is no comparison between the pleasure that you experience by following desire and the suffering. The suffering is so much greater—various sufferings for such an incredible length of time. The pleasure is just extremely short, it does not last—a few seconds or a few minutes, so short. The pleasure is experienced in order to get satisfaction, but what happens is that the craving increases. Then, for such incredible lengths of time, one experiences suffering in samsara. Various sufferings.

It is said in the sutra teachings that having desire and continuously following desire in everyday life one gathers many cravings, if one does not become satisfied, what greater disease is there? There is no greater disease than this.

Buddha also said in the teachings that having been born in the hells we have drunk the liquid of molten iron again and again. We have drunk so much, much more than the ocean, the Atlantic. Having been born as a pig, as a dog, we have eaten so many dirty things: if they were collected together the pile would be much greater than Mt Meru, much greater than this earth. The number of tears that we have cried when separating from friends would not even fit in the place of the Atlantic ocean if they were collected, they are so much. If the number of heads that we have had cut off by quarrelling were piled up, the pile would be much higher than Brahma's world, much greater than the whole earth. And, having been born as worms—in the toilet, in the septic tank, in the garbage, in the kaka—and eating these dirty things—rotting fruit, garbage, kaka—if all these things that we have eaten as worms were piled up it would be much greater than this earth. So much.

It is just that we cannot see all our past lives. We don't remember them. If we were able to remember all our past lives, all our suffering, we could not stand not being liberated from samsara even for a second. It is like that. We would be unable to eat food, unable to sleep, without being free. We could not stand being in samsara even for one second.

Buddha said in the sutra teachings—I will just translate it loosely—”Remember the beginningless bodies. Having taken one body which has been left, then another body and which was left. . . remember the beginninglessness of previous bodies. The continuity of samsara did not have a beginning. Remember the beginninglessness of previous bodies wasted by your great desire. Today, in order to seek enlightenment, practice good actions and renounce bad actions.”

What Buddha is saying is that you have taken so many bodies, an uncountable number of bodies over beginningless lifetimes. Even Buddha, even the enlightened mind cannot count how many bodies we have taken. All these have been wasted by following the great desire.

So, by knowing this, by being aware of this, today, to achieve enlightenment for the sake of other sentient beings, renounce the bad, negative actions and practice good actions. Whatever power of mind there is and whatever perseverance use all of that to destroy desire. Renunciation is the practice of goodness, renouncing the badness. In this way, we destroy the desire. Practicing virtue and renouncing non-virtuous things destroys desire.

Remember all the beginningless bodies that we have possessed; wasted by following the great desire. Even though so many buddhas descended, none of these bodies pleased the buddhas, none of these bodies heard teachings directly from any of these buddhas.

However, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, by taking the Mahayana ordination, entered the path, became enlightened, enlightened numberless sentient beings, and even now enlightens numberless sentient beings. Even now, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha is guiding us, gradually leading us from happiness to happiness by revealing the teachings, letting us practice virtue—the cause of happiness.

Generating the renunciation of the Mahayana practitioner

Think: “I have the same potential as Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. Being concerned with only my own happiness, having a selfish attitude, is no higher than a mule’s attitude—it is no higher than them. It is no better than their attitude.

“There is not one sentient being who has not been my mother and as kind as this present life mother (or father or whoever you see as kind in this life, whoever took care of your life). In this same way, all the sentient beings have been kind.

“Without depending on the kindness of sentient beings we cannot begin to practice Dharma, we cannot continue practicing and we cannot accomplish. All the happiness and perfections are accomplished by depending on the kindness of sentient beings. Even enlightenment, the peerless happiness, is reached by depending on the kindness of the sentient beings.

“What the sentient beings wish is happiness, what they do not wish is suffering. Achieving omniscient mind is the only method to free all the sentient beings from all the sufferings and to lead them to the peerless happiness. Therefore, I must achieve the state of omniscient mind.

