
422.212.21: Thinking About The Specific Suffering Of Humans

མིའི་སྐྱབས་བཞུགས་བསམ་པ།

You should ask yourself whether by taking higher rebirths you are free from suffering. The answer is no, because you are still prone to the suffering of that higher rebirth. So it is wrong to think that by being born in higher rebirths of cyclic existence that there will be less suffering. In the life story of Lord Buddha himself, he saw the suffering of old age, sickness and death, after which he renounced the householder's life and pursued the path of liberation.

So, as the text continues, we must be aware of all the suffering which exists in this human realm. Thinking of this suffering is not intended to add more suffering to our lives. Rather the purpose of such contemplation is to develop renunciation towards this human life within cyclic existence. If we trace the root cause of suffering in human life, it is the ignorance of ultimate reality; the ignorance of self grasping at inherent existence. But on the surface the immediate cause of our suffering, restlessness, disappointment and discontent is attachment to the seemingly attractiveness and beauty of cyclic existence.

This topic of thinking about the specific sufferings of humans has seven subdivisions.

422.212.211: The Suffering Of Birth

སྐྱེ་བའི་སྐྱབས་བཞུགས་བསམ་པ།

The first of the specific sufferings of human beings is the suffering of birth. We shall only deal with this briefly as the text gives a very clear description. One master said, "I am not frightened of death, I am frightened of birth". This is because the moment birth begins is also the beginning of the various forms of suffering. We cannot remember anything of our birth but that does not mean that we did not undergo suffering. It is said that the experience of being in the mother's womb is like being put in an iron vase filled with filth, and then having the lid tightly closed, for between nine and ten months. There is a lot of proof that what the mother does will affect the child. If what she drinks is too hot or cold it affects the child. If she engages in physical exercise the child will feel the movement. Although we do not remember these events now, whenever we take rebirth from the womb¹ we must experience these sufferings again. Likewise when we exit from the womb, that too is not pleasant. Our first response is to cry and our body is

¹Editor: There are four ways in which rebirth can occur: from an egg, a womb, heat and moisture, and miraculously. Here Geshe-la is only referring to the sufferings of taking birth from the womb since humans are generally born from the womb. In the times when we were born in other ways we encountered the various sufferings peculiar to those types of taking rebirth.

so sensitive that even being wrapped in soft cloth is like being wrapped in hot iron.

The reason why we have to take rebirth, why we have to undergo such experiences of suffering from that moment, and why it is all pervaded with suffering, is because the process of taking rebirth is all due to the force of our karma and mental delusions. So all these sufferings from the moment of birth are inevitable every time we are reborn, and only permanent freedom from cyclic existence can free us from these sufferings.

Making Meditation A Personal Experience

The manner of contemplating this suffering of birth, for example, should not be like watching a play involving other people. Rather in our contemplations we have to feel that unless we permanently free ourselves from cyclic existence we shall personally experience these sufferings, and they will become our experience of life. In this way we can generate a sense of fear of taking rebirth, and so arouse some thought of seeking a permanent state of liberation, and some sense of renunciation towards cyclic existence.

You should read the sections on this topic in the text. It is very clear. Whatever you do, whether meditating or reading on the subject, try to make your practice a means of generating a sense of renunciation, or a sense of repulsiveness to being born in cyclic existence. Having cultivated this renunciation, one will then seek liberation. Then because one seeks liberation one will follow the path of the threefold training of morality, concentration and wisdom.

422.212.212: The Suffering Of Ageing

ན་བའི་སྐྱབས་བཞུགས་བསམ་པ།

After birth the suffering does not stop. The body one has attained does not remain the same—it changes. It undergoes a process of disintegration or ageing moment by moment. Gradually this body which was once youthful, full of strength and beauty will become frail, unattractive and lose strength. These changes can become a source of various types of suffering eg, mental suffering, particularly if someone is very attached to the look of their body. If they were very beautiful when young, and in later years see an elderly face in the mirror they feel very sad, and suffer, all because of changes in their body.

We cannot prevent the natural ageing of the body but to some extent we can minimise the mental problems which we experience with ageing and the resulting changes to our body. There are some who are more accepting of their looks as they age. Even though their body looks old it does not disturb their mind. Our body is subject to change due to both this natural force of ageing and various unpredictable conditions. We have no choice—we must put up with various sufferings caused by ageing.

Our contemplations on the suffering of cyclic existence

should cause us to follow the Dharma practice with some sense of urgency. On taking rebirth the suffering of birth is followed by the suffering of ageing. As you grow older your body declines in outer looks, strength, function of organs and faculties, and response to sensual pleasure. Your life-span is constantly decreasing.

