
attached to the affairs of this life causes a lot of pain—the pain of separation from loved ones, separation from material wealth, not being able to acquire things that we wish for and so forth. All of these lead to strong attachment and clinging to the pleasures and concerns of this life. With a constant awareness of death the pain of separation naturally subsides. That creates a sense of peace and relief in our mind, so that the affairs of this life don't become our priority concern.

The main thing is to make sure that we try to maintain a virtuous mind at all times. That is the most essential task during our present life, because that can really help us at the time of death; at the very least a virtuous mind will help to secure a good rebirth in our next life. Although we may enjoy the benefits of wealth, it will not be of any help to us at the time of death. No teaching says that wealth can assist us to have a good rebirth in the next lifetime. However all teachings and all teachers unanimously agree that a virtuous state of mind will definitely secure a good rebirth in the next lifetime. That is why it is essential to protect and maintain a virtuous mind at all times.

The Lam Rim presentation of death and impermanence gives step-by-step instructions on how to contemplate death. One of the last stages is to realise that nothing but the Dharma will help at the time of death. Three main reasons why nothing but the Dharma will help at the time of death are that wealth cannot help us, our best friends and companions cannot help us, and even our own body cannot help us at that time. Contemplating these points is essential if we are to understand how the Dharma mind, or the virtuous mind, will assist and help us at the time of death.

The teaching goes into great detail in describing how wealth, our friends and even our physical body cannot prevent death, and cannot assist us at the time of death. As described in the Lam Rim teachings, the loved ones surrounding a dying person cannot prevent them from dying, or assist them in their journey to the next life. The only thing that can help is having a virtuous state of mind. So in this way, we can reflect on the importance of contemplating impermanence, in particular death.

In this section, *Precious Garland* is introducing the fact that impermanence itself does not exist inherently and is thus empty of inherent existence. Of the two truths impermanence is, of course, a relative truth. As explained in earlier teachings ultimate truth is explained within the context of the relative truth. It is said that all the teachings of the Buddha are given with the intention that we gain an understanding of the two truths, i.e. relative or conventional truth and ultimate truth.

As explained in the teachings, for example *The Four Hundred Verses*, the two truths, serve as the *basis* on which one practises the two essentials of the *path*, which are method and wisdom, from which one gains the *result* of obtaining the two main bodies of the Buddha. In this way the basis, the path and the result are explained. It is really important that we try to incorporate this main structure of the Buddha's teachings into whatever we are studying. In that way, we can understand the big picture, and incorporate this understanding into whatever we study and practice.

It is important that we familiarise ourselves with the topic of death and impermanence, in particular the main points to be incorporated into the meditation on death and impermanence. The three main points, as mentioned earlier, are that at the time of death our wealth cannot help us, our family and close friends cannot help us and our own body cannot help us. This is actually a very profound teaching in

itself. As we incorporate that understanding and practice into our life, it reduces attachment to friends, relatives, possessions and even our own body, while of course we strive towards overcoming attachment entirely.

We may not have reached the point right now of completely abandoning attachment to friends, relatives, wealth and our own body, however even a reduction in our attachment to just these three things really helps the mind to become less anxious and less worried. The mind naturally becomes calmer and more peaceful. This makes our practice of Dharma much more meaningful, more restful and will bring more quality into our current practice. But it is particularly at the time of death, which we will all eventually have to face, that we need to try to secure a peaceful mind. Then, if as a result of our practice now we can naturally maintain a state of mind where we are not attached to our relatives and friends, our wealth and our own bodies, there will be nothing to hold us back. There will be no fear, or anxiety at the time of death, thus we will naturally be very peaceful.

It is very logical to assume that the mind will be very calm and peaceful when there is no attachment to these things. Therefore as preparation for the time of death we need to incorporate this attitude into our practice now, so that we secure a peaceful and calm death. Otherwise, even before death, when we are ill or unwell we will accumulate extra mental pain if our mind is not calm and peaceful. In other words we will cause ourselves even more suffering. Therefore, at the very least, even though there might be some discomfort at the time of death, the mind can definitely be calm and peaceful. That will definitely benefit us.

When I encourage you to contemplate these points, I am not suggesting that you suddenly leave your work behind, give up all your material possessions, and go to a remote place to contemplate. That is not what I am suggesting. One can be engaged in normal activities, one's work or job or wherever one is, but the main point is to be mindful of these points, which is a mental activity that can occur regardless of where we are, or what we are doing physically. If we remember these points, then as we recall the main purpose of our life it will, in time, put things into perspective and bring about mental ease and comfort. That is the practical benefit of thinking in this way, which can be verified even by people who are not particularly Buddhist.

I have told the story before about how I once met two women in St Kilda, who I had not previously met. Apparently something had drawn them to come to me. One of them said, 'I have been diagnosed with cancer and I have been told that I have only two weeks to live, so how can I prepare myself? Can you help me by giving me some advice?' I asked her if she had any children to which she responded that she had children and a husband. The first thing I suggested to her was not to be overly concerned about her children and husband as they would be okay. I said, 'Just try to bring your focus inward on yourself and try not to be too overly concerned about the others. If it appeals to you, you could recite the Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra', and immediately she said, 'Yes, I can definitely do that'. She had no hesitation in committing to saying the mantra, and I said 'This is a technique that will help you keep your focus within yourself', and she took that practice very willingly.

