

## The Four Noble Truths

After the Buddha attained enlightenment, he spent the remaining 45 years of his life travelling across the Indian subcontinent turning the *Wheel of Dharma*, i.e. explaining and disseminating what he had come to realize.

There are said to be 84,000 collections of discourses taught by the Buddha according to the diverse dispositions, inclinations and interests of his disciples. Among the different ways in which those teachings are classified, one of the most common is the classification into the *Three Wheels of Dharma*.

The convention of the three wheels is a method of categorizing the content and philosophical views of the large array of Buddhist teachings and there are different ways in which to classify the discourses into three wheels.

One is from the point of view of time. The time from the Buddha's enlightenment until his passing away can be divided into three periods. The teachings the Buddha gave during the initial period fall into the category of the first wheel, the teachings he gave during the intermediate period fall into the category of the second wheel, and the teachings he gave during the later period fall into the category of the third wheel.

An example of a discourse that pertains to the first wheel is the ***Sutra on the Four Noble Truths*** (Skt. *Catvari aryasatyani sutra*, Tib. 'phags pa'i bden pa bzhi'i mdo) that the Buddha gave in the Sarnath deer park near Varanasi to his first five disciples, shortly after his enlightenment. Another example is the teaching in which the Buddha explains to the first five disciples that the lower part of the monastic robes (Tib. *sham thabs*) should be worn in a circular fashion. This discourse is from the ***Minor Teachings [of the Vinaya]*** (Tib. *lung phran tshegs*), which is one of the ***Four Texts on the Vinaya*** (Tib. 'dul ba lung sde bzhi) taught by the Buddha.

Discourses that pertain to the second wheel include the ***Perfection of Wisdom Sutras*** given on Vulture Peak Mountain in Rajgir.

Examples of teachings that pertain to the third wheel are the ***Sutra on the Essence of the Tathagata*** (Skt.: *Tathagathagarbha Sutra*, Tib.: *de bzhin gshegs pa'i snying po'i mdo*) and the ***Condensed Vinaya*** (Tib. *'dul ba mdor bsdus*).

Of the three wheels, the teachings of the second, the ***Perfection of Wisdom Sutras***, are the principal genre of teachings that the Nalanda tradition of Buddhism relies upon for the study of Buddhist philosophy.

There are many different ***Perfection of Wisdom Sutras*** of various lengths; seventeen of them were translated into Tibetan (one of them being the ***Heart Sutra***).

The ***Perfection of Wisdom Sutras*** explicitly teach emptiness and implicitly, or in a hidden fashion, the meditational paths leading to enlightenment. Nagarjuna in his ***Six Compendiums of Reasoning*** expounds on the explicit meaning of the ***Perfection of Wisdom Sutras*** and Maitreya in his ***Ornament for Clear Realizations*** expounds on the implicit meaning of the ***Perfection of Wisdom Sutras***. Here we are studying Maitreya's text.

The ***Ornament for Clear Realizations*** (Skt. *Abhisamayalamkara*, Tib. *mngon rtogs rgyan*) - abbreviated as 'the ***Ornament***' - is one of five treatises revealed to Asanga in the Tushita pure realm by the future Buddha Maitreya. As mentioned above, it is a commentary on the implicit or hidden meaning of the ***Perfection of Wisdom Sutras***, and it describes the different meditative stages and awarenesses required to become a fully awakened Buddha, from the generation of Bodhicitta up to the attainment of the omniscient mind of a Buddha. It is composed in verse.

Even though the ***Ornament*** is a commentary on all the ***Perfection of Wisdom Sutras***, its principal sutric sources (Tib. *bshad bya rtsa ba'i mdo*) are three:

1. [The Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in] ***One Hundred Thousand [Verses]*** (Tib. *'bum*)
2. [The Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in] ***Twenty Thousand [Verses]*** (Tib. *nyi khri*)

3. [The Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in] ***Eight Thousand*** [Verses]  
(Tib. ***brgyas stong pa***)

Owing to their different lengths, the three principal sutric sources of the *Ornament* are also commonly known as the 'extensive, middling, and short Sublime Mothers'.

Maitreya's ***Ornament*** has eight chapters and each chapter presents one 'clear realization' (Tib: *mngon par rtogs pa*). A clear realization is a path consciousness.

The way the ***Ornament*** presents these eight clear realizations or paths is by way of presenting other phenomena or topics that characterize each of the eight. For example, the first clear realization, the omniscient mind of a Buddha (presented in the first chapter), is characterized by ten topics.

In total, the ***Ornament*** expounds on seventy different topics, which is why the ***Ornament*** is commonly described as a treatise that presents the implicit or hidden meaning of the ***Perfection of Wisdom Sutras*** by way of *eight clear realizations* and *seventy topics*. At the beginning of the ***Ornament***, Maitreya provides a summary of the eight clear realizations and seventy topics.

Since the topic of the Four Noble Truths is explained in the first chapter, it will suffice to cite the two verses that summarize the ten topics of the first chapter, which characterize the omniscient mind of a Buddha:

*Mind generation, practice instructions,  
The fourfold branches of definite distinction,  
The foundation of practice -  
The natural Dharmadhatu,  
  
The focal objects, the objectives,  
Armor-like, activities of engagement,  
Accumulation and definite emergence:  
These are the exalted knower of all aspects of the Conqueror.*

The meaning of the two verses is:

(1) **Mind generation**, i.e. Bodhicitta, (2) Mahayana **practice instructions**, (3) **the fourfold branches of definite distinction**, i.e. the Mahayana path of preparation, (4) **the foundation** of Mahayana **practice** - the **naturally** abiding Buddha nature of **Dharmadhatu**, (5) **the focal objects** of Mahayana practice, (6) **the three great objectives** of Mahayana practice, (7) **armor-like** practice, (8) **activities of engagement**, i.e. engaged practice, (9) practice of **accumulation**, and (10) practice of **definite emergence**. **These are** the ten topics that characterize **the exalted knower of all aspects** (i.e. the omniscient mind) **of the Conqueror**.

In other words, the ten topics that characterize the omniscient mind of a Buddha are:

1. **Bodhicitta** - Bodhicitta is explained first because it is the entryway to the Mahayana path. It refers to a mental consciousness that aspires to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. The moment such a mind is newly generated, a practitioner enters the Mahayana path of accumulation.
2. **Mahayana Practice instructions** - Aspiring to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings is not enough; one needs to engage in the practice of study, contemplation, and meditation on the Mahayana practice instructions given by the Buddha and other masters.
3. **The Mahayana path of preparation** - Having generated Bodhicitta (and thus entered the Mahayana path of accumulation), and having studied, contemplated, and meditated on the two truths, etc. by relying on the Mahayana practice instructions, the Bodhisattva then proceeds to the Mahayana path of preparation. The path of preparation is attained when the practitioner achieves a union of calm abiding and special insight that realizes emptiness conceptually.
4. **Buddha nature/essence/lineage** - The nature of the mind that engages in Mahayana practice is the *lack of inherent/true*

*existence* of the mind. This lack of inherent/true existence of the mental consciousness is called 'Buddha nature' and serves as the basis for Mahayana practice. Having reached the Mahayana path of accumulation, etc., one is now in a position to realize that one possesses Buddha nature.

5. **Objects of focus of Mahayana practice** - Having explained the basis of Mahayana practice, which is Buddha nature, the *Ornament* proceeds to explain the objects of focus of Mahayana practice.
6. **The three great objectives of Mahayana practice** - This topic is concerned with the objectives or purposes of Mahayana practice, i.e. the purpose for studying, contemplating, and meditating on the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras*.
7. **Armor-like practice** - Having discussed the basis, objects of focus, and objectives of Mahayana practice, the *Ornament* subsequently explains the actual practice starting with armor-like practice. Armor-like practice deals with the development of the right motivation, which serves as armor or protection against unfavorable conditions.
8. **Engaged practice** - After the motivation for practice, the engaged practice is explained. Engaged practice is concerned with the development of calm abiding, the six perfections, the Arya paths such as the path of seeing, etc., the four immeasurables and so forth.
9. **Practice of accumulation** - This topic is concerned with the practice of accumulating great merit and great wisdom.
10. **Practice of definite emergence** - This consists of practicing eight different 'definite emergences' such as the practice of the three great objectives, of equally realizing the emptiness of all phenomena, of endlessly working for the benefit of sentient beings, and so forth.

As mentioned before, the first chapter of the *Ornament* presents the first of the eight clear realizations, the *exalted knower of aspects*, i.e. the omniscient mind of a Buddha. Thus, the first chapter explains the meaning of the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras* by way of presenting the omniscient mind. The reason for presenting the

omniscient mind at the beginning of the **Ornament** is to generate interest and enthusiasm in the continuums of practitioners. By studying, contemplating, and meditating on the first chapter, practitioners generate faith and the aspiration to attain the result of the Mahayana path – the omniscient mind of a Buddha. This aspiration in turn motivates them to continue to study, contemplate, and meditate on the remaining chapters of the **Ornament**, which expound the variety of different paths that lead to the enlightened state of a Buddha.

Of the ten topics of the first chapter of the Ornament, the first topic is Bodhicitta, which we discussed in a course organized by DFI (Dharma Friends of Israel) in the Fall of 2013.

The second topic is *Mahayana Practice Instructions*. *Mahayana Practice Instructions* consist of a further ten topics which are set forth in the **Ornament** by the following two verses:

*Practice, the truths,  
The three jewels such as the Buddha,  
Non-involvement, tirelessness,  
Thoroughly upholding the path,  
  
The five visions, clairvoyance's  
Six qualities and what are called "the paths of seeing  
And meditation": these practice instructions  
Should be known as having a tenfold character. [23]*

Having generated Bodhicitta (the first of the ten topics), Bodhisattvas on the path of accumulation should now listen, contemplate and meditate on the Mahayana practice instructions. This will enhance their practice and their progress on the path to enlightenment.

These practice instructions should be known as having a tenfold character since they describe the following ten topics:

1. The two truths: the two truths are explained in order to understand the nature and the aspect of **practice**
2. The four noble truths: **the** four noble **truths** are the focal object of practice

3. Going for refuge: going for refuge to **the three jewels such as the Buddha** and so forth serves as the basis of one's practice
4. The diligence of non-involvement: the diligence of **non-involvement** counteracts the laziness of engaging in non-virtuous actions and assists practitioners in stabilizing their practice
5. The diligence of tirelessness: the diligence of **tirelessness** counteracts the laziness of sloth/procrastination and helps practitioners to increase their practice
6. The diligence of thoroughly upholding the path of practice: the diligence of **thoroughly upholding the path** of practice counteracts the laziness of self-contempt/faintheartedness and assists practitioners in averting any deterioration of their practice
7. The five visions: the five visions are special powers that practitioners need in order to become more self-sufficient
8. The six clairvoyances: **clairvoyance's six qualities**, i.e. the six types of clairvoyance, are needed in order to quickly complete the accumulation of merit
9. The path of seeing: practitioners on the **path of seeing** have newly cultivated the meditative absorption directly realizing emptiness. The principal function of this meditative absorption is to permanently eliminate the *intellectually acquired* ignorance, etc.
10. The path of meditation: practitioners on the **path of meditation** have achieved the cessation of the *intellectually acquired* ignorance, etc. and their meditative absorption directly realizing emptiness now eliminates the *innate* ignorance, etc.

The first three topics (the two truths, the four noble truths, and going for refuge) are presented from the point of view of practice itself; the next three topics (the three types of diligence) are from the point of view of avoiding the manifestation of negativities in the continuum of practitioners; the following two topics (the five kinds of vision and the six clairvoyances) are from the point of view of increasing the practitioners' qualities, and the last two topics (the

path of seeing and the path of meditation) are from the point of view of permanently eliminating negativities in the continuum of practitioners.

Of the ten topics of the Mahayana Practice Instructions, we discussed the first topic, the Two Truths, in a course organized by DFI (Dharma Friends of Israel) in the Fall of 2014.

The second topic, the Four Noble Truths, will be explained here. Hence, the study of the Four Noble Truths is part of the study of the ***Perfection of Wisdom Sutras*** (Tib: ***Pharchin***):

Shortly after his enlightenment, Buddha Shakyamuni turned the *First Wheel of Dharma* which is also called the "Dharma Wheel of the Four (Noble) Truths". He gave the discourse on the four noble truths to his former five ascetic companions at Deer Park in Sarnath/Varanasi. The discourse on the four noble truths is the Buddha's first and most essential teaching. It encapsulates all of Buddhist philosophy and serves as the foundation and the framework for all the other teachings the Buddha gave during his forty-five years of teaching. This discourse is found in the ***Sutra on the Four Noble Truths***.

The four noble truths are:

**1. The (noble) truth of suffering**

Tibetan: *sdug bsngal 'phag-pa'i bden pa* or phonetically, *Dug-ngael Phag-pae Den-pa* (*Dug-ngael* = suffering/dissatisfaction/distress/ misery/discomfort/frustration/ pain/displeasure, *Phag-pa* = noble/superior/Arya, *Den-pa* = truth/reality)

**2. The (noble) truth of the origin (of suffering)**

Tibetan: *kun 'byung bden pa* or phonetically, *Kuen-Jung Phag-pae Den-pa* (*Kuen-Jung* = origin/origination/source, *Kuen*= all/complete/entire, *Jung* = to originate/to arise/to come forth/to emerge/to occur)



**3. The (noble) truth of cessation (of suffering and the origin of suffering)**

Tibetan: 'gog pa'i bden pa or phonetically, *Gog-pae Phag-pae Den-pa* (*Gog-pa* = cessation/extinction/eradication)

**4. The (noble) truth of the path (that leads to the cessation of suffering and the origin of suffering)**

Tibetan: *lam 'phags pa'i bden pa* or phonetically, the short form, *Lam Phag-pae Den-pa* (*Lam* = path/ path consciousness/ course/method/pathway/systematic way)

## THE TRUTH OF SUFFERING

In general, suffering, or *dukkha* in Sanskrit, refers to the mental factor of feeling which accompanies any awareness – any one of the five sense consciousnesses or the mental consciousness. Therefore, when the Buddha says that our present mind and body are a **truth of suffering**, he means that our present mind and body are *in the nature* of suffering. It is important to understand that the Buddha is not saying that our existence is suffering, for our mind and body are not the mental factor of feeling. To be in the nature of suffering means that with our present body and mind *the potential* to experience suffering is always there. Thus, our present mind and body are a **truth of suffering** because with such physical and mental aggregates the possibility or danger of experiencing suffering is ever-present.

According to Buddhist psychology, there are three types of feeling that accompany any kind of consciousness/awareness. The three types of feeling are:

1. Pleasant
2. Unpleasant
3. Neutral

Of those three, pleasant and unpleasant feelings cover a vast spectrum of different experiences. Pleasant feelings include feelings of pleasure, happiness, joy, elation, euphoria, bliss, delight, rapture, well-being, enjoyment, satisfaction, exaltation, and so forth.

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Unpleasant feelings include feelings of displeasure, dissatisfaction, frustration, unhappiness, worry, discomfort, suffering, misery, pain, depression, sadness, distress, gloom, despair, sorrow, hurt, and so forth.

Neutral feelings refer to feelings that are neither pleasant nor unpleasant and thus none of the feelings above.

Feelings are mental factors and thus awarenesses; they are concomitant either with one of the five sense consciousnesses or with a mental consciousness.

Therefore, there is:

1. a pleasant, unpleasant or neutral feeling accompanying every eye consciousness,
2. a pleasant, unpleasant or neutral feeling accompanying every ear consciousness,
3. a pleasant, unpleasant or neutral feeling accompanying every nose consciousness,
4. a pleasant, unpleasant or neutral feeling accompanying every tongue consciousness,
5. a pleasant, unpleasant or neutral feeling accompanying every body consciousness, and
6. a pleasant, unpleasant or neutral feeling accompanying every mental consciousness

A pleasant feeling concomitant with any of the five sense consciousnesses refers to the feeling of pleasure (or happiness, joy, elation, bliss, delight, well-being etc.) when perceiving, for instance, pleasurable sights, sounds, smells, etc. A pleasant feeling concomitant with a mental consciousness refers to the feeling of pleasure (or happiness, joy, elation, bliss, delight, pleasure, well-being etc.) when having positive thoughts, or remembering beautiful sights, for instance.

An unpleasant feeling concomitant with any of the five sense consciousnesses refers to the feeling of displeasure (or dissatisfaction, unhappiness, sadness, worry, etc.) when perceiving unpleasant sights, sounds, or smells, for instance. An unpleasant feeling concomitant with a mental consciousness refers to the

feeling of displeasure (or unhappiness, sadness, worry, despair, etc.) when having negative thoughts, remembering unpleasant sights, for example.

A neutral feeling concomitant with any of the five sense consciousnesses refers to a neutral feeling that is neither pleasant nor unpleasant when perceiving sights, sounds, smells, etc.

A neutral feeling concomitant with a mental consciousness refers to a neutral feeling that is neither pleasant nor unpleasant when reflecting upon something, when remembering sights, etc.

As explained above, the **truth of suffering** does not, as the name seems to suggest, merely refer to the feeling of suffering but also to various different phenomena. Those phenomena are **truths of suffering** because they have the potential to induce suffering. The reason why they have such potential is that they were caused by and are under the control of ignorance, the misperception that misapprehends how phenomena exist.

The **truth of suffering** is explained by way of presenting different categories. One category, the three types of suffering, is explained mainly in the context of the mental factor of feeling.

The three types of suffering are:

1. Suffering of suffering
2. Suffering of change
3. All-pervasive suffering

### ***Suffering of Suffering***

Suffering of suffering refers to actual suffering, i.e. to unpleasant feelings (feelings of pain, displeasure, dissatisfaction, depression, unhappiness, worry, discomfort, etc.) and is ordinarily identified by anyone – even by animals – as suffering or displeasure. It refers to the kind of unpleasant feelings that we experience in everyday life and continuously work to avoid.

More specifically, it refers to the *mental factor* of unpleasant feelings that may accompany any of the five sense consciousnesses or the mental consciousness.

### ***Suffering of Change***

Suffering of change is more subtle and not as visible as the suffering of suffering. It is difficult to recognize and requires some analysis. Suffering of change refers to *contaminated* feelings of pleasure.

In general, all our ordinary experiences or feelings – pleasant, unpleasant or neutral – are *contaminated* because they are induced and controlled by ignorance, i.e. by a misperception of reality that wrongly perceives the actual nature of phenomena. This means that even though our ordinary *pleasant* experiences are not actual feelings of suffering (i.e. suffering of suffering), they are ***sufferings of change***. They are ***sufferings of change*** because if one does not change the *objects* of those feelings (the objects responsible for the generation of those pleasant feelings) the pleasant feelings will inevitably transform into unpleasant feelings, i.e. *sufferings of suffering*.

For instance, an ordinary feeling of happiness that arises when watching movies is a suffering of change because if one continues to watch movies for hours on end, the initial feeling of pleasure will inevitably lessen and slowly transform into a feeling of suffering. Therefore, one needs to change the object which induced the initial feeling of happiness (i.e. the movies) to a different object, in order not to eventually experience suffering. This means that one needs to stop watching movies and engage the mind in another object of happiness such as taking a walk or talking to a friend. However, just as with watching movies, one can only continue those activities for a limited period of time before the initial feeling of pleasure resulting from the walk or talking to a friend also transforms into an unpleasant feeling. Therefore, in order to experience a certain degree of pleasure and happiness in our everyday life we need to continuously change from one object to the next.

Genuinely *lasting* feelings of happiness are experienced only by those who have irrevocably overcome the ignorance that

misperceives reality (i.e. that apprehends the self and other phenomena to exist independently/inherently/ objectively) and all other afflictions such as anger, attachment, jealousy, arrogance, and so forth that are induced by the ignorance that misperceives reality.

Please note that only the initial contaminated feeling of pleasure is a *suffering of change*; once it transforms into an unpleasant feeling it is no longer a suffering of change but a *suffering of suffering*.

Even though, strictly speaking, suffering of change refers to contaminated feelings of happiness or pleasure, there is another way to describe suffering of change. According to some descriptions, suffering of change is explained from the point of view of the *objects* of contaminated feelings of pleasure. Objects such as delightful sights, sounds, smells, etc., relationships with other people, and so forth are impermanent and therefore unable to provide us with lasting happiness. Owing to our misperception of their actual nature, they appear to be causes of happiness because they bring some temporary pleasure. However, as with the passing of time, the objects (and we ourselves) change, those objects which are not reliable sources of happiness may even become the causes of suffering.

There is, of course, nothing wrong with the objects themselves; it is not the pleasant objects or their transient, ever-changing nature that causes us suffering but our attachment to them and our desire that they would remain the way they are.

### ***Pervasive conditioned suffering***

Pervasive conditioned suffering is the most important of the three categories and the foundation of the other two (*suffering of suffering* and *suffering of change*). It is the subtlest and most difficult to recognize. Pervasive conditioned suffering refers to the five *contaminated* aggregates (i.e. our psycho-physical complex/the mind-body continuum), which are the result of our misperception of reality, other afflictions and contaminated karma.

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All sentient beings (except those in the formless realm) are composed of five aggregates. Beings in the formless realm do not have a physical body and therefore have only four aggregates.

The five aggregates are:

1. *Form*: the physical body of sentient beings. It includes bones, blood, flesh, and so forth.
2. *Feeling*: a mental factor which experiences pleasant, unpleasant or neutral feelings.
3. *Discrimination*: a mental factor whose main function is to discern and comprehend objects.
4. *Compositional factors*: this aggregate includes all the other mental factors such as mental engagement, volition, anger, compassion etc. Further, the seeds and imprints of awarenesses are also compositional factors.
5. *Consciousness* (main minds): this aggregate includes the five sense consciousnesses and the mental consciousness, which are not mental factors but main minds. The principal function of main minds is to apprehend their objects.

As before, the five contaminated aggregates are *contaminated* because they are the result of the misperception of reality. They are also the result of other afflictions (such as anger, attachment etc.) and karma.

Further, the five contaminated aggregates are *pervasive conditioned suffering*. Therefore, please note that whereas the other two types of suffering (*suffering of suffering* and *suffering of change*) refer only to feelings, pervasive conditioned suffering includes the entire psycho-physical complex (i.e. the five aggregates/the mind-body continuum).

The five contaminated aggregates are *pervasive* suffering because it is in the nature of those aggregates to have within them the potential to manifest suffering. Even though there are times when problems and discomfort are not present, they are always there in a potential form, and may arise at any time. Our feelings and experiences are the products of the misperception of reality, of other afflictions such as anger, attachment, etc., and karma, and thus carry with them the potential for suffering. There is simply no

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experience within our present existence (whether pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral), which is not rooted in contaminated afflictions and does not carry the potential for problems and difficulties.

Irrespective of the realm in which sentient beings are born, as long as they are under the power of karma and afflictions, suffering is the pervasive condition. Therefore, the third type of suffering is known as *conditioned* or compositional suffering (in some translations it is also called "the suffering of conditionality") because the condition itself, being born with contaminated aggregates – i.e. being born in *Samsara* – means that our psycho-physical aggregates are the result of previous afflictions and karma, and bear the seeds that will produce future misery.

Another way to categorize suffering is into the four types of suffering:

1. The suffering of birth
  2. The suffering of sickness
  3. The suffering of aging
  4. The suffering of death
- (These four will be explained below, for they are contained within the eight types of suffering)

The category of the eight types of suffering:

1. The suffering of birth
2. The suffering of aging
3. The suffering of sickness
4. The suffering of death
5. The suffering of encountering what is unpleasant
6. The suffering of the separation from what is pleasant
7. The suffering of not getting what we want
8. The suffering of (having) the five aggregates

The eight types of suffering are mentioned in Nagarjuna's ***Letter to a Friend***:

*Your highness, be disenchanted with cyclic existence,  
which is the source of many sufferings: not getting  
what you want, death, disease, aging, and the others.*

## **The suffering of birth**

This category has five points to contemplate:

- 1) Birth is [in the nature of] suffering because there is suffering at the time of birth itself
- 2) Birth is [in the nature of] suffering because beings are born with negative tendencies
- 3) Birth is [in the nature of] suffering because it is the source of suffering
- 4) Birth is [in the nature of] suffering because it is the source of afflictive emotions
- 5) Birth is [in the nature of] suffering because it results in an unwanted separation

- 1) *Birth is [in the nature of] suffering because there is suffering at the time of birth itself*

In general, the birth process in the desire realm is painful. More particularly, there are four types of beings whose birth is accompanied by intense pain: beings born in the hell-realm, beings born in the preta (hungry ghost) realm, beings born from a mother's womb and beings born from an egg.

