



which are either to take a fortunate rebirth or an unfortunate one—for as long as we are in cyclic existence, these are the only two options.

What leads to having an unfortunate rebirth is the negative karma that we create now, whereas engaging in virtue now is the cause for obtaining a fortunate rebirth in the next life. So we can see here that it actually comes to same point as in the Christian tradition. I have heard that in the Christian tradition there is a very strong emphasis on adopting virtue, and that the way to create virtue seems to be very much in line with the ten virtues that are explained in the Buddhist tradition.

Within the ten non-virtues, the Buddhist explanation of holding on to wrong views would be quite different to the Christian faith. However, the very basis of ethics, i.e. avoiding the non-virtues of body and speech and mind, seems to be really very similar to the Buddhist tradition. The point here is that we are all heading towards our impending death, and thus every tradition emphasises the need to prepare for what comes afterwards.

Within our own tradition, all the teachings emphasise strongly that obtaining a good, fortunate rebirth is not based on chance, and thus we won't achieve a fortunate rebirth if we don't create the causes now. If we fail to create the causes to have a good rebirth, then our hope and wish for a good rebirth will have no effect.

As explained in the Lam Rim teaching, we need to really contemplate death and impermanence, going over the main points and really familiarising ourselves with them, to the point that it becomes a great impetus to practise the Dharma. The meditation on death and impermanence is not to be underestimated as it is, in fact, a very profound level of practice. Sometimes it may be all too easy for us to think, 'Since that the topic of death and impermanence is presented in the small scope, it must be a low level of practice' and perhaps feel that it is not of great importance, and that there are grander, more important Buddhist teachings to focus on. But in fact there is no greater impetus for practising Dharma than to really contemplate death and impermanence in its entirety, particularly in relation to what happens after death.

We need to really contemplate the consequences of not engaging in the practice of Dharma, and engaging in non-virtuous deeds. What kind of rebirth would that lead to? If we really contemplate that point, it will become an impetus to practise Dharma. If we develop a complacent state of mind, thinking, 'Oh yes, I know desire is not good, but I'm not going to give it up—it's OK to have attachment', then there is no way that we can seriously engage in the practice of Dharma.

As explained in the teachings, the greatest practitioners experience death with a sense of joy and happiness, which is devoid of any fear and anxiety. For a medium level practitioner, the mark of having practised the Dharma is that they will not experience any fear at the time of death. And even for a practitioner who has done the least amount of Dharma practice, the state of mind at the time of death will be one of having no regrets. Whatever our level of Dharma practice, it is good to engage in it with the conscious intention of facing death at one of these three levels.

One of the main points of practising Dharma is to develop a sense of less desire and more contentment. This seems to be in accord with the Christian tradition, which also seems to have a strong emphasis on being contented and having less desire. When it comes down to the essential points of

practice, there is really lot of similarity between Christianity and Buddhism. I recently heard that, when done in the proper way, there is a Christian practice of having a strong, single-pointed faith in God, which actually works to reduce self-grasping. So in that sense it is quite a profound tradition, as any practice that works to lessen grasping at a self is a profound practice.

It is good to reflect upon, and become familiar with the practice of contentment as presented in the different traditions, as a way of encouraging ourselves to adopt this practice in its entirety, knowing that it has been thoroughly tested and seen as being worthy in all traditions. One must not misinterpret this to mean that being contented and having less desire means having to give away all one's belongings and live like a pauper. Rather it is a state of mind where we are not overly concerned about possessions and wealth and money and so forth, and where we utilise whatever we have in a proper way.

### **1.1.3. The forty-second, proclaiming one's own good qualities, etc.**

#### **(42) Conceptuality concerned with approbation**

The root text reads:

426 *Conceptuality concerned with approbation  
Is the thought that—no matter what—  
Others will take one as a spiritual guide  
Due to possessing good qualities.*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains,

The forty-second, *conceptuality concerned with approbation, is the thought that—no matter what—others will take one as a spiritual guide due to possessing good qualities*; this is in conjunction with the attitude of wanting others to know about one's qualities.

