
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།

4 October 1994

Generate the motivation that "In order to benefit all sentient beings, I must achieve Buddhahood, and for this reason I am listening to and practising the Lam Rim teachings."

Realising That Merely Achieving Higher Rebirth Is Not Enough

Last week we discussed the definition of the stages of path of a middling person. To begin with, remember that the main topics of the stages of the path of the small scope include taking refuge, then following the instructions associated with taking refuge - discarding the ten non-virtues and adopting the ten virtuous actions. So by following the path of the small scope one can be assured freedom from of lower rebirth, or even attaining a higher form of rebirth. But this is not enough.

The reason why it is not sufficient just to prevent lower rebirth is because we are like a criminal facing execution in 30 days. The date of that execution can be postponed, but ultimately that execution will occur. Similarly, even though we now enjoy a higher rebirth, the virtuous karma which caused us to enjoy such a high rebirth will soon run out. Then we shall be born in a lower rebirth.

It is a fact that none of us wishes for a lower rebirth. We prefer to take rebirth in the higher realms. So we have to consider both the causes to prevent lower rebirth, and the causes for higher rebirth. The cause is finding the correct refuge object. But this is not enough. Having found the correct refuge object one must then follow instructions for taking refuge.

The instructions of taking refuge are adopting the ten virtuous actions and discarding the ten non-virtuous actions. By following these instructions one can be certain of avoiding rebirth in the lower realms. Then, at the time of death there will be no reason to feel regret or fear, because one knows that after this life one shall not take rebirth in lower realms. Rather there will be a sense of joy because of anticipation of rebirth in the higher realms

If we contemplate further, we see that is it not enough to be reborn into higher rebirth. It is only a temporary relief from lower rebirth, just like the criminal who gets a temporary stay of execution. So we realise that to be permanently free of suffering we must free ourselves from cyclic existence.

Generating The Wish For A Permanent Cessation Of Suffering

What needs to be done in order to never experience suffering again? One needs to be permanently freed from the bondage of cyclic existence or samsara. Without such a

liberation from cyclic existence, that wish to never experience any future suffering, no matter how small, will not be fulfilled.

Generating The Wish To Achieve Nirvana

In order to achieve permanent state of liberation or nirvana there must be a genuine wish to achieve that state. Therefore one must consider how to cultivate that wish for liberation, for having that wish is entering into stages of path of the middling scope.

Such a wish for liberation does not arise naturally, rather it depends upon a knowledge of the reasons for wishing to achieve such liberation. According to stages of path of middling scope, there are two main teachings which act as causes and conditions to generate that wish:

- a. four noble truths¹
- b. twelve links of dependent arising²

Of course we shall cover these subjects later, but for now you should familiarise yourselves with the names of the four noble truths and the twelve links.

Definitions Of Liberation And Cyclic Existence

To begin the practice of achieving a true wish for liberation, the first thing to be known is the precise definition of 'liberation', for without that knowledge one cannot generate the wish to achieve it.

The term 'liberation' means being liberated or released or freed. There can be many things from which one can be liberated, but here liberation means freedom or release from bondage. To see this clearly, one must first understand that achieving liberation is like being tied with rope or chain to a pole, then being released. In this way karma and kleshas (mental delusions) are the chains of bondage. The contaminated aggregates, with which we are afflicted, and which cause us to be born again and again, are like the pole. Therefore liberation means being free or liberated from the bondage of contaminated aggregates.

In terms of places or realms where we take rebirth, there are

1The four are:

Truth of suffering, truth of cause of suffering, truth of cessation of suffering, truth of path

2The twelve are:

Ignorance, karmic formations, consciousness, name and form, six sense powers, contact, feeling, craving, grasping, existence, rebirth, aging and death,

three realms³. In terms of forms of life or migrations in which we take rebirth, there are five or six⁴. If we count the god and demi-god realms as one level of godly beings there are five levels. However if we count the demi-god level separately from level of gods, there are six levels.

There are four ways in which we born into any of the three realms⁵:

1. born from mother's womb
2. born from an egg
3. born from heat and warmth
4. born miraculously

Unless one cuts the continuation of the contaminated aggregates there is no end to samsara or cyclic existence. Such a severance depends upon uprooting karma and delusions.

