Chapter 4 Becoming Inspired to Practice Dharma

4.1 Levels Of Spiritual Trainees

Lamp for the Path: Verse 2

> Understand that there are three kinds of persons
> Because of their small, middling and supreme capacities. I shall write clearly distinguishing
> Their individual characteristics.

Having explained how to rely on a spiritual teacher, in his *Great Exposition*, Lama TsongKhapa goes on to discuss the procedure for engaging in the practices of the path. This is divided into two sections: how to inspire ourselves with enthusiasm for practice and how to actually engage in it. To practice Dharma successfully, we need determination and courage. We can arouse these qualities within ourselves by reflecting upon the preciousness of our human existence in three ways:

1. Recognising the opportunities our human existence affords us.
2. Appreciating the rarity of these opportunities.
3. Appreciating the great significance of these opportunities.

Once we have been inspired and have developed a determination to engage in the practice of Dharma, there are three main objectives that we seek:

1. The attainment of a higher rebirth in future lives.
2. The attainment of liberation from cyclic existence.
3. The attainment of full enlightenment.

There are three types of path leading to these three spiritual goals and, as we have seen, the lamrim teachings present them within the framework of the three scopes. The main practice that fulfils the aspirations of the initial scope—avoiding the three lower realms and attaining a higher rebirth—is that of maintaining the ethical discipline of refraining from the ten non-virtuous actions: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, meaningless gossip, covetousness, harmful intent and wrong views. This practice is undertaken on the basis of a clear recognition of the karmic law of cause and effect.

These ten actions encompass all the various negative manifestations of body, speech and mind. The practice of the ten *virtuous* actions is to maintain an ethical discipline where you deliberately and consciously refrain from the ten non-virtuous ones. If you engage in such an ethical discipline, you will establish the conditions for attaining a favourable existence in your next life.

The main practice that fulfils the aspirations of the middling scope—liberation from cyclic existence—is that of the Three Higher Trainings.[12]

The main practice that fulfils the aspirations of the great, or highest, scope—the full enlightenment of buddhahood—is that of the six perfec-

tions,[15] which is undertaken on the basis of generating the altruistic mind that aspires for enlightenment for the benefit of all beings—bodhicitta—which we discussed briefly earlier.

Just as there are different methods that need to be cultivated on each of these paths, there are also different factors that need to be overcome and eliminated. For example, in the context of the first spiritual goal of attaining a higher rebirth, the main factors that need to be overcome are the negative manifestations of the afflictions,[16] such as the non-virtuous actions of body, speech and mind. In the context of the second spiritual goal of attaining liberation, the main factors that need to be overcome are the mental and emotional afflictions[27] that lie at the root of our suffering. In the context of the third spiritual goal of attaining enlightenment, the main factors that need to be overcome are the subtle imprints left on our consciousness by the afflictions, which obstruct us from gaining perfect knowledge, the omniscient mind of buddhahood.

Lamp for the Path: Verse 3

Know that those who by whatever means
Seek for themselves no more
Than the pleasures of cyclic existence
Are persons of the least capacity.

The "means" in the first line refers to the practice of taking refuge in the Three Jewels, which includes reflecting on death and its inevitability and following the law of karma.

This verse goes on to define the characteristics of the initial scope (calling it "least capacity"), referring to practitioners who aspire to the first spiritual

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[15] **Six perfections** are: charity, ethical conduct, patience, effort, meditative concentration, wisdom.

Ethics: all the practices of persons of small and intermediate scope and the great scope practices of bodhicitta and the first four perfections are classified as ethics.

Concentration: the practice of single-point concentration is classified as concentration.

Wisdom: the highest insight, the sixth perfection, is the training of wisdom.

[16] In Buddhism, **mental afflictions**, kleshas, are negative mental states or destructive emotions that contribute to suffering and hinder one's spiritual development. The concept of mental afflictions is central to understanding the causes of suffering and the path to liberation in Buddhist teachings.