This is a very clear explanation. The defect that we need to overcome is having the thought, 'When others know about my good qualities they will accept me as a teacher, or a spiritual guide'. We need to be very careful that we don't incur this defect.

#### **(43) Conceptuality concerned with attachment to helping others**

The root text reads:

427abc *Conceptuality concerned with attachment to others  
Is an intention to help...  
Due to being affected by desire*

Here, Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

The forty-third, *conceptuality concerned with attachment to others, male or female, is an intention to help due to being affected by desire.*

Of all the different types of desire, the attachment between males and females, is one of the most harmful and disturbing types of desire. That kind of disturbing sensual attachment is really a nuisance for the practice of Dharma, because it is a form of attachment that seems to take up so much time, cause so many difficulties, and lead to so many unwanted complications. Maybe I don't need emphasise this point much, because you might have already experienced that for yourselves! *[laughter]*

Some have confided in me that the one thing that really disturbs their mind the most, the thing that makes them really agitated and unsettled, is being affected by sexual desire. In terms of contentment, this is apparently the one attachment that can never be satiated. The more one engages with it, the more, it seems, one has to further engage in it, as

there is no real sense of contentment to be had in sexual desire.

It is when one actually gives into it that desire that the complications arise. Because there is no satisfaction, one is constantly trying to appease that desire, and if the person that one is attracted to is not very compatible, then further complications arise. This is why I regularly emphasise that, as ordinary beings, we cannot expect ourselves or others to be completely free from sexual desire. After all, that is one of the characteristics of being of ordinary being. But because we are inclined to engage of the practice of Dharma, and because we are inclined to accumulate virtue, it is worthwhile for us to really consider bringing a true sense of love, and concern, and compassion to our relationships.

If the element of true compassion and love is present, then that helps to overpower the element of strong attachment to sexual desire. When the factor that holds you together is genuine love and concern then that can be considered as a good relationship that is of mutual benefit, but if attachment is the main factor then that is when the complications start to arise. These are points that you really need to consider.

As I have mentioned previously, we need to be really mindful and careful not to engage in negativity and feel glad when we are able to engage in that negativity, and feel regret when we are not able to engage in a non-virtue. Sexual desire is one of the negativities where these inappropriate feelings arise. If that is the case then how can we possibly assume that we are going to take a good, fortunate rebirth? Willingly engaging in non-virtue, and feeling regret about not being able to engage in that non-virtue is a sure path that leads to the unfortunate realms. These are points that I would assume Dharma practitioners take into consideration. However there are some who are known to have knowledge of Dharma, yet who still engage in these activities. I am not sure if it is because they are not able to practice or what the reason may be. Nevertheless this point needs to given specific consideration.

#### (44) Conceptuality concerned with attachment to harming others

Here the root text reads:

*427bcd...not help others  
Due to being affected by...  
an intent to harm.*

As Gyaltsab Je's restates:

*...and the forty-fourth, not to help others, due to being affected by an intent to harm.*

This is very like the previous defect, and thus no further explanation is really needed.

#### (45) Dislike

The first line of the next verse reads:

*428a Dislike is a mind that is unsteady.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary merely reiterates this line:

*The forty-fifth, dislike, is a mind that is unsteady.*

This defect is more like a consequence of dislike, in that when the mind dislikes something then, because of the nature of that dislike, the mind becomes unstable.

#### (46) Desiring union

The next line is:

*428b Desiring union is a dirtied mind.*

As this is quite explicit, the commentary doesn't give much further explanation:

*The forty-sixth, desiring union, is a dirtied mind polluted with desire.*

Thus the defect of desiring union is having a mind that is polluted or stained with desire.