So achieving liberation is being liberated from unending cycle of birth due to the force of karma and mental delusions. Another view of liberation is by seeing it as freedom from the contaminated aggregates which are samsara.

In addition to this teaching you must also refer to other commentaries so that you will have a better understanding.

Just to refresh your minds, the main object of abandonment of the person of small scope is attachment to this life. Whereas attachment to future pleasure is main object of abandonment for a person of middling scope.

Thursday Night Meditations

Next week the study group practice night meditations will begin. Geshe-la has already instructed Kaye that on these nights you are to do Guru Shakyamuni Buddha meditation in conjunction with nectar purification. She can write this down and make a copy for everyone.

Visualise Guru Shakyamuni Buddha then take refuge and generate bodhichitta, then do a visualisation of nectar purification. This year for the reading part, there will be two groups - one reciting and one listening to the *Foundation Of All Excellence* prayer. As you will also take it in turns to recite *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way Of Life* you are doing something extra this year. The *Foundation Of All Excellence*

³The desire, form and formless realms

⁴The six are:

Hell, preta, animal, human, demi-god and god

⁵Geshe Dawö in his teachings on the Twelve links on 27/10/82 gave this brief summary of the four types of rebirth:

1. Taking birth from the womb: most humans are born this way.
2. Taking birth from egg: for example of the sixteen arhats two were born from crane's eggs.
3. Taking rebirth from heat and moisture: This occurs when something is born without depending on the productive seed of the parents, eg a famous king, Narlingdsu, was born in this way.
4. Taking rebirth spontaneously (miraculously): The men of the first aeon were born in this way.

All four types of rebirth occur in the human realm and the animal realm. Spontaneous alone occurs in the god realm. Spontaneous and womb occur in the preta realm. Spontaneous alone for the intermediate state being.

More detail on this can be found in *The Sutra On Entering The Womb* and also in tantra.

prayer is a condensed version of the stages of the path. It is instructed to either recite each verse twice, or after first recitation take a little time before reciting the next verse. Or you can recite the verses very slowly.

In the first recitation of the first verse contemplate that one gets rid of all negativities associated with one's guru, eg not fulfilling the guru's wishes. Then repeat the first verse, thinking that "I have purified the negativities and now I receive the blessings from the gurus which leads me to experience spiritual realisations."

Upon completing the recitation and meditations to go with the verses of the *Foundation Of All Excellence* you dissolve Guru Shakyamuni Buddha into yourself. Then once again think that you receive full blessings of guru's body, speech and mind. Sit in that state for a few minutes before reciting *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way Of Life*.

These instructions are only for study group members. For others who join the meditations we need to make an advertisement to put on the notice board. It should include a drawing of someone in meditation posture.

The Four Ways Of Rebirth

Student 1: Could Geshe-la explain more about the four ways of being born and relate that to the realms in which each occurs

Geshe-la: Hell is a miraculous birth, as is a golden rebirth. Miraculous is like being born in a lotus. They are born complete and not stage by stage. For instance a bardo being is born instantly, like a lotus it opens immediately. Miraculous birth is the best and most enjoyable one.

Being born from the womb involves suffering and pain.

Birth from heat refers to heat from the body. This can cause birth. From the scientific viewpoint the child born from a womb is also born from an egg. Not all eggs are eggs as referred to in the above four manners of rebirth.

When humans first evolved they were born miraculously and not from a womb. Some humans were born from eggs (and miraculously). It is possible in very early times some very large birds in union with humans gave rise to an egg which gave birth to a human. It may be that this is possible.

Geshe-la heard last month of twins born being from same mother but different father - one was white and the other was black. This also confirms that it is said of the composites of human body the flesh and skin mainly comes from father's side, whereas the bones and marrow comes from mother's side.

Student 2: If born in god realms are they more or less likely to study dharma?

