
Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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

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

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

Practices of a middle scope being

Contemplating the first noble truth of suffering (cont.)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The three results of karma

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The order of the presentation

As mentioned in the commentary:

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

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

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

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

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

The eight types of suffering

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

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

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

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

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

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

The six faults of cyclic existence

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The three types of suffering

These three are:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The commentary refers to reflecting on:

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

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

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

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

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

As the commentary further explains:

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

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

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

The commentary further mentions:

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

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

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