From the point of view of birth as humans, it is obvious that the process of giving birth to a child is associated with severe pain for both mother and child.

Regarding the suffering of the child:

Nagarjuna says in his ***Letter to a Friend***:

*You are gradually squeezed as hard  
As one crushes sesame.  
Being born: is anything like this?*



Pabongka Rinpoche describes the suffering of birth very vividly in his ***Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand***:

*In other words, the suffering is like having your body squeezed in a vice. When you emerge your skin is like raw flayed cowhide; and when you are placed on a cushion, no matter how soft, it is like being thrown into a bramble patch. When you feel an outside wind it is like being penetrated by a sword. When your mother takes you in her arms and carries you, it is like a sparrow being carried off by a hawk. These things terrify you.*

*All your learning from past lives is veiled and you have absolutely no wisdom at all. You even have to learn from scratch how to eat, sleep, walk, and sit.*

*When you meditate on your birth from the womb it should not be goggling at someone else: you should develop insight into how you are certain to have such a birth again, and what it would be like. You should think about the sufferings mentioned in **The Sutra for Nanda for Entering the Womb**.*

*Some may think that the sufferings of birth do not harm because they have already finished with them. But until we set a future limit on our samsara we must re-experience the sufferings of birth an infinite number of times.*

2) *Birth is [in the nature of] suffering because beings are born with negative tendencies*

When we take birth in cyclic existence we are born with what are called "negative tendencies". Negative tendencies refer to the seeds and imprints of afflictive emotions (and contaminated karma). They hold the potential for encountering unwanted circumstances and result in us having little control over our future experiences. Furthermore, since they are produced by afflictions such as ignorance, anger etc. they are incompatible with wisdom. They make it difficult to direct our mind onto a

virtuous course, leave us only limited freedom or self-control to follow our aspirations, and are responsible for our meeting with all kinds of obstacles. The negative tendencies strongly influence all the factors that constitute our existence and naturally produce, sustain and increase further afflictive emotions.

3) *Birth is [in the nature of] suffering because it is the source of suffering*

By taking birth in cyclic existence under the control of afflictive emotions and contaminated karma, we are bound to experience various types of problems and difficulties such as the sufferings of aging, sickness and death. Those sufferings are activated by our birth because the moment we are born is the moment we start aging and start moving towards a time when we will experience illness and other mental and physical discomforts. Furthermore, from the moment we are born we embark on our inexorable journey towards death. Therefore, our birth is the beginning or source of all the other types of suffering.

4) *Birth is [in the nature of] suffering because it is the source of afflictive emotions*

Birth is not only the source of suffering but also the source of the *causes* of suffering. Afflictive emotions such as the three poisons of attachment, aversion and ignorance are the causes of our problems and difficulties in cyclic existence. We are born with sense faculties such as eyes, ears, and so forth which allow us to make contact with the outside world. When, for instance, the eye sense power (the eyes) and an external object of sight come together, an eye consciousness apprehending that object of sight arises. Since every moment of awareness is concomitant with a mental factor of feeling, a pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral feeling arises together with the eye consciousness and apprehends the same object. This feeling then triggers one of the three root afflictions. In general, a pleasant feeling induces attachment, an unpleasant feeling aversion, and a neutral feeling ignorance.

The moment those afflictive emotions arise in our mental continuum they unsettle our mind and body, disturbing any sense of satisfaction and peace. Furthermore, they set off a chain of other afflictions and contaminated actions (karma) of body, speech, and mind. Those actions in turn result in future rebirths in cyclic existence and in experiences that are in the nature of suffering. Therefore, not only are the afflictive emotions the *causes* of our birth, our birth is also the *source* of more afflictions. In this way, we are trapped in a self-perpetuating cycle, absorbed in reacting instinctively to the results of anger or attachment with further aversion or craving.

5) *Birth is [in the nature of] suffering because it results in an unwanted separation*

After our birth, the only certain event is our death. In fact, our birth is not only the *cause* of our present mind and body, it is also the *cause* of the deterioration of our present mind and body, i.e. it is the *cause* of our impending, inevitable and unwanted death.

This is similar to a seed which is not only the *cause* of the production of the sprout but also the *cause* of the deterioration of the sprout.

Our death is an unwanted separation because we desperately cling to our present mind and body; we cling to our friends, our family, our reputation and the material objects we have accumulated. Thus, without understanding that although our death is the end of one situation it is also the beginning of something new (in the same way as *every moment* is the "death" of one situation and the beginning of something new), we are terrified of even thinking about death, which leads us to behave as though we were going to live forever.

## The suffering of aging

Even though the suffering of aging is usually explained in relation to old age, it can also be explained in relation to children etc., for aging in general is associated with different types of suffering. For

instance, babies experience 'teething pain', young children suffer from what is called 'growing pain'; teenagers undergo the problems of hormonal changes pertaining to puberty, and so forth.

Regarding specifically the suffering of old age, there are five points to contemplate:

- 1) The handsome body deteriorates
- 2) Physical strength and vigour deteriorate
- 3) The senses deteriorate
- 4) Enjoyment of sense objects fades
- 5) (There is) the suffering of the diminishment of one's lifespan

1) *The handsome body deteriorates*

When we are young our skin looks fresh and beautiful, our bodies are flexible and well-shaped, etc. People may admire us for our youthful looks. However, as we grow older all that changes. Our skin loses its freshness and becomes wrinkly, our hair turns grey, and our body bends over. In short, we become less attractive and desirable.

2) *Physical strength and vigour deteriorate*

At a young age we have a lot of strength and energy. We can work hard and easily accomplish what we set out to do. At an advanced age our physical strength diminishes and a previously easy task requires great effort.

Lama Tsongkhapa says in his ***Lam Rim Chenmo (Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment)***:

*For example, when you sit down, you drop like a sack of dirt cut from a rope; when you rise up, it is like uprooting a tree; when you speak, you are incoherent; and when you walk, you stumble.*

3) *The senses deteriorate*

In old age our senses deteriorate; we cannot see, hear, or smell properly anymore. Gradually our memory starts fading, we

forget people's names and are unable to recall what we did yesterday or even an hour ago.

4) *Enjoyment of sense objects fades*

Due to the deterioration of our sense faculties, sense objects no longer provide us the same pleasure as before. We have difficulty watching a movie, for we cannot properly see and hear what is going on. We are unable to enjoy listening to music or looking at beautiful scenery.

Our appetite weakens and even our favourite food does not taste the way it used to anymore. With some of our teeth missing we have difficulty chewing. Our digestion is weakened and after a meal we feel physically uncomfortable. Even tactile sensations such as sexual activity no longer hold any attraction or we are physically unable to indulge in them.

5) *(There is) the suffering of the diminishment of one's lifespan*

This refers to the misery of realizing that one has reached the end of one's life and that death is inevitable and approaching fast. One undergoes the suffering of regret for not having made one's life most meaningful. Also, one experiences the fear of having to part from this life's mind and body, from one's friends, relatives and material possessions. On top of that there is the dread of not knowing what will come after death and where one will be reborn.

The suffering of old age is described in the ***Extensive Sport Sutra***:

*As aging progresses and we pass a certain point,  
We are like a tree struck by lightning,  
Withered by old age like a terrible, decrepit house.  
O Sage, speak quickly about an escape from old age.*

*Age enfeebles the masses of men and women  
As a windstorm strips vines from a grove of 'Sal' trees.  
Age steals our vigour, skill, and strength—  
It is as though we are stuck in mud.*

*Age makes attractive bodies unattractive.*

## The Four Noble Truths

*Age steals our glory and our strength.  
Age steals our happiness and subjects us to insults.  
Age takes our vigour, age begets death.*

When Milarepa encountered an old lady who berated him for begging for alms, he composed a song about the suffering of old age and sang it to her so she would understand her situation and turn to the practice of Dharma:

*To lift you from a chair is like pulling out a tent peg;  
With feeble legs  
You waddle like a thieving goose;  
Earth and stone seem to shatter  
When you drop into a seat;  
Senile and clumsy is your body.  
Grandmother, you have no choice but to obey.  
Question your own thought and examine your mind.  
You should practice the Buddha's teaching.  
What you require is a qualified and dependable guru.  
And from that you may find out how you have changed.*

*Your skin is creased with wrinkles;  
Your bones stand out sharply from your shrunken flesh;  
You are deaf, dumb, imbecilic, eccentric, and tottering;  
You are thrice deformed.  
Grandmother, your ugly face is wrapped in wrinkles.  
Question your own thought and examine your mind.  
You should practice the Buddha's teaching,  
You need a qualified and dependable guru.*

The Kadampa Geshe Chengawa said:

*The suffering of death is horrible but brief; how horrible is aging.*

The Kadampa Geshe Gamapa said:

*It is well that aging happens little by little. If it happened all at once, it would be intolerable.*

## The suffering of sickness

Regarding the suffering of sickness, there are also five points to contemplate:

- 1) Sickness changes the nature of the body
- 2) Pain and anguish increase and are seldom absent
- 3) There is no desire to enjoy pleasant objects
- 4) One is forced to make use of unpleasant objects, even though one does not want to
- 5) One loses one's vital energy, i.e. one dies

### 1) *Sickness changes the nature of the body*

When we get sick, we experience various physical changes. We lose our strength and feel weak and tired; activities that usually come naturally require enormous effort.

Our face looks drawn, hollow-cheeked and haggard, with our eyes puffy and bloodshot. Our skin turns ashen and loses its lustre. Our voice becomes hoarse and we cannot help but moan and groan. We have no control over our bowel movements and our breathing grows irregular. We lose our muscle tone, our flesh wastes away and we look scrawny and emaciated.

The suffering of sickness also includes mental illnesses such as depression, bi-polar disorder, etc.

### 2) *Pain and anguish increase and are seldom absent*

Physically we experience various types of hurt, pain, and agony. Mentally we feel depressed, lonely and isolated. Day and night we are caught in the despair of disease, worried that we may not recover, that we may lose our job and our friends, not be able to afford treatment, and so forth.

### 3) *There is no desire to enjoy pleasant objects*

During times of illness we lose our desire for the objects we enjoy when we are well; food, drinks, exercise, and companionship do not have any appeal anymore. They cause us to feel nauseous and aggravate our symptoms.

Even if there are still objects that we do enjoy, we are not able to indulge in them anymore for they may worsen our condition. And even if certain activities that we usually like are not harmful, we physically lack the strength to engage in them.

- 4) *One is forced to resort to unpleasant objects, even though one does not want to*

When we are sick, not only are we unable to indulge in the objects we ordinarily enjoy, we have to do or suffer things we do not like. Our diet is restricted and we are only allowed to eat and drink things we find distasteful. We need to take medicine that has strong side effects and makes us feel worse. We undergo unpleasant treatments such as physiotherapy, chemotherapy, having surgery and so forth.

- 5) *One loses one's vital energy, i.e. one dies*

When our disease is terminal and every kind of medical treatment proves unsuccessful, we have to separate from our body, our loved ones, and our material possessions.

The ***Extensive Sport Sutra*** says:

*Hundreds of illnesses and the pain of rampant disease  
Afflict us, just as humans oppress wild animals.  
Observe the beings overwhelmed by old age and disease  
And quickly speak about escape from suffering.*

*In deep winter, wind and great blizzards  
Take the vigour from the grasses, shrubs, trees, and herbs.  
In the same way, disease takes the vigour out of living beings;  
It breaks down their faculties, physical appearance, and  
strength.*

*It will drain a great fortune in wealth and grain to the last.  
Disease constantly humiliates living beings.  
It harms them and is contemptuous of beauty.  
It torments them, like the sun beating down from the sky.*



## The suffering of death

Again there are five points to contemplate:

- 1) One is separated from objects of enjoyment that are pleasant and beloved
- 2) One is separated from close relatives who are pleasant and beloved
- 3) One is separated from companions who are pleasant and beloved
- 4) One is separated from a body that is pleasant and beloved
- 5) At the time of death one experiences terrible suffering and distress

- 1) *One is separated from objects of enjoyment that are pleasant and beloved*

At the time of death we have to leave behind all our possessions, all the objects we value and to which we are attached. We may have worked extremely hard to accumulate a lot of wealth, a good reputation, fame, renown, great knowledge, and so forth, but there is nothing we can take with us.

In a sutra it says:

*A king goes leaving behind his kingdom,  
A beggar goes leaving behind his staff.*

Shantideva says in his ***Bodhisattvacharyavatara***  
***(Bodhisattva's Way of Life)***:

*Although I may have much material wealth,  
Be famous and well-spoken of,  
Whatever fame and renown I have amassed  
Has no power to accompany me (after death).*

## The Four Noble Truths

- 2) *One is separated from close relatives who are pleasant and beloved*

Even though we may have wonderful relatives, brothers and sisters, loving parents, a caring and

understanding spouse, beautiful children, and so forth, at the time of death we have to separate from them all.

- 3) *One is separated from companions who are pleasant and beloved*

We may have numerous friends, companions, students, teachers, colleagues and other acquaintances whose company we enjoy, but when we die none of them can accompany us.

- 4) *One is separated from a body that is pleasant and beloved*

From the time of our birth until the day we die we have this physical body; it is with us every moment of our life. We take care of it, worry about it and nourish it. We dress it well, beautify, adorn it and make it strong. We try in numerous ways to protect and guard it. However, at the time of death it will desert us and we will have to leave it behind.

- 5) *At the time of death one experiences terrible suffering and distress*

When we die we will have to leave behind everything we know, everything that is near and dear to us. At the same time, we face an uncertain future, for we do not know where we will go and where we will be reborn. This uncertainty leads to terrible misery and fear.

The ***Extensive Sport Sutra*** says:

*You die and pass on to another life, and in so doing  
You are forever separated from people who are beautiful and  
beloved.*

*Like a leaf fallen from a tree, or the current of a river,  
You will never return and meet them again,*

*Death makes the powerful weak.*

*Death takes you away, as a river carries a log.*

*People go alone, unaccompanied, with no companion –  
Powerless because their karma has had its effect.  
Death seizes myriad living beings,  
As sea-monsters seize swarms of creatures,  
As a garuda seizes a snake, or a lion an elephant,  
As fire takes hold of grass, trees, and swarming creatures.*

## **The suffering of encountering what is unpleasant**

Here there are also five points to contemplate:

- 1) Merely encountering one's enemy, one suffers and becomes unhappy
- 2) One fears that one will be physically harmed by one's enemy
- 3) One fears that one's enemy will spread malicious rumours about oneself
- 4) One dreads death
- 5) One fears that due to one's non-Dharmic activities, one will be reborn in suffering existences

- 1) *Merely encountering one's enemy, one suffers and becomes unhappy*

Here 'enemy' also refers to the people we dislike and do not want to be around. Wherever we are, at work or with friends and family, we feel unhappy, even miserable, when we encounter those we dislike. Our peace of mind is immediately disturbed and hostility, anger and resentment arise.

- 2) *One fears that one will be physically harmed by one's enemy*

When there are people we dislike and do not get along with, we are fearful that they may harm us. We constantly have to be on guard against their schemes and actions. They may possibly try to physically harm us, or hurt friends and family and so forth.

- 3) *One fears that one's enemy will spread malicious rumours about oneself*

Further, there is the worry that the people we dislike will harm us verbally. They may talk behind our

back, spread malicious rumours and damage our reputation. This in turn may cause us to lose our job, our friends, etc.

4) *One dreads death*

Even though we do not worry much about death when we are young, as we grow older and come closer to the end of our life, the prospect of death can become a source of great anguish. Especially when our life has been spent in engaging in harmful and meaningless activities, the mere thought of death may lead to much sorrow and misery.

5) *One fears that owing to one's non-Dharmic activities, one will be reborn in suffering existences*

If we have some understanding that the actions we have accumulated in this life may bear fruit in future existences, and if we have accumulated a lot harmful actions, we will be possessed by fear about our future rebirths.

Besides these five points there is also the suffering of encountering problems such as facing poverty, having to work at a job one does not enjoy, being resented by others, having an unattractive body, and so forth.

## **The suffering of the separation from what is pleasant**

This type of suffering is illustrated by five points, in relation to the pain of being separated from the people we love and cherish:

- 1) When one is separated from one's loved ones, grief arises in the mind
- 2) When one is separated from one's loved ones, one verbally laments
- 3) When one is separated from one's loved ones, one harms one's own body
- 4) One becomes sad when one remembers and yearns for the qualities of the departed
- 5) (There is the suffering of) no longer enjoying what one has lost

- 1) *When one is separated from one's loved ones, grief arises in the mind*

There are some people, such as a close friend, a spouse, a child, a teacher etc. that are so dear to us that we cannot bear to be apart from them even for a short time. However, one day we will definitely have to permanently separate from them, which (unless our own death is the cause of the separation) will cause us to experience great sorrow and grief.

The ***Bases of Discipline*** says:

*The end of accumulated things is depletion.*

*The end of things that are high is a fall.*

*The end of meetings is separation.*

*The end of life is death.*

- 2) *When one is separated from one's loved ones, one verbally laments*

When we feel miserable and extremely distressed over the separation from a loved one, we may not be able to control our emotions and we may verbally express our grief by crying, mourning, lamenting and wailing.

- 3) *When one is separated from one's loved ones, one harms one's own body*

In some cases the separation from someone we love may cause us to feel so desperate and unhappy that we physically harm ourselves. We may stop eating and sleeping, or adopt a very risky life-style, and eventually even attempt to kill ourselves. Even if we do not actively harm ourselves, the grief may weaken our immune system and make us susceptible to various kinds of disease.

- 4) *One becomes sad when one remembers and yearns for the qualities of the departed*

Time and again we bring back to mind the qualities of the departed and yearn to be reunited with them. We dream about meeting them only to wake up to the painful reality that this is

impossible. Our memories of those we have lost become the source of suffering; we need to repress the slightest thought of them in order to get through the day.

5) *(There is the suffering of) no longer enjoying what one has lost*

The absence of our loved ones has created a great void and it is extremely difficult to fill that void.

We may never be able to get over the separation and thus never be able to experience the same kind of joy we had before.

Furthermore, there is the suffering of, for instance, losing one's attractive body or one's intelligence through an accident, of losing one's job or one's home, of being robbed of one's possessions, and so forth.

## **The suffering of not getting what we want**

Regarding this type of suffering, Lama Tsongkhapa says in his ***Lam Rim Chenmo (Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment)*** that there are again five points to contemplate which are similar to the five points of the *suffering of the separation from what is pleasant*.

Once again, we should reflect on our personal experiences, i.e. on times when we suffered because we did not get what we wanted.

In the course of our life we have numerous dreams and aspirations which, when unfulfilled, can produce disappointment. We may desire to be wealthy, popular, successful, famous, respected, and loved. We may wish for a specific job, a relationship, an education, and so forth, and work extremely hard to achieve those goals. However, if in the end we fail, we feel sad and depressed. The stronger our desire is to obtain something, the greater our misery and suffering when we do not succeed.

## **The suffering of (having) the five aggregates**

The Buddha said: "In brief, the five contaminated aggregates are suffering." Here the Buddha means that the five contaminated

aggregates are in the *nature* of suffering. This is explained in five points:

- 1) The five (contaminated ) aggregates are vessels of future suffering
- 2) The five (contaminated ) aggregates are vessels of present suffering
- 3) The five (contaminated ) aggregates are vessels of the suffering of suffering
- 4) The five (contaminated ) aggregates are vessels of the suffering of change
- 5) The five (contaminated ) aggregates are in the nature of the all-pervasive compositional suffering

- 1) *The five (contaminated ) aggregates are vessels of future suffering*

The five contaminated aggregates are vessels of future suffering because we create the causes for future misery with our present contaminated mind and body. Having a body and a mind that is under the control of ignorance and other afflictions, we constantly accumulate negative actions of body, speech, and mind that will induce problems and difficulties in the later part of this life or in future rebirths. As explained previously, as a result of our present five aggregates we experience feelings of suffering which induce anger (resentment, hostility, hatred, etc.), we experience feelings of contaminated happiness which induce attachment (desire, longing, craving, etc.) and we experience contaminated neutral feelings which induce ignorance (misperceptions that misapprehend reality). In turn, anger, attachment, and ignorance cause us to engage in harmful actions (karma) that eventually ripen into various types of problems and difficulties.

- 2) *The five (contaminated ) aggregates are vessels of the suffering that presently exists*

The five contaminated aggregates are also responsible for the various troubles and discomforts that we *presently* experience. Owing to our current mind and body, we experience the

problems of sickness, aging and death. We face all sorts of difficulties, frustration and dissatisfaction. When afflictive emotions that induce future suffering arise, we immediately lose our peace of mind and feel restless and disturbed.

3) *The five (contaminated ) aggregates are vessels of the suffering of suffering*

Regarding the five contaminated aggregates being the vessel for the three types of suffering, our

present mind and body are the vessels that experience the various types of suffering of suffering, i.e. the physical suffering of cold, heat, pain, exhaustion, etc. as well as the mental suffering of sadness, depression, loneliness, anxiety, etc.

4) *The five (contaminated ) aggregates are vessels of the suffering of change*

Our present mind and body are also responsible for us undergoing the suffering of change. As explained before, whatever samsaric happiness we experience, it cannot last; it inevitably transforms into some form of misery. It is in the nature of our aggregates that any pleasure or happiness that arises has a limit and cannot be sustained. Eventually it will change into dissatisfaction and displeasure. Our present mind and body are contaminated because they are under the control of ignorance, other afflictions, and karma. Those afflictions and karma are the causes and conditions of all our problems and difficulties. Therefore, from the moment we are born with our contaminated aggregates we carry the potential to experience suffering.

Our mind-body complex is comparable to an open wound, sensitive to the touch and always ready to hurt. Our *pleasant* experiences are like putting cool water on the wound, which temporarily relieves the pain. However, as long as we have an open wound, pleasant relief from the pain cannot last and will inevitably change back into pain. Therefore, even if for the time being we are happy and content, circumstances can easily



change and transform our happiness into dissatisfaction and misery.

Even though our pleasurable experiences induce desire and attachment, nothing in any of these experiences has an essential nature of pleasure. Contaminated pleasant feelings arise from the temporary relief from suffering. They are a mere lightening of the burden and are then labelled "happiness". It is only in comparison to previous feelings of displeasure and pain that we call the temporary absence of those feelings "happiness".

Lama Tsongkhapa says in his ***Lam Rim Chenmo (Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment)***:

*Moreover, your current pleasant feelings – which cause attachment to grow – mostly arise only upon the relief of suffering; pleasure does not exist naturally, independently of the removal of suffering. For example, if you suffer because of too much walking, a pleasant state of mind arises when you sit down. Then, as the earlier intense suffering fades, pleasure appears to arise gradually. Yet sitting is not naturally pleasant, because if you sit too long, suffering arises again, just as before. Suppose that sitting and other postures were causes of pleasure by their nature. Just as suffering increases in proportion to your involvement with causes of suffering, so should pleasure increase the longer you walk, sit, lie down, drink or eat, or stand in the sun or shade. However, it is clear that if you do any of these for too long, suffering is all that results.*

Buddha says in the ***Sutra for Nanda for Entering the Womb***:

*Nanda, the physical activities of walking, sitting, standing, or lying down must each be understood as suffering. If meditators analyse the nature of these physical activities, they will see that if they spend the day walking and do not rest, sit down, or lie down, they will experience walking exclusively as suffering*

*and will experience intense, sharp, unbearable and unpleasant feelings. The notion that walking is pleasant will not arise.*

After explaining the other three physical activities of sitting etc. in the same way, the Buddha continues:

*Nevertheless, Nanda, because they break the continuity of suffering in one or the other of the physical activities, some other, new suffering arises; and this they take to be pleasure. Nanda, when this contaminated feeling of pleasure arises, it is only suffering that is arising; when it ends, it is only this nature of suffering that ends. When it arises yet again, it is only the compositional activity that arises; when it ends, it is only compositional activity that ends.*

The examples given here mainly refer to the body, in that they demonstrate that certain physical activities may initially provide us with physical happiness and well-being. However, that happiness is only temporary, for our body is under the control of karma and afflictions; it is like an open wound and thus in the nature of suffering. Therefore, physical happiness is merely the temporary absence of physical suffering.

