
Study Group - “Liberation *in the Palm of Your Hand*”

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

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ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ཀྱི་ལཱ་ལག་བཅངས།

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Reinforce your motivation of bodhicitta - the genuine wish to achieve the state of full enlightenment for the sake of all mother sentient beings. It is to fulfil this wish of bodhicitta that we receive these teachings and practise them.

The Four Noble Truths Include All Spiritual Practices Leading To Liberation

For those seeking liberation the four noble truths include what the practitioner should abandon and what they should achieve and attain. The reason why all spiritual practices are included in the four noble truths is because the four noble truths show the causal order in which sentient beings enter into cyclic existence and also the causal order in which they can be liberated from cyclic existence. Of the four noble truths the first two truths show how sentient beings enter into cyclic existence whereas the next two truths show the freedom/liberation from cyclic existence.

The First Noble Truth Of Suffering

To begin with as said in Maitreya's text Uttara Tantra, The Sublime Continuum it says "Suffering is to be known." In order to know the truth of suffering we can contemplate the various divisions of suffering - the three, six or eight types of suffering. In our text, six types of suffering are explained. The reason why eight types of suffering are mentioned is because the eight types of suffering include all the types of suffering found in the human world. Whereas the three types of suffering can be subsumed into one - pervasive suffering.

Pervasive Suffering As The Main Type Of Suffering

There are various types of suffering, but in order to generate renunciation the main type of suffering emphasised here is pervasive suffering, which is a more subtle form of suffering. Grosser forms of suffering, such as very unpleasurable, painful feelings, are not the main things which one has to know in order to generate renunciation, because even animals also show dislike of painful feelings. It is very natural for us to feel dislike of pain which results from some stomach upset. Not only do we experience such pain but at the same time we naturally have a thought of not wanting it or of wanting be rid of it. So there is no need to explain this gross form of suffering. Nor is there any need to make an effort to

generate renunciation towards these gross levels of suffering, because it is automatic.

Any type of birth that we assume in this existence is identified with the nature of suffering. Pervasive suffering co-exists with any type of body we obtain in cyclic existence. When we think of this life, we see that both our mind and body are subject to pervasive suffering. The indication that our mind is subject to pervasive suffering is that sometimes, without any foreseeable reason our mood or feelings change from happiness, joy and pleasure to pain and sorrow.

422.211: Thinking About The General Sufferings Of Samsara

འཛོལ་བའི་སྐྱེའི་སྐྱུག་བསྐྱེད་བསམ་པ།

The Six Faults Of Cyclic Existence¹

422.211.1: The Lack Of Certainty

ངེས་པ་མེད་པའི་ཉེས་པ།

Of the six types of suffering or faults of cyclic existence - the first is the lack of certainty. This means that there is no certainty in this cyclic existence with regard to pleasure and pain. So it is important to always be aware of the fact that because one has assumed this life within cyclic existence, so suffering and unwanted events are inevitable. They all happen as a consequence of having obtained this life within cyclic existence. So we have to realise that the various things within cyclic existence, which are believed to be a reliable source of happiness - friends, relatives, wealth, etc. - in reality are not a reliable source of happiness. Therefore in cyclic existence there is no certainty about relationships. They can quickly change from friendship to enmity and vice versa.

This should be integrated into our practice. As we try to

¹Liberation... p477 onwards. The six types of suffering are:

1. The bane of uncertainty
2. The bane of being unsatisfied
3. The bane of repeatedly leaving bodies
4. The bane of being conceived over and over again
5. The bane of moving from high to low over and over again
6. The bane of having no one to help you

try to develop our knowledge, we should also try to develop our understanding of how to put this into practice. In our daily life, we see with our own eyes how things change externally. You see your friends' relationships are changing. Your wealth, status, and feelings are always changing. These changes bring a lot of suffering and pain in the mind if one has not fully realised the truth that everything is changing. Although one sees things changing, in practice one still has hope and places trust in friends as being very reliable and trustworthy. Perceiving those objects - friends and so on - as reliable, clearly shows that our lack of understanding of the uncertainty of those objects. Due to this lack of understanding strong attachment to these objects develops, even when these objects are growing distant from one. This brings great dissatisfaction and frustration to the mind.

So we have to know how to put the teaching into practice at all times, and particularly when one is being separated from a very close friend. Then one shall realise that the change taking place is just the nature or one of the faults of being born in cyclic existence. In this way such a contemplation on cyclic existence can help relieve the pain from such unexpected changes.

Even when there are no dramatic circumstances we should remind ourselves not to be attached to any beautiful objects. In this way we can diminish attachment to the various objects so that losing or being separated from them will not bring a great sense of loss or suffering to the mind.

Uncertainty Of Our Relationships In Previous And Future Lives

Just as there is no certainty about our friends, relatives, enemies, and so on in this lifetime, similarly there is no certainty in the lives before and after. In order to know how friends and enemies change in the cycle of many past lifetimes we remind ourselves of the story where it is said "While eating the flesh of the father and kicking one's own mother"². Also in Nagarjuna's 3Letter to a Friend it says that it is possible that the child in this life was the father in the previous life, and the wife in this life was the mother in the previous life, and the friend of this life was an enemy in a previous life.

Therefore even in the life before and after, there is no certainty about the form of our relationship with others. In fact, if the lack of certainty in friendship is a very

obvious truth in this lifetime, then there is no need to mention about such lack of certainty in the lives before and after. In this very lifetime we can recall how someone who is a very close friend in one moment ,becomes an enemy in the next moment. This shows how quickly the change from enemy to friend and vice versa happens.