More than two weeks later, I received a letter from the friend who had brought her over to see me and in her letter she described how her friend had passed away very peacefully. I am not sure if she had recited the mantras before she passed away, however her friend said that she had shown the dying

woman a picture of me. Her friend had looked at that and smiled, and when she passed away, her face was radiant and smiling, very peaceful and calm. That seemed to be a result of the advice that she took to heart, which seems to have really helped her.

To me it seemed to confirm that she took my advice to heart, and by having put it into practice wholeheartedly just in the last two or three weeks of her life, she actually gained benefit from that. So if someone actually benefitted from reciting a mantra for just three or four weeks prior to death, or even just brought to mind some advice about keeping the mind inward and focussed, and that actually helped her to have a peaceful and calm death, then those of us who have spent a great deal of time in practising would definitely have to assume that this would also be the case for us.

Indeed, it would be a very sad if that was not the case. If we have done so much practice and preparation, and don't receive any benefit at the time of death when we really need it, then that indeed would be very sad. It would be a pity to have practiced all this time and then at the very last stage when we need to be calm and peaceful, we start complaining and screaming, or make a nuisance of ourselves to everyone around us.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary says that the main point of verse 69 is that it establishes what impermanence actually is. He says, 'The nature of permanence is something that is produced, remains for a moment, and in the very next moment disintegrates'. This is in response to the assertion that part of a moment is inherently existent.

The commentary continues, 'If you say a part of the moment does exist inherently, then just as you would accept a moment having an end, likewise you have to accept a beginning and a middle of a moment too'. So this response is using their own logic against them saying, 'If you consider there is an end to a moment, then you would also have to accept that there is a beginning and a middle of a moment too'. Therefore a moment cannot be partless, and so it cannot be independently existent.

As the commentary states, because partless things do not exist, neither living things nor the environment of the world can inherently abide, even for a moment, because every part of its moments has the triple nature of a moment.

The main point of this refutation is that establishing that a moment is impermanent, naturally contradicts inherent existence, because inherent existence implies an independently and unchanging existence. So if a moment were to be inherently existent then it could not change, because it would exist independently without depending on anything else. Therefore establishing a moment to be impermanent implies that it too is changing from moment to moment and thus has the nature of a beginning, middle and end. Therefore it cannot be inherently existent. Do you get the point?

Having established in verse 69 that all moments have parts, the next verse refutes the inherent existence of that which has parts. The next verse refutes possibility that a thing that has parts is itself inherently existent, which is another assertion by the opponents.

*70. Also the beginning, middle and end
Are to be analysed like a moment.
Therefore beginning, middle, and end
Are also not [produced] from self or other.*

The opponents are accepting that a moment does have a beginning, a middle and an end, but that individually, each

(i.e. the beginning, middle and an end) is inherently existent. In relation to that, Gyaltsab Je's commentary begins by saying, 'If you say that the beginning, middle and end each individually abide inherently' this syllogism is presented: Take the subject 'the beginning, middle and end of a moment'—none can abide or be produced inherently, in any instance (which is the predicate)—because just like the moment itself, when analysed each instant is found to have parts of a beginning, a middle and an end as well (which is the reason).

This presents the reason why the beginning, a middle and an end of a moment are not instances that abide inherently, or are produced inherently. As Gyaltsab Je says, when you really think about it and analyse it, just as with the moment, each instance of the moment also has its parts—a beginning, a middle and an end.

Therefore contemplating and further analysing the subtlest moment of the existence of a thing, shows that because it has the nature of impermanence, it can be further divided into parts. In this way there is no ultimate functional thing that can be found to be partless, permanent, and inherently and independently existent.

Gyaltsab Je concludes his commentary on the meaning of verse 70 by saying, 'Thus by refuting partless things in general, inherent existence is refuted as well'.

2.1.2.3.4.4.3 Refuting inherently existent things through the reason of their not being one or many

The next verse refutes the inherent existence of things with the reason that they cannot be inherently existent, because they are neither inherently existent one nor inherently existent many. This reason is based on the fact that if something were to exist, it has to exist either as one or as many. There is no third alternative—it is either a unity (of one) or it is many. So if something were to exist inherently, it would have to exist either as an entity that is inherently existent as one, or an inherently existent as many.

The verse reads:

*71. Due to having many parts there is no unity,
There is not anything without parts.
Further, without one, there is not many.
Also, without existence there is no non-
existence.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of this verse with another syllogism: Take the subject 'a functional thing that is form'—it cannot be truly one—because it is an entity which has parts. This syllogism refutes the proposition that something can be inherently one.