Geshe-la: In terms of the cycle of times there can be a time when being born in godly realms you are more likely to meet dharma than in other realms. But generally one is less likely to meet dharma than in the human realm, because the human realm brings certain types of life experiences. These experiences easily bring about realisations of the truth of life eg the nature of all existence is suffering, so it is easy to generate renunciation. Whereas in godly realms, due to there being so much pleasure, it is not easy to think of dharma.

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11 October 1944

Reinforce your motivation by thinking "I shall attain the state of Buddhahood, free of all faults and possessing all excellent qualities in order to benefit other beings, and for this reason I listen to this profound teaching on the stages of the path to enlightenment".

The Attainment Of The State Of Liberation

Last week we discussed the literal meanings of nirvana or liberation, and samsara or cyclic existence, also the way sentient beings are bound to this cyclic existence.

The meaning of achieving the state of liberation is the ending of the continuation of the cycle of taking birth through the force or influence of contaminated karma and delusions. The attainment of the state of liberation is when this continuation of the birth process by force of karma and delusions ceases to exist.

Delusions And Karma Driving Our Daily Actions

What does it mean when it says "under the force or grip of karma and delusions"? This is very clear if we examine our experiences and activities throughout the day. We can clearly see how we are under the force or grip of karma and delusions because there is no real personal independence or true freedom. Rather it appears that there is some kind of force which continually influences us to undertake an endless variety of activities. If we examine our activities we see the force or motivation behind all our actions is mental delusions which are in the form of afflictive emotions such as desire, anger, and so on. Each one of these forms of delusions has the capacity to dominate our thinking to the extent that our mind becomes fixated on an object, causing us to lose sight of the truth (not knowing what is skilful or unskilful; good or bad) which takes away any moment of calmness and happiness in the mind.

Generally speaking karmic actions are the inevitable result of delusions, and in this way many karmic actions we create due to the motivation of mental delusions can serve as cause for future rebirth. Therefore it is said unless we can overcome delusions and karmic actions, we cannot stop the cycle of existence. It is very important, therefore, to see how mental delusions and karmic actions are not only source of future suffering, but also the source of immediate suffering, destroying mental peace and happiness.

If we always remind ourselves that delusions and the karma that we create are the main things we need to overcome, then any meditational or other spiritual practice can be very effective in terms of enhancing calmness and happiness in the mind.

Three Poisonous Minds As The Root Of All Suffering In Life

More than external or outer conditions, it is the internal conditions that are important in determining whether we experience happiness or suffering in life. As mentioned before, all misery arises from the conditions in the mind, which is within oneself. The inner conditions are the three types of delusions known as the three poisonous minds. They are called the three poisonous minds, because they are just like a poison. If we consumed a physical poison our life would be finished. Similarly if we have these three poisonous minds residing in our continuum, there is no real inner moment of peace and happiness. These three poisonous minds kill inner peace and happiness.

In this way we can see that we have a choice. If we think very clearly, we can understand that rather than being at the mercy of those three poisonous minds, we can take control by overpowering them. If we wish to have happiness and calmness in the mind there is really no other option. We have to challenge those three poisonous minds and win over them. Allowing them to control our minds is like losing our rights or freedom.

Therefore it is important to be fully aware of our state of mind or thought. Just knowing that our own thought or state of mind can be an immediate cause of suffering and restlessness, enables us to realise that we also possess the best tools or equipment to find lasting peace and happiness within. If one develops this self-knowledge it is even possible to see the source of lasting peace and happiness within the mind almost as clearly as an outer form can be seen with our eyes.

The Wish For Liberation Arises From Seeing The Faults Of Samsara

Making the effort to reach liberation, depends upon developing the wish to attain the liberation. To clearly understand this think of a prisoner to wishing to escape from prison. Before the prisoner begins to look for a way

to escape he has to have the wish to be free from prison. Without this desire to be free from prison, there is no reason to make an attempt to escape. To have a desire to be free from prison, he must have some reason, and must see some disadvantages of remaining in prison.

Therefore unless one truly sees the faults or defects of cyclic existence or samsara, one will not have a true, genuine wish to be free of cyclic existence. Without such a wish for liberation, there will be no effort to find the path which is the means to attain liberation or to free oneself from cyclic existence.