1. **Ignorance**: This is considered the root of all other mental afflictions. It refers to a lack of understanding of the nature of reality, including the impermanence of phenomena and the interdependence of all things.
2. **Attachment or desire**: This involves an excessive craving for sensual pleasures, material possessions and attachment to things that are transient. Attachment leads to suffering when those objects or experiences are not attained or are impermanent.
3. **Aversion or hatred**: This is an aversion or hatred towards things that are perceived as unpleasant or undesirable. It can manifest as anger, resentment, or hostility.
4. **Ignorance of the law of karma**: This is different from the general ignorance mentioned earlier. It specifically refers to a lack of understanding of the law of cause and effect, the consequences of one's actions and the cycle of birth and death (samsara).
5. **Pride or ego**: This is an inflated sense of self-importance or superiority. It leads to a distorted view of oneself and others, hindering spiritual growth and understanding.
6. **Doubt**: Doubt refers to a lack of confidence or trust in the teachings of Buddhism, the path, or one's own abilities to follow the path. It can create obstacles on the journey towards enlightenment.

In Buddhist philosophy, the goal is to overcome these mental afflictions through ethical conduct, meditation and wisdom. The process of overcoming them is essential for attaining liberation (nirvana) and reaching a state of freedom from suffering. The practices within Buddhism, such as mindfulness and meditation, aim to cultivate awareness and insight to gradually eliminate these mental afflictions.

goal of attaining higher rebirths in cyclic existence and therefore lead ethically disciplined lives, refraining from the ten non-virtuous actions based on a deep conviction in the truth of the law of karma.

4.2 Developing Faith In Karma

According to Buddhist tradition, the subtlest workings of karma are evident only to the omniscient minds of the buddhas; ordinary beings have no way of understanding karma at its deepest levels. Therefore, in order to be deeply convinced of the truth of the law of karma, you need to have a deep conviction in the validity and efficacy of the Three Jewels of Refuge; the basis of your spiritual practice must be strong faith in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

This faith is not developed from the words of the Buddha alone but, as we have seen, on the basis of your own critical analysis. If you look at the Buddha's teachings, you can discern two basic objectives: the secondary, temporary objective is to help sentient beings gain upper rebirths, but the primary, ultimate objective is to lead them to complete liberation from samsara.

When you examine the Buddha's teachings on the complex issue of negative emotions and how to counter them, you can see that these matters are evident to all. We are all familiar with the emotions, so as we relate the Buddha's teachings on them to our own personal experience, we can gradually recognise the truth of the Buddha's words. Similarly, all his teachings dealing with the ultimate goal of liberation—impermanence, the Four Noble Truths, emptiness and so forth—can also be understood through critical analysis. That analysis can then be extended to the scriptures dealing with the subtle workings of karma. We can thus conclude that if Buddha has not failed us in the most important area, the attainment of liberation, why should he fail us in his teachings on cause and effect? In this way we can begin to develop conviction in the law of karma. We can also consider that the Buddha had no reason to make false claims about karma and how there are no contradictions in the scriptures discussing it.

To summarise, once we develop a deep conviction in the validity of the Buddha's teachings, we gain an admiration for and faith in the Buddha himself. Based on these considerations, we can recognise the validity of the Buddha's teachings on karma. It is on this basis that we then engage in the practice of ethical discipline, refraining from the ten non-virtuous actions.

4.3 The Three Levels Of Refuge

If there is a threat, we should seek refuge from it. Similarly, in the context of spiritual practice, to protect ourselves from the threat of an unfavourable rebirth, we should seek refuge in the Three Jewels: Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

Buddhism teaches three different levels of refuge. The first is where we seek protection from the immediate threat of the suffering of rebirth in a

lower realm of existence. Inspired by the great fear that this possibility evokes, we seek refuge in the Three Jewels in order to avoid it. This level of refuge is relevant to initial scope practitioners, whose goal is to attain an upper rebirth.

When we think of the lower realms of existence, we should not think of some place far away in the distant future. All that actually lies between the present moment and the next life is simply the continuity of our breath. The moment we stop breathing, when we breathe out and don't breathe in, the next life is right there in front of us. It's not a matter of some distant time in the future; it's immediate. In order to bring about a concordant sense of urgency, therefore, it is necessary for us to reflect upon impermanence, particularly upon the inevitably of death, the uncertainty of the time of death and what will benefit us when death arrives.

