
and prayer, to benefit others. If we can be reborn in cyclic existence voluntarily, without the influence of delusion and karma, that is something we can aspire to, but not to be reborn involuntarily and experience suffering.

The first suffering of birth is divided into five different types. The first is associated with pain; it indicates that pain is the very nature of being reborn involuntarily in samsara. The text states that birth is accompanied by many intense feelings of pain for those born as hell beings and hungry ghosts who invariably have to suffer; for beings born from a womb, which is our own human situation; and for those beings born from an egg. These four types of births by their very nature cause beings to experience very intense suffering.

Birth from a womb is something that we can relate to. We can see how that definitely brings a lot of suffering. We can all relate to the suffering of birth from a womb, such as the suffering experienced by both the mother and child when the child is in the womb for a certain number of months. Then there is suffering when the child is actually born. Thus we can see the various types of suffering experienced in relation to birth.

The second suffering of birth is that it is associated with dysfunctional tendencies, or specific inherent faults of the body and mind. By its very nature, the body has certain faults; it is the same for the contaminated mind.

As the teaching describes, this type of suffering is because the compositional factors are ill-suited to the service of virtue: they are associated with seeds that generate, sustain and increase the delusions. In other words, because the very nature of our body is that it is contaminated, it is subject to the arising of delusions. We can see that delusions such as attachment and anger arise in our mind even for the slightest reason. That is largely due to the very nature of our contaminated body.

The compositional factors associated with the seeds of the delusions are in the mind, but because the body is related to the mind, it serves to generate the delusions and suffering, sustain them once they are generated, and increase them. This means that when the appropriate conditions are there, even with the slightest cause or incident, the delusions can arise in the mind and also affect the body. Therefore because of the dysfunctional tendencies that the body and mind possess, ordinary beings are reborn with a contaminated body and mind prone to afflictions that arise easily, and thus easily experience suffering.

So because of the dysfunctional tendencies, the body and mind are ill-suited to the service of virtue, and as the text further explains, you cannot control these tendencies. We are not able to use our body and mind in the service of virtue; we are not able to efficiently engage in virtue.

If we take a particular example such as meditation, when we attempt to meditate, we soon notice that our body feels quite heavy. The body starts feeling aches and pains and also starts feeling heavy – physically, you experience a 'sinking' feeling. That is the sign of the physical body having dysfunctional tendencies. Because of that, the body, by its very nature, is not able to effectively engage in the practice of meditation.

On the mental level, as we try to focus on the object in meditation, we notice that the mind becomes easily distracted. The particular obstacles or hindrances that arise in the mind during meditation are excitement and dullness. The reason why our mind is so easily influenced by these obscurations, excitement and dullness, is because of the dysfunctional tendencies of the mind, which do not allow the mind to be serviceable for engaging in the practice of meditation.

From the moment of birth, the physical body and mind have these dysfunctional tendencies due to the fault of the past cause of birth itself, which is said to be the delusions and karma. So our body and mind are a product of our previous delusions and karma. Because there was a fault in the very cause of our body, the result – which is the contaminated aggregates, the body and mind – comes with the dysfunctional tendencies. The fault that we have in our body and mind is because of the fault in the causes.

Let us take the example of making ornaments such as jewellery. If there is a fault in the material that is used to make jewellery, such as the metal being contaminated, the end result will be flawed. If we were to use gold as an example, jewellery made out of the purest gold would make the finest jewellery, whereas if there were some contamination in the metal used – such as the gold being mixed with other kind of metals – then when you try to make jewellery, the outcome would be flawed. Why? Because the cause, the metal used to make the jewellery, was faulty. Similarly, if the causes of our body and mind were tainted or had faults, the result is a contaminated body and mind that has dysfunctional tendencies.

Having described what the dysfunctional tendencies are on the physical and mental level, we can now ask if and how they can be overcome. As related in the teachings, the main technique for overcoming the dysfunctional tendencies at the physical and mental level is to train one's mind in meditation so that we can attain what is called the mental state of calm abiding or mental quiescence as it is referred to in some translations. Basically it is a state where the mind attains a state of mental tranquillity and is able to focus on an object for as long as one wishes.

As one progresses through the meditation stages to achieve calm abiding, it is said that one first overcomes the physical obstacles to meditation to eventually attain physical pliancy. The obstacles in relation to the dysfunctional tendencies of the body are slowly overcome. The body becomes serviceable by the clearing of the wind channels within the body, which induces physical pliancy then physical bliss. This in turn induces what we call mental pliancy and one attains mental bliss. When one attains the combination of physical and mental pliancy and bliss, one attains the state of calm abiding where one is able to focus on an object for as long as one wishes.

As one of the teachings describes, when one attains the state of calm abiding one can use the mind to overcome all the obscurations: the enemy – the distractions – which are the two main obstructions to the meditative state – excitement, and laxity or dullness. These are completely overcome, and thus the mind becomes as firm as an

indestructible mountain. You can use that state of physical and mental pliancy and bliss to focus on any virtuous object that you choose, and you will be able to focus unwaveringly without distractions for as long as you wish.

These are summarised as the qualities of achieving calm abiding. Having overcome the physical and mental dysfunctional tendencies, one can attain physical and mental pliancy, which induces physical and mental bliss.