Everyone who takes birth is subject to ageing. No-one escapes the suffering it brings. Even the young and beautiful will experience it. So there is no point of being too attached to your fit and beautiful body. It will inevitably decline, so it is better to have less attachment to the beauty of the body. There are some who are reputed to be able to run hundreds and hundreds of kilometres, but when they become old they can hardly walk for a few steps, or even stand, or sit down.

Whose fault is it that our body suffers such changes? It is the fault of being born in cyclic existence. And why is one born in cyclic existence? It is because of karma and mental delusions. Of these two main causes the main one is the mental delusions which cause us to create karma. To be more precise, it is the ignorance of self grasping which is the root cause, and the antidote to that is the wisdom realising emptiness. To generate that wisdom which realises emptiness one requires stable single pointed concentration. To generate single pointed concentration you need to train the mind in ethics. So we need to follow the pure Dharma practice of morality.

From the text we gain a clear knowledge of subject of the teaching, but when we engage in meditation we must know how to combine the elements of our knowledge so as to produce a strong drive to achieve spiritual goals, and actually change one's way of thinking and whole view of life. Thus when contemplating the suffering of ageing, of course we have to think of all the sufferings of old age, but eventually this can be linked to the twelve links, then progressively linked to the entire stages of the path up to the state of buddhahood. If you want to combine the teachings with your meditation practice there is no lack of material upon which to meditate. If the suffering of ageing is the main subject, it provides a lot to meditate upon.

This finishes the first block of teachings. Next week is discussion night. So prepare for that and share your knowledge with others. The night after that will be the written test. This gives an opportunity to do self study and put pen to paper. The skill of writing is a useful thing to have. Those who do not want to write the test must still attend but do their own meditation.

The compulsory test question will be related to the short beginning talk on the motivation of bodhicitta. "Why do we need the motivation of bodhicitta when engaging in Mahayana practice? Why are forms of motivation other than bodhicitta not suitable for practising Mahayana?"

We shall recite the Twenty-one Tara's praise. This prayer is said so that all of us will meet all suitable condition of Dharma practice and be free of all obstacles. Also dedicate some prayers to those who are ill, for their

quick recovery and long life.

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

A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Samdup Tsering



ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅངས།

25 April 1995

Try to generate the right motivation to the best of your ability

422.212.21: Contemplating The Suffering Of Humans (Cont.)

We are talking about the suffering of human beings. Even though it is excellent to be born as a human being, there is still a great deal of suffering in that human existence. Try, therefore, to realise that the reason why there is suffering in the human realm is because a human birth is also a birth in cyclic existence. As the nature of human existence is suffering, and because you do not wish to experience any suffering, you should try to see the cause of this suffering, and seek the path to liberation.

Suffering Strengthens Our Spiritual Practice

At the times when you face a problem in life e.g. some physical disease or receiving harm from others, you must remember to reinforce your knowledge of Dharma. You must think of integrating the teachings on the law of karma as explained in the small stages of the path. The difference between those who follow the spiritual path and others does not depend on their outer looks, but is in their mental outlook - their approach to life. When we face life's problems, we have to try to see them in the light of our Dharma knowledge, such as the law of karma for instance. The pain we experience from disease, or the feeling of hurt caused by others, are all manifestations of the fruit of our own karma which we have created in the past.

Realising that the true cause of such unwanted situations is our own karma, shows us that there is no reason to get angry at another person or object. It is like cutting our own hand with a knife through our own fault. Since it is our own fault, we do not get angry at anyone else, and somehow we have tolerance of the pain. It is the same if we realise that unwanted situations are caused by ourselves, or are the results of our own karmic actions. As we have already learnt, once an action is created it will definitely produce its result. So we can see that an unpleasant situation is the result of our karma, and this is a good thing, because now you know that will not have to experience that result in the future. This generates more tolerance towards the unpleasant situation. Also, because the result of that karma is

undesirable, you are keen to avoid creating that karma again.

To a large extent, the way we mentally view a situation makes a great difference. If our view is very negative this gives us further mental problems, in addition to the problem we are actually facing. Tempers are frayed, courage is lost and so on. However with a correct view you will have more tolerance of the situation. This will encourage you, and give more strength to your spiritual practice.