The second level of refuge is where we seek protection from the suffering of pervasive conditioning; the suffering of being caught in cyclic existence and the destructive power of the negative thoughts and emotions. In order to overcome these sufferings, we take refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, which embody the total transcendence of suffering and cyclic existence, particularly the suffering of pervasive conditioning. This level of refuge is relevant to middling scope practitioners, whose goal is to attain nirvana.

The third and highest level of refuge is that of the Mahayana practitioner. Here, we seek refuge from the extremes of samsaric existence on the one hand and individual liberation on the other. In order to be protected from these two extremes, we seek the attainment of buddhahood, dharmakaya and rupakaya, for the benefit of all sentient beings. When we view refuge in this way, we can understand the significance of Maitreya's statement that the true and ultimate refuge is Buddha alone, because only an enlightened being embodies all this perfection. Maitreya goes on to say that the Buddha's enlightened mind encompasses the ultimate jewel of Dharma and also represents the ultimate perfection of the jewel of Sangha.

4.4 The Value And Transient Nature Of Human Existence

Lines of Experience: Verse 10

> This human existence with its (eight) liberties[17] is much more precious than a wish-granting jewel.
> Obtained just this once, difficult to acquire and easily lost, (it passes in a flash) like lightning in the sky.
> Considering how (easily this can happen at any time) and realising that all worldly activities are as (immaterial as) chaff, you must try to extract its essence at all times, day and night. I, the yogi, have practiced just

[17] The **eight liberties**, or freedoms, are freedom from the four non-human states of rebirth in the hell, hungry ghost, animal or long-lived god realms and the four human states of rebirth when or where the Dharma teachings do not exist or with imperfect faculties or wrong views. In none of these states do we have the freedom to practice Dharma to the full. See Liberation in Our Hands, Part 2, p. 73 ff.

that. You who also seek liberation, please cultivate yourself in the same way.

This verse presents the contemplations that need to be done to fully appreciate the significance of the opportunities offered us by our human existence. First, we must recognise the nature of this existence; second, we must reflect upon its rarity; and third, we must consider its fragility; the fact that it can be lost at any time. Based on such contemplations, we should then reflect upon these three important facts:

1. Death is inevitable.
2. The time of death is unpredictable.
3. At the time of death, only spiritual practice will be of benefit.

Most of us feel that we will be alive tomorrow. We think that just because there are no medical or physical conditions threatening our lives, we can justifiably conclude that there is a ninety-nine percent chance that we will live beyond today. However, what about that one percent? We cannot say with one hundred percent certainty that we won't be dead tomorrow. When death strikes, our wealth, no matter how great, will be of no significance; nor will our family or friends. Even our cherished body will be of no use. At the time of death, nobody else can help us; we must travel that path alone.

Now the big question arises: does the continuity of consciousness disappear after death? This is an important question and not new to this generation; it has been addressed for thousands of years. However, when actually confronted by death, only the spiritual qualities we have developed through our practice of Dharma will help; nothing but Dharma can benefit us at the time of death.

4.5 Meditation: Cultivating Mental Discipline

The way we develop positive qualities of mind is through constant practice and meditation. Meditation is a discipline whereby we cultivate familiarity with a chosen object. Our problem is that in normal day-to-day life, we allow ourselves to be dominated by afflictive emotions and deluded thoughts, totally overwhelming our mind with negative states that then perpetuate a whole cycle of problems, confusion and suffering.

What we seek in spiritual practice, therefore, is a way of reversing this cycle so that we can finally take charge of our mind and prevent it from coming under the influence of such negative impulses. We do this by engaging in a constant discipline of cultivating familiarity with a chosen object, which, of course, must be a positive one. In so doing, we gain a certain mental stability that allows us to place our mind single-pointedly upon this object. This is the actual meaning and purpose of Buddhist meditation.

Thoughts and emotions with which we are more familiar are the ones that come more easily to us. If we are more familiar with negative thoughts and emotions, those are the ones that will arise in us more naturally, but if we

are more habituated to positive thoughts and emotions, those are the ones that will naturally arise.

We can observe this in our own personal experience, particularly when studying a new subject. At the beginning, we find it difficult and struggle to understand anything at all, but as we persevere, the clearer it becomes. Eventually we reach the point where understanding arises through merely directing our mind to the subject. This does not mean that the subject has suddenly become easy. All we have done is to enhance our understanding of it through constant engagement.

