

Yet there seem to exist independently rising
And falling events, which, in fact, are conditioned
By various forces, components and parts.
It is this very level on which we experience
Birth and our death and whatever life brings.
So please, in this world of appearances only,
Let's always be sure what we do is of virtue
And shun all those acts that would cause us great pain.

The other day we had the example of the sitar. We were saying that the sound of the sitar does not arise independently of the accumulation of its causes and conditions, but depending on the accumulation of the causes and conditions the result – sound – arises. But if we look for sound in any one of the causes, we won't find it – not in the strings, not in the body of the sitar, not in the hands playing it. Since sound is arising in dependence upon its causes and conditions, we say that sound is empty of inherent existence. Sound is neither a 'truly existing one' nor a 'truly existing many', because it is established in dependence on its parts.

Even though phenomena are empty of independent existence, conventionally they still exist. In this world of appearances, one still experiences happiness and one still experiences suffering, and in this world of appearances, happiness comes from virtue, and suffering comes from non-virtue. Therefore, it is important that one still tries to abandon negative karma and tries to accumulate virtue.

So, we go to the next verse:

When a vase has been filled by the dripping of water,
The first drops themselves did not fill it alone;
Nor was it made full by the last several drops.
It was filled by an interdependent collection
Of causes and forces that came all together -
The water, the pourer, the vase and such things.

This is again an example to illustrate how results come about through the collection of causes and conditions. In this case, the full vase does not arise out of itself, and also it is not caused, for example, by one drop alone. We cannot pinpoint any one drop as being the drop that is solely responsible for filling the vase. But, as a collection, the drops are able to cause the filling of the vase. So, the full vase doesn't arise independently of its causes and conditions – such as the many drops, the vase, and so forth – but in dependence upon these.

One has to relate to one's own life this example of the vase being filled by an accumulation of drops. First of all, do not think that it is OK to create even small negative karma, thinking you have abandoned very heavy negative acts but that the small acts don't matter. It is very good to remember this example – that, even though one small act by itself might not be all that harmful, one small act after another will slowly, slowly bring about a very strong accumulation of negative karma, and the vase will fill.

The same applies for the other way around. One shouldn't think that only very great and very strong positive actions are worth doing, and that small positive acts are not worth doing. Again, that is a wrong attitude. In fact, one has to accumulate virtues little by little, piece by piece.

Everybody wants to attain happiness, and the happiness one wants to attain, as in the examples mentioned, doesn't arise independently of an accumulation of causes and conditions. Rather, one's happiness comes about through the accumulation of causes and conditions, and [the result

of] those causes and conditions doesn't come about all at once, again arising independently – all at once there is this big happiness – but one has to accumulate the causes and conditions one by one. Then, slowly after having worked for a long time, one can achieve one's aim.

Thinking in this way generates more confidence, strength of mind and enthusiasm. Geshe-la says he quite often advises people that it is very good to put aside a certain amount of money every week – put \$50 in the bank every week and, even though at the beginning it might not sound very much, once one has done this for a year, or for a few years, one will have accumulated quite a bit of money. It works like that in the ordinary world, and it also works like that in dharma. Dharma happiness doesn't arise independently, or all at once, but has to be created through the accumulation of its causes and conditions.

We have time for a few questions.

Question: I am not sure about everybody wanting happiness. I think this is conditioned through society and that small children don't have that yearning for happiness.

Answer: Geshe-la says there is not the slightest doubt that people want happiness and don't want suffering. There's no need to state any kind of proof for that. Everybody has self-grasping and, with that, comes the wish for the self to be happy.

So, based upon the grasping at the 'I' or the self, we automatically generate like and dislike. We generate like for what appears to us as pleasant and desirable, and we generate dislike for what appears to us as undesirable and unpleasant. We can even observe this with small children – they want this, and they don't want that. So, we generate attachment towards the pleasurable appearances, and aversion towards the unpleasurable appearances. This is something that small children also have.