Examples that are related to the mind demonstrate that certain mental activities may in the same way initially provide mental peace and well-being. For instance, remembering a joyful event may make us feel happy and content. However, since our mind is equally under the control of karma and afflictions, since it is also like an open wound and thus in the nature of suffering, the initial pleasant feeling is only temporary relief from suffering and will inevitably change into an unpleasant feeling of, for example, boredom and tediousness.

This explains why, no matter how blissful and happy we feel upon getting or achieving something we yearned for, that happiness is short-lived and soon replaced by boredom and dissatisfaction.

Aryadeva says in his **Four Hundred Stanzas**:

*For pleasure, when it increases,  
Is seen to change into its opposite.  
When pain increases,  
It does not similarly change into its opposite.*

- 5) *The five (contaminated ) aggregates are in the nature of (pervasive) conditioned suffering*

The very existence of our five aggregates constitutes pervasive conditioned suffering because our aggregates are conditioned by karma and afflictions. In fact, anything that is conditioned by karma and afflictions is in the nature of pervasive conditioned suffering.

Therefore, having the wound of those aggregates we can temporarily find some relief by taking pain killers, or the pain can flare up if we apply an irritant like chilli. However, it is the wound of the aggregates itself that is the basis of the experiences of relief and pain, and it will also give rise to a future wound, and unwanted future pain.

Lama Tsongkhapa says in his **Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment**:

*In the same way that someone bearing a heavy burden cannot be happy as long as the burden must be borne, you too will suffer so long as you carry the burden of the appropriated aggregates. Though you have occasional moments when painful feeling is absent, because the aggregates are firmly embedded in the dysfunctional tendencies of suffering and the afflictions, compositional suffering is still present, and therefore myriad sufferings are just on the verge of arising in countless ways. Therefore, since compositional suffering pervades all suffering and is the root of the other two types of suffering, meditate on it often in order to become disenchanted with it.*

Pervasive conditioned suffering is very subtle and extremely difficult to comprehend. We are so enmeshed in our attachment to cyclic existence, so attached to this present psycho-physical complex and our imagined inherently existent "I" that it requires great determination and effort to understand the third type of suffering.

The ***Commentary on the Treasury of Abhidharma*** says:

*When one hair from the palm of the hand  
Goes to the eye,  
There will be discomfort and suffering.  
The childish, like the palm of the hand,  
Are not aware of the hair of pervasive suffering.  
The saintly are like the eye,  
And will feel the pervasive suffering.*

However, only when we realize how our entire samsaric existence is pervaded by this subtle nature of misery, can we realize the first of the four noble truths and thus effectively generate renunciation. It is seeing the deep, inescapable, all-pervasive suffering nature of *everything* in cyclic existence that inspires the sincere wish to overcome our contaminated aggregates and achieve liberation.

Another category of suffering is the six types of suffering, which requires us to reflect on past and future lives:

1. The suffering of uncertainty
2. The suffering of insatiability
3. The suffering of having to give up our bodies repeatedly
4. The suffering of repeated rebirth
5. The suffering of repeatedly descending from high to low
6. The suffering of having no companions

### **The suffering of uncertainty**

There is no certainty regarding the relationships we have with other people. Good friends become enemies and enemies become

friends. Those that like and respect us today may set out to harm us tomorrow.

The ***Tantra Requested by Subahu*** says:

*Within a short span of time an enemy becomes a friend,  
And a friend becomes an enemy.  
Likewise, some become strangers.  
While those who were strangers become enemies,  
Or close friends.  
Knowing this, the wise never become attached.  
Rejecting the notion that they can find happiness in friends,  
They rest their minds in the pleasures of virtue.*

Reflecting on this, we should prevent the arising of attachment and resentment, which arise from making unrealistic distinctions between friends and enemies; between "good" and "bad" people.

We have a tendency to judge people based on very superficial reasons. Oftentimes we only focus on one characteristic without seeing the entire person with all their good and bad qualities; we have a "black and white" kind of view of them. Further, we are not aware of the impermanent nature of phenomena; we are not aware how we ourselves, other people, situations, circumstances, etc. are changing *moment by moment*. Therefore, we have a sense that those to whom we feel attached and those we resent are not changing and are always the same.

Also from the point of view of past and future lives, as we take constant rebirths, close relatives such as our mother and father become enemies in other lifetimes, while enemies become close relatives, etc.

The uncertainty of cyclic existence is illustrated by the following story: there was once a layman whose father liked to fish in a nearby pond. When the father died he was reborn as a fish in that same pond. The layman's mother was so attached to the family and the family house that she was reborn as her son's dog. The layman had an enemy whom he had killed for having an affair with the layman's wife. Since the enemy was so attached to the wife he was reborn as her son. The layman caught his father, the fish in the

pond, and killed it. While he ate its flesh, his mother, the dog, stole the fish bones and was beaten by her son, the layman. At the same time, his enemy, reborn as the layman's son, was sitting on his knee. One of Buddha's foremost disciples, Shariputra, who had clairvoyant powers, watched the scene and declared:

*He eats his father's flesh and hits his mother.*

*The enemy he killed sits on his knee.*

*A wife gnaws her husband's bones.*

*Cyclic existence can be such a farce.*

Nagarjuna said in his **Letter to a Friend**:

*For those in cyclic existence there are no certainties*

*Because fathers become sons, mothers become wives,*

*Enemies become friends,*

*And the opposite happens as well.*

## **The suffering of insatiability**

Since our mind and body are in the nature of suffering we will not be able to find any lasting satisfaction in this existence. From a Buddhist perspective, we have been taking rebirth in cyclic existence since beginningless time. If we collected all the milk we drank from our mothers as animals or humans it would more than fill all the oceans of the world (according to ancient Indian explanations there are four oceans in this world). Furthermore, unless we make an effort to overcome our present psycho-physical aggregates we will continue to take countless rebirths.

Nagarjuna says in his **Letter to a Friend**:

*Each one of us has drunk more milk*

*Than would fill the four oceans; yet*

*Those in cyclic existence who act as ordinary beings*

*Are intent on drinking still more than that.*

Moreover, Ashvagbosa's *Alleviating Sorrow (Soka-vinodana)* says:

*Again and again in hells  
You drank boiling liquid copper –  
So much that even the water in the ocean  
Does not compare.*

*The filth you have eaten  
As a dog and as a pig  
Would make a pile far more vast  
Than Mt. Meru, the king of mountains.*

*On account of losing loved ones and friends  
You have shed so many tears  
In the realms of cyclic existence  
That the ocean could not contain them.*

*The heads that have been severed  
From fighting one another,  
If piled up, would  
Reach beyond Brahma's heaven.*

*You have been a worm  
And, having been ravenous, you ate so much sludge  
That if it were poured into the great ocean  
It would fill it completely.*

There is not a single pleasant object in cyclic existence that we have not already enjoyed; there is not a single worldly feeling of happiness that we have not experienced. Countless times we were extremely rich, powerful, and famous, we were incredibly beautiful or handsome; we had wonderful friends, family, spouses, children, and so forth. Whatever worldly objects we wish for in this lifetime we have obtained innumerable times in past rebirths. However, none of them were able to give us any lasting satisfaction.

We also experienced measureless pain, sorrow and misery; in fact, there is no suffering that we have not tasted. Nevertheless, despite those countless experiences of happiness and pain we still repeat the same mistakes, we are never satisfied and always crave the

same meaningless and transient objects. What a waste of time and energy!

Chandragomin says in his ***Letter to a Student***:

*What realm of birth have we not come into hundreds of times?*

*What pleasure have we not already experienced many times before?*

*What luxury, such as splendid white yak-tail fans, have we not owned?*

*Yet, even when we possess such things, our desire continues to grow.*

*There is no suffering we have not experienced many times.*

*The things we desire do not satisfy us.*

*There is no sentient being who has not slept in our bellies.*

*So why do we not rid ourselves of attachment to cyclic existence?*

In the ***Compendium of the Perfections*** it says:

*You get what you want,*

*Use it up, then acquire more,*

*And still you are not satisfied*

*What could be more pathetic than this?*

## **The suffering of having to give up our bodies repeatedly**

When we are born with a particular body we start regarding that body as "my body" and become attached to it. However, since the one thing in life that is certain is death, we have to eventually move on and leave our cherished body behind. Therefore, over the course of countless lifetimes we repeatedly experience the suffering of death - of separating from our physical aggregate.

If we piled up the bones from all the bodies we possessed in previous lives, they would form a pile higher than the king of mountains, Mount Meru.



Nagarjuna says in his **Letter to a Friend**:

*Each of us has left a pile of bones  
That would exceed Mount Meru.*

## **The suffering of repeated rebirth**

Not only do we have to part from our body again and again, we also have to continuously take rebirth. As long as we do not overcome our afflictions, our contaminated karma will keep ripening and throw us into new existences. This is why we have had countless different mothers throughout our countless lifetimes.

Nagarjuna says in his **Letter to a Friend**:

*If you looked for the limit of mothers by counting with  
earthen pellets  
The size of juniper berries, the earth would not suffice.*

A Sutra says:

*For example, O monks, if someone took this vast earth  
pellets the size of juniper berries and set them aside,  
saying, "This is my mother, and this is my mother's  
mother," then, monks, the clay of this vast earth  
would be exhausted, yet the line of matrilineal  
predecessors would not.*

Not only have we had countless *different* mothers, also *every single* sentient being has been our mother innumerable times.

Furthermore, innumerable times we had to undergo the suffering of birth, the difficulty of being a helpless infant, the hardship of learning to walk and talk, and so forth.

## **The suffering of repeatedly descending from high to low**

Even though we may be born in a privileged family with a lot of freedom and opportunities in one lifetime, that existence is transient and depending on our karma, in another life we may be

born in less fortunate states where we will undergo many physical and mental hardships.

Thus, there is no certainty within cyclic existence and we will continuously be tossed up and down in different existences.

Nagarjuna says in his **Letter to a Friend**:

*You may become Indra, worshipped by the world,  
But by the power of karma you will fall once more to earth.  
You may become a universal monarch,  
But once again you will become a lowly servant in cyclic  
existence.*

## **The suffering of having no companions**

Not only do we repeatedly die and take another rebirth, we have to do so without a companion. We die alone and we are born alone. No one can relieve us by taking a share of whatever difficulties we are to experience.

Shantideva says in his **Bodhisattvacharyavatara**:

*This body comes forth whole, yet  
The bones and flesh that accompany it  
Will break apart and disperse. As this is so,  
Why mention others, such as loved ones?*

*You are born alone.  
Also you die alone.  
As others cannot share your suffering,  
Of what use is the hindrance of loved ones?*

It is important to understand that Shantideva is not saying we should not love others and that others are a hindrance. Cultivating love and compassion for other sentient beings is in fact the essential practice for Bodhisattvas. However, our *attachment* to loved ones, our unrealistic expectations that they can provide us with lasting happiness, those are a hindrance – they are a hindrance in particular to having a peaceful death.

This completes the description of the three, eight, and six types of suffering. Traditionally there is also an explanation of the various sufferings specific to the six realms, which can be found in Lama Tsongkhapa's ***Lam Rim Chenmo (Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment)***.

Reflecting on and contemplating these different kinds of suffering and pain, we truly come to understand the disadvantages of our present situation, which is an absolute prerequisite for generating sincere renunciation - the heartfelt determination to escape cyclic existence.

Cultivating disenchantment with our miserable condition and developing the single-pointed intention to overcome it naturally leads to the question: what is the origin or the cause of suffering?

## THE TRUTH OF THE ORIGIN

The origin or cause of the different types of suffering is the afflictions, and contaminated volitional actions/karma.

Of these two, the principal cause is the afflictions. They are the principal cause because (1) they induce contaminated karma and because (2) they are the indispensable cooperating conditions that lead to the ripening of contaminated karma.

Afflictions induce contaminated karma because afflictions such as ignorance, anger, attachment, etc. motivate us to engage in various contaminated volitional actions of body, speech, and mind. These actions are contaminated because they were induced by afflictions. However, not all karma is *contaminated*; even a Buddha creates karma, for a Buddha, motivated by love and compassion, engages in actions of body, speech, and mind. However, since a Buddha has overcome afflictive emotions his/her karma is *uncontaminated*.

Furthermore, whatever contaminated actions we accumulate motivated by ignorance and other afflictions leave karmic imprints in our mental continuum. Of those karmic imprints, imprints of *projecting karma* (karmic imprints that are responsible for which rebirth one takes) can only ripen if there are afflictions that serve as

cooperative conditions. For instance, Arhats or Bodhisattvas on the eighth bhumi still have countless contaminated karmic imprints (which they accumulated before they attained liberation) in their mental continuum. However, since they have eliminated afflictions, the *projecting* karmic imprints cannot ripen anymore, which is why they cannot take rebirth in cyclic existence through the power of contaminated karma. The *projecting* karmic seeds in their continuum are like dry seeds that lack the cooperative condition of moisture.

Dharmakirti says in his ***Pramanavarttika (Commentary on the 'Compendium of Valid Cognition')***:

*The karma of those who have transcended attachment to  
cyclic existence  
Lacks the power to project another rebirth  
Because the cooperative condition is absent.*

## Afflictions

Since the afflictions are the principal cause of suffering, it is important to identify and understand their nature.

According to Asanga's ***Compendium of Knowledge*** the definition of afflictions is:

*An affliction is defined as a phenomenon that, when it  
arises, arises with the characteristic of being  
disturbing, and that, through arising, disturbs the  
mental continuum.*

Afflictions are mental consciousnesses the function of which is to disturb or unsettle the mind. Therefore, not only do afflictions (such as ignorance, anger, attachment, jealousy, arrogance, etc.) induce contaminated actions that lead to future sufferings, they also create problems the moment they manifest by immediately creating mental agitation and destroying the mind's peace and tranquility.

Furthermore, the root cause of afflictive emotions is ignorance (which is an afflictive emotion itself). More specifically, the

ignorance that misperceives the "I" and "mine" or other phenomena as existing inherently is the root of all other afflictions and thus the main cause of their arising.

## ***Ignorance***

Ignorance is a mental factor and a mental consciousness. In general, it can be defined on many levels and thus there are various types of ignorance. One type of ignorance is the mental factor that is a mere *not-knowing*, a lack of understanding. An example of this is the ignorance that does not understand how the engine of a car works or the ignorance that does not know the alphabet. However, this type of ignorance is one of the most superficial, or coarsest.

Another type of ignorance is the mental factor that is not merely confused about reality but actively misapprehends it. It is a distorted perception of its object. In fact, it is a misconception that is diametrically opposed to what actually exists.

There are also various types of this kind of ignorance. In the Sutras, nineteen different types of ignorance are described as the various kinds of wrong perception related to extreme positions.

Furthermore, there are numerous layers of that ignorance in terms of coarseness and subtlety. Some of the subtlest types of ignorance are so subtle that we may not even be aware of them.

However, in general, ignorance that is a misperception or misconception is said to be of two types:

1. Deprecating misconception
2. Superimposing misconception

### **1. Deprecating misconception**

An example of a deprecating misconception is the ignorance that apprehends the non-existence of the law of karma, or the ignorance that apprehends the non-existence of past and future lives.

They are *deprecating* misconceptions because they perceive the *non-existence* of something that actually exists.

## 2. Superimposing misconception

An example of a superimposing misconception is the ignorance that misapprehends reality on the deepest level, that is, the ignorance that apprehends phenomena to exist inherently and from their own side. Another example is a coarser level of ignorance that apprehends that which is impermanent to be permanent, or the ignorance that apprehends that which is in the nature of suffering to be in the nature of happiness. They are *superimposing* misconceptions because they apprehend [the existence of] something that does not exist.

Another way to categorize ignorance is to categorize it into:

1. Innate or instinctive ignorance
2. Intellectually or ideologically acquired ignorance

### 1. Innate ignorance

Innate ignorance is a misperception that arises naturally for all sentient beings. It is inborn and not conditioned by the culture and environment we live in. Regarding, for instance, the innate ignorance apprehending the non-existence of the law of karma, we may have developed firm conviction in the working of karma and live in a community that holds that same conviction. However, when we encounter problems and difficulties we instinctively blame other people or the environment for our problems; we spontaneously ascribe to them the main responsibility for all our trouble.

Similarly, even though we know rationally that our mind and body change moment by moment, we often have the sense that we ourselves and others do not change and always remain the same. In other words, we instinctively perceive ourselves and others to be permanent. Also, though we understand that one day we are going to die, we plan and live our lives as if we were immortal.

Furthermore, even if we have realized the lack of an inherently existent "I" and "mine", until we overcome the seeds of the

*innate* ignorance apprehending inherent existence there will be the spontaneous and instinctive sense of an inherently existent self etc., which in turn will induce attachment, aversion, and other afflictions.

## 2. Intellectually acquired ignorance

Intellectually or ideologically acquired ignorance, although rooted in innate ignorance, is a misperception that is not innate but comes about from the influence of philosophical, religious, scientific, or cultural views and beliefs.

For example, at the time of the Buddha there were a number of philosophical systems that postulated a *permanent, partless, independent self*. Likewise, many religions accept the existence of a soul, a permanent entity that exists independently of mind and body. And then there is the extremely influential Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud's descriptions of the ego and the super-ego as well as cultural ideas that encourage us "to be someone in the world", "to be true to ourselves", and to "find ourselves". All these are intellectually acquired perceptions of the "I" which arise from the view of an inherently and objectively existent self.

Another intellectually acquired view is the acquired ignorance that apprehends the non-existence of past and future lives. This misconception comes about due to the current, widely-accepted scientific view that our mind is merely the product of chemical reactions within our brain and body, and that it ceases to exist at the time of death when those chemical reactions come to an end.

From a Buddhist perspective, religious beliefs in an omnipotent creator God, for example, are explained to arise from an acquired ignorance that apprehends the non-existence of the law of karma.

## **Ignorance that is the root of cyclic existence**

Ignorance that is the root of all other afflictions and thus the root of cyclic existence is the ignorance that apprehends inherent existence. Ignorance that apprehends inherent existence is the root of all other afflictions because it induces all the other afflictions; it induces the other types of ignorance (such as the ignorance that apprehends the non-existence of the law of cause and effect, the ignorance that apprehends the existence of a permanent, partless, independent self, etc. ) as well as anger, attachment, arrogance, jealousy, and so forth.

This root ignorance is also of two types:

1. Ignorance that apprehends the inherent existence of the **"I" and "mine"**
2. Ignorance that apprehends the inherent existence of **phenomena** (phenomena other than "I" and "mine")

Since both types of ignorance apprehend inherent existence, they are both the root of cyclic existence.

## ***Six or ten primary afflictions***

Besides the root ignorance there are numerous other afflictions. The scriptures talk of 84,000 different types which is why it is said that Shakyamuni Buddha gave 84,000 different teachings in order to counteract those 84,000 afflictions.

There are different ways to categorize afflictions. Vasubhandu in his ***Abhidharmakosha (Treasury of Knowledge)*** describes six primary afflictions and twenty secondary ones.

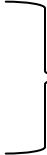
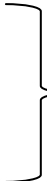
The six primary afflictions are:

1. attachment
2. anger
3. arrogance
4. ignorance
5. (afflictive) doubt
6. wrong view



The first five afflictions are called the *five non-views*. The sixth affliction, wrong view, can be further divided into five distinct types of wrong view, called the *five views*. This way of subdividing wrong view into further five types leads to another way of categorizing afflictions into ten (the *five views* and the *five non-views*) which are also described in Vasubhandu's *Abhidharmakosha* (*Treasury of Knowledge*):

The ten afflictions are:

- |   |   |             |
|---|---|-------------|
| 1. attachment   |  | <i>five</i> |
| 2. anger/aversion   |   |             |
| 3. arrogance  |   |             |
| <i>non-views</i>  |   |             |
| 4. ignorance  |   |             |
| 5. (afflictive) doubt   |  | <i>five</i> |
| 6. view of the transitory collection                                |   |             |
| 7. view holding to extremes   |   |             |
| 8. belief in the supremacy of mistaken views                        |   |             |
| <i>views</i>  |   |             |
| 9. belief in the supremacy of mistaken ethics and religious conduct |   |             |
| 10. wrong view  |   |             |

## 1. Attachment

Attachment is a mental factor that focuses on an object we consider to be a source of pleasure, such as another person, and either exaggerates the person's positive qualities or superimposes positive qualities the person may not even possess. While apprehending those qualities, attachment craves for, and becomes attached to the person.

Regarding the generation of attachment, its root is ignorance apprehending the inherently existent "I," the inherently existent other person, or the inherently existent positive qualities of that person. Those misperceptions then induce other wrong perceptions such as the awareness that perceives the person as being permanent, or in the nature of happiness, or flawless, which in turn lead to a mind that exaggerates the person's

positive qualities or superimposes positive qualities the person does not possess. The latter awareness is not attachment yet, for craving is still to arise.

The mental factor that craves for and becomes attached to the person, *while* exaggerating the person's positive qualities or *while* superimposing positive qualities the person does not possess, is attachment.

The arising of attachment is quite unlike the arising of, for instance, anger. Anger is impulsive and explosive but usually ebbs away quickly. Attachment arises slowly; becoming attached to an object is a gradual process. Attachment craves its object, attaches to and fuses with it, making it very difficult to separate from the object once the mind becomes attached. This is why attachment is compared to a piece of cloth that is stained with oil. The oil is absorbed by the cloth, penetrates into it, and is therefore difficult to remove.

Furthermore, the stronger the attachment, the stronger the sense we cannot find happiness if we are separated from the object. This feeling is particularly strong regarding attachment to another person.

Depending on the intensity of the attachment to the other person, there is the fear that we may be separated from them, there is jealousy when they spend time with someone else, and anger when they leave us.

## 2. Anger/aversion

Anger is a mental factor that focuses on an object that we consider to be a source of displeasure. This source of displeasure can be another sentient being, an unpleasant situation, a disease, etc.

In the case of being angry with someone, anger focuses on that person and exaggerates their negative qualities or superimposes negative qualities they do not possess. While apprehending those qualities, anger cannot bear the person and wants to harm them.

Regarding the generation of anger, its root is ignorance apprehending the inherently existent "I", the inherently existent person who is the object of anger, or the inherently existent negative qualities of that person. Those misperceptions induce a mind that exaggerates the person's negative qualities or superimposes negative qualities the person does not possess. The latter awareness is not anger, for the wish to get rid of or to harm the person has not arisen yet. Rather, anger is the mental factor that wants to get rid of the person or to harm them, *while* exaggerating the person's negative qualities or *while* superimposing negative qualities the person does not possess.

Anger is an affliction that leads to a wide range of different emotions such as resentment, ill-will, fury, irritation, rage, hatred, aggression, rancor, spite, etc. It is considered a particularly harmful affliction because it unsettles the mind more than other afflictions and has the power to destroy a lot of *root virtue* or positive karma we have accumulated over many lifetimes.

### 3. Arrogance

Arrogance is a mental factor that focuses on oneself and exaggerates one's good qualities or superimposes good qualities one does not possess. While apprehending those qualities one feels conceited and superior to others. Through superimposing superiority upon oneself while superimposing inferiority upon others, arrogance causes a feeling of being elevated above others.

Arrogance is rooted in the ignorance that apprehends an inherently existent "I" and in the ignorance that apprehends the inherent existence of one's own good qualities.

It creates a lot of unhappiness especially when there is evidence that the image we have of ourselves and of our positive qualities is distorted and not in accordance with reality. Furthermore, it can be a great obstacle to deepening our understanding and increasing our good qualities.

According to Vasubhandu's *Abhidharmakosha* there are seven types of arrogance:

- 1) Arrogance
- 2) Excessive arrogance
- 3) Arrogance beyond arrogance
- 4) Arrogance of thinking "I"
- 5) Arrogance of conceit
- 6) Arrogance of slight inferiority
- 7) Wrongful arrogance

1) *Arrogance*

An inflated or puffed-up mind that considers oneself to be superior to one's inferiors

2) *Excessive arrogance*

A puffed-up mind that considers oneself to be superior to one's equals

3) *Arrogance beyond arrogance*

A puffed-up mind that considers oneself to be superior to one's superiors

4) *Arrogance of thinking "I"*

A puffed-up mind that thinks "I" by focusing on the aggregates (Some explain the "I" here as referring to the non-existent self, while others explain it as referring to the conventionally existent "I". If it refers to the non-existent self, this arrogance apprehends an inherently existent self and feels inflated about it. If the "I" this arrogance takes to mind is the conventionally existent "I", it merely feels inflated about the conventional "I" without apprehending its inherent existence. Either way, this arrogance is a deluded mind that feels inflated about one's identity. For instance, it may feel puffed-up about being European, American, etc.)