In relation to this, the commentary further explains that there is no fault of the reason not being established, because partless forms do not exist anywhere. If there is a doubt that the reason could not be established, i.e. thinking that that there is no entity that has parts, there is no fault in thinking that the reason cannot be established, because partless forms do not exist anywhere.

Whatever the form or functional thing, it has to have parts. There cannot be a unitary single thing that has no parts to it. Therefore all entities have parts, all forms have to have parts and so therefore they cannot be truly one. In other words an entity cannot be truly or inherently established as one.

Then the commentary continues with a second syllogism: A form or thing—cannot be truly many—because it is not established as truly one. This is a pervasion, because without one there cannot be many.

You cannot establish a truly or inherently existent many because there is no truly existent one to begin with. So if there is no truly existent one entity or object, then there cannot be truly a multiple entity or object, because 'multiple' has to come from one. As Gyalsab's commentary says: 'This is a pervasion, because without one, there cannot be many'.

Thus the logical reason why without one there cannot be many has been established.

If we were to say that there are two people then that implies that there are more than one. Which means in order to have two people there has to be one person to begin with. Without one person you cannot have two! In summary form cannot be an inherently existent one because it has parts, and form cannot be an inherently existent many because there is no form that is inherently one. The commentary states that using the example of form, the truly established existence of all phenomena is systematically refuted through the reason of there being neither one nor many.

The next qualm as stated in Gyalsab Je's commentary refers to the forms' lack of inherent existence as being inherently existent itself. The qualm begins with the subject: 'If you were to say that the form's lack of true existence is inherently existent...' This is saying 'We agree that form itself cannot be inherently existent. But the lack of true existence of form must be inherently existent'.

The commentary goes on to refute this saying that form does not exist inherently, however the lack of inherent existence of form itself is not established inherently, because without the basis, there cannot be the dependent.

The reason why the lack of inherent existence of form cannot be inherently established or inherently existent is that form itself lacks inherent existence. The form itself is the *basis* and the lack of inherent existence of form is the *dependent*. What is being established here is that if the basis itself lacks inherent existence, then whatever is dependent on the basis cannot be inherently established as well. That is because whatever is dependent on the basis has to be related to the basis. Thus, because the basis itself, which is form, lacks inherent existence, that which is dependent on the basis, which is the lack of inherent existence or emptiness of form, also has to lack inherent existence.

The main point is that because form itself lacks inherent existence, the emptiness of form could not be inherently existent. Why? Because the emptiness of form is dependent on form. Thus, as Gyalsab Je's commentary states, 'without the basis there cannot be the dependant'.

In the Buddha's teaching on the categories of emptiness there is the 'emptiness of emptiness'. That refers to the emptiness of emptiness rather than the inherent existence of emptiness.

The reason for going into this detail is because doubts about inherent existence can arise very easily. When one gets an inkling of how form itself lacks inherent existence, then the doubt, 'I wonder if the emptiness of form and the lack of inherent existence of form itself are inherently existent or truly existent' could easily arise. So in order to remove any possibility of inherent existence or true existence under any circumstance, what is being established here is that the emptiness or the lack of inherent existence of form is itself also empty, and therefore lacks inherent existence.

72. *If it is thought that though disintegration or an antidote
An existent becomes non-existent,*

*Then how without an existent
Could there be disintegration or an antidote?*

As Gyalsab Je explains in his commentary: When a thing naturally disintegrates or is destroyed by an antidote such as when smashed by a hammer, if you think that its inherent existence has ceased to be, how can a thing's inherent existence naturally disintegrate or be destroyed by an antidote?

When a thing naturally *disintegrates* through aging or the process of decay, or when it is *destroyed by an antidote* that is used to bring about its destruction (*such as when smashed with a hammer*), has *the inherent existence* of that thing now been destroyed? As this qualm may arise it has to be refuted.

As the commentary explains, the destruction of the inherent existence of a thing is not possible because inherent existence itself cannot possibly exist. How can a thing's inherent existence naturally disintegrate or be destroyed by an antidote? That is not possible because inherent existence itself cannot possibly exist.

One might assume that when something, for example a vase, disintegrates either naturally or through other causes, then the inherent existence of the vase has also ceased. One could not possibly make that assumption because there was never any inherent existence in the first place. So to assume that its inherent existence has been destroyed when the vase itself is destroyed is a fallacy.

*73ab. Hence, in fact there is no disappearance
Of the world through nirvana...*

As Gyalsab Je's commentary explains: Thus when *nirvana* is obtained, it is not the case of that a *world*, which previously existed inherently, suddenly *disappears*, because there was never a time when it existed inherently.

Just like the earlier example of general phenomena it is further established here that when one obtains nirvana, it is not the case that one is leaving behind a samsara that is inherently existent, and that having obtained nirvana, the inherently existent samsara just suddenly disappears. That cannot be the case because samsara never existed inherently to begin with.

The doubt which may arise is that when one obtains nirvana, one has been freed from an inherently existent samsara. In order to remove that doubt, it is being re-affirmed that there was never an inherently existent samsara to begin with.

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