“That depends on generating the path. The cause of generating the path is moral conduct—practicing moral conduct and thereby accumulating merit. Therefore, to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all the sentient beings I am going to take this Mahayana ordination.”

Generate the attitude of bodhichitta.

(Tuesday, 13 September)

Renunciation leading to liberation and enlightenment

Having aversion only for the suffering of suffering is not the perfect thought of renouncing samsara. Having aversion for the suffering of change by realizing how samsaric pleasures are in the nature of suffering is still not the perfect thought of renouncing samsara.

Even the Hindus, who do not have Buddhadharma as refuge, bored with the outside pleasures, the sense pleasures, look at their shortcomings and seek the inner pleasure that is derived from concentration, samatha, the tranquil abiding meditation.

Through this tranquil abiding meditation they approach the first stage of stable concentration; from there they seek the inner pleasure of the second stage, and so on to the fourth. At the fourth stage they even get bored with the inner pleasure derived from concentration and seek inner equanimity. They approach the four categories of the formless realm: the infinite sky, nothingness, infinite consciousness, the top of samsara.

When they reach these stages, the visible disturbing thoughts—anger and the dissatisfied mind—do not arise, so they believe they have reached liberation. They believe that they have ceased the disturbing thoughts and karma. But when it is about time to transfer the consciousness from that realm, when the karma to be in that formless realm is finished, they see that they have to be born back in the lower realm again and heresy arises that there is no true cessation of suffering, that it is a lie, not true. Heresy

arises and that causes them to be born in the naraks.

The conclusion is that even though they have aversion to the suffering of change, they still don't have aversion to the pervasive suffering of compounding action caused by the deluded aggregates of craving and grasping, and also they have not realized shunyata, the direct remedy that cuts off the seed of the disturbing thoughts, so they have not received liberation.

The thought to renounce samsara is the thought to renounce all the deluded aggregates caused by craving and grasping: the realm of desire, the realm of form, the formless realm, the stages of stabilized concentration and the four categories that I just mentioned, from infinite sky to the top of samsara. One sees all these realms caused by the deluded aggregates of craving and grasping like being in a burning house, in the center of fire, extremely unbearable. To be in samsara for even one hour, even one minute is extremely unbearable. Then the wish to achieve liberation arises day and night without effort. If one has this, one has realized the thought of renouncing samsara.

When, by using this method and developing the wisdom realizing voidness, the seed of disturbing thoughts (ignorance holding things as truly existent) has been ceased, even if one has achieved nirvana (separation from the true cause of suffering and the complete removal of even the seed of the ignorance of true existence), still one has not finished the works of self. There is the obscuration to fully knowing—the subtle obscuration (*she drib*)—so the work is still not complete. One has not achieved the omniscient mind because the cause, the bodhichitta realization, has not been achieved; so the work for others is not finished.

One has not removed the subtle obscuration that disturbs the fully knowing mind: the cause of the four unknowings, such as unknowing the subtle karmas—small karma that has been accumulated an incredible long time ago, for example, the causes of the different colors of a peacock or butterfly. There are subtle karmas such as these, the inconceivable secret actions of the buddhas. Even the arhats who have achieved nirvana cannot see these inconceivable secret actions of the buddhas.

Enlightenment only comes when one has completed the works of self and the works of others and the principle cause of that is bodhichitta.

Generating bodhichitta

In order to generate the realization of bodhichitta, one should first generate the realization of equanimity by training the mind in the seven points of cause and effect. If you do not fertilize a field well before planting, if you just throw the seeds all over without preparing it, then they cannot grow.

In order to generate bodhichitta, which comes from the thought of loving kindness and compassion, one should see all sentient beings in beauty, in warm nature. One should have the thought of equanimity, cutting off anger and attachment.

How to cut off the thought of anger? There are two ways, one ultimate and one relative. On the aggregates of one who gives a small harm, you label enemy and then anger rises. Instead, think: “Even wild animals get angry, if I get angry then I myself am no different from those wild animals—snakes, tigers and very vicious animals. These animals even attack others just because they have been given some small harm. They recognize others as the enemy, undesirable, then they attack. So, if I get angry,

I am no different from those vicious animals. So poor, so terrible, I am no better than those vicious animals, therefore I should no get angry at all.”

