

Study Group - "Liberation *in the Palm of Your Hand*"

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering

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Make sure that you have generated the right motivation.

Last time we noted in our discussion how a cycle of twelve links can be completed within two lifetimes. Will anyone volunteer to review this point?

Jeremy: In the first life are ignorance, karmic formation, and causal consciousness, and in the second life are the resultant cause, name and form, six senses, contact, feeling, grasping and death.

Geshe-la: So you are saying finish three in the first life, then the rest in the next life. Who agrees with this?

Salome: Geshe-la said the first six are in the first life and the second six are in the second life. The first six are ignorance, karmic formations, consciousness, name and form, the six sense sources and contact in the first life.

Geshe-la: What we are discussing is an example of how a particular karma is created in this life, and how its result is ripened in the immediate next lifetime. In terms of the twelve links then the results of a karma created in this life must finish within two lifetimes - this life and the next.

We must think in terms of the causal order of the twelve links. Out of the motivation of ignorance we create a compositional karma, and the potential of that karma is then stored or left in the consciousness. So those three propelling causes - ignorance, karma and consciousness - have finished.

Then, the potential of the karma must be fully nourished or activated in order for it to ripen in the immediately following life. In terms of the twelve links, the three links or the branches of the establishing cause - craving, grasping and existence - must nourish the karmic potential before death. So besides the three propelling causes, the three establishing causes must also be finished in this life.

This inevitably leads to the next life wherein all the propelled and established results of the twelve links (birth, name and form and the rest) occur.

I don't know if it is clear to you but maybe one of you will volunteer to explain what has just been said.

Jenny L: In the first life ignorance is the basic cause which leads to karmic formation. Then as a result of that there are karmic imprints on consciousness so we have the first three - the propelling causes. Then to nourish those and bring about the next rebirth you need the establishing causes: craving, grasping and existence. Existence is the strong intention, just before rebirth, which leads to rebirth in the next life. In the next life are

name and form, six senses, feeling, contact, birth and old age and death

Geshe-la: If we focus on our present life then its karmic cause is virtuous karma. Now if we think of our current life in terms of the twelve links, then how many have been completed in this life? Answering that question also gives the idea of the way the twelve links are related to this life.

This life is the result of a ripening of karmic result. The causes of this result are the six causal links which cannot occur in this lifetime. So perhaps Wayne could explain how the other six finish in this life?

To restate the question, from the first moment you are conceived, or born, in a mother's womb until now how many of the twelve links have been completed?

Wayne: Name and form, sources, contact, feeling, birth and old age. Only death is still to come.

Geshe-la: This human life is the fruit of virtuous karma. The six resultant links always occur in the same lifetime.

- On first being conceived in the mother's womb, birth and name and form simultaneously occur.
- As the foetus gradually develops so do the six sense sources, then contact, then feeling which all have occurred in our life.
- Of the twelfth link of old age or death, old age has occurred but not death, so this link has not yet been completed.

The number of lifetimes over which the twelve links can be finished is a matter of whether the six causal links - three propelling causes and three establishing causes - occur in the same lifetime. If they occur in the same lifetime then the twelve links are completed over two lifetimes. If not then it will take three lifetimes for a complete round to be completed.

Completing the Twelve Links over Three Lifetimes

If the three propelling causes and the three establishing causes occur in the same lifetime, then the cycle of twelve links will occur in two lifetimes, as there cannot be any gap between establishing causes and establishing results.

But between propelling causes and propelled result there is no limit. It could be hundreds or thousands of lifetimes.

Once the karma is activated by the two of the three establishing causes, then without a gap, that is without the occurrence of a life with a twelve link cycle, the propelled and established result of the twelve links must

occur in that immediate next lifetime. In short a cycle of twelve links cannot finish within a single lifetime, since the minimum to finish a cycle of twelve links is two lifetimes and the maximum is three lifetimes. There cannot be a cycle of twelve links requiring more than three lifetimes to complete. Damien can you explain how the twelve links occur over three lifetimes?