Upper And Lower Rebirth Are Equally A Source Of Suffering

It is said that a wise person regards both higher and lower rebirth with the same amount of fear. In order to generate a true wish to attain liberation from cyclic existence, all realms must be seen as part of cyclic existence, and therefore the same as the source or cause of suffering.

Contemplating The Faults Of Cyclic Existence

As to this contemplation of the faults of cyclic existence there are two main subjects

1. Four noble truths
2. Twelve dependent arisings

The Four Noble Truths

Regarding the four noble truths, the original source of this is first wheel of the dharma which Guru Shakyamuni Buddha turned in Varanasi to his five main disciples.

Guru Shakyamuni Buddha said:¹

- This is noble truth of suffering.
- This is noble truth of its origin.
- This is noble truth of its cessation.
- This is noble truth of the path to cessation.

Etymology Of Noble Truths

¹The Tibetan translation from Trijang Rinpoche of this famous verse is:

དགེ་སློང་དག།

འདི་ནི་སྣུག་བསྐྱེད་འཕགས་པའི་བདེན་པའོ།

འདི་ནི་ཀུན་འབྱུང་འཕགས་པའི་བདེན་པའོ།

འདི་ནི་འགོག་པ་འཕགས་པའི་བདེན་པའོ།

འདི་ནི་ལམ་འཕགས་པའི་བདེན་པའོ།

They are called the four noble truths because they are realised by the noble or arya beings as being the actual truth. Therefore these four are known as four noble truths.

Etymology Of Arya Or Superior Being

Arya beings are literally known as superior beings. The qualities that distinguish a superior being is that they have a direct realisation of four noble truths, whereas ordinary or common beings do not have such a direct perception. So one reason why an arya is called a "superior being" is because they are superior to ordinary being in terms of their direct perception of the four noble truths.

Another reason is that as a result of this direct perception of the four noble truths and the ultimate truth of selflessness, they have freed themselves from the control of self grasping which is the misapprehension of ultimate reality.

We should remember by heart the names of the four noble truths.

Geshe-la wants to thank everyone for doing the written test. It seems that everyone has done very well.

Headings with outline numbering are derived from the Text. Headings without outline numbering are derived from Geshe Doga's commentary.

The original typescript is prepared from Alan Molloy's original transcript, which has been checked against Damien Busby's notes. Adair Bunnett then checks the typescript against a tape recording, and edits the text, which is finally checked by Alan Molloy.

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18 October 1994

As usual let us begin by developing the correct motivation.

Thus far we have learnt that in order to feel a repulsion towards cyclic existence, we must see all the faults of the cyclic existence through meditation. This meditation, concerning contemplation on the various faults of cyclic existence, falls into two subjects:

1. Four noble truths
2. Twelve links or twelve dependent originations.

Four Noble Truths

To start with subject of four noble truths.

Their Order Of Presentation

There are two orders in which the four noble truths can be presented.

1. Order in terms of **cause and effect** of the four noble truths: the truth of origin of suffering is the cause, so it comes before the truth of suffering. Similarly the truth of path is the cause of cessation, and thus comes before the truth of cessation.

Therefore the order of the four noble truths in terms of cause and effect:

- i. the truth of origin or source of suffering which are mainly two - karmic source and afflictions source
- ii. the truth of suffering
- iii. the truth of path
- iv. the truth of cessation

2. The order which accords with the **practice on the path**:

This is the order of the four noble truths as they were taught by Buddha. The order is:

- i. truth of suffering
- ii. the truth of origin
- iii. the truth of cessation
- iv. the truth of path.

The reason why the four noble truths are taught in this order is because it is effective for training practitioners on the path. This will be covered again later but briefly the reason why this order is suitable for training is as

follows. The noble truth of suffering is taught first because it is essential to recognise suffering very clearly and having a strong wish to eliminate it is very important. Without a strong desire to be free of suffering there will not be any exertion to removing the causes of this suffering. On the other hand there will be a great effort to remove the causes of suffering if there is a strong wish to be free of suffering. With a strong wish to attain liberation one will make greater effort on the path to cessation of suffering.