#### (47) Indifference

The root text reads:

*428cd Indifference is a laziness with a sense of inadequacy  
Coming from a listless body.*

Here Gyaltsab Je says:

*The forty-seventh, indifference, is laziness with a sense of inadequacy, coming from a listless body.*

Basically, what is described here as indifference, is a form of laziness, which was explained earlier. This particular type of laziness is a sense of inadequacy coming from a listless body, which refers to a body that feels heavy, and weighed down by a listless mental state that has no inclination to use one's body to engage in the practice of Dharma.

This particular laziness comes from feeling complacent about the practice of Dharma and not wanting to engage in virtue. The words 'listless body' convey the sense of just lying around. As Shantideva emphasised in *Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, when there is laziness there is no opportunity for virtue to be accumulated. Here Shantideva was quoting directly from a sutra where Buddha mentioned this point. Thus laziness is really the opposite of joyous effort, which is defined as joyfully engaging in virtue. So laziness causes one to lack any sense of joy about engaging in virtue. It is also explained that the person who is infected by laziness will not achieve their goals or wishes.

#### (48) Distortion

*429ab. Distortion is for the afflictive emotions  
To influence body and colour.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je adds a slight point to explain this further.

*The forty-eighth, distortion, is for the afflictive emotions to influence a transformation of body and colour.*

As explained here, afflictive emotions transform one's body and colour.

#### (49) Not wishing for food

As the root text says:

*429cd. Not wishing for food is explained  
As physical sluggishness due to over-eating.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

*The forty-ninth, not wishing for food, is explained as physical discomfort due to overeating.*

As a result of overeating the body becomes very sluggish, and there is no wish to eat more food. The Buddha explained in the vinaya text that the ideal measure of how much one should eat is where two thirds of the stomach is filled, and one third is empty. As the Buddha explained this enables the mind remain fresh, because breathing is not obstructed. From experience you might have noticed that if we eat too much, it becomes harder to breathe, and that is because there is not much room, as the stomach is completely filled up.

#### (50) Having a dejected mind

The root text reads:

*430ab. A very dejected mind is taught  
To be fearful faintheartedness*

Because this is quite explicit, Gyaltsab Je's commentary just reiterates these lines.

The fiftieth, *a very dejected mind, is taught to be fearful faintheartedness.*

Basically, this is a state of mind where one feels very low and has no enthusiasm. With such a state of mind we lose all inspiration and enthusiasm to engage in any activity, in particular Dharma practice. So we need to ensure that we have courageous mind, but again it is a matter of finding the right balance, as being over-courageous and over-zealous can also be a fault. So we need to try finding a realistic measure of courage and zealousness to engage in whatever we want to achieve.

I have emphasised this point in earlier teachings. A great Indian master called Lopon Pawo, or Ashvagosha in Sanskrit, said that if one has a dejected and discouraged mind then nothing meaningful can be accomplished, but with a mind of courage and self-confidence one will be able to achieve everything, which actually lies within our own hands. With that state of mind we will be able to engage in activities to obtain whatever goals that we set out to achieve. So what this great master is actually emphasising is the need for us to have a courageous mind, and a strong sense of confidence in what we want to do.

### (51) Longing for desires

These two lines of the root text relate to this defect.

430cd. *Longing for desires is to desire  
And seek after the five attributes.'*

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary explains:

The fifty-first, *longing for desires is to desire and seek after the five sense pleasures.*

As clearly explained here, this defect is the longing for desire, specifically seeking out the five sense pleasures.

### (52) Harmful intent

Although this was also explained earlier, harmful intent is introduced again in this verse:

431 *Harmful intent arises from nine causes  
Of intending to injure others—  
Having senseless qualms concerning oneself,  
friends, and foes  
In the past, present, and future.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary gives this clear explanation:

The fifty-second, *harmful intent arises from nine causes of intending to injure others, having senseless qualms concerning oneself, friends and foes; that others have harmed oneself and friends in the past, are harming us in the present and will do so in the future, and in regards to enemies, that they have benefited them in the past, are benefiting them in the present and will do so in the future.*

As explained previously, an intention to harm occurs in relation to one's friends and enemies. The nine causes of harmful intent are.