Change is a gradual process. Therefore, when we are trying to dispel confusion with respect to reality, illumination dawns by degrees. Again, we can observe this in our personal experience. At the beginning, we may have a single-pointed perception of reality that is completely opposite to the way in which things really exist, but as we investigate the nature of reality with our analytical mind, we eventually reach the point where our misconceptions are undermined and we enter a state of uncertainty. We still tend more towards misconception, but our grasping at it has been loosened. As we continue deepening our understanding through our analysis, our indecisiveness gradually progresses into a state of equilibrium, where we begin to incline more towards the correct understanding of reality.

As we further deepen our understanding through investigation and critical thinking, we reach the point where we have a clear intellectual understanding of reality, having convinced ourselves that this is the way in which things actually exist; that this is the true nature of reality. If we deepen our analysis even further, we gain even stronger conviction; a certainty derived from our own critical thinking. This is called "valid cognition"; a true ascertainment of a certain state of affairs.

If we pursue this process of constantly engaging our mind with the object—in this case, the nature of reality—we reach the point where we have not only intellectual, inferential knowledge of the object but also a kind of experiential knowledge. At this initial stage, the experience still depends to a large extent upon rational thought processes and is therefore called the stage of "simulated experiential knowledge."

If we continue deepening our analysis, we reach the point where our experiential knowledge becomes spontaneous and we can recall the experience of deep understanding simply by focusing our attention on the object of investigation. At this point, our understanding has reached the level of "spontaneous, non-simulated experiential knowledge." Thus, even with a single characteristic of phenomena, our thought processes go through deepening levels of understanding and experience.

From another point of view, we can say that we go through three stages of understanding. First, there is the understanding derived from learning and study; from listening to teachings, for example. Second, there is the stage of understanding derived not so much from learning and study, but from

personal reflection and contemplation. Third, there is the level of understanding that derives from personal experience; from meditation.

There are two principal approaches to the actual process of meditation. One is called "placement" or "absorptive meditation"; sometimes this is also called "calm abiding." The other is "analytic" or "insight meditation." Let's take the example of meditating on cultivating faith in your spiritual teacher or another high object, such as the Buddha.

Initially, you can cultivate a firm, deeply grounded, genuine faith in your teacher by, for example, constantly reflecting upon his or her great qualities from various points of view. The more resources you can draw upon in this analytic meditation, the stronger will be your feeling of connectedness to your teacher.

Once you have arrived at the point where from the depths of your heart you feel reverence, admiration and closeness, let your mind abide in this state. This is placement meditation. As you remain single-pointedly in this feeling of admiration for your teacher, the intensity and vitality of this state may slowly begin to diminish. When you observe this happening, reinforce your awareness by reapplying your analytic meditation on your teacher's positive qualities.

When you engage in meditation on impermanence or no-self nature, you take impermanence or no-self as the object of your attention and focus on it, trying to deepen your understanding of it. You engage in analytic meditation by constantly reflecting upon the various reasons that led you to the conclusion that all phenomena are impermanent or not self-existent. When you arrive at the conclusion that everything is definitely impermanent or definitely lacks self-existence, place your mind single-pointedly on that conclusion. Abide as long as you can in that state of absorptive meditation.

These examples show how analytic and absorptive meditations combine to make a successful meditation session.

If you think about your own daily experiences, you will see that you engage in analytic and absorptive meditation all the time. For example, your thoughts are constantly influenced by strong emotions, such as attachment to somebody you like, or anger towards somebody you don't. When you are attached to somebody, you're always thinking how desirable that person is and examining that person's positive, attractive qualities, constantly justifying, reinforcing and dwelling in your feelings of attachment. Similarly, when you feel strong aversion towards somebody, you constantly reinforce your hatred by thinking up one reason after another to justify your feelings ("he did this", "she didn't do that" etc) and abide in these feelings. Thus, you are already familiar with practices similar to analytic and absorptive meditation.

As spiritual practitioners, what we should be doing is applying the experiences with which we are familiar to a realm that is not—that of spiritual practice. Through the application of analytic and absorptive meditation we

can really bring about the spiritual transformation that we seek. There is, however, a third condition that we may have to take into account.