We come to the third type of suffering of birth, which is that it is the original suffering. As described in the text, when one takes birth in the three realms, on the basis of that one suffers old age, illness and death – just by the very fact that one is born in any of the three realms of cyclic existence.

In relation to the third type of suffering, it is good to reflect on how, by being born in cyclic existence through the power and influence of the delusions and karma, one invariably has to experience the various types of suffering such as old age, sickness and eventually death. When we reflect upon that, we can relate to it.

As indicated in the text, the fourth type of suffering of birth is that by the very nature of being born in cyclic existence, one has a tendency to experience different types of afflictions or delusions in the mind. When you are born in cyclic existence, the three mental poisons arise in relation to objects of attachment, hostility or anger, and ignorance. As a result, the body and mind are disturbed and in pain and you cannot be happy. The afflictions torment your body and mind in numerous ways.

So just being born under the influence of delusions and karma, and having obtained this contaminated body and mind, becomes the cause for us to experience the arising of further delusions in the mind. We experience attachment to those objects that seem attractive to our body and mind; without much effort, without much reason, we immediately feel attached to those attractive objects. Towards those objects that are not attractive to us, we may develop anger or hostility. We also feel indifference towards people and objects that we are neither attracted to nor angry at; this indifference is a form of ignorance. These delusions arise so easily and rapidly just by the fact that we have this vulnerable body and mind.

One might ask, what is wrong with having delusions arising in the mind? As we know from our own experience, at the very moment that the delusions such as attachment or anger arise in the mind, it disturbs the mind; the very nature of a delusion is to disturb the mind. This disturbance causes us to experience unhappiness on a mental level as well as a physical level. Basically that fits the definition of a delusion: the moment it arises in our mind, that which causes unrest and unease, is defined as a delusion.

As the text describes, the afflictions torment our body and mind in numerous ways. It is true that as soon as a delusion arises, it agitates the mind, and we experience torment or suffering in various ways – feeling hurt, neglected, abandoned, and so forth. All the different sufferings we experience arise as a result of the delusions.

Being reminded of this should help us develop a strong determination to overcome the delusions. If the delusions have no other purpose than to give us torment, to give us suffering, and if they can be overcome, then by all means we should develop the strong determination to overcome them, because they do not serve any purpose for ourselves or for others. We can see that the very fact of being born in such a situation really brings about these unwanted sufferings, and as the delusions continue to arise, we will again experience more torment and suffering.

The fifth suffering of birth is that it brings unwanted separation. As the text describes, all births end in death, which is undesirable and causes one to experience only suffering. What is being explained here is the fact that when we are born, our fate is to die and separate from this life. We have to separate from our body and go on to another one. We have no desire to separate from our body and from our loved ones; nevertheless, that separation is inevitable. It has to come, that is the very nature of being born – that one has to experience death. When we think about not wanting to be separated from this life and having to experience death, it brings suffering in our mind.

If death were something that we could look forward to, if we could enjoy having to experience death, it would not bring suffering in our mind. But we don't want to separate from this life, and this brings suffering to our mind. However, for someone who has practised well and has prepared for their death, it is said that when they have to experience death, there will be joy in their mind. That would, of course, be a different case.

When we reflect on the five types of suffering of birth, our mind will realise that, as long as we are born into cyclic existence under the influence of delusions and karma, we will have to inevitably experience these various sufferings, which we do not wish for ourselves or for others. This realisation helps us develop the determination to overcome the delusions and karma.

The next of the eight types of suffering is the suffering of ageing. We can leave that for our next session.

Of course, the suffering of ageing is something that many of us are experiencing right now, something that we can definitely relate to. If one has any doubt whether one has aged or not, one can look at one's photo albums. When you look at pictures of when you were fifteen or sixteen, it is as if that was a completely different person. A more vivid example would be if we take a picture of someone in their teens or their twenties, and then take another picture of the person when they have reached their seventies. When you put the pictures together, it is as if they are totally different people. In some cases it would be hard to recognise that the early picture was of the same person. So just putting the two pictures together and looking at them can induce a feeling how intangible and transient our life is.

In reflecting on the suffering of ageing, in a practical sense, the realities of ageing can help to reduce strong attachment to our youthful bodies. For those who are still at a youthful age with strong, healthy bodies, there can naturally be strong attachment arising due to the state of

the body. However if we can train our mind to overcome strong attachment to the body when we are younger, it seems that it helps when we later come to a 'ripe old age; we will be able to handle the ageing process more easily because we have trained our mind to reduce its attachment to the body. That seems to be the case: there is a practical benefit to developing detachment from one's youthful body.

We must, however, understand that what is being advised here in terms of developing detachment to one's body does not imply that one should not look after one's body. By all means, one should look after and take care of one's body through diet and being health conscious. We need to sustain our body, to use it for a good purpose. However while we sustain our body and make it healthy, we have to train one part of our mind not to be excessively attached to the body. So we need to train in finding the balance between looking after the body but without strong attachment towards it.

Before we end the session for the evening, while sitting in an appropriate posture, let us again take a few minutes to meditate. This time after bringing our mind inward, we will focus on the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. Just keep our mind focused on the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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