- In relation to *yourself*, the harmful intent arises in relation to those who have harmed you in the past, are harming you now, and will do so in the future.
- In relation to your *friends*, the harmful intent arises in relation to those who have harmed your friends in the past, are harming them now, and will do so in the future.
- In relation to your *enemies*, harmful intent arises towards those who have benefited by your enemies in

the past, are benefiting them now, and who will benefit them in the future.

### (53) Sluggishness

432ab. *Sluggishness is non-activity  
Due to heaviness of mind and body.*

Here Gyaltsab Je's commentary reiterates:

The fifty-third, *sluggishness, is non-activity due to heaviness of mind and body.*

This defect influences the ability to be able to maintain a focused meditation. In meditation, sluggishness is said to be one of the obstacles that can cause the mind to be really dark and in a stupor. As the prayer for the Flourishing of Lama Tsong Khapa's Teachings states: *His pure meditation is cleansed of dark fading and fog.* Through experience you would have noticed that sometimes in meditation there can be a sense of darkness and heaviness in the body and mind, and when that occurs then there is no joy in meditation anymore. When one attempts to meditate, if the mind doesn't seem to be clear and actually feeling dark, then this is the obstacle of sluggishness, which arises from ignorance.

### (54) Drowsiness

432b. *Drowsiness is sleepiness.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary elaborates:

The fifty-fourth, *drowsiness is sleepiness*, which is when the six sensory functions are uncontrollably withdrawn from their respective objects of engagement.

As explained clearly here, drowsiness is actually a form of sleepiness, and when that occurs then the six sensory functions are uncontrollably withdrawn, and are therefore not able to engage with their objects of engagement. There are a number of causes of drowsiness or sleepiness: overeating, hard work or labour, and being very tired, and these are an obstacle to meditation.

The significant point about sleep is that it is one of the fifty-one mental factors, where it is presented as one of the four variables. The reason it is presented as a variable is because, although by its very nature it is usually neutral, sleep can be also non-virtuous or virtuous. These three categories of sleep—virtuous sleep, neutral sleep and non-virtuous sleep—are dependent on the state of mind just prior to going to sleep.

These are very significant points to consider. Since we are practitioners and want to accumulate virtue, we can transform a simple activity such as going to sleep into virtue. We all go to sleep and spend big portion of our life in sleep, so if we can ensure that our sleep is virtuous then we will naturally accumulate virtue even while we sleep.

The way to ensure *virtuous sleep* is to reflect on whatever good deeds one might have done during the day just before going to bed, and think about any practice one has done and rejoice about that. If possible, just before going to sleep visualise the Buddha Shakyamuni just above one's pillow, with light rays flowing down and entering ourselves, and blessing our mindstream. If we can actually fall asleep like that, then we will sleep soundly and naturally, and even at a subconscious level our mind will be in a virtuous state.

If, on the other hand, prior to going to sleep we are reminded of conflicts we have had with others, and we have disturbing thoughts and attitudes, then going to sleep in that state of mind will be *non-virtuous sleep* and, most likely, disturbed sleep as well. Of course if we don't have either good or bad thoughts, virtuous or non-virtuous thoughts,

when going to sleep, then our sleep will be naturally a *neutral sleep*.

So, when we are skilful we can even use our sleep as a means to accumulate virtue. Then if you sleep longer at least you have a virtuous frame of mind for longer [*laughter*]. If we bring to mind all our negative thoughts and concerns prior going to sleep, then our sleep will be non-virtuous sleep, and we will have wasted an opportunity to create virtue as we sleep.

On a practical level, sleep is one of the best ways to rejuvenate our body, and in fact that is the purpose of sleep. So it is most important that our sleep is very sound and undisturbed. If we are not able to sleep well then that doesn't help to rejuvenate the body. If we ensure that we have a virtuous frame of mind as we go to sleep then, by default, because our mind is very peaceful, it will induce a good sound sleep, which will then help to rejuvenate our body, and on the next day we can use it for good purposes. This is another significant point to consider.