The four noble truths are a very fundamental topic for those who seek liberation in terms of what they should adopt and what they should discard.

Regarding the order in which the four noble truths are taught, Maitreya said in his text *Uttara Tantra, The Sublime Continuum*:

"Know the suffering and abandon the cause"

In this text when Maitreya said that we should know the sickness then abandon the cause, and rely upon the medicine for recovery¹ he is using the analogy of a patient being cured of a sickness. This analogy shows very clearly why this order in which the four noble truths are taught is very suitable for practice. The patient has to identify his or her disease or sickness first, and then has to make an effort to cure that sickness. The way to cure it is to rely upon medicine, and the result of relying upon medicine is recovering from the sickness.

We should first of all recognise suffering as being like a disease, then identify its cause and think of removing it. The cause of the suffering which we want to remove is the truth of origin. The state of having completely removed the cause or origin of suffering completely is the truth of cessation. For this we need to have the aspiration or wish to attain the cessation of suffering. Since the fulfilment of that aspiration to attain the truth

¹Liberation.. p476:

The illness is to be diagnosed,
Its cause is to be abandoned,
Health is to be achieved,
The medicine is to be relied on.
Likewise, suffering, its cause,
Cessation, and path are to be
Diagnosed, abandoned,
Reached, and relied upon.

of cessation is the path, we see the need to follow the truth of the path.

This is a brief explanation of the order in which the four noble truths are taught.

Cultivating A Genuine Aspiration For Liberation

For the cultivation of a genuine wish to attain liberation, it is said that there are two possibilities which depend upon one's faculties or intelligence.

Those gifted with sharp faculties realise ultimate truth or emptiness prior to generating the aspiration to liberation. This is because those with such a sharp intellect either accept or reject ideas based upon their understanding. Therefore unless they have actual cognition of emptiness, or at least some gross cognition of emptiness roughly, they cannot produce the genuine wish to seek liberation.²

For those with lesser intelligence there will not be a realisation of emptiness or a gross understanding of emptiness, prior to generating the aspiration to liberation. For these others with lesser faculties, reason is not so important. Without a prior understanding of emptiness they can still base a wish to achieve liberation upon their faith. Therefore those with lesser faculty do not necessarily have to understand emptiness before developing the wish to obtain liberation.

How Does Realisation Of Emptiness Help Develop A Wish For Liberation?

Gyaltsab Je's commentary to Maitreya's text uses the example of a painful headache in which instance the actual pain or suffering is seen as the truth of suffering. How does this suffering come about? It comes about as a result of karma having been created. Furthermore the karma one has created is motivated by some form of affliction. What is that affliction? In this manner if one traces the cause of the suffering to the root, the root cause of the suffering is the subtle misconception with regard to ultimate reality. This subtle misconception is the misapprehension of the self as being truly existent. So as one analyses this ignorance, which misconceives the mode of existence of self, one realises this way of conceiving the mode of existence of self is wrong. In this way one disproves the object of this misconception. In this way those with sharp faculties realise the truth of suffering, its cause, then the final termination of that cause, so that they then seek liberation. Cultivating the aspiration to liberation is one of the most important parts in the stages of the path of middle scope.

In order to uproot the cause of suffering one needs to eliminate the ignorance of misconceiving the mode of existence of self. The direct remedy to that ignorance is the realisation of emptiness. So you can see how it is important to at least have some theoretical

understanding of emptiness.

Realising Emptiness By The Threefold Training

One very important method of developing this realisation is achieving the state of single-pointed concentration. To achieve that state of single-pointed concentration one needs to live a life of pure morality or ethics. This shows us the importance of the threefold training. One needs to depend upon this training in wisdom, ethics and concentration to fully realise ultimate truth of emptiness, the realisation of which can directly counter ignorance which is the root cause of all suffering.