5) *Arrogance of conceit*

A puffed-up mind that thinks one has attained good qualities that one has not attained

6) *Arrogance of slight inferiority*

A puffed-up mind that thinks one is only slightly inferior to those that are greatly superior

7) *Wrongful arrogance*

A puffed-up mind that thinks that one has attained excellent qualities while one has not attained such excellent qualities but instead has developed faults

#### 4. **Ignorance**

As explained before, ignorance refers either to a mental factor that is merely confused with regard to the nature of an object or to a mental factor that actively apprehends the opposite of what is actually there. Lama Tsongkhapa explains this ignorance to refer mainly to ignorance that is mistaken with regard to the four noble truths, the law of cause and effect, and the nature of the Three Jewels.

However, it also refers to the ignorance that apprehends inherent existence, to ignorance that apprehends phenomena that are impermanent as being permanent, to ignorance that apprehends phenomena that are in the nature of suffering as being in the nature of happiness, and so forth.

#### 5. **(Afflictive) Doubt**

Doubt is not generally considered to be an affliction, for it is one of the stepping-stones to gaining a correct understanding of reality. In the beginning there is, for instance, the wrong view apprehending inherent existence, which, after hearing and contemplating instructions explaining the emptiness of inherent existence, transforms into doubt. This doubt then becomes a correctly assuming consciousness that, even though it does not *realize* it, correctly assumes or perceives emptiness.

In dependence on further listening, contemplating, and meditating, one eventually generates the wisdom that realizes the lack of inherent existence.

However, *afflictive* doubt is a mental factor that acts as an obstacle to spiritual development, for it is an awareness that, despite correct reasoning, does not transform into a correctly assuming consciousness and continues to waver with respect to the four noble truths, the law of cause and effect, the Three Jewels, and so forth. It is "two-pointed" or irresolute and undermines our ability to engage in any action with confidence and resolve. Furthermore, it hinders us from committing ourselves whole-heartedly to a particular practice or remaining diligent in our effort to accomplish a desired result. There is a Tibetan saying that just as we cannot sew with a two-pointed needle, we cannot attain our goal with a doubting two-pointed mind.

### 6. View of the transitory collection

The view of the transitory collection refers to a mental factor that apprehends an inherently existent "I" and "mine". It is an 'afflictive wisdom' because its function is similar to wisdom in the way it actively apprehends an object. However, it is an *afflictive* wisdom because its object, an inherently existent "I" or "mine", does not exist.

The reason for calling it "the view of the transitory collection" is that this view apprehends an inherently existent "I" or "mine" while focusing on the aggregates, which are a transitory collection. The aggregates are a transitory collection because of their impermanent and perishable nature.

### 7. View holding to extremes

The view that holds to extremes is an afflictive wisdom focusing on the self as apprehended by the view of the transitory collection, perceiving it either as being permanent and non-changing, or as subject to annihilation in such a way that it becomes non-existent at the time of death.

## **8. Belief in the supremacy of wrong views**

Belief in the supremacy of wrong views is an afflictive wisdom that focuses on one of three views – the view of the transitory collection, the view holding to extremes, or wrong view (which will be explained below) – and regards them as supreme.

## **9. Belief in the supremacy of mistaken ethics and religious conduct**

Belief in the supremacy of mistaken ethics and religious discipline is an afflictive wisdom which asserts that various misguided religious practices are supreme and lead to spiritual attainment. Examples of such practices can be found in many different religious systems. In certain Christian traditions, for instance, one finds the practice of 'corporal mortification' or 'mortification of the flesh' which in some of its more severe forms can mean self-inflicted pain and physical harm, such as beating, whipping, piercing, or cutting oneself. It is felt that these practices will help the practitioner attain union with god, obtain a place in heaven etc. Similarly, in some religious traditions one finds the practice of ritual animal sacrifices. Then there are ascetic practices such standing on one leg or burning the body in the sun for a long time in order to purify negativities. Further, there are numerous cases of self-immolation and ritual suicide that are performed for the sake of spiritual salvation. The view that holds such practices as supreme and as a means of attaining spiritual emancipation is the fourth of the *five views*.

## **10. Wrong view**

Even though the previous four views are all forms of wrong view, here wrong view refers specifically to an afflictive wisdom that apprehends the non-existence of the law of karma, the non-existence of past and future lives, etc. It also refers to the view that asserts the cause of sentient beings and cyclic existence to be a divine creator, a primordial essence (as propounded by the non-Buddhist Indian philosophical system of the Samkyas), and so forth.

## ***The twenty secondary afflictions***

### **1. Aggression / belligerence**

Aggression is a mental factor that is an increase of the primary affliction of anger and wishes to physically or verbally harm others

### **2. Resentment**

Resentment is a mental factor that maintains the continuum of the primary affliction of anger without forgetting it, and wants to retaliate

### **3. Concealment / denial**

Concealment is a mental factor that is a type of ignorance which wants to conceal one's faults from others when they are pointed out by someone with the motivation to be of benefit

### **4. Spite**

Spite is a mental factor that is a type of anger which, motivated by the secondary afflictions of aggression and resentment, wants to speak harshly

### **5. Jealousy / envy**

Jealousy is a mental factor that is a type of anger which, motivated by attachment to material possessions, status, etc., cannot countenance and resents others' qualities, accomplishments, and so forth. It is the basis for the immediate arising of unhappiness in the mind and has the function of causing one's own qualities, wealth, etc. to become exhausted.

Jealousy often contains an element of fear. It sees, for example, that someone may be about to gain a position that one wanted very much for oneself. Desirous of the position and afraid that one may not gain it, one starts to dislike and even hate the person who appears to be the cause of the problem.



## **6. Miserliness**

Miserliness is a mental factor that is a type of attachment which, motivated by attachment to material possessions, status, etc., holds onto things tightly and does not want to separate from them

## **7. Pretension / deceit**

Pretension is a mental factor that is a type of ignorance or attachment which, motivated by attachment to material possessions, status, etc., wants to pretend that one possesses qualities one does not possess

## **8. Dissimulation**

Dissimulation is a mental factor that is a type of ignorance or attachment which, motivated by attachment to material possessions, status, etc., does not want others to know one's shortcomings

## **9. Haughtiness**

Haughtiness is a mental factor that is type of attachment which, having taken to mind one's accomplishments and good qualities, generates an afflictive sense of self-confidence

## **10. Harmfulness**

Harmfulness is a mental factor that is a type of anger which wants to inflict harm on other sentient beings

## **11. Shamelessness / non-shame**

Shamelessness is a mental factor that is a type of ignorance, anger, or attachment which is devoid of a sense of shame with regard to one's negative actions

## **12. Lack of consideration / non-embarrassment**

Lack of consideration is a mental factor that is a type of ignorance, anger, or attachment which is devoid of

consideration for other sentient beings when it comes to one's negative actions

### **13. Dullness / lethargy**

Dullness is a mental factor that is a type of ignorance which makes the mind lethargic so that it is unable to comprehend its object clearly

### **14. Excitement**

Excitement is a mental factor that is a type of attachment which scatters the mind so that it is unable to remain focused on one object

### **15. Non-faith**

Non-faith is a mental factor that is a type of ignorance which does not believe in, does not have faith in, and does not aspire to virtuous phenomena

### **16. Laziness**

Laziness is a mental factor that is a type of ignorance which, due to attachment to sleep, etc. dislikes or feels sluggish about engaging in virtue

### **17. Non-conscientiousness**

Non-conscientiousness is a mental factor that manifests together with one of the three poisons and with laziness, and leaves the mind in a relaxed state without habituating it to virtue and protecting it from contaminated phenomena

### **18. Forgetfulness**

Forgetfulness is a mental factor that is blurred with respect to virtuous objects due to remembering non-virtuous objects

## **19. Non-alertness /non-introspection**

Non-alertness is a mental factor that is a type of afflicted wisdom which is not alert with respect to physical, verbal, and mental actions

## **20. Distraction**

Distraction is a mental factor that is a type of anger, attachment, or ignorance which is distracted

According to the Mahayana tradition, the origin of suffering constitutes the ignorance that actively misapprehends reality and that induces all other afflictions. In the Theravada tradition, the root of suffering is described differently: the emphasis is on craving as the major cause of all other afflictions and thus of all our problems and difficulties.

However, while the two explanations are slightly different, they do not contradict each other, for they are given from the point of view of different perspectives and are designed to cater to disciples of diverse interests and predispositions. Furthermore, *both* ignorance and craving are inseparable from our minds and in this way responsible for all our other afflictions and confused actions.

The Buddhist scriptures outline three types of craving:

- 1) Craving sense pleasures
- 2) Fearful craving
- 3) Craving existence

### **1) Craving sense pleasures**

In particular, living beings in the desire realm are constantly driven by a craving for pleasurable sights, sounds, smells, and so forth. If we examine this type of craving we come to see that most of what we do on a daily basis is dominated by the need to satisfy our craving for sense pleasures.

### **2) Fearful craving**

Fearful craving refers to the craving to avoid any type of displeasure and suffering. It is called *fearful* craving because it is linked to the fear of experiencing suffering.

### 3) Craving existence

Craving existence is the strongest and most subtle type of craving because what we desire most is to exist. This craving becomes particularly intense at the time of death when, as the mind starts to separate from our body, we experience a great fear of annihilation. It is so intense that it activates a projecting karmic imprint and thus induces a new existence in cyclic existence.

Dharmakirti says in his ***Pramanavarttika (Commentary on the 'Compendium of Valid Cognition')***:

*For this reason we assert that is the craving for existence,  
Those that relate to living beings' desire  
To obtain pleasure and avoid suffering are  
Craving for sense pleasures and fearful craving.*

### ***The process of generating the afflictions***

There are two systems regarding the production of afflictions. According to the Abhidharma system laid out primarily by Vasubandhu and his half-brother Asanga (the *Sautrantika/Sutra school* and *Cittamatra/Mind-only school following scripture*), the type of ignorance that is the root of cyclic existence is regarded as being distinct from the view of the transitory collection, in that the root ignorance is considered to be a mere not-knowing, a mental dullness. The view of the transitory collection, on the other hand, is considered to be an afflictive or mistaken 'wisdom' that actively misapprehends its object. The way in which the root ignorance induces the view of the transitory collection and other afflictions is explained in Lama Tsongkhapa's ***Lam Rim Chenmo (Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment)***:

*One way to look at this is to consider ignorance as distinct from the view of the transitory collection. For example, when twilight falls on a coiled rope, its*

*status of a coiled rope will be unclear and someone may imagine that it is a snake. Similarly, according to this view, the misapprehension of the aggregates as self arises due to the darkness of ignorance, which prevents clarity about how the aggregates exist. The other afflictions then develop from this misapprehension.*

According to the *Cittamatra/Mind-only school* following reason as laid out by Dharmakirti as well as the *Madhyamika/Middle Way school*, the view of the transitory collection is an ignorance that is the root of cyclic existence, which means that the ignorance that is the root of cyclic existence is not a mere mental dullness but an afflictive wisdom.

Therefore, as explained before, the root cause of all other afflictions refers to the ignorance that apprehends the inherent existence of **phenomena** (phenomena that are other than "I" and "mine") as well as to the view of the transitory collection which is the ignorance that apprehends the inherent existence of "**I**" and "**mine**".

Especially regarding the latter ignorance, i.e. the view of the transitory collection, it serves as the basis for yet another misperception that perceives "I" and others as being inherently different. The misperception that perceives the inherent existence of "I" and mine and the misperception of the "I" and others as being inherently other induces the *improper attitude* (Tib: *tshul min yid byed kyi rnam rtog*) which perceives the "I" and mine as more important or more precious than others. This improper attitude in turn induces *attachment* to and *craving* for "I" and "mine" as well as attachment to and craving for whatever benefits "I" and "mine". It is also the cause of *anger* towards that which is considered harmful to the "I" and "mine" and of *arrogance* that apprehends the "I" and "mine" as superior.

From the ignorance that apprehends an inherently existent "I" and "mine" further arises the *view holding to extremes*, that is, the awareness that focuses on the "I" and either apprehends it as being unchanging and permanent (view of permanence) or as being

subject to complete extinction at the time of death (view of nihilism).

Similarly, we cultivate the *belief in the supremacy of wrong views* by regarding, for instance, the view that apprehends "I" and "mine" to exist inherently as superior. This leads to the *belief in the supremacy of mistaken ethics and religious conduct*, i.e. to the view apprehending misguided ethics and conduct, which are associated with the former views, as supreme.

Likewise, we develop the *wrong view* that denies the existence of the Buddha, who taught selflessness, and denies what the Buddha taught, such as the law of cause and effect, the four noble truths, the three Jewels, and so forth. Even if we do not hold the latter wrong view we may develop *doubt* that thinks that the Buddha and his teachings probably do not exist.

Dharmakirti says in his ***Commentary on the 'Compendium of Valid Cognition'***:

*Once there is a self, there is an idea of other  
On behalf of self and other there is attachment and anger  
All of the faults come about  
In association with these.*

Similarly, the secondary afflictions of aggression, resentment, concealment, and so forth also arise from the root ignorance.

By reflecting on this process of the production of afflictions, we come to understand that Samsara is an internally created condition; it arises from a chain of different afflictions and contaminated actions that are rooted in ignorance that misperceives an inherently existent "I" and "mine". By looking inwardly we come to see that all actions – even virtuous actions – invariably arise from attachment to "I" and "mine", from an awareness that seeks benefit and gratification for the self, etc.

Therefore, as Buddhist practitioners we should not blame the external world for our problems and difficulties but regard our afflictions as the actual enemies. We should try our best to overcome the root of those afflictions by working to realize the lack

of inherent existence of all phenomena. At the same time, until we achieve that realization, we should work on different methods to temporarily decrease and resist the influence of the various afflictive emotions. This is expressed beautifully by the Kadampa Geshe Ben Kungyal who said: "I have no other job than to stand at the door of the afflictions, holding the spear of the antidotes."

### ***The causes of the afflictions***

Afflictions arise from a combination of different causes and conditions. Lama Tsongkhapa explains six causes in his ***Lam Rim Chenmo (Great Treatise on the Stages to the Path to Enlightenment)***. Until we realize the ultimate nature of phenomena it is very helpful to develop an understanding of those causes and to steer away from their influence. The six causes are:

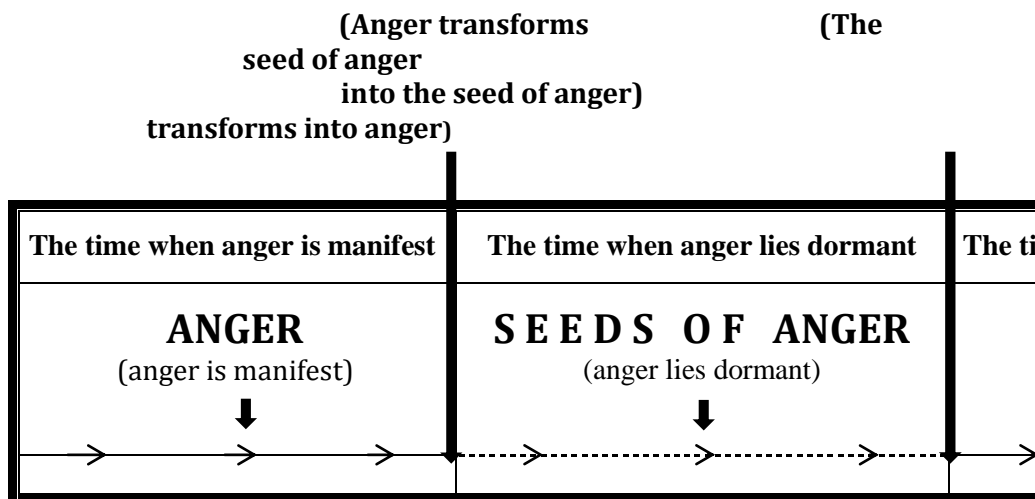
1. Basis
2. Object
3. Distractions
4. (Mistaken) explanations
5. Habituation
6. (Wrong) mental engagement

#### **1. Basis**

The basis refers to the seeds of afflictions. This means that when afflictions are not manifest or present in a person's mental continuum they lie dormant, i.e. they abide on an unconscious level in the form of subtle predispositions or propensities. These subtle predispositions or propensities are called "seeds". For instance, when anger does not manifest in a person's continuum it remains in the form of the seed of anger in that person's continuum. The seed of anger is the potential of anger to arise again. It is present in a person's continuum only when anger is not manifest. If the conditions for anger to become manifest (e.g. feeling tired and encountering an annoying object) come together, the seed of anger transforms into manifest anger, i.e. anger becomes manifest in the person's mental continuum. When anger becomes manifest, the seed of

anger ceases to exist. Please note that since those seeds are subtle predispositions or propensities they are also imprints.

Only the meditative absorption directly realizing emptiness can eliminate afflictions and their seeds. Until the seeds of afflictions are eliminated, the potential for them to arise is ever-present. Therefore, the seeds of afflictions are the **basis** or support of the afflictions.



Therefore, there are two types of imprints:

- 1) Imprints that are seeds, and
- 2) Imprints that are not seeds

*Imprints that are seeds* were explained above. However, it is important to understand that not only afflictions but any awareness in a person's continuum leaves a seed when it becomes non-manifest. For instance, when we fall asleep the sense consciousnesses become non-manifest and thus transform into seeds or the potential to arise again. When we wake up the seeds of the sense consciousnesses transform back into their respective sense consciousnesses. The same applies to virtuous minds, such as love, compassion, generosity, and so



forth. While they do not arise or manifest in our mental continuum they lie dormant or latent.

*Imprints that are not seeds* are the imprints (predispositions or propensities) that afflictions leave *while* they are manifest in a person's mental continuum. In the case of anger that lasts, for instance, for thirty seconds, that anger leaves imprints in the person's mental continuum every second of its presence. These imprints (other than the *imprints that are seeds*) are present at the time of anger but cannot transform into anger.

Furthermore, they continue to exist in the person's continuum even after the anger becomes non-manifest and remain until they are purified. They are the imprints that are responsible for future habitual tendencies, future experiences etc.

The time when anger is manifest						
1. moment of anger	2. moment of anger	3. moment of anger	4. moment of anger	5. moment of anger	6. moment of anger	7. moment of anger
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
IMPRINT	IMPRINT	IMPRINT	IMPRINT	IMPRINT	IMPRINT	IMPRINT

It is not only the afflictions that leave imprints, neutral and virtuous awarenesses do too. They are responsible for our neutral and virtuous habitual tendencies, future experiences and so forth.

## 2. Object

Here, 'object' refers to the object of the afflictions. Since all awarenesses have objects, afflictions cannot arise unless they focus on particular objects. Objects are the conditions in dependence on which the seeds of afflictions transform into manifest afflictions. For instance, anger arises when encountering an unpleasant or annoying object. The object of

focus of the anger is an object whose negative qualities the anger exaggerates or superimposes.

Therefore, it is not only the object itself in dependence on which afflictions arise, it is also the misapprehension of the object that is responsible for the arising of afflictions. We apprehend objects to inherently exist, to have inherent negative or positive qualities, to be permanent, to be pure and able to provide lasting happiness, etc.

Since an object is required for an affliction to become manifest, we can prevent seeds from awakening into the active form of the afflictions by avoiding objects that activate them. We can try to intentionally avoid the situations that give rise to particular afflictions.

Of course this is only a temporary – although effective – method to reduce afflictions, which becomes unnecessary once we are able to completely eliminate afflictions and their seeds by cultivating the wisdom that directly realizes the ultimate nature of phenomena.

### 3. Distractions

Here, distractions refer to worldly social activities that naturally contribute to the generation and increase of afflictions. These include activities such as gambling, drinking, taking drugs, excessive partying, and engaging in other frivolous activities. They agitate and distract the mind and are extremely detrimental to any kind of spiritual practice.

Unless we have some understanding of selflessness, our spiritual resolve is easily swayed by external distractions.

Therefore, monks, nuns, and lay practitioners take vows that help them to avoid those distractions. Monks and nuns live in monasteries or nunneries which in Tibetan are called *Gompa* (*dgon pa*). The word *Gompa* literally means "a place of solitude", a place free from the external influence of worldly distractions.

#### **4. (Mistaken) explanations**

Mistaken explanations are another cause of afflictions. Here, mistaken explanations refer to adverse teachings, harmful books, movies, video games and so forth that are in conflict with reality and encourage and stimulate us to engage in non-virtuous actions.

#### **5. Habituation**

Here, habituation means becoming accustomed to afflictions. Negative habits are formed by allowing afflictions to arise and remain for a long time without applying their antidotes. This strengthens their destructive nature and their ability to induce other non-virtuous actions of body, speech, and mind. If we allow, for instance, anger to arise in our continuum and do not try to stop it by applying the antidotes of love and patience we leave powerful imprints in the form of negative tendencies or habits in our mental continuum that cause us to constantly get angry with little provocation.

#### **6. (Wrong) mental engagement**

Wrong mental engagement refers to wrong conceptions, i.e. to imputing onto phenomena characteristics that they do not possess. For instance, misperceiving objects of attachment in four ways: (1) apprehending that which is impermanent to be permanent, (2) that which is in the nature of suffering to be in the nature of happiness, (3) that which is impure to be pure, and (4) that which is selfless to possess a self.

Other examples of wrong mental engagement are the wrong conceptions that arise when feeling angry at an object. As explained before, anger exaggerates the negative qualities of its object or superimposes negative qualities that the object does not possess. Furthermore, there is the misperception that perceives the object of anger to be permanent and the misperception that perceives the object of anger to possess a self.

## Karma

Following the explanation of afflictions comes an explanation of contaminated karma which is the other main cause or origin of the truth of suffering.

As explained below, there is a difference between *contaminated* and *uncontaminated* karma. Contaminated karma refers to volitional actions of body, speech, and mind that are motivated and induced by ignorance and other afflictions, whereas uncontaminated karma refers to volitional actions of body, speech, or mind that are not motivated or induced by afflictions but by wisdom and compassion. The karma that is a truth of origin is contaminated karma.

In general, everything that exists - the fabric of the entire universe - is based on the law of cause and effect. Its basis is the fact that causes produce specific results and results are produced by specific causes. The law of karma is only one aspect of the law of cause and effect, for there is a law of cause and effect that is based on volition and a law of cause and effect that is *not* based on volition. The law of karma refers to the law of cause and effect that is based on volition. The law of cause and effect that is not based on volition refers to the principle of non-karmic causes (i.e. causes that are not induced by volition) producing specific results, as in the case of a seed producing a sprout when the necessary conditions for such production come together. This process of production does not depend on volition but takes place naturally when the specific causes and conditions aggregate.

The law of cause and effect, and thus the law of karma, are based on the principle of *dependent arising*, i.e. the interdependence of phenomena. So from a Buddhist point of view, our different experiences, the situations in which we find ourselves, etc. are not the product of a creator god but of impermanent and volitional actions we accumulated in the past, with positive volitional actions having the potential to create only positive results, negative volitional actions having the potential to create only negative results, and neutral volitional actions having the potential to create only neutral results.

In general, it is volitional or intentional physical, verbal, and mental actions that are the causes of the variety of our pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral experiences. Pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral experiences correspond to beneficial, harmful, and neutral volitional actions respectively.

Please note that in general, negative volitional actions are actions induced by the motivation to harm someone, positive volitional actions are actions induced by the motivation to benefit someone, and neutral volitional actions are actions induced by a neutral motivation, i.e. a motivation that neither wants to harm nor benefit someone.

However, it is important to realize that not everything is the result of karma. For instance, the fact that compounded phenomena are impermanent, that we have a mind etc. are not the results of karmic actions.

The law of karma is one of the fundamental teachings of Buddhism. It is a very profound topic and extremely difficult to comprehend in all its complexity. In particular, the details of the relationship between an action and its result are exceedingly subtle and profound; they are much more difficult to realize than the lack of inherent existence. It is only when we have removed cognitive obstructions and attained the state of a Buddha that are we able to understand all the details of the relationship between certain karmas and their results. Likewise, only then will we be able to know exactly which circumstances led to the ripening of a particular karma.

Since as sentient beings (who have not overcome cognitive obstructions) we cannot fully comprehend the subtle workings of the law of karma, the Buddha told numerous stories to illustrate the principles of how karma works. These stories are collected in various sutras and in the scriptures on the Vinaya (monastic discipline).