The Benefits Of Contemplating Suffering

Obviously meditation on suffering is to free ourselves from the suffering, not bring more. As a result of meditating on the various faults of cyclic existence, we will receive the benefits listed in Shantideva's *Guide to a Bodhisattva's Way of Life*:¹

- refraining from non-virtuous negative actions
- having strong wish to perform a positive or virtuous action
- cultivating compassion towards other samsaric beings
- overcoming pride
- generating a feeling of disgust towards cyclic existence

Through knowing the sufferings of cyclic existence in a personal context, compassion towards other beings will increase. For example someone who has had excruciating stomach pain in the past, will naturally feel sympathy for someone else suffering the same pain. Therefore it is natural that through fully realising your own suffering in cyclic existence you will recognise it in other beings, and feel compassion towards them.

In reality everything that we experience personally, and that we see others experience, is a learning experience. It

¹ *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*, Chapter 6, verse 21 :

Furthermore suffering has good qualities:

"Through being disheartened with it, arrogance is dispelled, compassion arises for those in cyclic existence, evil is shunned and joy is found in virtue."

In the lam rim teachings generally the additional benefit of inspiring one to take refuge is stated.

teaches the Dharma to us. For instance, if you are a spiritual practitioner, and you see somebody who is very sick and in pain, you cannot simply watch. You know that the cause is negative karma. For you, therefore, it generates the motivation to refrain from negative actions. Likewise the happiness which we always seek is the result of positive karma, and this generates the motivation to practise positive actions. You will feel compassion for the one who is undergoing suffering, and realise that although you are not presently suffering from physical pain or disease, it may happen to you in the future. So there is no pride when you see other beings suffering since you could also face that same suffering. As long as there is samsaric rebirth due to force of karma, and delusion, there is no escape from the sufferings that follow: sickness, aging and death.

422.212.213: The Suffering Of Sickness²

འཚི་བའི་སྐྱུག་བསྐྱེད་བསམ་པ།

Having finished the suffering of birth and aging we now move to the suffering of sickness. Think of how sickness changes our life: the loss of mental clarity and thinking power, not to mention the decline of our body in terms of its physical appearance, strength, and the sense organs. All these decline. Your feelings also change. Because of sickness you lose your desire for things which you usually like, and must take things which are very undesirable. On the surface some look healthier or happier than others, but in reality we are all caught in the nature of the suffering of illness.

Meditating On Suffering Strengthens Motivation

Meditation helps us to practise virtue and to avoid non-virtue. This is very important. Why do we meditate on suffering? It is because our aim is to attain happiness in this life and future lives. If, by meditating on suffering, we develop a stronger motivation to practise virtue and avoid non-virtue, then naturally this will help us in the future. For even if one does not wish it, happiness will come naturally, and suffering will not be experienced even if we should want it.

The practice of creating virtue and avoiding non-virtue will even help us in this life, because it will help us to purify negativities. This cleanses our continuum. The reason why our mind is unruly, uncalm and unhappy is because of the piles of negativities inside us. In a sense the more negativities we accumulate within us, the more unruly and unhappy our mind becomes. On the positive side, through the practice of adopting virtue and avoiding non-virtue you will find more peace and happiness within your mind.

Anzac Day Holiday

Today is a public holiday because of Anzac Day. To Geshe-la's knowledge this is the day on which we remember the very brave Australian soldiers who went to war and gave their lives for their country. It is important to remember them. Because of their sacrifice, Australia today enjoys peace, freedom and national security. To show our gratitude to them we shall recite Chenrezig's six syllable mantra twenty-one times. Dedicate the mantra to those who died for their country and people, so that they will be born in pure land of Chenrezig.

Geshe-la would like to thank you for rolling mantras last week. We did many but there are many more to do. We shall do some more next week.

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² *Liberation In The Palm*, page 492. The title used in the text is The Suffering Of Illness.

Study Group - "Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand"
A Commentary by The Venerable Geshe Doga
Translated by Samdup Tsering



ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུངས།

2 May 1995

The visualisation of Shakyamuni Buddha is a suitable practice for meditation. If you feel uncomfortable visualising on the crown of your head then you can visualise the image in front of yourself. If you choose to have it above your head, the base of the visualisation should be about 15 cm (6 inches) above your crown¹, and the object should not be very large. With improvement in your visualisation skills, a large size can make you feel uncomfortable (due to its weight). So visualise the object in a small size. Also, use the same size, colour and all the features of the object whenever you engage in this type of meditation. This is important, so that calm abiding can be cultivated more quickly.

Now generate the proper motivation for listening to the teachings.

We have been discussing the sufferings of human beings in terms of the four types of suffering: birth, sickness, ageing and death. As discussed last week, it is important to know the reasons for meditating on suffering and how this meditation can be put into practice. Having finished the sufferings of birth, ageing and sickness, the next is death.