### (55) Excitement

As the root text says:

*432d. Excitement is strong disquiet of body and mind.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je basically reiterates this line:

The fifty-fifth, *excitement*, is a strong disquiet of body and mind, due to overeating.

This defect of excitement actually stems from attachment and, as you are aware, excitement is one of the main obstacles to meditation practice. Excitement hinders our capacity to focus the mind from the very beginning. Once we are focused on the object then another obstacle that may arise is laxity, which is when the focus on the object slowly slackens and becomes sluggish. The main point here is that the excitement that arises from attachment is a defect, and that it is one of the main obstacles to our meditation practice. It is said that while distraction can arise from various causes, excitement is particularly related to attachment. This is another point to note.

### (56) Contrition

As the root text explains:

*433ab. Contrition is regret for bad deeds  
Which arises afterwards from grief about them.*

Gyaltsab Je's commentary merely reiterates these lines:

The fifty-sixth, *contrition*, is regret for bad deeds which arises afterwards from grief about them.

It is explained in the teachings that, just like sleep, regret is also one of the variable mental factors. Like sleep there can be a virtuous regret, non-virtuous regret and neutral regret.

*Virtuous regret* is the regret that arises in relation to acknowledging that one has done a negative deed, accepting that that is a wrong deed and generating a strong sense of wishing to purify that negative karma.

*Non-virtuous regret* is regretting having done a positive deed. When we do engage in a good deed, we might later regret it thinking, 'Oh, that was waste of time' or, if you have been generous to others, later you might think, 'Oh, if I haven't given that away I would be able to use it now', and you feel a bit deprived.

*Neutral regret* is the normal regret we feel when we lose something, or a loved one passes away.

Virtuous regret (regretting having engaged in negative deeds in the past) is said to be a very important element of

the purification of negative karma. As most of you would be aware, for a purification practice to be complete, all four opponent powers have to be intact, and of these four the most essential one is regret.

As explained in the teachings, strong regret about a non-virtuous act can purify half of the negative karma that was generated. However for a full purification to take place, all four opponent powers have to be intact, which includes resolve, i.e. making a resolution that one will not engage in that negative deed again in the future. When one is engaging in the practice of purification one must develop the determination to not engage in that negative deed again.

Although it may be possible that one will encounter similar situations and commit the same misdeed in the future, one should not anticipate that this will happen. Rather we need to develop the strong determination, 'I will not engage in this negative deed again', and that strong determination in itself suffices as the opponent power of resolve. If at the back of one's mind one is already anticipating engaging in negative deed, then that resolution would be like a lie. However, if we develop a strong determination to not engage in that misdeed again as part of the purification practice, it is a complete opponent power of resolve.

The main point is the necessity of engaging in the practice of purification, because we don't have to make any effort to accumulate negative karma. We are so drawn to accumulating negative deeds it is as if we cannot even survive without negative karma. It seems to be an essential part of our life and that we cannot survive without engaging negative deeds. One way or another we find ourselves accumulating negative deeds again and again, and the main counter to that is purification practice. That is why purification practice is presented as being essential for Dharma practice. We have so readily engaged in negative deeds, due to habituation and past imprints, and if we don't apply a purification practice then negative deeds rain down on us, and we accumulate more and more negative karma. If, on the other hand, we are constantly mindful and engage in purification practice, it can definitely minimise the effect of our negative deeds. This is how we need to contemplate.

The practice of purification helps to protect us from being daunted by the prospect of not being able to avoid engaging in negative deeds. We might end up thinking, 'Oh, there is no hope for me, because I keep committing this negative deed again and again'. However all is not lost and we can counteract that negativity by engaging in the purification practice. That is the reason why purification practice is presented as essential for our transformation.