Lama Tsongkhapa's ***Lam Rim Chenmo (Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment)*** mentions three texts that contain these stories:

- a) ***The Bases of Discipline*** (Skt. *Vinaya vastu*)
- b) ***The Sutra of the Wise and Foolish*** (Skt. *Dama muko nama sutra*)
- c) ***The Hundred Actions Sutra*** (Skt. *Karma sataka sutra*)

For a karmic action to be complete three factors are needed: (1) the motivation, (2) the action itself, and (3) satisfaction.

The motivation is the most important factor, for it induces the latter factors and determines whether the action is positive, negative, or neutral. It is important to understand that here, the motivation does not merely refer to the coarse kind of intention of which we are aware, but also to the unconscious, instinctive, and spontaneous drives that direct our actions.

The action itself refers to the physical, verbal, and mental actions motivated by an intention. Satisfaction constitutes the concluding stage, as it refers to a feeling of satisfaction, or even joy, upon the completion of the action.

Physical karma (karma of the body) is any volitional action of the body, such as stealing, refraining from killing, exercising the body, and so forth. Verbal karma is any volitional action of speech such as lying, refraining from gossiping, debating, and so on. However, *mental* karma does not refer to just *any* action of the mind but only to the mental factor of volition (also called “mental engagement”). The mental factor of volition is one of the five omnipresent mental factors that accompany every main mind. The other four mental factors are feeling, discrimination, attention, and contact.

The principal function of the mental factor of volition is to direct or move the mind toward an object so that the mind becomes involved with that object. Volition is the motivating element of consciousness that causes the mind to become involved with and apprehend an object. Just as a piece of iron is moved by a magnet that comes near it, by the mere existence of volition the mind is similarly drawn to different objects.

The mental factor of volition that is concomitant with mental consciousnesses can be virtuous, non-virtuous, or neutral, while the

volition that is concomitant with sense consciousnesses is always neutral. Furthermore, volition induces and accompanies physical or verbal karma, thereby determining whether these actions of the body or speech will be positive, negative, or neutral.

Also, since volition is always present – particularly volition that is concomitant with the mental consciousness – there is no time when we are not creating mental karma.

Once a mental karma is accumulated, it leaves a kind of residue or potency, called an “imprint” (Skt. *vasana*, Tib. *bag chags*) on our mental continuum. Imprints have the potential to ripen as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral experiences in the future. Imprints are also left when we create karma of the body and speech, but this does not mean that physical or verbal karma is karma of the mind. Rather, physical and verbal karma constitutes actions of body or speech that are caused and controlled by mental karma.

Hence, any volitional physical or verbal action is induced and accompanied by different types of mental volition which leave karmic imprints on our mental continuum. These imprints have the potential to ripen as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral karmic results (related to the body or speech) in the future.

We have accumulated countless different karmas; an infinite number of karmic imprints have been placed on our mental continuum, ready to ripen when the appropriate causes and conditions assemble. It is therefore vital to understand that our experiences are not dependent on one single cause. Quite often when we encounter a situation, particularly a problem, we blame it on just one cause. In fact, there are always numerous conditions involved in creating a situation – the external causes and conditions as well as the ripening of the internal karmic imprints.

Furthermore, every single moment of our life we are accumulating new karmic actions of body, speech, and mind that possess the potential to shape our future experiences. Therefore, it is only an omniscient Buddha who is able to understand karma's full implications. Nevertheless, knowing the basic characteristics and

functions of karma can have a profound effect on our life and it is essential for comprehending the second noble truth.

There are two major benefits derived from reflecting on the general working of karma. The first benefit is that when we encounter problems and difficulties, we will know not to blame them on others. We will be able to accept them as the results of our own previous actions and even be able to rejoice, knowing that the previously accumulated karma has now yielded its result and is no longer able to ripen in further suffering.

The second benefit is that, having recognized that meeting difficult circumstances is the result of our past actions, we will know better than to generate more negative future karma by getting angry at others for causing us problems. Instead, we will make a serious effort to avoid repeating the actions that caused us to experience the present suffering.

Also, we will come to an understanding that all negative karma can be purified by relying on the four powers of purification (i.e. the power of remorse, the power of applying the antidote, the power of turning away from the fault, and the power of reliance), providing us with hope and the conviction that no matter how negative the karma we accumulated in the past, it can be remedied.

Even though karma actually refers to the *cause* of our experiences, the term is also often used to describe the *result* of our karma. When the term karma is used to describe a karmic result (e.g. saying that the experience of an unpleasant feeling 'is my karma'), we are giving the name of the cause (karma) to the result (the karmic result of experiencing an unpleasant feeling). This is similar to saying that our room 'gets a lot of sun' when the rays of the sun enter our room. The rays of the sun are the result of the sun and so we are giving the name of the cause (the sun) to the effect (the sun rays).

The basic characteristics and functions of karma are extensively explained in Lama Tsongkhapa's ***Lam Rim Chenmo (Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment)*** in the



sections on the attitude of a person of smaller capacity and on the attitude of a person of medium capacity.

For the sake of a good understanding of the second noble truth, some of the characteristics and functions of karma will be explained below.

### ***The four characteristics of karma***

In general, the way to reflect on karma entails four points:

- 1) The certainty of karma
- 2) The great increase of karma
- 3) Not experiencing the result of any action one has not done
- 4) Actions one has accumulated do not perish

#### **1) The certainty of karma**

The certainty of karma refers to the fact that the result of a virtuous action (unless destroyed e.g. by

anger) can only be positive, the result of a non-virtuous action (unless purified e.g. by the four powers) can only be negative, and the result of a neutral action can only be neutral. Likewise, any pleasant feeling can only be the result of a positive action, any unpleasant feeling can only be the result of a negative action, and any neutral feeling can only be the result of a neutral action. Even the slightest inconsistency in this natural process is impossible.

The reason is that the law of karma is a law of nature operating with empirical uniformity, like the law of gravity, the laws of motion, and so forth. Hence, just as warmth does not produce cold, nor light produce darkness, harmful actions do not produce pleasant experiences, and beneficial actions do not produce unpleasant experiences.

In brief, our different experiences of happiness and suffering are not causeless and do not arise from incompatible causes such as a creator god.

Nagarjuna says in his ***Precious Garland***:

*From non-virtues come all sufferings,  
And likewise all bad migrations,  
From virtues, all happy migrations  
And the pleasures of all lives.*

## 2) The great increase of karma

Another general characteristic of karma is that it expands greatly. Even a small virtuous action (if not destroyed by an affliction) can lead to great happiness, whereas a small non-virtue (if not purified) can result in immense suffering. Therefore, a karmic imprint's ability to produce particular results expands over time. An analogy for this characteristic is how a small seed over time produces a tree with a large trunk, numerous branches, countless leaves, and so forth.

The increase of karma is expressed in the following quotes:

The ***Collection of Indicative Verses*** says:

*Like a poison that has been ingested,  
The commission of even a small non-virtue  
Creates in your lives hereafter  
Great fear and a terrible downfall.*

*As when grain ripens into bounty,  
Even the creation of small merit  
Leads in lives hereafter to great happiness  
And will be immensely meaningful as well.*

## 3) One does not experience the result of an action one has not done

If we have not accumulated a specific karma that is the cause of happiness or suffering, we will not experience that happiness or suffering. Therefore, we cannot experience the result of a karma done by another person and another person cannot experience the result of a karma done by ourselves.

This explains why some people will die of an illness although everyone else recovers, and why others become the lone survivors of an airplane crash.

#### 4) **Actions one has accumulated do not perish**

When we accumulate a karmic action, a karmic imprint is left in our mental continuum. In the case of a virtuous karmic imprint, if it is not destroyed by anger or other afflictions, the karmic imprint will not perish and will remain until it ripens. Likewise, in the case of a non-virtuous karmic imprint, unless it gets purified, it will not be destroyed and will eventually produce its result. Therefore, karmic imprints may remain in our mental continuum for millions of eons before the causes and conditions for their ripening come together.

The ***King of Concentration Sutra*** says:

*Further, once you have committed an action, you will  
experience its effect;  
And you will not experience the effects of what others have  
done.*

Furthermore, the ***Bases of Discipline*** says:

*Even in one hundred eons  
Karma does not perish.  
When the circumstances and the time arrive  
Beings surely feel its effects.*

In brief, the general characteristics of karma are that: (1) our different experiences are invariably the effect of their respective virtuous, non-virtuous, or neutral karma, (2) karma expands over time so that the effects are greater than the cause, (3) we cannot experience something without having accumulated the corresponding karmic action, and (4) once karma is accumulated it cannot disappear, unless (in the case of virtuous karma) it is destroyed by an affliction or (in the case of a non-virtuous karma) it is purified.

## ***A brief description of the criteria for powerful or weighty karmic actions***

The strength of actions is dependent on four factors:

1. Powerful in terms of the recipient
2. Powerful in terms of the support
3. Powerful in terms of the substance
4. Powerful in terms of the motivation

### **1. Powerful in terms of the recipient**

The recipient, or literally the *field*, refers to the recipient of our actions. The most powerful recipients are Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, our spiritual guides, Bodhisattvas and other beings who have spiritual realizations, and our parents.

With respect to the non-virtue of stealing, the Buddha explains in the ***Mindfulness of the Excellent Teaching (Sad-dharmanumrti-upasthana)*** that it is far worse to steal from the Sangha than to steal from the Buddha and the Dharma. Here the Sangha mainly refers to monks and nuns, or in a wider sense, to laypeople who have dedicated their lives to spiritual practice.

The reason for the greater non-virtue is that the Buddha and the Dharma do not need the substances we offer. The Sangha, on the other hand, traditionally lead a simple life with no income and meager possessions. Stealing from them would therefore interfere with their Dharma practice and indirectly harm all other sentient beings for whose benefit the Sangha is working.

The ***Sun Essence Sutra (Surya-garbha-sutra)*** also teaches that we should not use any object offered to the Sangha. On the other hand, when it comes to the virtue of generosity, there is immense positive potential gained from making offerings to the Sangha and supporting their practice thereby.

Other powerful recipients of positive or negative actions are Bodhisattvas. ***The Seal of Engaging in Developing the Power of Faith Sutra (Sraddha-baladhanavatara-mutra-sutra)*** says

that it is far worse if we get angry with a Bodhisattva, than if we put all sentient beings in a gloomy prison, steal all their possessions, or destroy as many stupas as there are grains of sand in the Ganges River.

Regarding virtuous actions, the *Seal of Engaging in Certain and Uncertain Destinies Sutra (Niyatani-yata-gati-mudravatara-sutra)* says that we accumulate far greater merit if we have faith in, and praise a Bodhisattva than if we lovingly restored the eye-sight of all sentient beings after they had lost their eyes.

The reason for this is that Bodhisattvas have dedicated their entire life to working for the liberation and enlightenment of all sentient beings. Therefore, any action that either benefits or harms a Bodhisattva either facilitates or interferes with their commitment to lead sentient beings to liberation and enlightenment.

## 2. Powerful in terms of the support

The support refers to the person who performs the action. The consequences of a negative action are far worse for a person who is ignorant about the working of karma because they may not be aware of the negativity of their action, experience no regret, are unable to generate antidotes to purify the karma, and do not know how to prevent such action in the future. A person who is familiar with the law of karma, on the other hand, is far more able to distinguish between virtuous and non-virtuous actions, generate regret, purify the karma, and protect themselves from such actions recurring in the future. They are also more likely to enhance their positive actions and defend themselves against afflictions that have the potential to destroy the virtuous karmic imprints they have accumulated.

Therefore, a *negative* action is more powerful if a person does *not* live in accordance with the working of karma and a *positive* action is more powerful if a person *does* live in accordance with the working of karma.

Furthermore, a positive action becomes weightier if the support (the person performing the action) holds vows – ideally the three sets of vows, i.e. the Pratimoksha, Bodhisattva, and Tantric vows. If one finds it difficult to make a lifelong commitment one could also take the one day vows (possibly combined with the Mahayana motivation) and thus make any positive action more powerful. However, negative actions also become stronger if one takes vows but does not keep them purely to the best of one's ability.

### 3. Powerful in terms of the substance

Here the substance refers to the object or the material that is used in a positive or negative action. With respect to the act of giving, the substance is explained to be threefold: (1) giving material goods, (2) giving the Dharma, and (3) giving of protection. The third type of giving can be subdivided into (a) giving protection from worldly threats and dangers and (b) giving protection from the obstructions to liberation and enlightenment. The latter substance (the obstructions to liberation and enlightenment) as well as the substance of the second type of giving (the Dharma, which also includes one's own Dharma practice) are substances which, when given, make the act of generosity more powerful.

### 4. Powerful in terms of the motivation

The motivation that makes a positive action most powerful is the motivation of Bodhicitta, or thinking: "May this action enable me to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings." A lesser motivation is the attitude that wants to attain self-liberation, and an even lesser motivation is the wish to obtain a higher rebirth and happiness in future lives. However, if one performs an action motivated by the wish to attain happiness merely in this life, the action is likely to be negative.

Lama Tsongkhapa says in his *Lam Rim Chenmo (Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment)*:

*If your concern is mainly for the pleasures of this lifetime, prior to death, then you accumulate non-meritorious actions.*

### ***The three karmic results***

There are three results of karma:

- 1) Fruitional results
- 2) Causally concordant results
- 3) Environmental results

#### **1) Fruitional results**

Fruitional results refer to the types of rebirth or the types of life we take within samsara as a result of the fruitional karmic causes we have accumulated. Please note that fruitional karmic causes are either virtuous or non-virtuous since neutral actions lack the strength to produce samsaric rebirths.

The Buddhist scriptures describe samsara as consisting of three realms:

1. The Desire Realm
2. The Form Realm
3. The Formless Realm

The Desire Realm further consists of six levels:

- a) The Hell Realm
- b) The Preta Realm
- c) The Animal Realm
- d) The Human Realm
- e) The Semi-celestial Realm
- f) The Celestial Realm

The Form Realm consists of four levels:

- a) The First Concentration Level
- b) The Second Concentration Level
- c) The Third Concentration Level
- d) The Fourth Concentration Level

The Formless Realm also consists of four levels:

- a) The Limitless Space Level
- b) The Limitless Consciousness Level
- c) The Nothingness Level
- d) The Peak of Cyclic Existence Level

Rebirth in the hell, preta, and animal realms is caused by non-virtuous actions, whereas rebirth in the human, semi-celestial, and celestial realms of the Desire Realm as well as in the Form and Formless Realms is caused by virtuous actions.

From the point of view of their strength (or severity), *non-virtuous* actions that have the potential to produce rebirth within samsara can be classified into great, middling, and small actions. Hence any non-virtuous action that is a fruitional cause is one of the three: a great, medium, or small non-virtuous action. A great non-virtuous action can cause rebirth in the hell-realm, a medium non-virtuous action can cause rebirth in the preta realm, and a small non-virtuous action can cause rebirth in the animal realm. The strength or severity of a negative fruitional cause is determined by the affliction and the motivation that induced it. Likewise, from the point of view of their strength, *virtuous* actions that have the potential to produce rebirth within samsara can also be classified into great, middling, and small actions. Thus, any virtuous action that is a fruitional cause is a great, medium, or small virtuous action. In general, a great virtuous action can cause rebirth in the Form or Formless Realm, a middling virtuous action can cause rebirth in the semi-celestial or celestial realms of the Desire Realm, and a small virtuous action can cause rebirth in the human realm.

One may wonder why human rebirth is considered the lowest result of the three types of positive fruitional causes, while it is also described as the most conducive for Dharma practice.

Even though as humans we have relatively high intelligence and the potential to achieve the most advanced spiritual goals, we also possess an extremely fragile physical body prone to disease, pain, and discomfort and with a short lifespan. Also, compared to beings in the celestial realms, we live in a very



coarse environment, exposed to the dangers of extreme heat or cold, storms, floods, earthquakes, and other calamities.

Therefore, since human beings experience more suffering, an ordinary human rebirth is regarded as being lower than rebirth in any of the higher realms.

On the other hand, a *precious human rebirth* with all the leisure and endowments conducive for Dharma practice is explained to be superior to rebirth in any of the celestial realms. The reason is that in general, human life provides a sound balance between experiencing happiness and suffering, thus enabling a person with the leisure and endowments of a *precious human rebirth* to cultivate essential spiritual qualities such as renunciation, compassion, and so forth relatively swiftly.

## 2) Causally concordant results

A causally concordant result (i.e. a result that is similar to its cause) refers to the karmic result of a previously accumulated contaminated action that corresponds either to the action itself or to the experience of the being at whom the action was directed.

There are two types of causally concordant results:

- a. Causally concordant experiential results
- b. Causally concordant behavioral results

### a. *Causally concordant experiential results*

The causally concordant experiential result of a contaminated action of the body or speech refers to the *experience* that is the karmic result of that previously accumulated action, and it corresponds to the experience of the being (or beings) at whom that contaminated action was directed. In other words, as a result of a contaminated physical or verbal karma, one undergoes an experience that corresponds to the experience one caused by one's previous action. For instance, in the case of taking the life of another living being, one causes the other being to experience

a premature death. The causally concordant experiential result of the act of killing will be the premature death of the killer (which he may experience in this or another life). The causally concordant result of actively refraining from killing is having a long life.

A causally concordant experiential result of a contaminated action of the mind, on the other hand, refers to the experience that is the karmic result of that previously accumulated mental action and it corresponds to the action itself. For instance, as a causally concordant experiential result of actively refraining from covetousness, one experiences less desire.

### ***b. Causally concordant behavioral results***

The causally concordant behavioral result refers to a karmic result of a previously accumulated contaminated action that corresponds to the action itself, since it refers to the kind of behavior one adopts as a result of that previous action. In other words, one behaves in the same way one was used to behaving in the past.

For example, as a result of killing in the past, one continues to be violent and takes a liking to killing; as a result of stealing, even though one may be wealthy and prosperous, one likes to steal others' possessions; as a result of sexual misconduct, one is unable to be faithful and frequently changes partners, and so forth.

As a result of refraining from killing, on the other hand, one disdains the taking of life and tries to protect others from harm; as a result of refraining from stealing, one is very careful about not taking what has not been given; as a result of refraining

from sexual misconduct, one is faithful and able to stay with the same partner, and so forth.

### **3) Environmental results**

The previous two types of results took the form of personal and inner experiences. The third type of result is concerned with the result that manifests as one's external environment.

For instance, the environmental result of killing is being born in a war-torn area, in an environment where it is difficult to find food, drink, and medicine, or where epidemics or other terminal illnesses prevail – in short, being born in circumstances where most inhabitants die a premature death.

The environmental result of stealing is taking rebirth in a place that is poor and destitute, with a harsh climate that precludes the basic necessities for a comfortable life. The environmental result of sexual misconduct is rebirth in a place that is unclean, messy and unsanitary.

The environmental result of refraining from killing, on the other hand, is being born in a place where the food, climate, and other circumstances are conducive for living a long life; the environmental result of refraining from stealing is to be born in a place where one finds all that is required to live a prosperous and comfortable life; the environmental result of refraining from sexual misconduct is to be born in a clean and tidy place, and so forth.

A powerful virtuous or non-virtuous karma can have the potential to produce all three results. An example of such karma would be when someone, after careful and extensive deliberation, murders another human being in a very brutal fashion, while enjoying the act of killing. Following his death, the killer then takes several consecutive rebirths in the hell realm as the fruitional result of that heavy karma.

Thereafter, even though he may return as a human being (as the fruitional result of a previously accumulated *positive* action) he takes birth in a barren land devoid of clean food and water and

riddled with disease, which is the environmental result of the previous action. Also, as the causally concordant behavioral result, he has a very cruel nature and enjoys torturing and killing other living beings. He further suffers from various illnesses and dies prematurely at a young age, as the causally concordant experiential result of the previous murder. Since in the meantime the karma of killing has expanded, the killer is also likely to continue to experience different types of pain and misery in future lives.

The most serious of the above-mentioned results is the causally concordant behavioral result, since it perpetuates the karma of killing and thus the production of future suffering.

### ***Different classifications of karma***

Owing to its great complexity, there are numerous different ways of classifying karma.

1. Karma of the body, speech, and mind
2. Virtuous, non-virtuous, and neutral karma
3. Projecting and completing karma
4. Meritorious, non-meritorious, and immovable karma
5. Karma that will definitely be experienced and that which will not necessarily be experienced
6. Karma that will be experienced in the current life; after taking rebirth; at other times
7. Karma that is volition and volitional karma
8. Contaminated and uncontaminated karma

#### **1. Karma of the body, speech, and mind**

##### ***(a) Karma of the body***

Karma of the body (or physical karma) refers to volitional physical actions such as the three non-virtues of the body: killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct, or the three virtues of the body: actively refraining from killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct.

***(b) Karma of speech***

Karma of speech (or verbal karma) refers to volitional verbal actions such as the four non-virtues of speech: lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, and senseless speech, or the three virtues of speech: actively refraining from lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, and senseless speech.

***(c) Karma of the mind***

Karma of the mind (or mental karma) refers to the mental factor of volition. As mentioned above, the mental factor of volition is one of the five omnipresent mental factors that accompany every main mind. Examples of the karma of the mind are the mental factors of volition that are concomitant with the three mental non-virtues of covetousness, malice, and wrong view. Other examples are the mental factors of volition that are concomitant with the three virtues of the mind: actively refraining from covetousness, malice, and wrong view.

**2. Virtuous, non-virtuous, and neutral karma**

***(a) Virtuous karma***

Virtuous karma refers to volitional actions of body, speech, or mind that have the potential to produce positive results.

***(b) Non-virtuous karma***

Non-virtuous karma refers to volitional actions of body, speech, or mind that have the potential to produce negative results.

***(c) Neutral karma***

Neutral karma refers to volitional actions of body, speech, or mind that have the potential to produce neutral results.

### 3. Projecting and completing karma

#### (a) *Projecting karma*

Projecting or propelling karma is a fruitional cause that is responsible for the kind of rebirth we take in samsara. It projects us into our future life by serving as the main cause that determines whether we are born as a celestial being, a human, or an animal, etc.

A projecting karma leaves a karmic imprint in our mental continuum which at the end of this life, or at the end of a future life, ripens and projects us into another birth in samsara.

Projecting karma is either virtuous or non-virtuous; there is no projecting karma that is neutral. *Virtuous* projecting karma causes rebirth in one of the higher realms (human, semi-celestial, and celestial realms of the Desire Realm as well as the Form and Formless Realms) whereas *non-virtuous* projecting karma causes rebirth in one of the lower realms (hell, preta, and animal realms).

In some cases a single projecting karma leads to only one rebirth. In other cases, a single powerful projecting karma can produce a succession of many rebirths. Or a collection of smaller karmas can lead to a single rebirth. This is possible when one repeatedly performs several similar actions, with each individual action being unable to act as projecting karma but with the accretion of those actions propelling one into a single rebirth in any of the realms of cyclic existence. Finally, there are cases when many projecting karmas can project one into many rebirths.

Asanga says in his ***Abhidharma-samuccaya*** (***Compendium of Knowledge***):

*There is karma where a single action projects one into one body. There is karma where a single action projects one into many bodies.*

*There is karma where many actions project one into a single body. There is karma where many actions project one into many bodies.*

**(b) Completing karma**

While projecting karma determines birth in one of the realms of samsara, completing karma determines the other features or experiences of that life: whether one's life is pleasant or unpleasant, long or short; whether one is rich or poor, beautiful or ugly; who one's parents are, what country one is born in, and so forth.

In the scriptures, the usual analogy is creating a painting. Drawing the outline of the painting is analogous to projecting karma, and filling in the details of color and highlight is analogous to completing karma.

Like projecting karma, completing karma is either virtuous or non-virtuous since there is no completing karma that is neutral. However, virtuous completing karma does not necessarily ripen in one of the higher rebirths, and non-virtuous completing karma does not necessarily ripen in one of the lower realms.