Here is an example to understand the role of the threefold training to aid in realising emptiness. To see an object clearly it is important that your eyesight has no defects, and the object of that eyesight is close enough and not moving. The actual thing which looks at that object is the eye. However the clarity with which that object is seen depends on other factors. If for example that object must be brought close to the eye to be seen, then the hand or arm are involved. However if the hand or arm is not strong it will shake, and so effect the sight of the eye. That actual object is likened to the truth of emptiness. The eye that perceives the object is the wisdom realising emptiness which is the training of wisdom. The strong healthy arm holding the object without moving is the training of morality. The hand which brings the object closer to the eye is the training of concentration.

Morality As A Prerequisite To Meditation

Student 2: Of the six opponent powers one is meditation on emptiness, and yet pure ethics are required prior to realising emptiness so how can one purify without first practising pure ethics?

Geshe-la: Without basis of pure morality, let alone realise emptiness, you cannot even maintain concentration in meditation. The practice of ethics or morality helps ones mind to abide within us. That is why it is said that the training of moral ethics is like the foundation for training in concentration. The fact that when we engage in meditation and our mind wanders all over the place without staying on the object indicates the weakness of our morality.

It is said in one text:

Morality is the basis for all moving and non moving things.

The "basis" is like the ground or the surface of the earth which is the support for all "moving" which refers to animate beings and "non moving things" which refers to the environment where these animate beings live. The start of all spiritual realisations can occur only if there is a good foundation of training in moral ethics.

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²This material was derived from Geshela's answer to a question, and was placed in the body of the text in the interests of clarity.

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15 November 1994

Reinforce your motivation of bodhicitta - the genuine wish to achieve the state of full enlightenment for the sake of all mother sentient beings. It is to fulfil this wish of bodhicitta that we receive these teachings and practise them.

The Four Noble Truths Include All Spiritual Practices Leading To Liberation

For those seeking liberation the four noble truths include what the practitioner should abandon and what they should achieve and attain. The reason why all spiritual practices are included in the four noble truths is because the four noble truths show the causal order in which sentient beings enter into cyclic existence and also the causal order in which they can be liberated from cyclic existence. Of the four noble truths the first two truths show how sentient beings enter into cyclic existence whereas the next two truths show the freedom/liberation from cyclic existence.

The First Noble Truth Of Suffering

To begin with as said in Maitreya's text Uttara Tantra, The Sublime Continuum it says "Suffering is to be known." In order to know the truth of suffering we can contemplate the various divisions of suffering - the three, six or eight types of suffering. In our text, six types of suffering are explained. The reason why eight types of suffering are mentioned is because the eight types of suffering include all the types of suffering found in the human world. Whereas the three types of suffering can be subsumed into one - pervasive suffering.

Pervasive Suffering As The Main Type Of Suffering

There are various types of suffering, but in order to generate renunciation the main type of suffering emphasised here is pervasive suffering, which is a more subtle form of suffering. Grosser forms of suffering, such as very unpleasurable, painful feelings, are not the main things which one has to know in order to generate renunciation, because even animals also show dislike of painful feelings. It is very natural for us to feel dislike of pain which results from some stomach upset. Not only do we experience such pain but at the same time we naturally have a thought of not wanting it or of wanting be rid of it. So there is no need to explain this gross form of suffering. Nor is there any need to make an effort to

generate renunciation towards these gross levels of suffering, because it is automatic.

Any type of birth that we assume in this existence is identified with the nature of suffering. Pervasive suffering co-exists with any type of body we obtain in cyclic existence. When we think of this life, we see that both our mind and body are subject to pervasive suffering. The indication that our mind is subject to pervasive suffering is that sometimes, without any foreseeable reason our mood or feelings change from happiness, joy and pleasure to pain and sorrow.

422.211: Thinking About The General Sufferings Of Samsara

འཇོམས་བའི་སྐྱེའི་སྤྱད་བསྐྱེད་བསམ་པ།

The Six Faults Of Cyclic Existence¹

422.211.1: The Lack Of Certainty

ངེས་པ་མེད་པའི་ཉེས་པ།

Of the six types of suffering or faults of cyclic existence - the first is the lack of certainty. This means that there is no certainty in this cyclic existence with regard to pleasure and pain. So it is important to always be aware of the fact that because one has assumed this life within cyclic existence, so suffering and unwanted events are inevitable. They all happen as a consequence of having obtained this life within cyclic existence. So we have to realise that the various things within cyclic existence, which are believed to be a reliable source of happiness - friends, relatives, wealth, etc. - in reality are not a reliable source of happiness. Therefore in cyclic existence there is no certainty about relationships. They can quickly change from friendship to enmity and vice versa.