422.212.214: The Suffering Of Death²

འཆི་བའི་སྐྱུག་བསྐྱེད་བསམ་པ།

At this point we should recall the teachings on death and impermanence which we covered in earlier teachings. The main fact is that none of us can do anything to prevent death. However we have the capacity to prevent unwanted experiences at the time of death. We can prepare ourselves now so that at the time of death nothing will frighten or worry our mind, and the moment of death will be very calm and peaceful.

Preparing For Death

Just as we prepare in order to accomplish daily activities, so there are certain things that can be prepared before

death comes. These include getting our mind used to wholesome ways of thinking, or in other words getting our mind used to virtue. Because, if at the time of death we cultivate a very positive state of mind, then death is not terrifying, and our future destiny is not unpredictable and frightening.

The great Lama Langdo Rinpoche said:

Death for me is like changing
this very old body, which is
old in the morning, to a divine
body in the afternoon.³

To a person used to virtue or spiritual practice, death is a matter of leaving this old body to attain a new one. It is not something very unwelcome or frightening. The experience of death, for the very advanced spiritual practitioner, is very joyful. For a medium practitioner there is no feeling of nervousness or reluctance. Lastly, for the lower level spiritual practitioner death is not something regrettable.

One of our main challenges as spiritual practitioners is death. Meeting that challenge is a matter of familiarising the mind with virtuous practice and positive ways of thinking. Virtuous practice does not come naturally and at the time of death it is even more difficult to generate a virtuous state of mind. So it is important to cultivate a virtuous mind now. If through your practice, your mind becomes very familiar with virtue now, then at the time of death, cultivating that virtuous state of mind is only a matter of having the motivation to do so.

Therefore it is important to know how to integrate this study on death into our own practice so as to encourage our spiritual development. Performing the Guru Shakyamuni Buddha meditation at the time of death would ensure a very peaceful death, and a better future. So you can see the benefit of becoming familiar with this meditation now.

Why Does Fear Arise At The Time Of Death?

Fear arises at the time of death because of being separated from all those things to which you are very attached – your body, possessions, close relatives, friends, followers

¹ During the teaching Geshe-la actually gave the following illustration of how far the visualisation should be above the crown of your head. He made a fist with the thumb stretched upwards. This is about 15 cm or 6 inches.

² "Liberation In The Palm Of Your Hand", page 492

³ Page 342, *Liberation In The Palm Of Your Hand*

or students, and any other pleasant objects. Most of our fear is all because of our attachment to all these desirable things. There is also fear because of physical pain. Of all these reasons, the main reason for fear is of the mind being parted from this body. That separation of the mind from the body is the literal point of death. Without this attachment to the body there is no reason to be scared of leaving it.

How can this fear of death be utilised?

Unless we do something about it, death is not something we look forward to. It is quite natural for us to feel unhappy if we think of death now, because it entails permanent separation from all the desired objects to which we are attached.

Those not following a spiritual practice either do not think of death at all, or if they do, they just experience fear. For a spiritual practitioner however, that fear causes them to search for what will help at the time of death. The things that will fail to be of benefit are worldly things like wealth, friends, relatives and possessions. The spiritual practitioner realises that the only thing that can help is spiritual practice.

Therefore for a spiritual practitioner, thinking of death now, or reflecting on this fear of death, can stimulate them to practise now. It can also help them gain a deeper understanding of life, and the impermanence of all the things around them now. Thus attachment to those things is minimised.

If at the time of death one thinks of worldly things that are attractive, attachment is generated, and there are other objects which generate hatred. If, at the time of death the mind is allowed to wander in those directions of desire and hatred it becomes very unstable. So it is important to train the mind in meditation now, to cut off from all those objects that generate desire and hatred, and to focus on virtuous objects that enhance inner peace. Then, at the time of death we can focus the mind on virtuous objects, and completely stop all other thoughts from arising.

If we have taken this life due to the force of karma and delusions then death is unavoidable. Nothing in this world including our body, possessions and friends can be of help at the time of death, so there is no point in pursuing and grasping at those things. Realising the true insignificance of all those worldly objects, one generates a sense of disgust towards them. That sense of disgust towards samsara is the main cause leading to the state of liberation.

The sense of renunciation is very important to cultivate, and if all our spiritual practice is performed within the force of this sense of renunciation, then our practice becomes a true cause to attain liberation. From this point of view talking about death is not just to frighten us. Rather it is to lead us to a state of liberation – the state beyond life and death.

Now we are going to roll some mantras, but before that we shall recite the Heart Sutra.

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9 May 1995

Establish the right motivation for listening to the teachings.