Damien: *Life one:* ignorance, karmic formations, consciousness. At death another set of twelve links comes into play.

Life two: is the other intervening life or lives. At death in this second life craving, grasping, existence occur.

Life three: birth, name and form, six sense sources, contact, feeling, ageing and death.

Geshe-la: To add to Damien's answer, each of us might have various karmic formations stored in our consciousness before we were born into this human life. We were born as a human in this lifetime, because we had the karmic imprint to be born in the human realm, and it was activated by this life's cycle of craving, grasping and existence. However we may still we carry a karmic imprint to be reborn in hell realms, which can still ripen its result if it meets with the three nourishing conditions.

Jools: So Damien said another twelve links kicks in when it's more than two lifetimes?

Samdup: Between the propelling causes and propelled results of one set of twelve links you can have many lifetimes, or sets of cycles of the twelve links.

Geshe-la: We may have the karmic imprint of negative karma in our mind, but if at the time of death we can produce a virtuous state of mind, then this can postpone or delay the result of that ripening of the negative karmic imprint. This is because a virtuous state of mind cannot nourish the negative imprint. It is in this way that we can continue taking higher rebirth. That negative karmic seed is like a seed that will only sprout if given the right nourishing conditions such as moisture, manure, heat and so on.

Jools: If we have this huge backlog of lives that have not resulted yet, then can you become enlightened and still have this backlog?

Geshe-la: Even if you have reached permanent liberation from cyclic existence you can still have the virtuous karma to be born as a human which you have created in the past.

It is incorrect to say that when you are fully enlightened or reach a state of arhatship, or full liberation, that you abandon all the karma created in the past. It is however, correct to say that you have abandoned all negative or non-virtuous karma, but not the meritorious or virtuous karmas. On attaining liberation you have not abandoned the karma to be born as a human.

In this sense we talk of purifying negative karma. What does this mean? It means preventing the negative karma from producing its result. To prevent any karma producing its result does not necessarily mean that we have to abandon that karma. But by removing delusions we sterilise that karma, so that it is ineffective, and can

no longer produce its result. This is why we say that delusion is the main cause of creating karma, and then the main cause for yielding the conditions to ripen that karma so that it can produce its result. Geshe-la recalls that we have covered this same topic in the past.

Jenny L: Is there a cycle of twelve links for every action of body, speech and mind?

Geshe-la: It is not necessary that every action we create by body, speech and mind will be the karma of the twelve links. The karma of the twelve links must be one which is capable of propelling a life, e.g. a virtuous karma which will give a good rebirth such as a human one. We can create a verbal karma which is not strong enough to propel a good rebirth by itself, but which can be a cause to achieve good speech in a future life.

We must understand that there is a cause for any specific result. First we must know what we seek in life, then know what is the right cause to achieve it. For example, if you wish to be born as a human being, what is the main cause to be born in a better rebirth? It is moral ethics. The cause of comfort in this life is good living conditions, which is the outcome of giving. If we wish to be good looking and to be surrounded by friendly people, the cause is tolerance and patience. Also if we wish for that life to be a glorious one then the cause is the practice of effort, or perseverance. The cause for less distractions, and more calm and peace in the mind is to practise concentration. To have clear discriminating wisdom we must practise wisdom. So specific karma produces a specific result, and is not necessarily a cause for future rebirth.

In between the propelling causes and the propelled results it is possible to have a gap of many cycles of lifetimes. Between the establishing causes and established results of a given cycle of twelve links there cannot be any other cycles of twelve links.

In the Lam Rim commentary this is clearly explained. Please go over it.

Edit methodology

The initial transcript is prepared from Alan Molloy's notes. These are checked with Damien Busby's notes by Alan Molloy and any differences noted.

Adair Bunnett then compares her notes against the typed transcript and prepares this edited version.

Edited version checked by Alan Molloy

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