This should be integrated into our practice. As we try to

¹Liberation... p477 onwards. The six types of suffering are:

1. The bane of uncertainty
2. The bane of being unsatisfied
3. The bane of repeatedly leaving bodies
4. The bane of being conceived over and over again
5. The bane of moving from high to low over and over again
6. The bane of having no one to help you

try to develop our knowledge, we should also try to develop our understanding of how to put this into practice. In our daily life, we see with our own eyes how things change externally. You see your friends' relationships are changing. Your wealth, status, and feelings are always changing. These changes bring a lot of suffering and pain in the mind if one has not fully realised the truth that everything is changing. Although one sees things changing, in practice one still has hope and places trust in friends as being very reliable and trustworthy. Perceiving those objects - friends and so on - as reliable, clearly shows that our lack of understanding of the uncertainty of those objects. Due to this lack of understanding strong attachment to these objects develops, even when these objects are growing distant from one. This brings great dissatisfaction and frustration to the mind.

So we have to know how to put the teaching into practice at all times, and particularly when one is being separated from a very close friend. Then one shall realise that the change taking place is just the nature or one of the faults of being born in cyclic existence. In this way such a contemplation on cyclic existence can help relieve the pain from such unexpected changes.

Even when there are no dramatic circumstances we should remind ourselves not to be attached to any beautiful objects. In this way we can diminish attachment to the various objects so that losing or being separated from them will not bring a great sense of loss or suffering to the mind.

Uncertainty Of Our Relationships In Previous And Future Lives

Just as there is no certainty about our friends, relatives, enemies, and so on in this lifetime, similarly there is no certainty in the lives before and after. In order to know how friends and enemies change in the cycle of many past lifetimes we remind ourselves of the story where it is said "While eating the flesh of the father and kicking one's own mother"². Also in Nagarjuna's ³Letter to a Friend it says that it is possible that the child in this life was the father in the previous life, and the wife in this life was the mother in the previous life, and the friend of this life was an enemy in a previous life.

Therefore even in the life before and after, there is no certainty about the form of our relationship with others. In fact, if the lack of certainty in friendship is a very

obvious truth in this lifetime, then there is no need to mention about such lack of certainty in the lives before and after. In this very lifetime we can recall how someone who is a very close friend in one moment ,becomes an enemy in the next moment. This shows how quickly the change from enemy to friend and vice versa happens.

The great Tibetan master, Kuntang Jampal Yang said,

It only takes a word or two to change ones most dear friend into a very worst enemy. Therefore there is no point of holding someone very close to one's heart and holding others very distant from one's heart.

If we put this into practice then we can certainly balance our attitude towards others. Think of an enemy, some other person who you hate. Of course the reason you feel hatred towards them is because that person did something wrong to you. But we should think that in the past that person helped me. By thinking in this way we broaden our view. We see there is no difference in friend, enemy, or stranger in terms of giving hatred to one, and love to the other. Therefore if we give love to one person we must give love to all, to hate one person we must hate all, to ignore one person we must ignore all.

Such a meditation will bring a state of equanimity to the mind. In this way we integrate the lack of certainty of relationships into our practice. This helps us to diminish strong attachment to some beings and diminish strong hatred to other beings. If one is able to think in this way then there is no need to know any further reasons why a friend is leaving one behind. Or why peoples' attitude to one is changing. Or why ones own feelings of pleasure or pain are uncertain. Or why one's wealth is uncertain.

By observing our feelings over time this sense of uncertainty is very obvious . A feeling of pleasure in the morning changes to unhappiness at midday and changes again by night. Wealth also changes. A person may be rich one moment, then find themselves as poor as a beggar in a crowd of their own enemies.

All this happens because one is born in cyclic existence. One is chained to cyclic existence. Therefore if you think 'What could I expect other than these changes?' such a thought will help us to cope with real situations much better.