Asanga says in his ***Abhidharma-samuccaya (Compendium of Knowledge)***:

*Understand that virtuous and non-virtuous actions project and bring to completion birth in the happy realms and the miserable realms. Projecting karma projects fruition. Completing karma is that which, in a rebirth, you experience the wanted and unwanted.*

Therefore, there are four possibilities to the interrelationship of the two karmas:

- a) Both the projecting and the completing karma are virtuous

- b) Both the projecting and the completing karma are non-virtuous
- c) The projecting karma is virtuous, but the completing karma is non-virtuous
- d) The completing karma is virtuous, but the projecting karma is non-virtuous

However, the presentation of these four possibilities is extremely simplified, for with respect to completing karma there are countless different positive and negative completing karmas that ripen throughout a person's life determining the quality of that life. For instance, one may be born human as the result of positive *projecting* karma but while growing up experience numerous health problems as the result of negative *completing* karma. At the same time, one may have a loving and caring family and abundant opportunities to receive a good education, etc. owing to the ripening of positive *completing* karmas.

Likewise, one may be born a dog as the result of negative *projecting* karma and spent several years as a street dog, experiencing hunger, cold, sickness and other difficulties as the result of negative *completing* karma. Yet, owing to the ripening of positive *completing* karma one may eventually be taken in and cared for by a kind and loving person.

Please note that projecting karma not only determines the realm in which one is born, it also determines the maximum lifespan of the rebirth one takes. For example, in the case of being born in the human realm, a previously accumulated projecting karma determines both the rebirth as human and the maximum length of time one can remain in that life. Once the projecting karma is exhausted one inevitably dies.



However, it is also possible that one dies prematurely before one's projecting karma is exhausted. One reason for premature death could be the ripening of a completing karma of killing that produces a causally concordant experiential result of, for instance, dying in an accident. In other words, one's life may be shortened by the ripening of the imprints of a completing karma of killing - ripening in the form of getting killed in a fatal accident.

Another reason for dying prematurely could be the exhaustion of the merit, that is, the positive karma that is necessary to sustain oneself. This means one may die from not having the karmic causes for finding food, shelter, medicine, and so forth.

In short, even though our lifespan is determined by the projecting karma that propelled us into our present life, there is no guarantee that we will not die earlier owing to the ripening or exhaustion of one of the countless completing karmic imprints abiding on our mental continuum.

#### **4. Meritorious, non-meritorious, and immovable karma**

This classification of karma is a threefold division of *projecting karma*.

##### ***(a) Meritorious karma***

Meritorious karma refers to virtuous projecting karma of the desire realm. It constitutes the actions of body, speech, and mind that determine whether one is reborn as a human being or a celestial being of the desire realm.

##### ***(b) Non-meritorious karma***

Non-meritorious karma refers to non-virtuous projecting karma, i.e. to the type of actions that propel us into one of the three lower realms.

**(c) Immovable karma**

Immovable karma constitutes any action that is responsible for rebirth in the celestial form or formless realm. Meritorious and non-meritorious karma are *movable* or *variable* because when one accumulates karma that should bear fruit as a celestial being, under certain circumstances it may ripen instead as rebirth as a human, an animal, or a preta being.

Lama Tsongkhapa says in his ***Lam Rim Chenmo (Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment)***:

*In the desire realm, karma that should bear fruit while you are a celestial being may instead bear fruit while you are a human, an animal, or a hungry ghost; thus, its effect is variable.*

Virtuous projecting karma that determines birth in the form or formless realm, on the other hand, does not move or vary. A projecting karma that should ripen in the region of the first concentration of the form realm, for instance, would never ripen as rebirth in the region of the second concentration. Therefore, it is called *immovable* karma.

Vasubhandu says in his ***Abhidharmakosha (Treasury of Knowledge)***:

*Why? Because the fruition of karma  
On these levels is not variable.*

**5. Karma that will definitely be experienced and that which will not necessarily be experienced**

Karma that will definitely be experienced and that which will not necessarily be experienced refer to volitional actions that are either virtuous or non-virtuous. The difference between the two types of karma is explained in Asanga's ***Levels of Yogic Deeds***:

*Karma the result of which you definitely will experience is that which is done intentionally and accumulated.*

*Karma the result of which you will not definitely experience is that which is intentionally done but not accumulated.*

Karma that is accumulated is explained in Asanga's **Levels of Yogic Deeds** as being any karma that is not included in the following list of ten types of actions:

*Karma that is accumulated is that not included among the following ten types of actions: (1) actions done in dreams; (2) those done unknowingly; (3) those done unconsciously; (4) those done without intensity or not continuously; (5) those done erroneously; (6) those done forgetfully; (7) those done without wanting to; (8) those naturally ethically neutral; (9) those cleared away through regret; and (10) those that have been cleared away with an antidote. Any other karma that is not included in the ten types of actions is karma that is accumulated. Karma that is not accumulated is simply [one of] the ten types presented here.*

Asanga's **Compendium of Determinations** presents four possibilities between karma that is accumulated and karma that is done. Taking killing as the example, the four possibilities are:

- (1) Killing that is done but not accumulated is killing that is done unknowingly, i.e. being unaware of or oblivious about the killing. Other examples of karma done but not accumulated are killing in a dream; being coerced into killing; killing unintentionally; killing whose karmic force is weakened by seeing the fault of the action and vowing to never kill again; killing that is done only once and after which one feels strong regret.

Killing is also done but not accumulated if, before the karma ripens, one is able to temporarily overcome attachment by means of a mundane path, i.e. one of the concentrations of the form- or formless realms. The attainment of such concentration weakens the karmic imprint so that it does not bear fruit. Furthermore, karma is done but not accumulated when before the karma ripens, one realizes emptiness directly. At that time one reaches the Arya path of seeing which means that one eliminates all non-virtuous *projecting* karma and weakens the force of negative *completing* karma.

- (2) Killing that is accumulated but not done: an example is planning to kill someone in a way that fulfills the mental requirements of the act, which are (a) having a correct apprehension of the person one plans to kill, (b) having the intention to kill the person, and (c) having definitely planned how to kill them. However, if despite the plan one does not kill the person, one acquires the karma that is accumulated but not done. This karma is heavier than the previous type.
- (3) Killing that is both accumulated and done: an example is the act of killing someone, preceded by planning to kill the person. In this case (a) one has a correct apprehension of the person one plans to kill, (b) one possesses the intention to kill the person, (c) one has definitely planned how to kill them, (d) one goes through with the action, and (e) one feels satisfied or joyful after having killed the person. This karma is the most negative.
- (4) Killing that is neither accumulated nor done: an example would be neither planning to kill someone nor actually killing someone.

Those four possibilities also apply to other non-virtuous actions of body and speech such as the remaining six non-virtues (the two non-virtues of the body – stealing and sexual misconduct – and the four non-virtues of the speech – lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, and senseless gossip) as well as to *virtuous* and *neutral* actions of body and speech.

## **6. Karma that is experienced in the current life, after taking rebirth, and at another time**

A contaminated karmic imprint can ripen in this life, the next life, or at another time (i.e. in any other life that is subsequent to the next life).

### ***(a) Karma that is experienced in the current life***

This refers to karma the results of which are experienced in the same life during which the karma was accumulated. Such karma is considered to be a very powerful virtuous or non-virtuous action, for the more powerful the karma the earlier its results will usually be experienced. However, this does not mean that one does not experience other results of that karma in a later life – it means that the karma is so powerful that one *starts* to experience its results in this lifetime. In the case of a heavy negative karma, such as the karma of killing one's parents, it may ripen in this life in the form of various illnesses, mental problems or a premature death.

In the case of a powerful positive karma, such as helping one's father or mother with the attitude of strong love and compassion, it may ripen in this lifetime in the form of great mental and physical well-being.

Please note that of the two, completing and projecting karma, karma that is experienced in the current life is necessarily *completing* karma, for projecting karma

cannot ripen in the same life during which it was created.

***(b) Karma that will be experienced after taking rebirth***

Karma that is experienced after taking rebirth refers to karma the results of which will not be experienced in the current but in the next life. In other words, the karma will not ripen in the life during which it was accumulated but in the rebirth that immediately follows that life. This karma is not as powerful as the *karma that is experienced in the current life*.

***(c) Karma that is experienced at other times***

This type of karma refers to a volitional action the result of which will be experienced neither in the current nor the next life. Instead, its results will ripen in any life that is subsequent to the next life. *Karma that is experienced at other times* is likely to be weaker than the other two types of karma since the weaker the karma the later its results will usually ripen.

## **7. Karma that is volition and volitional karma**

***(a) Karma that is volition***

According to the Sautrantika, Chittamatra, and Madhyamika Svatantrika tenet systems, karma refers solely to the *mental factor of volition*. This means that whatever is a physical, verbal or mental karma is necessarily volition. Volition is one of the five mental factors that are concomitant with and thus accompany every main mind. The other four mental factors are: feeling, discrimination, attention, and contact.

Hence, according to these tenet systems, *karma that is volition* refers to the mental factor of volition that leads to any physical or verbal karma.

Physical or verbal karma is always *preceded* by a virtuous, non-virtuous, or neutral mental factor of volition that initiates or induces the action of the body or the speech. Therefore, in the case of killing, the mental factor that induces and thus precedes the act of killing is a *karma that is volition*. However, the mental factor of volition concomitant with the mental consciousness (in the continuum of the killer) *during* the actual act of killing is not a *karma that is volition* but a *volitional karma*.

The mental factor of volition that precedes any verbal or physical action, i.e. the *karma of volition*, directs and propels the mind to become involved in the object. It moves the mind towards engaging with beneficial, harmful and neutral objects.

Asanga says in his ***Abhidharma-samuccaya*** (***Compendium of Knowledge***):

*What is volition? It is the mental karma that involves the mind; it acts to engage the mind in virtuous, non-virtuous, or neutral actions.*

However, according to the Vaibhashika and Madhyamika Prasangika tenet systems, physical, verbal, or mental karma does not refer solely to the mental factor of volition. In fact, whatever is a mental factor of volition is necessarily *mental* karma. Verbal karma refers to volitional verbal actions of speech, while physical karma refers to volitional physical actions of the body. Therefore, according to these two tenet systems, *karma of volition* is necessarily mental karma and refers to both the mental factor of volition that *precedes* the physical act of killing and the mental factor of volition that manifests *during* the act of killing.

**(b) Volitional karma**

As explained above, according to the Sautrantika, Chittamattra, and Madhyamika Svatantrika tenet systems, *volitional karma* does not refer to actual volitional physical or verbal actions but to mental actions, i.e. the mental factors of volition concomitant with the mental consciousnesses that *accompany* a particular volitional physical or verbal action.

Taking the example of killing, the mental factor of volition planning to kill someone (*karma of volition*) induces a later volition that moves the body *during* the act of killing. That later volition which is present at the time of the physical act of killing is a *volitional karma*.

Similarly, a volitional verbal action is preceded by a volition wishing to say something (*karma of volition*). The *karma of volition* then induces a later *volitional karma* which refers to the mental factor of volition that is present at the time of the verbal action and that directs the voice.

Therefore, the volitional physical act of killing and the volitional verbal act of saying something are not considered to be actual karmas, since they are not mental factors.

According to the Vaibhashika and Madhyamika Prasangika tenets, *volitional karma* refers to *any* volitional physical or verbal action that is motivated by the preceding *karma of volition*. In the case of killing, the karma of volition, i.e. the volition at the time of planning or merely wishing to kill, induces another mental factor of volition that directs the body *during* the act of killing. Both volitions – prior and during the act of killing – are *karma of volition*. The actual physical act of killing, on the other hand, is physical karma and thus *volitional karma*.



Also, a volitional verbal action is preceded by the volition wishing to say something. The volition to say something induces another mental factor of volition that manifests during the act of speaking and that directs the voice. Both volitions are karma of volition. The actual verbal action of speaking is physical karma and hence *volitional karma*.

Vasubhandu says in his ***Abhidharmakosha (Treasury of Knowledge)***:

*From karma the various worlds are generated.*

*Karma is both volition and what volition generates.*

*Volition is mental karma;*

*What it generates are physical and verbal karma*

	<b>Mental karma</b>	<b>Physical or verbal karma</b>	<b>Karma that is volition</b>	<b>Volitional karma</b>
<b>Sautrantika, Cittamatra, and Svatantrika tenets</b>	The mental factor of volition that manifests while <u>not</u> engaging in a physical or verbal action	The mental factor of volition that manifests <i>while</i> engaging in a physical or verbal action	The mental factor of volition that manifests <i>before</i> a volitional physical or verbal action	The mental factor of volition that manifests <i>while</i> engaging in a volitional physical or verbal action
<b>Vaibhashika and Prasangika tenets</b>	The mental factor of volition	A volitional physical or verbal action	The mental factor of volition that manifests <i>before</i> or <i>during</i> a physical or verbal karma	A volitional verbal or physical action

Please note that the mental factor of volition does not have to be a mental consciousness, because as one of the five omnipresent mental factors it is also concomitant with a sense consciousness.

However, volition that is a sense consciousness cannot be virtuous or non-virtuous but is always neutral.

## **8. Contaminated karma and uncontaminated karma**

### ***(a) Contaminated karma***

Contaminated karma refers to all volitional actions of body, speech, and mind that are induced and dominated by the root ignorance that perceives inherent existence and possibly by other afflictions.

Whatever is a non-virtuous action is necessarily contaminated. Virtuous and neutral actions that are motivated, for instance, by the misperception that grasps onto an inherently existent "I" and "mine", are also contaminated. Such contaminated actions induce and nourish further afflictions and contaminated karma in the future.

Also, projecting and completing karma are contaminated actions, for the former propels us to take rebirth in cyclic existence and the latter is responsible for the quality of life we have in this existence.

As mentioned above, whatever is a karma that is a truth of origin is necessarily contaminated karma.

### ***(b) Uncontaminated karma***

Uncontaminated karma refers to volitional virtuous actions of body, speech, and mind that are *not* induced and dominated by the root ignorance that perceives inherent existence or by other

afflictions. Examples of uncontaminated actions are physical, verbal, and mental actions of a Buddha.

## THE TRUTH OF CESSATION

In general, a truth of cessation refers to the complete and irreversible elimination of an obstruction to liberation or enlightenment.

The three, the truth of cessation *in the continuum of an Arhat*, liberation, and Nirvana, are equivalent. They are basically different names for the same referent object.

The truth of cessation in the continuum of an Arhat refers to the complete and irreversible elimination of the root ignorance and its seed. In this way it also constitutes the complete and irreversible elimination of all the other afflictions (such as anger, attachment, etc.) as well as their seeds.

Owing to the elimination of the afflictions, there is no longer any accumulation of contaminated karma resulting in any of the different types of suffering.

Hence, by relinquishing the root ignorance one also naturally overcomes all the afflictive awarenesses and experiences that are induced by that ignorance.

But although Arhats no longer accumulate contaminated karma since they have attained the cessation of the root ignorance, they still have the contaminated karmic imprints that were left on their continuum before they eliminated ignorance. Those karmic imprints consist of completing and projecting karmic imprints.

Even though *projecting* karmic imprints can no longer ripen because Arhats have eliminated the cooperative conditions of craving and grasping, *completing* karmic imprints can still ripen for as long as Arhats possess the contaminated physical aggregate (i.e. the body). This contaminated physical aggregate is the result of afflictions and contaminated karma that the Arhat was born with before attaining liberation and becoming an Arhat.

The elimination or cessation of the root ignorance is obtained by Hinayana practitioners when they reach the Hinayana path of no more learning, that is, when they reach the state of a Hinayana Arhat.

Mahayana practitioners or Bodhisattvas, who have not previously obtained the Hinayana goal, attain the state of an Arhat when they reach the eighth Bodhisattva bhumi. However, Bodhisattvas on the eighth ground are neither Hinayana nor Mahayana Arhats. They are not Hinayana Arhats because they are not on the Hinayana paths, and they are not Mahayana Arhats because they have not yet attained enlightenment.

Furthermore, cessations are the mere *absence* of ignorance etc. and therefore they are permanent.

The definition of permanent is: **a phenomenon that is not momentary**. The definition of impermanent is: **that which is momentary**. To be momentary does not mean to merely exist for one moment, but to *change* moment by moment. Nor does it mean that something that is impermanent changes every moment into something completely different, for momentary change can be extremely subtle. For instance, although the molecules that constitute a table change momentarily (which is why we have to say that the table is momentary) the table does not cease to be a table from moment to moment. In fact, the changes are so subtle that they are not directly obvious to us.

Thus, whatever is impermanent is necessarily a phenomenon that changes moment by moment whereas whatever is permanent is necessarily a phenomenon that does not change moment by moment.

There is a difference, however, between being permanent and eternal.

There are four possibilities between something that is permanent and something that is eternal:

- (I) *Whatever is permanent is not necessarily eternal*: for instance, the absence of elephant in this room is permanent

because as long as no elephant enters the room the absence of elephant in this room exists as a negative phenomenon, which does not change moment by moment. However the absence of elephant in this room is not eternal, for it does not exist forever. It ceases to exist the moment an elephant enters the room.

Likewise, the lack of inherent existence of a car is permanent because it is the mere absence of inherent existence and thus does not change moment by moment. Nevertheless, the lack of inherent existence of the car is not eternal because it ceases to exist the moment the car goes out of existence.

- (II) *Whatever is eternal is not necessarily permanent:* For instance, mind is eternal because it has existed since beginningless time and will continue to exist forever. However, it is also impermanent because it changes every second. Every moment it takes on different objects and engages in its objects in a different way; sometimes it merely observes them, sometimes it reflects on them, at other times it judges or enjoys them.
- (III) *There is something that is both permanent and eternal:* For instance the lack of inherent existence of the mind is permanent because it is the mere absence of inherent existence. At the same time it is eternal because its basis is eternal and because there is no mind that does not lack inherent existence.
- (IV) *There is something that is neither permanent nor eternal:* For instance, the table in front of us is impermanent because it changes moment by moment and it is not eternal, for one day it will break and cease to be a table.

Therefore, even though the truth of cessation is permanent, this does not contradict the fact that such a cessation did not always exist but was newly achieved at some point. For instance, a Hinayana practitioner, in order to obtain the truth of cessation of afflictive obstructions, first needs to cultivate the antidote to the

root ignorance, which is the wisdom that directly realizes the *lack* of inherent existence of all phenomena. Through continuous familiarity with that wisdom, he or she is able to gradually eliminate the different layers of ignorance, their seeds, etc. until he or she overcomes the subtlest level of ignorance etc. and thus newly obtains the truth of cessation of afflictive obstructions; Nirvana, or liberation.

The main obstructions or obscurations to liberation are called “afflictive obstructions”. The afflictive obstructions are the root ignorance and all other afflictions together with their seeds, for they are the main obstructions or obstacles for achieving liberation.

Here, liberation means the liberation from the root ignorance, and thereby the liberation from cyclic existence as well, i.e. from taking rebirth uncontrollably due to contaminated karma and afflictions and from experiencing suffering.

In general, there are two ways of categorizing truths of cessation. The first category is merely nominal, for only one of the two divisions is an actual truth of cessation. The two categories are:

1. Non-analytical cessation
2. Analytical cessation

### **1. Non-analytical cessation**

A non-analytical cessation is just temporary and therefore not an actual truth of cessation. An example is the temporary stopping of anger when one of the conditions necessary for anger to arise, an annoying object for instance, is absent. However, this cessation is reversible, because when all the necessary conditions assemble, anger will again become manifest.

Another example of a non-analytical cessation is when Bodhisattvas who have reached the forbearance level of the path of preparation cease to take rebirth in the lower realms. This cessation of rebirth in the lower realms is a non-analytical cessation because it is not obtained on account of the wisdom directly realizing emptiness – a

wisdom that is cultivated in dependence on analyzing the ultimate nature of phenomena. Instead, it was obtained because on the forbearance level of the path of preparation, the conditions required for rebirth in the lower realms do not assemble anymore. Please note that here, rebirth in the lower realms only refers to rebirth caused by contaminated karma and afflictions; not to rebirth caused by compassion and prayer.

Vasubhandu says in his ***Abhidharmakosha (Treasury of Knowledge)***:

*That which constantly hinders production,  
The other cessation is the non-analytical.*

Gyalwa Genduen Drup, the first Dalai Lama, says in his ***Clarifying the Path to Liberation*** (a commentary on the ***Abhidharmakosha***):

*That which constantly hinders the production of its  
object of negation and is other than an analytical  
cessation is a non-analytical cessation.*

Other temporary cessations of afflictions such as anger, desire, arrogance, etc. owing to the application of particular meditative techniques (meditation on patience, love, compassion, death and impermanence, rejoicing, selflessness, etc.) are *not* non-analytical cessations. They are not non-analytical cessations because they arise in dependence on meditative techniques while non-analytical cessations arise only when the necessary conditions for a phenomenon to arise are absent.

The temporary cessations of particular afflictions that occur due to the application of meditative techniques are merely *temporary* because their antidotes, meditation on patience, love, compassion, etc., can only reduce or stop afflictions temporarily. As soon as those meditations are discontinued the afflictions will gradually arise again. Thus, the only antidote that can overcome afflictions together with their

seeds, and thus overcome them irreversibly, is the wisdom that directly realizes emptiness.

Other examples of temporary cessations that are *not* non-analytical cessations, since they are also the results of meditation, are:

- The temporary absence of the afflictions pertaining to the desire realm in the continuum of someone who has attained the first concentration of the form realm;
- The temporary absence of the afflictions pertaining to the desire realm and the first concentration of the form realm in the continuum of someone who has attained the second concentration of the form realm;
- The absence of the afflictions pertaining to the desire realm, the first concentration of the form realm, and the second concentration of the form realm in the continuum of someone who has attained the second concentration of the form realm, and so forth.

## 2. Analytical cessation

An analytical cessation is an actual truth of cessation, for it is the *irreversible* absence of obstructions obtained in dependence on the wisdom that directly realizes the emptiness of inherent existence.

This absence is irreversible because the obstructions will never return. Therefore, analytical cessations are compared to the state of a permanently locked door after a thief has been thrown out of a house.

They are called *analytical* cessations because they can only be obtained by relying on the cultivation of the wisdom that directly realizes emptiness.

The wisdom that directly realizes emptiness in turn depends on a prolonged *analysis* of the ultimate nature of reality. Non-analytical cessations, on the other hand, do not depend on an awareness that analyzes reality.

Another way of classifying truths of cessation is into:



- 1) Nirvana with remainder
- 2) Nirvana without remainder

## 1) Nirvana with remainder

In general, Nirvana with remainder refers to the Nirvana (liberation or truth of cessation) in the continuum of an Arhat who still possesses a contaminated form aggregate. Thus, it is a type of residual truth of cessation.

When Hinayana practitioners newly eliminate the afflictive obstructions and become Arhats, their minds are completely purified of afflictions.

However, they still possess a physical body that is the result of contaminated karma and afflictions. This is why the cessation of afflictive obstructions in their continuum is called *Nirvana with remainder*.

Furthermore, even though these Arhats do no longer experience any mental suffering, they may still experience physical suffering from having contaminated physical bodies and as a result of non-virtuous karma accumulated before attaining liberation.

Lama Tsongkhapa says in his ***Lam Rim Chenmo (Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment)***:

*All sufferings in the sense of painful feelings – including even the slightest suffering occurring in an Arhat's mind-stream – arise from previously accumulated non-virtuous karma.*

## 2) Nirvana without remainder

Nirvana without remainder refers to the Nirvana in the continuum of an Arhat who no longer has a contaminated physical aggregate. This means that the lifespan of the physical aggregate in the continuum of the Arhat who obtained *Nirvana with remainder* is exhausted. In other words, first one attains the *Nirvana with remainder* and then, when the lifespan of the remaining contaminated physical aggregate comes to an end, one attains the

*Nirvana without remainder.* In both cases, the Nirvana, i.e. the cessation of the afflictive obstructions, is the same. The difference is that the first Nirvana is newly obtained while the Arhat's liberated consciousness remains within the contaminated physical aggregates, and later, when the Arhat dies, his liberated consciousness separates from the physical aggregate.

However, even though Arhats who obtain Nirvana without remainder no longer have any physical aggregate, they still possess a purified mental consciousness. With that mental consciousness they remain in a blissful state of mental absorption focused on the cessation of afflictive obstructions. They may remain in that absorption for many eons, until eventually their meditative absorption weakens and they are inspired by Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to generate great compassion and Bodhicitta in order to enter the Mahayana path.

From the point of view of the Mahayana tradition, everyone will eventually enter the Mahayana path and become a fully enlightened Buddha.

The truth of cessation is far more difficult to comprehend than the first two truths, for even though we have abundant experience of suffering and afflictions etc. we do not have any experience of the irreversible cessation of any of our shortcomings.