Think: “The reason I get attached is because somebody has given some small benefit, some help, so on those aggregates I label friend and then attachment rises. I am no different from animals like pigs. A pig also gets attached to the person who gives it food because of that help and clings to that person.”

Also think of those you are attached to as cannibals, betraying cannibals. In the beginning they are smiling, but in the end they eat you. In the beginning they are nice, but if you trust that, you get eaten. His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche, root guru of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and the lineage gurus have used this example of a cannibal, who is in the nature of betrayal—not to be trusted. Thinking in this way, you cut off attachment. There is no point in attachment rising at all.

His Holiness Song Rinpoche also gave some advice; you should accomplish the thought of equanimity by using this example in relation to all sentient beings: One person gave you a slap on the cheek yesterday but today he gives you \$100. Another person gave you \$100 yesterday, but today gives you a slap.

Normally anger arises towards the one who gives you a slap today, and you label as friend the one who gives you money. The reason you label enemy is because the person gives you harm. But the person who gives you harm today also gave you help yesterday, so he must also be a friend. If you think that he is your enemy because he gave you a slap, then the other person is also your enemy because he gave you a slap yesterday. You see, there is no reason to cling and no reason to get angry, because both have helped you.

In the same way, all sentient beings have given you benefit. Not only that, all sentient beings have been your own mother.

The continuity of consciousness has no beginning; you have not always been born to this present life’s mother. At other times, we have been born through other sentient beings’ bodies, different bodies, whether it was an animal’s body or a human body. So all sentient beings have been our mother, there is not one single sentient being who has not been our mother. Just as this present life’s mother has been kind—giving us a body, protecting our life from danger, giving education, leading us in the path of the world, and bearing much hardships for our sake. In the same way each sentient being has been kind, numberless times.

Think: “What the sentient beings do not want is suffering, so in order to repay their kindness I must achieve the omniscient mind.”

Colophon:

From *How to Develop Loving Compassion*, a Wisdom Intermediate Transcript (*out of print*), excerpt reprinted with permission from Wisdom Publications.

Anger

by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

During a teaching at Vajrapani Institute in Boulder Creek, California, Lama Zopa Rinpoche explained various ways to deal with anger—one's own anger and the anger of others directed at oneself. This teaching appears in the July–August 1997 issue of Mandala, the newsmagazine of the FPMT.

Emptiness is a remedy for the foundation of all delusions—ignorance—so all the other delusions will disappear. The minute one meditates on emptiness, anger for example, will stop. Anger arises when you believe in the false I, false object—all this which does not exist. So when one meditates on emptiness of the self and other objects, there is no foundation for anger. This is the most powerful antidote. But if it arises again, it is because there is no continuation of the meditation; the meditation, the mindfulness, has stopped. The problem is to remember the technique. Once you remember the technique, it always works. When you don't remember the technique, it is delayed and the delusion, anger and so forth, has already arisen and taken you over.

One thing I tell people is always to think about karma. His Holiness always says Buddhists don't believe in God. This basic Buddhist philosophy helps you remember there is no separate mind outside of yours that creates your life, creates you karma. Whatever happens in one's own life comes from one's own mind. These aggregates, all the views of the senses, all of the feelings, happiness, sadness and so forth—your whole world comes from your consciousness. The imprints of past good karma and negative karma left on the consciousness manifest, become actualized. The imprints to have a human body, senses, views, aggregates, all the feelings—everything is realized at this time, and all of it comes from consciousness, from karma.