End of discourse.

Four Aspects Of First Noble Truth

The four aspects of the first noble truth of suffering are:

1. being impermanent

མི་རྒྱུ་སྤྱི་

2 Liberation... p478. Shariputra said,

He eats his father's flesh and hits his mother.
The enemy he killed sits on his knee.
A wife gnaws her husbands bones.
Samsara can be such a farce!

3 Liberation... p478

Fathers, sons, wives and enemies can change:
Friends may become the opposite
and change again: samsara
holds no shred of certainty.

2. being misery

སྤྲུག་བསྐྱེལ་བ།

3. being empty

སྤོང་བ།

4. being selfless

བདག་མེད།

The five contaminated aggregates which constitute this human life are an example of the noble truth of suffering. These five contaminated aggregates must be qualified by these four qualities. They must be impermanent, miserable and so on. Each characteristic must therefore be proved with some reason.

Geshe-la: What is the reason why these aggregates are impermanent?

Student: They display both gross and subtle change or momentariness.

Geshe-la: Generally the reason that we provide to establish a fact must be something easier to understand than the fact itself. The reason is the vehicle or cause to reach that conclusion. The reason Alan gave of momentary change is itself the definition of impermanence. Therefore someone who understands that five aggregates change from moment to moment, ie are momentary, will have no doubt that the aggregates are impermanent. It is like asking 'Why am I human?' and answering 'Because I am human'. The reason given in text as to why the five contaminated aggregates are impermanent is because they are conditionally arising. They are conditionally arising in the sense that they do not always remain the same, rather they continuously undergo change.

Also the reason why they are subject to misery or suffering is because they are overpowered by karma and afflictions. Therefore there are reasons to establish each of those characteristics as the entity or fact of truth of suffering. "Liberation in your Hand" specifically mentions those sixteen characteristics of the four noble truths.

Each of these sixteen characteristics has their opposite⁴

- impermanent - opposite is permanent. Therefore the realisation of impermanence of the aggregates is the truth of path and what it directly counteracts is the wrong view which holds the aggregates as permanent. The overcoming or cessation of that wrong view is the truth of cessation.

Student: In relation to the indication of pervasive

suffering as being the arousal of feelings or moods without any obvious cause. Does pervasive suffering have to be when a displeasing thought or feeling arises without precedent?

Geshe-la: If we cannot see a reason, it does not mean that there is no reason. Of course the reason can be traced back to karma. Simply because this body is the outcome of karma and afflictions, it is subject to pervasive suffering. Because it is subject to pervasive suffering it can serve as basis to give rise to karma and afflictions and further suffering. Therefore we are not only talking about cause of suffering. Karma and afflictions are causes of this body which also acts as a basis to bring about future suffering.

We have no full control or authority over this body, even though we serve it for an entire lifetime doing all possible things to keep it healthy and young. We get sick despite the preventative measures that we take. Sometimes the doctor cannot identify the cause of this sickness. This does not mean that there is no cause. Saying that our mind and body are controlled by karma and afflictions does not mean that we should do nothing. We can do some good to this body but not to a complete extent. There is a limit because it is the outcome of karma and afflictions. Therefore this is the meaning of all pervasive suffering.

In the scripture it says:

The health of the body depends upon the soundness of the four elements and including the functioning of the mind.

The four elements which constitute this body have so many levels. At a subtle level these elements are like tiny particles and the wind energy at subtle levels is a very subtle energy indeed.

Geshe-la said that scientific tests on the health of the body of someone who is sick, in order to find out what is wrong are most likely only measuring mainly fire and water but without understanding the subtle wind energy and let alone the subtle energy of the mind. When the sickness is due to the imbalance of the elements, then depending upon the weakness of the element found, medicine is prescribed to cure the disease. Geshela believes the elements of our body can influence the emotions. When certain elements are high they can increase desire or hatred. If you want to know more about this then you should check with our doctors.

Headings with outline numbering are derived from the Text. Headings without outline numbering are derived from Geshe Doga's commentary.

⁴Refer to the class notes of 25/10/94 where in a footnote all these opposites were clearly explained.