An essential element of the purification practice that we need to consider is that while the particular negative deeds that we may have committed in this life may be an impetus for us to engage in purification practice, the real impetus comes from recalling all the negative karmas we have created in past lives. That assumption is based on the fact that in this life, even with a certain amount of intelligence and understanding of virtue and non-virtue we have still created negative deeds. So how much more have we have created in the past when we were completely ignorant of the need to avoid non-virtue. As an animal, a tiger for example, how many other lives have we taken in the past? As a human we might have been a very evil person, committing really negative deeds, such as theft and murder and all of that. Or we have taken rebirth as a god, and been completely engaged with sensual desires, or taken rebirth as a hungry

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ghost in the hell realm, being completely obsessed with food and drink.

If we bring to mind how we have been completely immersed in negativity in past lives, then when we engage in the purification practice our regret will be as strong as if we have consumed poison. This analogy of poison is a very vivid illustration of the degree to which we need to develop regret. If we consume poison we would fear for our life, and think, 'I might die from this. What I have done by consuming this?' We would do everything possible to try to remove that poison from our system. It is said that prospect of the consequences of the negative karma that we have created in the beginningless past lifetimes is even graver, in that it becomes the cause for unceasing suffering in unfortunate rebirths. Therefore developing very strong regret is essential for our purification practice to have a strong effect.

Just as we develop regret for negative deeds, it is good for us to rejoice in our many good virtuous deeds in past lifetimes. Even though we don't remember them now, we must have also created virtuous karma, because we enjoy a fortunate rebirth now. So we should rejoice in the virtues we created in the past, the virtue that we are accumulating now, and the virtues that we will create in the future. Following that rejoicing in virtue we need to dedicate the merit that we have accumulated from those virtues in the past, the merit we have accumulated now, and the merit that we will accumulate in the future, to the ultimate goal of enlightenment. Practising purification and accumulating merit is the way for us to engage in life as a practitioner.

### **(57) Doubt**

As the root text reads:

*433cd. Doubt is to be of two minds  
About the [four] truths, the Three Jewels, and so  
forth*

What is translated here as doubt, is basically a state of mind which has qualms in two directions, being uncertain about whether something is 'this' or 'that'.

Gyaltzab Je's commentary basically reiterates the verse:

*The fifty-seventh, doubt, is to be of two minds about the  
four truths, the Three Jewels and so forth.*

There are said to be three types of doubts: doubt that leans towards falsity, neutral doubt, and doubt that leans to the truth.

The doubt that is presented as one of the six root delusions is to be understood as deluded doubt. It seems we need to refer to that as a deluded doubt, because all doubts are not necessarily a deluded doubt, thus not necessarily a delusion.

The doubt that is presented here is being of two minds about the four truths, the Three Jewels and so forth, is a doubt about the validity of the Dharma. So this presentation of the defect of doubt is definitely related to a deluded doubt. Deluded doubt is to be understood as one of the three main obstacles to achieving the ultimate goal of liberation and enlightenment.

The *Abhidharmakosha* says that the three main obstacles to liberation that are to be abandoned on the path of seeing are deluded doubt, the view of the transitory collection, and holding unethical conduct as being supreme. Deluded doubt causes uncertainty about obtaining liberation; the view of the transitory collection causes fear and hesitation about obtaining liberation; and holding unethical conduct as being

supreme causes one to go on a wrong path, which misleads and thus does not bring one to liberation.

This can be understood with a simple analogy: If one wishes to reach a particular destination, the three main obstacles to reaching our destination are going on a path that has a fork, causing you to wonder is it this path or that path; having fear and hesitation about actually stepping onto the path; and going on a completely wrong and misleading path, which never gets you to your destination.

I usually advise people to rely upon their own wisdom. If we have keep on asking someone else, it will be hard to always find someone to ask. Ultimately we need to develop the wisdom to be able to determine what is best for ourselves. And if one can cultivate and really strengthen that wisdom then we won't have to constantly have to rely upon always seeking advice from others.

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