422.212.215: Suffering Of Being Separated From Desirable Objects

སྐྱེས་པ་དང་བྲལ་བའི་སྐྱེས་བཞུགས།

We have finished discussing the suffering of human beings in terms of the sufferings of birth, sickness, ageing and death. Next is the suffering of being separated from desirable objects.

As a natural part of being born as a human in samsara, we are subject to being separated from close people, such as our parents, partners, relatives and friends. We are also subject to being separated from the social position or status we may have. We must also suffer due to losing our own power, fame and reputation. There is the suffering due to losing our wealth and possessions. Even if you are a celibate Sangha, one day you will be separated from your own vows.

All this suffering results from being separated from things which we cherish. It is not something unpredictable or unexpected; it has to happen and it is a natural result of being born in cyclic existence.

Overcoming The Suffering Of Being Separated From Desirable Objects

Two things need to be done to overcome this suffering of being separated from desirable objects. Firstly the cause should be known, and secondly, that cause must be removed.

The true spiritual practitioner, has detachment from all mundane objects, and so does not experience suffering as a result of not attaining wealth or friends, or being separated from them. Whereas for most of us, all

samsaric objects - friends, wealth and so on - are a source of suffering. The more friends or wealth you have, the more problems you face. Why do all these objects bring suffering to our lives? It is due to our grasping at them. So the main cause of suffering is our strong attachment to mundane objects such as friends and wealth.

In order to free ourselves from being enslaved by these worldly objects (and therefore undergoing suffering), we must turn our mind away from attachment to them. This can be done by seeing faults in those objects, because if we see good qualities in them we may become attached. Excluding our parents who have true affection within their hearts, what worldly friends will not eventually deceive or disappoint us? We must be careful upon whom we rely, since most other people are intent on pursuing their own selfish goals. We shall be lucky if, through friendship with another, one quarter of that friendship will provide satisfaction. The other three quarters are likely to be a cause for dissatisfaction - worldly friends are uncertain and unreliable.

Through realising the faults of various samsaric objects, we can cultivate a sense of renunciation towards them. Then, the more we turn away from these objects, the more we can enhance and generate peace in the mind, and the more freedom from suffering we shall enjoy.

The True Cause Of Suffering

The true cause of suffering is the desire which is within the mind. We may attribute the cause of our suffering to someone else, but actually it is a direct outcome of our own desire or attachment. We can understand this by thinking of a person to whom we were very attracted to in the past, but who is an object of hatred at the moment. You currently have a picture of that hated person as being very negative, ugly, and undesirable, so you are not unhappy if that person is far away. Indeed, not having that person around you makes you happy. However five years ago, when you saw that same person as very attractive and desirable, to be separated from them caused suffering. If the direct cause is not our mental attitude of desire, there is no reason to feel happy about being separated from that person now, or unhappy about being separated in the past. It is the same person!

1 Page 493 Liberation In The Palm Of Your Hand. The title used in the text is The Suffering Of Being Separated From The Beautiful

Changing Your Mental Attitude

Suppose you are rejected by a friend to whom you are very attracted. You will feel unhappy and disturbed every time you think of that attractive and desirable person. Obviously if your attitude to that person changes (from seeing them as desirable to seeing them as antagonistic) it will not upset you if you do not see, or talk to, that person.

If you have not overcome desire for someone, the initial step to stop the misery they bring to your life, is to stop thinking of them. Do not bring them to mind. Try to forget them, because there is no point in thinking of them if the relationship cannot be restored. It is better to completely forget about it, since it only brings suffering.

Just as we meditated today on uncertainty, so in our own minds we should try to realise the reasons why the various samsaric objects (friends, relatives, etc) are so unreliable. If, in your mind, you gain some conviction in that fact, then meditation can be very effective in calming the mind. However, you cannot meditate with paper; listing reasons on a piece of paper will only aid memorisation, not inner peace and happiness.

Try to see that the purpose behind learning and meditating on the various types of suffering in cyclic existence, is part of cultivating a sense of renunciation – of liberation from cyclic existence. Try also, to incorporate all these reflections on suffering, and all the faults of cyclic existence to produce that renunciation.

Geshe-la would like to thank Vanessa, Caroline and the others who helped organise the Sunday picnic, which was a great success. Geshe-la was glad to see so many there.

Once again Geshe-la has to ask your patience, and help, to roll more mantras. There is only one month before the blessing ceremony, which will be attended by many other geshes. Geshe-la does not feel comfortable about asking for help, but he feels close enough to the study group to ask them to assist.

As usual on these mantra rolling nights, we shall have tea ready in the hall. Please do stay for the tea even if you cannot stay longer.

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