For example, take two practitioners under the guidance of the same teacher, who have both studied and practiced meditation for an equal length of time. One finds it easy to understand the teachings and is very successful in gaining realisations, but the other finds it difficult, even though he or she has put in an equal amount of time, attention and effort.

Buddhism explains this in terms of merit or a lack thereof—a person's karma and level of karmic obscuration. For example, those who support themselves through wrong livelihoods[18] will have much heavier degrees of karmic obscuration than those who don't. Some people who have devoted their whole life to solitary meditation have told me that when they utilise offerings from certain people, it temporarily hinders their progress. This suggests that because of the purity of their way of life, they have developed an extremely fine-tuned sensitivity to environmental factors and can immediately recognise the effect of things on their practice.

In summary, three factors contribute to a successful meditation practice:

1. Successful engagement in analytic and absorptive meditation.
2. Accumulation of merit and purification of negativity and karmic obscurations.
3. Engagement in specific meditation practices for particular purposes.

Of the three, engagement in specific meditation practices is the most important and is done in the meditation session, whereas other virtuous activities, such as making prostrations, circumambulating and so forth are done in the post-session periods.

During the actual session, the faculty of introspection ensures that you continually maintain mindfulness and are not distracted by external factors. And while introspection and mindfulness are critical during the session, they are also very important during the post-meditation periods, when they ensure you sustain the vitality and diligence of your meditation experiences.

You must also ensure that during the post-meditation periods you carry out your normal activities, such as eating, sleeping etc, in an appropriate manner, that is with mindfulness and introspection. If you do, the practices you did during the session will reinforce and enhance those of the post-meditation periods and the practices you do during the post-meditation periods will reinforce and enhance those of the session. If you can maintain your spiritual practices effectively in this manner, their influence may even extend into your sleep, and mindfulness and introspection will function in your dreams as well. For example, you may experience powerful surges of admiration for the Buddha or your spiritual teacher in your dreams and be able to feel the lingering effects of such experiences after you awaken.

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[18] Wrong livelihoods include killing or abusing sentient beings for a living, living off the proceeds of selling holy objects such as texts, statues and thangkas and so forth.

Finally, to ensure the quality of your meditation practice, it is more effective to do many short sessions rather than a few long ones.

4.6 Death And Rebirth

As to what specific meditation practices you should engage in, take the topic of impermanence as an example. The significance of meditating on impermanence and death is not just to terrify yourself; there is no point in simply making yourself afraid of death. The purpose of meditating on impermanence and death is to remind you of the preciousness of the opportunities that exist for you in life as a human being. Reminding yourself that death is inevitable, its time unpredictable and when it happens only spiritual practice is of benefit gives you a sense of urgency and enables you to truly appreciate the value of your human existence and your potential to fulfil the highest of spiritual aspirations. If you can develop this profound appreciation, you will treat every single day as extremely precious.

As spiritual practitioners, it is very important for us to constantly familiarise our thoughts and emotions with the idea of death so that it does not arrive as something completely unexpected. We need to accept death as a part of our lives. This kind of attitude is much healthier than simply trying not to think or talk about death. When we examine the teachings of the Buddha himself, we find that during his first public sermon he enumerated sixteen characteristics of the Four Noble Truths, of which four are the characteristics of suffering. Of the four characteristics of suffering, the first is impermanence. Then, when the Buddha passed away, at the threshold of his final nirvana, the last teaching he gave was on the importance of contemplating impermanence . In other words, the very first and last teachings of the Buddha were on impermanence.

A discussion of death naturally brings up the question of what happens next, bringing up the issue of rebirth. From the Buddhist point of view, rebirth is understood in terms of a continuity of consciousness. One of the premises of the Buddha's teachings on rebirth, therefore, is the continuity of consciousness. In his *Pramanavarttika*, Dharmakirti says that something that is not in the nature of consciousness cannot be turned into consciousness. His point is that in accounting for the nature and existence of consciousness, we have two choices. Either we posit that the continuum of consciousness has a beginning or that it doesn't. If we posit a beginning to the continuum of consciousness, the question arises, when did that first instance of consciousness come into being and from where did it come? Then our choices are that the first moment of consciousness came from nowhere—from no cause—or that it was created by a cause that is permanent and eternal.