Therefore, in order to cultivate faith and conviction in the total cessation of afflictive obstructions, the scriptures describe four steps:

- a. understanding that ignorance and other afflictions are impermanent
- b. understanding that there are methods to overcoming those shortcomings
- c. understanding that those methods are available to us
- d. understanding that we can cultivate those methods in our own continuum.

However, we should start by reflecting on the possibility of *temporarily* reducing and stopping afflictions. Having gained some

conviction and understanding, we can establish the possibility of complete cessation in reliance on an inference.

Therefore, by becoming aware and mindful of our various afflictions, we come to see that they are impermanent and changing; they are not solid and static but can be reduced and eradicated. Then the next step is to examine whether there are methods to overcome our afflictions and whether the application of such methods will be effective in bringing about some change. Having gained conviction about this, we come to see that it is possible to gradually remove the afflictions from our mental continuum, since they are not in the nature of our mind but can be separated from it. After this we need to comprehend that these methods are available and that we ourselves can cultivate them in our mental continuum.

These reflections are highly effective in transforming our intellectual understanding of the third truth into an experiential understanding, which is essential for the pursuit of a dedicated and continuous Dharma practice.

This completes the explanation of the truth of cessation.

## THE TRUTH OF THE PATH

The truth of the path comprises the methods for attaining the truth of cessation. Paths are consciousnesses cultivated by listening, reflecting, and meditating on the Dharma. They are called *paths* because through being generated in our mental continuum, they gradually take us to liberation from cyclic existence.

Even though both the Theravada/Hinayana and the Mahayana traditions assert that the path that leads to Nirvana was described by the Buddha as the noble eight-fold path, in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition there is more emphasis on the three trainings and the five paths when explaining the fourth truth of the path. In the Tibetan tradition, the noble eight-fold path is explained in the context of the thirty-seven aspects to enlightenment that are expounded in the fourth chapter of Maitreya's *Ornament for Clear Realizations*.

However, there is no contradiction, for the noble eight-fold path is basically an extensive version of the three trainings in that it describes the different aspects of ethics, concentration, and wisdom. Thus, the three trainings and the eight-fold path constitute different types of practices that are important at every stage of our spiritual development.

The five paths, on the other hand, describe the different levels of attainment gradually taking us to liberation. In fact, the eightfold path is contained in the five paths, for a practitioner on any of the five paths must engage in the practice of the eight-fold path and thereby in the practice of the three trainings in order to be able to attain Nirvana.

Therefore, the eight-fold path and the five paths are not contradictory systems but different paradigms of the truth of the path.

The three trainings are:

1. The training in ethics
2. The training in concentration
3. The training in wisdom

### **1. Training in ethics**

Training in ethics basically refers to the practice of refraining from harmful physical, verbal, and mental actions such as the ten non-virtues (killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and so forth). Physical and verbal harmful actions are based on harmful mental actions, i.e. on afflictions that induce the intention to harm others. Such harmful intent is the factor that transforms a physical and verbal action into a harmful action.

Ethics, on the other hand, are based on sincere concern for others. Practicing ethics leads to the reduction of afflictions and harmful intentions, which naturally creates more peace and space in the mind. This is why the practice of ethics is the foundation for the other two trainings.

Taking vows, such as the Pratimoksha vows, assists practitioners in training in ethics, for they are constrained from engaging in physical and verbal negative actions.

### **2. Training in concentration**

Ethical behavior pacifies and calms the mind and thus prepares it for engaging in the second training, training in mental stabilization or concentration. Training in concentration comprises the practice of mindfulness and one-pointed focus on a particular object.

Such mental stabilization is cultivated in a retreat setting with practitioners staying in a quiet place, avoiding any external disturbances. By focusing on a particular object, such as the ebb and flow of the breath or an image of the Buddha, they train their ability to settle the mind on an object and remain focused single-pointedly on the object with clarity and intensity over an extended period of time.

### **3. Training in wisdom**

Training in wisdom refers to developing discriminative wisdom that correctly realizes reality. All of our problems can be traced back to various misperceptions such as perceiving that which is in the nature of suffering to be in the nature of happiness, perceiving that which is impermanent to be permanent, perceiving that which is impure and faulty to be pure and faultless, perceiving that which lacks and intrinsic and inherent nature to exist inherently.

The training in concentration refines practitioners' awarenesses to such a degree that it enables them to reflect single-pointedly on the nature of reality and thereby to generate a wisdom that is able to serve as the antidote to suffering and its causes.

There are different types of wisdom depending on their object of engagement. There is the wisdom that realizes that our present body and mind are in the nature of suffering,

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the wisdom that realizes subtle impermanence, the wisdom that realizes *the lack of a permanent, partless, independent self*, the wisdom that realizes *the lack a self-sufficient, substantially existent self*, the wisdom that realizes the lack of inherent existence, and so forth. The most important of these is the wisdom that directly realizes the lack of inherent existence of all phenomena, for it serves as the direct antidote to the root ignorance that perceives the self and all other phenomena to exist inherently.

The eight-fold path is:

- 1) Right view
- 2) Right thought
- 3) Right speech
- 4) Right aims of action
- 5) Right livelihood
- 6) Right effort
- 7) Right mindfulness
- 8) Right meditative stabilization

How the eight-fold path is included in the three trainings:

<b>The training in ethics</b> ↓	<b>The training in concentration</b> ↓	<b>The training in wisdom</b> ↓
Right speech Right action Right livelihood	Right effort Right mindfulness Right concentration	Right view Right thought

The five paths are:

1. Path of accumulation
2. Path of preparation
3. Path of seeing
4. Path of meditation
5. Path of no more learning

## 1. Path of accumulation

In order to attain liberation from cyclic existence, practitioners first need to enter the Hinayana path of accumulation. The criterion for entering that path is generating a sincere and spontaneous aspiration to overcome cyclic existence and become an Arhat. Such an aspiration can only arise after intense and prolonged contemplation of the shortcomings and suffering nature of our existence.

Once practitioners have cultivated the path of accumulation, they need to accumulate sufficient merit and wisdom to be able to proceed. This is why this path is called the path of *accumulation*.

They also need to generate an inferential cognizer realizing the emptiness of inherent existence. In other words, unless practitioners had realized emptiness *before* they entered the path of accumulation, they must now reflect on the various reasons that establish the ultimate nature of reality until they are able to infer the lack of inherent existence of phenomena and thereby newly and conceptually realize emptiness.

Additionally, practitioners must develop *calm abiding*, a special concentration that is able to focus uninterruptedly on an internal object with calmness, clarity, and intensity for at least four hours.

Thereupon, calm abiding and the analytical meditation that is a conceptual consciousness realizing emptiness are harmonized by alternating from one to the other.

## 2. Path of preparation

The criterion for entering the path of preparation is newly attaining a union of calm abiding and special insight taking emptiness as the object. This union refers to two awarenesses, calm-abiding and special insight, arising simultaneously and both realizing emptiness. That means that calm-abiding, the one-pointed awareness realizing

emptiness, and special insight, the thorough discrimination of emptiness, operate in parallel, at the same time, with equal power, one assisting the other. This enables the practitioner to gain a deep, clear and intense realization of emptiness free from mental distraction and mental sinking.

However, this union of calm-abiding and special insight is a *conceptual* consciousness and therefore unable to act as a direct antidote to any of the afflictive obstructions.

When practitioners arise from the realization of emptiness they also engage in the accumulation of merit by practicing of love, compassion, generosity, and so forth.

Since this path serves as a preparation for the path of seeing, i.e. for realizing emptiness directly, it is called the path of *preparation*.

### 3. Path of seeing

The criterion for entering the path of seeing is cultivating a union of calm abiding and special insight that realizes emptiness *directly*. The first moment of the path of seeing is a yogic direct perceiver that directly realizes the lack of inherent existence of all phenomena. It is a non-dualistic path because it is free of the appearance of inherent existence, the appearance of conventional truths, and the sense that the subject (the meditative equipoise) and its object (emptiness) are separate and cut off. So for this yogic direct perceiver, all appearances of subject and object have become indistinguishable, like water being poured into water.

Also, the first moment of the path of seeing completely eliminates – in one single meditative session – the coarsest level of afflictive obstructions: the *intellectually-acquired* afflictive obstructions.

However, during the path of seeing practitioners are not merely absorbed in the wisdom that realizes emptiness but



also accumulate merit by practicing love, generosity, patience, and so forth.

Since this path is obtained when practitioners are able to generate the wisdom that is able to *see* emptiness directly, it is called path of *seeing*.

### 4. Path of meditation

The path of meditation is obtained when practitioners have familiarized with the meditative equipoise that directly realizes emptiness and in that way strengthened its ability to remove the *innate* afflictive obstructions. Thereafter, every time the meditative absorption in the continuum of practitioners on the path of meditation manifests, it eliminates one of the different layers of the innate afflictive obstructions. When practitioners arise from the meditative absorptions they continue to accumulate merit by deepening their love, compassion, and so forth.

Since the Tibetan word for meditation (*sgom*) means to familiarize, and since practitioners on this level meditate on or familiarize themselves with the direct perception of emptiness, this path is called the path of *meditation*.

### 5. Path of no more learning

The path of no more learning is obtained after the subtlest afflictive obstructions have been removed. Practitioners who reach this path have attained the truth of cessation of afflictive obstructions, liberation, and Nirvana and have become Arhats.

This concludes a brief presentation of the four noble truths. Please note that all the explanations are given from the point of view of the Hinayana or Fundamental Vehicle.

It follows a presentation of the four noble truths based on two texts by the great Tibetan adept Panchen Sonam Drakpa. These are the two main texts traditionally used by Drepung Loseling Monastery, Ganden Shardze Monastery, the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics, and other monastic institutions during the study and debate of the

various topics explained in the commentary on the ***Perfection of Wisdom Sutras***, Maitreya's ***Ornament for Clear Realizations***.

The two texts are:

**(I) General Meaning**

This text gives general explanations, divisions, definitions, etc. of each topic

**(II) Decisive Analysis**

This text analyzes and debates the different aspects of each topic. It gives precise definitions and refutes definitions and other assertions that are logically incorrect.

(Please note that the following is not an exact translation of the two texts)

## **The presentation of the four noble truths according to the *General Meaning*:**

The ***General Meaning*** expounds the four noble truths by way of five subtopics:

- 1) The definite enumeration of the four noble truths
- 2) The order of the four noble truths
- 3) The definitions of the four noble truths
- 4) The etymology of the four noble truths
- 5) The sixteen aspects of the four noble truths

## **The definite enumeration of the four noble truths**

The four noble truths are a definitive enumeration of four truths because from the point of view of *engaging* in cyclic existence there is a set of two truths that consist of a cause and an effect, and from the point of view of *eliminating* cyclic existence there is a set of two truths that consist of a cause and an effect.

The first set, from the point of view of engaging in cyclic existence, refers to the truth of origin and the truth of suffering in that the truth of origin is the cause of the truth of suffering. The latter, from

the point of view of eliminating cyclic existence, refers to the truth of the path and the truth of cessation. Even though the truth of cessation is permanent and therefore not an actual effect or result of the truth of the path, it is nevertheless obtained in dependence on the truth of the path. Therefore the truth of cessation is the *nominal* effect of the truth of the path.

### **The order of the four noble truths**

The Buddha set forth the four noble truths in the order of their comprehension, not of their causation. As mentioned above, according to the causal order, the truth of origin gives rise to the truth of suffering, while the truth of the path gives rise to the truth of cessation. However, the Buddha presents the effects before the causes in order to demonstrate their application in practical understanding.

This process is illustrated using an illness as an analogy. First one recognizes the symptoms of the disease and then comes to understand its causes and that these causes must be eliminated. This leads to a wish to actualize the cessation of the symptoms and then to implementing the remedy.

Likewise, first we need to understand that our existence is in the nature of suffering. Then, seeing that our suffering is the result of afflictions and contaminated karma, we come to realize that we must

overcome those causes. This in turn leads to a recognition that we can actualize the cessation of suffering and that this is possible by meditating on and cultivating the paths that take us there.

Maitreya says in his ***Uttaratantra (Sublime Continuum)***:

*Just as an illness should be recognized, its causes eradicated,  
A healthy state obtained, and the remedy applied, so  
Should suffering, its causes, its cessation, and the path  
Also be recognized, eradicated, actualized, and applied.*

Therefore, the order of the four noble truths is in accordance with the natural, psychological processes of our mind, which starts by recognizing a problem and then investigates its causes. When we understand the causes, we come to know that it is possible to overcome the problem which in turn motivates us to search for a solution.

### **The definitions of the four noble truths**

According to the ***General Meaning*** the category of the definitions of the four noble truths is again divided into four:

1. The definition of the truth of suffering
2. The definition of the truth of origin
3. The definition of the truth of cessation
4. The definition of the truth of the path

#### **1. *The definition of the truth of suffering***

The definition of the truth of suffering is: a truth that has the aspect of affliction and is a contaminated result.

Truths of suffering can be categorized into three:

- A) suffering of suffering
- B) suffering of change
- C) pervasive conditioned suffering

Instances of those three are respectively: (a) all contaminated feelings of suffering, (b) all contaminated feelings of happiness, and (c) all contaminated aggregates that are the result of contaminated karma and afflictions

#### **2. *The definition of the truth of origin***

The definition of the truth of origin is: a truth that has the aspect of affliction and is a contaminated cause.

Truths of origin can be categorized into two:

- A) karmic origin
- B) afflictive origin

## **A) Karmic origin**

The origin that is karma can be categorized into three:

1. Meritorious karma that is subsumed under cyclic existence
  2. Non-meritorious karma that is subsumed under cyclic existence
  3. Immovable karma that is subsumed under cyclic existence
- 
1. *Meritorious karma that is subsumed under cyclic existence* can be subdivided into (i) projecting karma for rebirth as human beings and (ii) projecting karma for rebirth as celestial beings of the desire realm
  2. *Non-meritorious karma that is subsumed under cyclic existence* can be subdivided into (i) projecting karma for rebirth in the hell realm, (ii) projecting karma for rebirth in the preta realm, and (iii) projecting karma for rebirth in the animal realm
  3. *Immovable karma that is subsumed under cyclic existence* can be subdivided into (i) projecting karma for rebirth in the form realm and (ii) projecting karma for rebirth in the formless realm

## **B) Afflicted origin**

The afflicted origin can be categorized into two:

- A) The six primary afflictions
- B) The twenty secondary afflictions

Since those afflictions were explained previously they are not listed here.

## **3. The definition of the truth of cessation**

The definition of the truth of cessation is: a separation that is the elimination of the object of abandonment by its attaining factor, a truth of the path.

The truth of cessation is a separation from afflictive obstructions (i.e. obstructions to liberation). It is a separation from those obstructions because it is the irrevocable elimination of those obstructions. This separation or elimination is attained in dependence on the truth of the path, in dependence on the meditative equipoise directly realizing emptiness, in particular, for this meditative equipoise eliminates the obstructions. Hence, the truth of the path is the attaining factor of the truth of the path because it is responsible for attaining the truth of cessation.

Truths of cessation can be categorized into three: (1) Hearers' truths of cessation, (2) Solitary Realizers' truths of cessation, and (3) Bodhisattvas' truths of cessation

Asanga's *Compendium of Knowledge (Abhidharma-samuccaya)* lists a *nominal* category of eight:

- 1) Symbolic cessation
- 2) Ultimate cessation
- 3) Cessation that is not thoroughly completed
- 4) Cessation that is thoroughly completed
- 5) Cessation with ornament
- 6) Cessation without ornament
- 7) Cessation with remainder
- 8) Cessation without remainder

### 1) Symbolic cessation

A symbolic cessation refers to a temporary or non-analytical cessation (as explained above).

### 2) Ultimate cessation

An ultimate cessation refers to the elimination of the seed of an object of elimination of the path of seeing or of the path of meditation.

**3) Cessation that is not thoroughly completed**

A cessation that is not thoroughly completed refers to a cessation in the continuum of Hearers and Solitary Realizers who have reached the result of a Stream-enterer, Once-returner, or Never-returner.

**4) Cessation that is thoroughly completed**

A cessation that is thoroughly completed refers to a cessation in the continuum of Hearers and Solitary Realizers who have reached the result of a foe-destroyer or Arhat.

**5) Cessation without ornament**

Cessation without ornament refers to the truth of cessation in the continuum of Arhats who have eliminated afflictive obstructions but have not overcome the obstructions to meditative stabilization and therefore have not attained any of the concentrations of the form or the formless realms.

**6) Cessation with ornament**

Cessation with ornament refers to the truth of cessation in the continuum of Arhats who have eliminated afflictive obstructions and the obstructions to meditative obstructions, and thus have attained any of the concentrations of the form and formless realms.

**7) Cessation with remainder**

Cessation with remainder refers to a Nirvana with remainder (as explained above)

**8) Cessation without remainder**

Cessation without remainder refers to a Nirvana without remainder (as explained above)

#### 4. *The definition of the truth of the path*

The definition of the truth of the path is: a thoroughly purified truth in the continuum of an Arya, that is the nominal cause of its object of attainment, the truth of cessation.

A truth of the path is a thoroughly purified truth because it is an Arya path, i.e. a path in the continuum of someone who has directly realized emptiness, and thus reached the path of seeing, the path of meditation, or the path of no-more-learning. It is a *nominal* cause of the truth of cessation because it is responsible for the attainment of the truth of cessation. The truth of the path is responsible for the attainment of the truth of cessation because the meditative equipoise directly realizing emptiness (which is a truth of the path) eliminates afflictive obstructions, the elimination of which is a truth of cessation. However, since the truth of cessation is permanent, it is not a result and does not have a cause; it merely has a *nominal* cause.

Truths of the path can be categorized into three: (1) Hearers' truths of the path, (2) Solitary Realizers' truths of the path, and (3) Bodhisattvas' truths of the path

According to Asanga's *Compendium of Knowledge* the truth of the path can be categorized into five: (1) path of accumulation, (2) path of preparation, (3) path of seeing, (4) path of meditation, and (5) completed path [i.e. path of no more learning]

However, this category is explained to not be in accordance with reality because the path of accumulation and the path of preparation are not instances of the truth of the path. They are not instances of the truth of the path because they are mundane paths, i.e. paths in the continuum of practitioners who have not yet directly realize emptiness.

Vasubhandu says in his *Treasure of Knowledge* (*Abhidharmakosha*):

*Those who have not obtained [truths of] paths  
Are asserted to be mundane beings.*



Asanga says in his *Compendium of Knowledge (Abhidharma-samuccaya)*:

*What are mundane beings? They are those who have not attained Arya paths.*

## **The etymology of the four noble truths**

Truth has different meanings in different contexts. In the context of the four noble truths, the four noble truths are called *truths* because what the Buddha said about those four is true, i.e. that the first two truths are objects of abandonment and that the two latter truths are objects to be adopted.

Furthermore, they are *noble* truths because they are perceived as true by noble or Arya beings. Aryas are beings who have directly realized the ultimate nature of reality and thus are able to thoroughly comprehend the four noble truths.

The Buddha says in one of the sutras:

*Children are not aware of compositional suffering  
Which is like not being aware of a hair in one's hand  
Aryas have generated the mind [that is aware of  
compositional suffering]  
Which for them is like being aware of a hair in one's eye.*

## **The sixteen aspects of the four noble truths**

Each noble truth possesses four aspects or attributes, making sixteen altogether. The contemplation of those sixteen aspects helps us achieve a better understanding of the four noble truths. At the same time, the sixteen aspects counteract erroneous views held by various non-Buddhist philosophical systems.

### ***The four aspects of the truth of suffering***

1. *Impermanent*: The five contaminated aggregates are impermanent because they are produced occasionally (i.e. they are produced and disintegrate, which means they are not static but change moment by moment).

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This counteracts the misperception that the five contaminated aggregates are permanent.

2. *Suffering*: The five contaminated aggregates are in the nature of suffering because they are under the control of contaminated karma and afflictions.

This counteracts the misperception that the five aggregates are in the nature of pleasure and happiness.

3. *Empty*: The five contaminated aggregates are empty because they are empty of a permanent, partless, independent self.

This counteracts the misperception of a permanent, partless, independent self.

4. *Selfless*: The five contaminated aggregates are selfless because they do not exist as, or are not controlled by, a self-sufficient, substantially existent self.

This counteracts the misperception of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self.

### ***The four aspects of the truth of origin***

1. *Cause*: Contaminated karma and attachment are causes because they are the roots of suffering.

This counteracts the misperception that suffering is causeless.

2. *Origin*: Contaminated karma and attachment are origins because they produce suffering again and again.

This counteracts the misperception that suffering is caused by only one cause.

3. *Strong Production*: Contaminated karma and attachment are strong producers because they produce suffering with great force.

This counteracts the misperception that the nature of things is permanent but their states are changeable.

4. *Condition*: Contaminated karma and attachment are conditions because they act as the cooperative conditions of suffering.

This meditation counteracts the misperception that suffering is created under the supervision of a deity.

### ***The four aspects of the truth of cessation***

1. *Cessation*: A separation which is a total elimination of contaminated karma and afflictions is a cessation because of being a state of having abandoned suffering.

This counteracts the misperception that there is no liberation from cyclic existence.

2. *Pacification*: A separation which is a total elimination of contaminated karma and afflictions is a pacification because of being a state of having pacified afflictions.

This counteracts the misperception that certain contaminated states are liberation (e.g. the Jaina's assertion that there is a place of liberation on top of the world that is like an upside-down umbrella).

3. *Auspicious Highness*: A separation which is a total elimination of contaminated karma and afflictions is auspiciously high because it is a separation which is in the nature of benefit and bliss.

This counteracts the misperception that there is a liberation that is superior to the cessation of suffering.

4. *Definite Emergence*: A separation which is a total elimination of contaminated karma and afflictions is a definite emergence because it is a separation from suffering such that it will never return.

This counteracts the misperception that liberation, once attained, is reversible.

### ***The four aspects of the truth of the path***

1. *Path*: A Bodhisattva path of seeing that directly realizes selflessness is a path because it causes one to proceed to liberation.

This counteracts the misperception that there are no paths of liberation from cyclic existence.

2. *Suitability*: A Bodhisattva path of seeing that directly realizes selflessness is suitable because it is a path which serves as an antidote to afflictions.

This counteracts the misperception that the mind directly realizing selflessness is not a path of liberation.

3. *Achiever*: A Bodhisattva path of seeing that directly realizes selflessness is an achiever because it directly and unmistakably realizes the nature of the path.

This counteracts the misperception that paths such as worldly concentrations, undergoing ascetic hardships like the five fires, etc. are paths of liberation.

4. *Deliverance*: A Bodhisattva path of seeing that directly realizes selflessness is a deliverer because it is a path which eliminates suffering and afflictions irreversibly.

This counteracts the misperception that there is no total eliminator of suffering.

Regarding relations among the four noble truths:

Whatever is a truth of suffering is not necessarily a truth of origin.

However, whatever is a truth of origin is necessarily a truth of suffering. The truth of suffering, the truth of cessation, and the truth of the path are mutually contradictory.

Regarding relations among the sixteen aspects of the four noble truths:

The four aspects of the four noble truths are contradictory. The four aspects of the truth of origin, the four aspects of the truth of cessation, and the four aspects of the truth of the path are equivalent.

This completes the presentation of the four noble truths according to the ***General Meaning***.

### **The presentation of the four noble truths according to the *Decisive Analysis*:**

- Someone says: "(1) The definition of the truth of cessation is '*that which is an uncontaminated effect*' and (2) the definition of the truth of the path is '*that which is an uncontaminated cause*'."
- (1) The first definition is not correct because whatever satisfies that definition is not necessarily a truth of cessation. For instance, an omniscient mind is *that which is an uncontaminated effect* but it is not a truth of cessation.
- (2) The second definition is also not correct because whatever satisfies the second definition is not necessarily a truth of the path. For instance, the Buddha is an uncontaminated cause but not a truth of a path.
- Someone says: "(1) The definition of the truth of suffering is '*that which is contaminated and the fruitional result of its cause, a truth of origin*', (2) the definition of the truth of origin is '*that which is contaminated and the fruitional cause of its effect, a truth of suffering*', (3) the definition of the truth of cessation is '*an analytical cessation that is the nominal effect of a truth of the path*' and (4) the definition of

the truth of the path is '*a purified truth that is the nominal cause of a truth of cessation*'."