[Questioner repeats same point as above regarding the conditioning.]

But Geshe-la just mentioned the children. Can you clarify that one? Geshe-la asks you to clarify.

[Questioner continues, asking whether or not there is a universal quality of happiness that exists without the definition being given to us by others, continuing that they had felt no inclination to be either happy or unhappy as a child.]

Geshe-la says that small children will have various experiences, without necessarily being able to give them a clearly defined name – small children will not necessarily say, "I am looking for happiness, and I am trying to avoid suffering" – however when they experience suffering, they will generate dislike for that.

A small child might see these flowers, and not know the name of the flowers. They will see the flowers but they will not say, "Oh, look, there is a camellia", because first they need to be informed that that's a camellia, but that doesn't mean that they don't see them.

If somebody doesn't tell you, "Oh, that person is such-and-such", or otherwise inform you that another person's name is so-and-so, you will not know that person's name. It is the same with this glass. First, somebody tells you, "Oh, that's a glass of water. That's what's called a glass, and in there, that's water". Then you know that, "What I'm seeing here, that's a glass, and inside there, there is water". So, that labelling process comes about through outer conditions.

In the same way, small children also experience various

feelings of happiness and suffering, and also generate like for happiness and dislike for suffering, but they are not able to really articulate that, or give the process they experience a name.

For example, if you take a child to a place where he or she likes very much to go, then he or she will be very happy, and laugh, and so forth. Of course, whether that is actual happiness is a different debate. A small child will cry if it is hungry – first the child is hungry and it cries, then it gets its milk, and then it is very content.

Is there some other question?

Question: Does ignorance get abandoned all at once, or through accumulation of causes and conditions as mentioned in the example?

Answer: The abandoning of ignorance comes about in stages. For example, one has to realise emptiness in order to overcome ignorance. That is first done on a conceptual level by way of a mental image. Then, through increasing that realisation, it becomes a direct, non-conceptual understanding. Further, through meditating on that again for some time, one can attain the state of arhatship, when one has completely abandoned ignorance. So there is a process.

Question: I would just like to clarify one thing. Cause and effect creates karma, and cause and effect is without inherent existence, yet it is the karma which survives our death, because it is the karma which will determine our rebirth into whatever realm. Could Geshe-la please elaborate on that for me?

Answer: It comes about through the accumulation of causes and conditions, conventionally in mere name; but saying that it exists conventionally in mere name doesn't mean to say that it is completely non-existent. What do you have to say to that?

Karma arises through the accumulation of causes and conditions. Our happiness arises through the accumulation of its causes and conditions, and also our suffering arises through the accumulation of its causes and conditions. Therefore, in dharma practice, what we try to do is to accumulate all the complete causes for happiness and increase them. If we try to lessen and finally completely eradicate all the causes for suffering, then that is the whole point of dharma practice.

So happiness comes about through the ripening of virtuous karma, so through the ripening of this virtuous karmic potential, then happiness can arise.

Questioner: I understand that. Perhaps I can simplify my question. Does karma survive death? If so, does it have inherent existence?

Answer: Actually, karma disintegrates in the very next moment of its existence, but it leaves or it plants on the mental continuum what we call a karmic potential, or a karmic seed. This karmic potential goes with the mind from this life to the next life. In a future life, that karmic potential has the possibility to create happiness or suffering through its ripening.

For example, in the case of killing, at first we will generate the motivation in our mind, wanting to kill the other person. At that moment, we accumulate or create what is called 'mental karma'. Then, through the force of that motivation, if we go and actually kill that other person through actions of our body, for example, we create the

actual karma of killing. That karma of killing leaves on our mental continuum a karmic seed or a karmic potential, and that karmic seed or karmic potential goes with our mental consciousness to the next life, where it then ripens in a suffering result.

As was explained before, we should bring the mind home, not letting it be distracted to outside objects, and then focusing single-pointedly inwards, we will recite the Shakyamuni Buddha mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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