If your meditation on emptiness is not effective, this teaching of karma is very powerful for us ordinary beings. The minute one meditates on karma, there is no room in the mind for anger because there is nothing to blame. Thinking of karma is practicing the basic Buddhist philosophy that there is no creator other than your mind. It is not only a philosophy but a very powerful technique. Anger is based on believing in a creator: somebody created this problem; this happened because of this person. In daily life, when a problem arises, instead of practicing the philosophy of no creator, we act as if there is a creator, that the problem was created by somebody else. Even if we don't use the word God, we still believe someone else created the problem. The minute you think of karma and realize there is no creator, there is no basis for the anger.

We need to think: In the past I gave such a harm to sentient beings, therefore I deserve to receive this harm from another sentient being. When you get angry what you are actually saying is that you can harm others, but you feel that you should not receive harm from others. This is very illogical. So in this

practice you say, 'I deserve this harm.'

Another practice is to use this situation to develop compassion: I received this harm because of my karma. Who started all this? It's not because of the other person, it's because of your own actions. You treated other sentient beings this way in the past, that is why you receive harm now; your karma persuaded the person to harm you now. Now this person has a human birth and they harm you because of something you inspired in the past. By harming you now they are creating more negative karma to lose their human rebirth and to be reborn in lower realms. Didn't I make that person get lost in the lower realms?

In this way you are using that problem to generate bodhichitta. This means one is able to develop the whole Mahayana path to enlightenment, including the six paramitas, whether sutra path or tantra path. One can cease all mistakes of the mind and achieve full enlightenment. Due to the kindness of that person you are able to generate compassion, free sentient beings from all the sufferings, to bring enlightenment, to cause perfect happiness for all sentient beings.

One can also think in this way: by practicing compassion on that person, one is able to generate compassion towards all sentient beings. This person, who is so kind, so precious, is helping you stop harming all sentient beings, and on top of that, to receive help from you. By not receiving harm from you, peace and happiness come; also, by receiving help from you, numberless sentient get peace and happiness. All this peace and happiness that you are able to offer all sentient beings comes from this person.

Similarly, one can practice patience in this way and is able to cease anger. In the Kadampas' advice, there are six techniques for practicing patience; I don't need to go over all that now. They are good to memorize, to write down in a notebook, in order to use.

Another thing that is very good is what Pabongka Rinpoche explains in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*: generally speaking one doesn't get angry at the stick that the person used to beat you. The stick itself is used by the person, so therefore there is no point in getting angry at the stick. Similarly, the person's body, speech and mind are completely used by the anger, by the delusion. The person's body, speech and mind become like a slave, completely used as a tool of the anger. The person themselves has no freedom at all—no freedom at all. So therefore, since the person has no freedom at all, they should become an object of our compassion. Not only that, one must take responsibility to pacify that person's anger. By whatever means you can find, help the person's mind, pacify the anger; even if there is nothing you can do, pray to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha to pacify the person's mind.

What His Holiness teaches is to meditate on how that person is kind, how that person is precious like Dharma, precious like Buddha, precious like the guru; kind like Buddha, like the guru. The conclusion is that if no one has anger towards us, we can never develop patience. If everybody loves us then we can never generate the precious quality of patience, the path of patience. So therefore there is an incredible need in our life for someone to have anger towards us. It is so precious, so important that someone has anger towards us. It's not precious for that person, but for us it's very precious. For that person it's torturous, it's like living in the lower realms. But for us, that person having anger towards us is so precious. We have a great need for this, a great need.

It's important that someone loves you, but it is even more important that someone has anger towards

you. You see, if someone loves you it does not help you benefit numberless sentient beings or actualize the entire path to enlightenment. So why is this person the most precious thing to me. Because they are angry with you. To you, this person's anger is like a wish-granting jewel.

Also, your anger destroys merit, destroys your happiness, not only in day to day life but in long term happiness. As the *Bodhicharyavatara* mentions, one moment of anger delays realizations for one thousand eons. Anger is a great obstacle, especially for bodhichitta realizations. Therefore, because this person is angry towards me, I am able to develop patience and overcome my own anger and complete the entire path to enlightenment. One can complete the two types of merit, cease all the obscurations, achieve enlightenment, and free all sentient beings and lead them to enlightenment.

Colophon:

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