- (1) The first definition is not correct because the impure worldly environment is a truth of suffering but does not satisfy the first definition. The impure worldly environment is a truth of suffering because Asanga says in his ***Compendium of Knowledge (Abhidharma-samuccaya)***:

*What is the truth of suffering? One should be aware that it constitutes sentient beings taking birth and the world into which they are born.*

The impure worldly environment does not satisfy the definition because the impure worldly environment is not a fruitional result. It is not a fruitional result because it does not exist in the continuum of a sentient being.

Whatever is a fruitional result must necessarily exist in the continuum of a sentient being because Vasubhandu says in his ***Treasure of Knowledge (Abhidharmakosha)***:

*Express a sentient being*

Furthermore, the first definition is not correct because non-virtuous karma is a truth of suffering but it does satisfy the definition. Non-virtuous karma is a truth of suffering because it is a truth of origin. It is a truth of origin because it is a karmic truth of origin. A non-virtuous karma is a karmic truth of origin because it is karma that is subsumed under cyclic existence.

However, non-virtuous karma does not satisfy the first definition because it is not a fruitional effect. It is not a fruitional effect because it is not neutral. Whatever is not neutral is necessarily not a fruitional effect because Vasubhandu says in his ***Treasure of Knowledge (Abhidharmakosha)***:

*Fruitional [effects] are neutral phenomena*

- (2) The second definition is not correct because attachment that facilitates birth in a higher (form or formless) realm is a truth of origin but does not satisfy the second definition. It does not satisfy the second definition because it is not a fruitional cause. Attachment that facilitates birth in a higher (form- or formless) realm is not a fruitional cause because it is neither a non-virtue nor a contaminated virtue.

Whatever is neither a non-virtue nor a contaminated virtue is necessarily not a fruitional cause because Vasubhandu says in his ***Treasure of Knowledge (Abhidharmakosha)***:

*Fruitional causes can only be either non-virtues  
Or contaminated virtues.*

Attachment that facilitates birth in a higher (form or formless) realm is neither a non-virtue nor a contaminated virtue because it is neutral. It is neutral because it is an affliction that pertains to the higher (form or formless) realms. Whatever is an affliction that pertains to a higher (form or formless) realm is necessarily neutral because Vasubhandu says in his ***Treasure of Knowledge (Abhidharmakosha)***:

*All the higher are neutral.*

- (3) The third definition is not correct because a truth of cessation that exists at the same time as a truth of the path does not satisfy the third definition. It does not satisfy the third definition because it is not '*an analytical cessation that is the nominal effect of a truth of the path*'. A truth of cessation that exists at the same time as a truth of the path is not '*an analytical cessation that is the nominal effect of a truth of the path*' because it is not the nominal effect of a truth of the path. It is not the nominal effect of a truth of the path because it exists at the same time as a truth of the path. However, if something is the nominal effect of a truth of the path it must come into existence when a truth of the path has gone out of existence because the cause must

precede the effect, and cause and effect cannot exist at the same time.

(4) The fourth definition is not correct because a truth of the path that exists at the same time as a truth of cessation does not satisfy the fourth definition. The reasoning is the same as above.

- Someone says: "(It is asserted that) there is no non-virtue that pertains to a higher (form or formless) realm because whatever is an affliction that pertains to a higher (form or formless) realm is necessarily neutral. However, this is not correct because in the higher realms there are beings that hold the wrong view asserting that Brahma is the creator of sentient beings."

There is no fault because whatever is the wrong view that is one of the ten non-virtues is necessarily a *deprecating* wrong view. However, the wrong view asserting that Brahma is the creator of sentient beings is a *superimposing* wrong view.

- Someone says: "(1) The definition of the truth of suffering is '*a contaminated aggregate that is the result of its cause, contaminated karma and afflictions*' and (2) the definition of the truth of origin is '*an aggregate that issues forth suffering for its fruitional result*'."

(1) The first definition is not correct because Hearer Arhats who abide in the Nirvana with remainder satisfy the first definition but are not truths of suffering. Hearer Arhats who abide in the Nirvana with remainder satisfy the first definition because their contaminated physical aggregates satisfy the first definition, and because the direct causes of Hearer Arhats who abide in the Nirvana with remainder and the direct causes of those Arhats' contaminated physical aggregates are equivalent. Hearer Arhats who abide in the



Nirvana with remainder are not truths of suffering because they are Arhats.

- (2) The second definition is not correct because projecting karma that determines rebirth as a celestial being of the desire realm is a truth of origin but it does not satisfy the second definition. Projecting karma that determines rebirth as a celestial being of the desire realm is a truth of origin because it is a karma that is subsumed under cyclic existence.

However, projecting karma that determines rebirth as a celestial being of the desire realm does not satisfy the second definition because it does not issue forth suffering. Projecting karma that determines rebirth as a celestial being does not issue forth suffering because it is virtuous.

- Someone says: "Whatever is karma is necessarily contaminated karma."

That is not correct because in the continuum of Buddhas there is karma. In the continuum of Buddhas there is karma because in the continuum of Buddhas there is karma that is volition. In the continuum of Buddhas there is karma that is volition because every main mind is concomitant with karma, i.e. with the omnipresent mental factor of volition.

- Someone says: "It follows that there is a something that is both, karma and a sense consciousness."

The reply from our own system is: "Yes, we assert that."

- Someone says: "(1) The definition of the truth of suffering is '*an assemblage that is the four: impermanent, suffering, empty, and selfless*', (2) the definition of the truth of origin is '*an assemblage that is the four: a cause, origin, strong production, and condition*', (3) the definition of the truth of cessation is '*an assemblage that is the four: a cessation, pacification, auspicious highness, and*

*definite emergence', and (4) the definition of the truth of the path is 'an assemblage that is the four: a path, suitability, achiever, and deliverance'."*

- (1) The first definition is not correct because Arhats who abide in the Nirvana with remainder satisfy the definition but are not truths of suffering. Arhats who abide in the Nirvana with remainder satisfy the definition because they possess the four aspects of the truth of suffering. They possess the aspect of impermanence because they are impermanent; they possess the aspect of suffering because they have contaminated aggregates that are in the nature of suffering; they possess the aspect of being empty because they are empty of a permanent, partless, independent self; they possess the aspect of being selfless because they lack a self-sufficient, substantially existent self.
- (2) The second definition is not correct because the mundane Devadatta satisfies the second definition but is not a truth of origin. The mundane Devadatta satisfies the definition because he possesses the four aspects of the truth of origin (he is a cause, an origin, etc.). However, he is not a truth of origin because he is not contaminated karma nor an affliction nor a contaminated physical aggregate etc.
- (3)+(4) The third and fourth definitions are not correct because the Buddha satisfies the third and fourth definitions but is neither a truth of cessation nor a truth of the path. The Buddha satisfies the third and the fourth definitions because he possesses those eight aspects (the four aspects of the truth of cessation and the four aspects of the truth of the path). He possesses the aspect of cessation, etc. because he obtained the cessation of afflictive and cognitive obstructions. Further, he possesses the aspect of a path, etc. because he is endowed with the Mahayana path of no more learning, i.e. the omniscient mind.

- Someone says: "(1) The definition of the truth of suffering is '*a truth that is an aspect of thorough affliction and that is explained in the sutras to be similar to a disease in that it is to be known by those who aspire to liberation*', (2) the definition of the truth of origin is '*a truth that is an aspect of thorough affliction and that is explained in the sutras to be similar to the cause of a disease in that it is to be abandoned by those who aspire to liberation*', (3) the definition of the truth of cessation is '*a truth that is a purified aspect and that is explained in the sutras to be similar to the separation from a disease in that it is to be actualized by those who aspire to liberation*', and (4) the definition of the truth of the path is '*a truth that is a purified aspect and that is explained in the sutras to be similar to the remedy for a disease in that it is to be cultivated by those who aspire to liberation*'."

(1) The first definition is not correct because the contaminated physical aggregates in the continuum of Arhats abiding in the Nirvana with remainder are truths of the path but they do not satisfy the first definition. The contaminated physical aggregates in the continuum of Arhats abiding in the Nirvana with remainder are truths of the path because Arhats who abide in the Nirvana with remainder still possess truths of the path. Arhats who abide in the Nirvana with remainder still possess truths of the path because they still have karma in their continuum that is subsumed under cyclic existence. Arhats who abide in the Nirvana with remainder have karma in their continuum that is subsumed under cyclic existence because they dwell in cyclic existence through the force of karma. They dwell in cyclic existence through the force of karma because they still have the contaminated physical aggregates.

However, the contaminated physical aggregates in the continuum of Arhats abiding in the Nirvana with remainder are not in accord with the definition because they are not *truths that are aspects of thorough affliction*. The contaminated physical aggregates in the continuum of Arhats abiding in the Nirvana with remainder are not *truths*

*that are aspects of thorough affliction* because Arhats do not have *truths that are aspects of thorough affliction* in their continuum. Arhats do not have *truths that are aspects of thorough affliction* in their continuum because they have completely eliminated afflictive obstructions.

Furthermore, the first definition is not correct because a *faith faculty* that is a truth of suffering exists and because such a faith faculty is not *a truth that is an aspect of thorough affliction*.

A *faith faculty* that is a truth of suffering is not *a truth that is an aspect of thorough affliction* because it is a truth that is a purified aspect. It is a truth that is a purified aspect because it is a purified faculty. A *faith faculty* that is a truth of suffering is a purified faculty because it is a faith faculty.

Moreover, a *faith faculty* that is a truth of suffering exists because a *faith faculty* concomitant with a main mind which is a virtuous projecting karma exists. A *faith faculty* concomitant with a main mind which is a virtuous projecting karma exists because a main mind that is a virtuous projecting karma must be concomitant with a faith faculty. A faith faculty concomitant with a main mind which is a virtuous projecting karma must be concomitant with a faith faculty because it is virtuous main mind, and because whatever is a virtuous mind is necessarily concomitant with faith. Whatever is a virtuous mind is necessarily concomitant with faith because whatever is a virtuous mind is necessarily concomitant with ten mental factors (that include faith). Whatever is a virtuous mind is necessarily concomitant with ten mental factors because Vasubandhu says in his ***Abhidharmakosha (Treasure of Knowledge)***:

*Faith, conscientiousness, pliancy,  
Equanimity, shame, consideration,  
The two roots (non-attachment and non-hatred),  
non-harmfulness, and  
Effort always arise with the virtuous.*

(2) The second definition is not correct because projecting karma that determines rebirth as a *Brahma type* (*Brahma type* is the first of the seventeen regions of the form realm) is a truth of origin but does not satisfy the second definition. Projecting karma that determines rebirth as a *Brahma type* is a truth of origin because it is immovable projecting karma that is subsumed under cyclic existence.

However, projecting karma that determines rebirth as a *Brahma type* does not satisfy the second definition because it is not *to be abandoned by those who aspire to liberation*. It is not *to be abandoned by those who aspire to liberation* because it is not an object of elimination. Projecting karma that determines rebirth as a *Brahma type* is not an object of elimination because it is virtuous. It is virtuous because it is immovable karma.

- Someone says: "The truth of suffering and the truth of origin are equivalent."

That is not correct because the impure worldly environment is a truth of suffering but not a truth of origin. The impure worldly environment is a truth of suffering because that was previously established. However, it is not a truth of origin because it is not karma, an affliction, or a physical aggregate etc. that is a truth of origin.

- Someone says: "A Hearer who is on the path of meditation and who will attain Nirvana in this lifetime is a *samsaric being* because he dwells in *Samsara*."

There is no pervasion, i.e. whoever dwells in *Samsara* is not necessarily a *samsaric being*. Otherwise it would absurdly follow that a Hearer Arhat who abides in the Nirvana with remainder is a *samsaric being* because he dwells in *Samsara*.

- Someone says: "A Hearer who is on the path of meditation and who will attain Nirvana in this lifetime is not a truth of suffering because he is a Sangha Jewel. Whoever is a Sangha jewel is necessarily not a truth of suffering because whatever is a Dharma jewel is necessarily not a truth of suffering."

Even though we agree that whatever is a Dharma Jewel is necessarily not a truth of suffering, we do not agree that whoever is a Sangha Jewel is necessarily not a truth of suffering. Therefore, a Hearer who is on the path of meditation and who will attain Nirvana in this lifetime is both a Sangha Jewel and a truth of suffering.

In dependence on refuting the different definitions of the truth of suffering we can determine that whatever is a truth of suffering is not necessarily suffering because whatever is suffering is necessarily a mental factor. Whatever is suffering is necessarily a mental factor because whatever is suffering is necessarily the feeling of suffering.

Furthermore, whatever is a truth of suffering is not necessarily suffering because whatever is pervasive conditioned suffering is not necessarily suffering. Whatever is pervasive conditioned suffering is not necessarily suffering because the contaminated five aggregates are pervasive conditioned suffering but they are not suffering.

The contaminated five aggregates are pervasive conditioned suffering because Dharmakirti says in his ***Pramanavartika (Commentary of the 'Compendium of Valid Cognition')***:

*The aggregates are endowed with the cycle of suffering*

Moreover, the contaminated five aggregates are not suffering because they are not the feeling of suffering.

- Someone says: "The truth of suffering and the truth of origin are contradictory."

This is not correct because whatever is a truth of origin is necessarily a truth of suffering. Whatever is a truth of origin is necessarily a truth of suffering because whatever is a karmic truth of suffering is necessarily a truth of suffering and because whatever is an afflictive truth of origin is necessarily a truth of suffering.

Whatever is either a karmic truth of origin or an afflictive truth of origin is necessarily a truth of suffering because whatever is either a karmic truth of origin or an afflictive truth of origin must be subsumed under cyclic existence and must have arisen from its causes, contaminated karma and afflictions.

Furthermore, the truth of suffering and the truth of origin are not contradictory because the contaminated five aggregates are both a truth of suffering and a truth of origin.

- Someone says: "Whatever is an afflictive obstruction is necessarily an afflictive truth of origin."

This is not correct because the seeds of afflictive obstructions are afflictive obstructions but they are not afflictive truths of origin. The seeds of afflictive obstructions are not afflictive truths of origin because they are not consciousnesses. They are not consciousnesses because they are not manifest consciousnesses.

- Someone says: "Whatever is a truth of origin is necessarily a karmic truth of origin or an afflictive truth of origin."

This is not correct because the contaminated aggregates that are truths of origin exist, but they are neither karmic truths of origin nor afflictive truths of origin. The contaminated aggregates that are truths of origin are neither karmic truths of origin nor afflictive truths of origin because whatever is a karmic or an afflictive truth of origin is necessarily a compositional aggregate.

However, whatever is one of the contaminated five aggregates that are truths of origin is not necessarily a compositional aggregate. For example, the contaminated physical aggregate is one of the contaminated five aggregates but it is not a compositional aggregate. The contaminated physical aggregate is not a compositional aggregate because it is a form aggregate.

- Someone says: "Karmic truths of origin and afflictive truths of origin are not contradictory."

This is not correct because the karmic truth of origin and the afflictive truth of origin are each distinct mental factors. The karmic truth of origin refers to the mental factor of intention and the afflictive truth of origin refers to the mental factor of any of the afflictions, such as anger, attachment, and so forth.

- Someone says: "The wrong view that deprecates the law of cause and effect is not an afflictive wrong view (i.e. a wrong view that is a delusion) because it is karma. The wrong view that deprecates the law of cause and effect is karma because it is mental non-virtuous karma. It is mental non-virtuous karma because there is something that is both karma and one of the ten non-virtuous actions. There is something that is both karma and one of the ten non-virtuous actions because there is something that is both a karmic path and one of the ten non-virtuous actions."

Even though there is something that is both a karmic path and one of the ten non-virtuous actions, that does not mean that there is something that is both *karma* and one of the ten non-virtuous actions, because a karmic path and karma are not equivalent.

A karmic path and karma are not equivalent because the three mental non-virtues (covetousness, ill-will, and wrong view) are karmic paths but not karma. Covetousness, ill-will



and wrong view are not karma because they are not the mental factor of volition. But they are karmic paths because when they manifest in the mental continuum, karma is accumulated.

However, the three physical non-virtues (killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct) and the four verbal non-virtues (lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, and senseless gossip) are both karmic paths and karma. They are karmic paths because when they manifest karma is accumulated.

They are karma because the three physical non-virtues are physical karma and the four verbal non-virtues are verbal karma.

Vasubhandu says in his ***Treasure of Knowledge (Abhidharmakosha)***:

*Three are [karmic] paths, seven are also karma.*

Karma can be categorized into two: (1) karma that is volition and (2) volitional karma.

Karma that is volition refers to mental karma and volitional karma to physical and verbal karma.

Vasubhandu says in his ***Treasury of Knowledge (Abhidharmakosha)***:

*From karma the various worlds are generated.*

*Karma is both volition and what volition generates.*

*Volition is mental karma;*

*What it generates are physical and verbal karma*

If it is mental karma it is not necessarily a mental consciousness because there is a volitional karma that is a sense consciousness. There is a volitional karma that is a sense consciousness because a volitional karma (i.e. one of the omnipresent mental factors of intention) concomitant with an eye consciousness apprehending form is a sense consciousness.

A volitional karma concomitant with an eye consciousness apprehending form is a sense consciousness because it is an eye consciousness. A volitional karma concomitant with an eye consciousness apprehending form is a sense consciousness, because such a volitional karma concomitant with an eye consciousness apprehending form exists. A volitional karma concomitant with an eye consciousness apprehending form exists, because whatever is a main consciousness is necessarily concomitant with feeling, discrimination, volition, attention, and contact. Whatever is a main consciousness is necessarily concomitant with feeling, discrimination, intention, attention, and contact because feeling, discrimination, etc. are omnipresent mental factors.

According to the Vaibhashika (Great Exposition school) and the Madhyamika Prasangika (Middle Way Consequentialist school), there is something that is both karma and form. The remaining tenet holders – the Sautrantika (Sutra school), Cittamatra (Mind-Only school), and the Svatantrika (Middle Way Autonomy school) tenet holders – do not assert that there is something that is both karma and form. According to them, whatever is karma is necessarily consciousness.

- Someone says: "Whatever is a cessation is necessarily a truth of cessation."

That is not correct because there are cessations that are non-analytical cessations and cessations that are analytical cessations.

- Someone says: " Whatever is a path is necessarily a truth of the path."

That is not correct because whatever is a truth of the path is necessarily an Arya path, i.e. a path in the continuum of someone who has directly realized emptiness and therefore

reached a path of seeing, a path of meditation, or a path of no more learning.

Furthermore, whatever is the physical aggregate in the continuum of an Arhat is not necessarily a truth of suffering, because Arhats without remainder possess physical aggregates but these aggregates are not truths of suffering. The physical aggregates in the continuum of Arhats without remainder are not truths of suffering, because they are mental bodies that are produced by the *level of imprints of ignorance* and *uncontaminated karma*.

Moreover, in the continuum of Arhats without remainder there is no truth of suffering because Arhats without remainder have completely eliminated truths of suffering. They have completely eliminated truths of suffering because they have completely eliminated cyclic existence.

### **The definition of the truth of suffering**

The definition of the truth of suffering is: that which pertains to cyclic existence and which has arisen from its own causes, karma and afflictions

Truths of suffering can be categorized into: (1) contaminated realms and (2) their contaminated inhabitants.

Pure realms such as Amithaba's Buddha field Sukhavati are not truths of suffering.

- Someone says: "There are stream enterers who are inhabitants of Sukhavati."

This is not correct because whoever is an inhabitant of Sukhavati must have necessarily obtained an actual concentration, but a stream enterer has not yet obtained an actual concentration.

Whoever is an inhabitant of Sukhavati must have necessarily obtained an actual concentration because

whoever is an inhabitant of Sukhavati must have necessarily obtained clairvoyance.

- Someone says: "Whoever is an inhabitant of Sukhavati has not necessarily obtained clairvoyance because whoever is reborn in Sukhavati necessarily acquires clairvoyance naturally."

This means that it is correct that whoever is an inhabitant of Sukhavati has necessarily obtained clairvoyance because whoever has naturally acquired clairvoyance must have necessarily obtained clairvoyance. Whoever has naturally acquired clairvoyance must have necessarily obtained clairvoyance because whoever has naturally acquired an actual concentration must have necessarily obtained an actual concentration.

Furthermore, there are no stream-enterers in Sukhavati because whoever is an inhabitant of Sukhavati necessarily does not possess a physical aggregate cast by former karma and afflictions. Whoever is an inhabitant of Sukhavati necessarily does not possess a physical aggregate cast by former karma and afflictions because there are no truths of suffering in pure realms. There are no truths of suffering in pure realms because pure realms are pure because they are free from truths of suffering.

Furthermore, truths of suffering can also be classified into three: (1) the suffering of suffering, (2) the suffering of change, and (3) the suffering of pervasive conditioned suffering

### **The definition of the truth of origin**

The definition of the truth of origin is: that which pertains to cyclic existence and generates its own effect, a truth of suffering

Truths of origin can be categorized into: (1) karmic truths of origin and (2) afflictive truths of origin

## **The definition of the truth of cessation**

The definition of the truth of cessation is: a separation that is an elimination of corresponding obstructions by its attaining factor, a truth of the path.

Truths of cessation can be categorized into: (1) Hearers' truths of cessation, (2) Solitary Realizers' truths of cessation, and (3) Bodhisattvas' truths of cessation

- Someone says: "Whatever is a truth of cessation in the continuum of a Solitary Realizer is necessarily a Solitary Realizer's truth of cessation and whatever is a truth of cessation in the continuum of a Bodhisattva is necessarily a Bodhisattva's truth of cessation because whatever is a truth of cessation in the continuum of a Hearer is necessarily a Hearer's truth of cessation."

Whatever is a truth of cessation in the continuum of a Hearer is necessarily a Hearer's truth of cessation. However, whatever is a truth of cessation in the continuum of a Solitary Realizer is not necessarily a Solitary Realizer's truth of cessation and whatever is a truth of cessation in the continuum of a Bodhisattva is not necessarily a Bodhisattva's truth of cessation.

Whatever is a truth of cessation in the continuum of a Solitary Realizer is not necessarily a Solitary Realizer's truth of cessation because a truth of cessation in the continuum of a Solitary Realizer who is on the path of accumulation or preparation and who had previously attained the realizations of an Arya Hearer is not a Solitary Realizer's truth of cessation.

A truth of cessation in the continuum of a Solitary Realizer who is on the path of accumulation or preparation and who previously attained the realizations of an Arya Hearer is not a Solitary Realizer's truth of cessation because whatever is a Solitary Realizer's truth of cessation must necessarily be preceded by a Solitary Realizer's truth of the path.

Moreover, a Solitary Realizer who is on the path of accumulation or preparation and who had previously attained the realization of an Arya Hearer has not yet obtained a Solitary Realizer's truth of the path. A Solitary Realizer on the path of accumulation or preparation, who had previously attained the realization of an Arya Hearer, has not obtained a Solitary Realizer's truth of the path because he has not yet obtained a Solitary Realizer's Arya path.

Furthermore, whatever is a truth of cessation in the continuum of a Bodhisattva is not necessarily a Bodhisattva's truth of cessation, because a truth of cessation in the continuum of a Bodhisattva on the path of accumulation or preparation who previously attained the realizations of a Hearer is not a Bodhisattva's truth of cessation. A truth of cessation in the continuum of a Bodhisattva on the path of accumulation or preparation who previously attained the realizations of a Hearer is not a Bodhisattva's truth of cessation because whatever is a Bodhisattva's truth of cessation must necessarily be preceded by a Bodhisattva's truth of the path.

Moreover, a Bodhisattva on the path of accumulation or preparation who had previously attained the realization of an Arya Hearer has not yet obtained a Bodhisattva's truth of the path. A Bodhisattva on the path of accumulation or preparation who had previously attained the realization of an Arya Hearer has not yet obtained a Bodhisattva's truth of the path because he has not yet obtained a Bodhisattva's Arya path.

### **The definition of the truth of the path**

The definition of the truth of the path: An Arya clear realization which abides in the type of being an attaining factor that is the nominal cause of a truth of cessation

Truths of the path can be categorized into: (1) Hearers' truths of the path, (2) Solitary Realizers' truths of the path, and (3) Bodhisattvas' truths of the path

Furthermore, whatever is a truth of the path in the continuum of a Hearer is necessarily a Hearer's truth of the path. However, whatever is truth of the path in the continuum of a Solitary Realizer is not necessarily a Solitary Realizer's truth of the path. Likewise, whatever is a truth of the path in the continuum of a Bodhisattva is not necessarily a Bodhisattva's truth of the path.

This concludes the presentation of the four noble truths according to the ***Decisive Meaning***.