The great Tibetan master, Kuntang Jampal Yang said,

It only takes a word or two to change ones most dear friend into a very worst enemy. Therefore there is no point of holding someone very close to one's heart and holding others very distant from one's heart.

If we put this into practice then we can certainly balance our attitude towards others. Think of an enemy, some other person who you hate. Of course the reason you feel hatred towards them is because that person did something wrong to you. But we should think that in the past that person helped me. By thinking in this way we broaden our view. We see there is no difference in friend, enemy, or stranger in terms of giving hatred to one, and love to the other. Therefore if we give love to one person we must give love to all, to hate one person we must hate all, to ignore one person we must ignore all.

Such a meditation will bring a state of equanimity to the mind. In this way we integrate the lack of certainty of relationships into our practice. This helps us to diminish strong attachment to some beings and diminish strong hatred to other beings. If one is able to think in this way then there is no need to know any further reasons why a friend is leaving one behind. Or why peoples' attitude to one is changing. Or why ones own feelings of pleasure or pain are uncertain. Or why one's wealth is uncertain.

By observing our feelings over time this sense of uncertainty is very obvious . A feeling of pleasure in the morning changes to unhappiness at midday and changes again by night. Wealth also changes. A person may be rich one moment, then find themselves as poor as a beggar in a crowd of their own enemies.

All this happens because one is born in cyclic existence. One is chained to cyclic existence. Therefore if you think 'What could I expect other than these changes?' such a thought will help us to cope with real situations much better.

End of discourse.

Four Aspects Of First Noble Truth

The four aspects of the first noble truth of suffering are:

1. being impermanent

མི་རྒྱུ་སྤྱི་

² Liberation.. p478. Shariputra said,

He eats his father's flesh and hits his mother.
The enemy he killed sits on his knee.
A wife gnaws her husbands bones.
Samsara can be such a farce!

³ Liberation... p478

Fathers, sons, wives and enemies can change:
Friends may become the opposite
and change again: samsara
holds no shred of certainty.

2. being misery

སྤྲུག་བསྐྱེལ་བ།

3. being empty

སྤོང་བ།

4. being selfless

བདག་མེད།

The five contaminated aggregates which constitute this human life are an example of the noble truth of suffering. These five contaminated aggregates must be qualified by these four qualities. They must be impermanent, miserable and so on. Each characteristic must therefore be proved with some reason.

Geshe-la: What is the reason why these aggregates are impermanent?

Student: They display both gross and subtle change or momentariness.

Geshe-la: Generally the reason that we provide to establish a fact must be something easier to understand than the fact itself. The reason is the vehicle or cause to reach that conclusion. The reason Alan gave of momentary change is itself the definition of impermanence. Therefore someone who understands that five aggregates change from moment to moment, ie are momentary, will have no doubt that the aggregates are impermanent. It is like asking 'Why am I human?' and answering 'Because I am human'. The reason given in text as to why the five contaminated aggregates are impermanent is because they are conditionally arising. They are conditionally arising in the sense that they do not always remain the same, rather they continuously undergo change.

Also the reason why they are subject to misery or suffering is because they are overpowered by karma and afflictions. Therefore there are reasons to establish each of those characteristics as the entity or fact of truth of suffering. "Liberation in your Hand" specifically mentions those sixteen characteristics of the four noble truths.

Each of these sixteen characteristics has their opposite⁴:

- impermanent - opposite is permanent. Therefore the realisation of impermanence of the aggregates is the truth of path and what it directly counteracts is the wrong view which holds the aggregates as permanent. The overcoming or cessation of that wrong view is the truth of cessation.

Student: In relation to the indication of pervasive

suffering as being the arousal of feelings or moods without any obvious cause. Does pervasive suffering have to be when a displeasing thought or feeling arises without precedent?

Geshe-la: If we cannot see a reason, it does not mean that there is no reason. Of course the reason can be traced back to karma. Simply because this body is the outcome of karma and afflictions, it is subject to pervasive suffering. Because it is subject to pervasive suffering it can serve as basis to give rise to karma and afflictions and further suffering. Therefore we are not only talking about cause of suffering. Karma and afflictions are causes of this body which also acts as a basis to bring about future suffering.

We have no full control or authority over this body, even though we serve it for an entire lifetime doing all possible things to keep it healthy and young. We get sick despite the preventative measures that we take. Sometimes the doctor cannot identify the cause of this sickness. This does not mean that there is no cause. Saying that our mind and body are controlled by karma and afflictions does not mean that we should do nothing. We can do some good to this body but not to a complete extent. There is a limit because it is the outcome of karma and afflictions. Therefore this is the meaning of all pervasive suffering.

In the scripture it says:

The health of the body depends upon the soundness of the four elements and including the functioning of the mind.

The four elements which constitute this body have so many levels. At a subtle level these elements are like tiny particles and the wind energy at subtle levels is a very subtle energy indeed.

Geshe-la said that scientific tests on the health of the body of someone who is sick, in order to find out what is wrong are most likely only measuring mainly fire and water but without understanding the subtle wind energy and let alone the subtle energy of the mind. When the sickness is due to the imbalance of the elements, then depending upon the weakness of the element found, medicine is prescribed to cure the disease. Geshela believes the elements of our body can influence the emotions. When certain elements are high they can increase desire or hatred. If you want to know more about this then you should check with our doctors.

Headings with outline numbering are derived from the Text. Headings without outline numbering are derived from Geshe Doga's commentary.

⁴Refer to the class notes of 25/10/94 where in a footnote all these opposites were clearly explained.