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

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

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Produce the right motivation for listening to the teachings.

Generating A Sense Of Renunciation

The purpose behind discussing the various types of suffering in this human world is to generate a sense of renunciation to cyclic existence. We begin to understand that the true cause of the unending chain of suffering we have experienced, and experience even in this human form of life, is having a life which is the result of our own karma and mental delusions.

Actually the true cause of our suffering is the contaminated aggregates to which we are subject. These aggregates are the true cyclic existence. So when we say the cause of suffering is birth in cyclic existence, this cyclic existence is not a distant land or place - it is our own contaminated aggregates. These contaminated aggregates are the load of cyclic existence which we must carry for as long as we are born in cyclic existence.

So it is wrong to blame the cause of our daily suffering on our surroundings, or those with whom we interact. Since the place where we live and those other beings are not the true cause of our suffering, then any attempt to change where we live, or the person with whom we live, is not a real remedy to overcome suffering. Thus by developing true understanding of the cause of cyclic existence in the context of our own process of rebirth, you can cultivate some feeling of renunciation or disgust towards cyclic existence. Then, as a result of this feeling of renunciation, you can generate the thought of attaining liberation.

Samsara Is Our Own Contaminated Aggregates

It is very important to identify cyclic existence or samsara, and understand what it means personally. Then when we meditate on the suffering nature of cyclic existence, it can induce this true renunciation, and then a very definite thought of leaving cyclic existence. With this thought, following the spiritual path, or the practice of Dharma, makes good sense. So we can see how meditation on suffering will direct our minds towards following the spiritual path.

As discussed earlier, the term cyclic existence or samsara indicates that beings are born over and over again. This indicates that we have been born uncontrollably, and so we have no true freedom because we are bound to an

existence which is suffering in nature. So cyclic existence cannot be something outside of us. It is not a place or environment. Australia is the country in which we live, but it is not the cyclic existence to which we have been chained by karma and delusions since beginningless time. Cyclic existence, then, refers to one's own contaminated aggregates, which are contaminated in the sense of being the product of one's own karma and delusions. Therefore to renounce cyclic existence means to emerge permanently from the bondage of ones own contaminated aggregates, and when we meditate on the suffering nature of cyclic existence, we are meditating on our own aggregates, whose nature is suffering.

Such mediation leads us to overcome our attachments—to wealth, possessions and worst of all, our own body. Generating true renunciation overcomes attachment to our own body. Therefore true renunciation begins with renouncing one's own cyclic existence—in other words, renouncing the aggregates or factors which make up our own cyclic existence. With the destruction of attachment to ones own body, for instance, attachment to the bodies of other beings is also eliminated—even very attractive bodies. It is like a person with jaundice who cannot tolerate certain foods: even if they see another person strongly attracted to, and eating such food, they will have no appetite for it, because of their negative experiences with that food in the past.

422.212.22: Suffering Of Demi-Gods

Having heard about the suffering of human beings and contemplated those sufferings, the desire to be born as a human is lost. There is, however a likelihood the meditator might think that birth in the godly or demi-god realms would be fine. To show how the nature of suffering pervades even the godly realms, we next study and contemplate the suffering of the demi-gods.

The demi-gods are said to have been banished from the godly realms because of their jealousy of the godly beings, and their tendency to negative deeds. Because they were banished from the level of godly beings they are called demi-gods, just as we do not consider someone banished from human society as part of that society. (Some of the drawings of The Wheel of Life, however, classify sentient beings into five realms rather than six. In such drawings the demi-gods are included with the godly beings.)

The Torment Of Jealousy

According to Nagajuna's *Letter to a Friend* the demi-gods have the natural tendency to envy the enormous wealth of the godly beings, and so they experience a lot of mental suffering. Even if they possess some sense of discernment or intelligent power, their mind is so obscured that they cannot see the ultimate reality.

Think of the sort of jealousy generated when even the small belongings of our enemies disturb our mental peace. Then you can understand how much demigods suffer, because of their jealousy of the enormous wealth of the godly beings. The demi-gods, by their nature, feel jealous, but can never successfully compete with the godly beings who enjoy the nectar of immortality. The wealth and material comfort of the godly beings is beyond that enjoyed by the demi-gods, so the demi-gods have to endure jealousy throughout their lives.

The main cause of the suffering of demi-gods arises from their instinctive competitiveness over the good fortune of the godly beings. Due to the influence of this jealousy, the demi-gods engage in war with the godly beings. In the human world when war happens, there is great mental fear and insecurity; there is destruction of the environment; the cost of lives and the loss of wealth. In a war in the higher realms between gods and demigods the amount of destruction, and kind of weapons used, are beyond imagination. The loser, of course, is always the demi-gods who die from merely being struck by the weapons of the godly beings. The demi-gods on the other hand can only kill a godly being by cutting off its head, so the demi-gods experience great fear and suffering. In addition to their mental and physical suffering the demi-gods have a lake (like we have television) where they can see their friends being defeated in battle and suffering. It all adds to the suffering of the demi-gods.

The godly existence described here is that which depends on being supported by Mount Meru, or the ground of the earth, so these godly beings belong to the desire realms.

It is important to know that the focus of our contemplation is to produce the thought of leaving this cyclic existence. The outcome of such meditation on suffering is to produce the wish to engage in virtuous practice. The best motivation for engaging in this virtuous practice is, of course, Bodhicitta, which transforms our virtuous action to become the cause to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Otherwise we should generate a genuine (or even a fabricated) renunciation, so that the virtuous practice we do does not become the truth of the cause of suffering.

Realising that being born as a human being entails suffering, and so does birth as a demi-god, we must be sure that suffering pervades all levels of cyclic existence, then we must ensure that the virtuous practice we do is a cause to free us from cyclic existence. Try to realise that if

you engage in virtuous practice to attain level of human being, it is not sufficient because of the various levels of suffering which that entails. Doing this virtuous practice to be born as godly realms is also not enough. So try to generate the motivation to attain state of liberation, or better still full enlightenment.

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

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