From the Buddhist point of view, either answer gives rise to many inconsistencies. If something comes from no cause, it should exist either all the time or not at all. Both options are untenable. If, on the other hand, some-

thing comes from a cause that is itself permanent, eternal, unchanging and unitary, this negates the fundamental Buddhist view of universal causation. Therefore, from the Buddhist point of view, the idea of divine creation is completely unacceptable. If one accepts that some divine force created the entire universe, then the nature of this divine force has to be independent, unitary, uncaused and original, all of which are untenable within a philosophical outlook in which universal causation is the fundamental principle.

It is on these grounds that Buddhists do not posit a beginning to the continuum of consciousness & explain its nature and existence purely in terms of the principle of causes and conditions. From the Buddhist point of view, even the existence of the galaxies and the universe has to be explained from the point of view of causes and conditions. In the case of the universe, there has to be a relationship between the sentient beings that inhabit the physical plane and the existence and evolution of the physical world.

Buddhists explain it in the following way. As I mentioned before, at the subtlest level of the physical world, there is an ever-present physical continuum of space particles. When this subtle physical continuum interacts with the karma of sentient beings, the karma acts as a condition that gives rise to various permutations of physical reality. Eventually there comes into being a macroscopic world that can actually have a direct effect upon sentient beings' experience of pain, pleasure, suffering and happiness. It is along these lines that Buddhists explain the entire evolution and dissolution of the universe. This is made very clear in the traditional Buddhist teachings on the twelve links of dependent origination.[19]

4.7 The Twelve Links[7]

The interlocking chain of the twelve links demonstrates the entire process of evolution and explains the individual's existence in samsara. There is no concept of there being some kind of central, unifying creator around which everything evolves.

While we are experiencing the consequences of one set of twelve links, the ignorance and karmic action links of another cycle have already been set in motion. Thus, there are ever-rotating, interlocking chains of twelve links of dependent origination constantly keeping us bound to the wheel of life, which is how our evolution through cyclic existence is explained.

The Buddha actually taught the twelve links in two ways. One charts our evolution through cyclic existence from ignorance to karmic volitional acts to consciousness and so on down the chain, while the other presents the same process in reverse, explaining how we escape from samsara and reach enlightenment. By bringing an end to ignorance, volitional acts are prevented; by preventing volitional acts, consciousness is prevented, etc.

Commenting on these teachings, the Indian master Asanga identified three principal features:

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[19] See, for example, His Holiness the Dalai Lama's The Meaning of Life for a detailed explanation of the twelve links.

1. Everything has its causes. In the Buddhist teachings on dependent origination, the notion of divine creation is rejected, because everything comes into being as a result of causes and conditions.
2. These causes are impermanent. Even the causes that set the whole cycle in motion are themselves subject to causes and conditions and are, therefore, impermanent.
3. Only compatible and corresponding causes give rise to the effects. Causation is not a random process; not everything can produce everything. Causes and effects must be compatible; only commensurate causes lead to corresponding results.

Asanga identified these factors by commenting on a passage from the sutras, where the Buddha stated, "Because this exists, that exists; because this originated, that will ensue; and because there is fundamental ignorance, volitional acts will follow."[20] [21]

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[20] See World of Tibetan Buddhism, p. 42: "Due to the existence of this, that arises; due to the production of this, that is engendered. It is thus: due to ignorance, there is the volitional action; due to action, there is consciousness," which is attributed to the Rice Seedling Sutra (*Shalistambhasutra*).

[21] **The twelve links of dependent origination** describe the cycle of existence and suffering, illustrating how ignorance leads to a continuous cycle of rebirth, suffering, and death. Understanding and breaking this cycle is key to attaining enlightenment. Here are the twelve links:

1. Ignorance (Avidyā):
- Ignorance of the true nature of reality is the root cause of suffering and the starting point of the cycle.

2. Formations (Sanskrit: Saṃskāra, Pali: Saṅkhāra):
- Mental formations or volitional activities, influenced by ignorance, shape our future experiences and actions.

3. Consciousness (Vijñāna):
- Consciousness arises from formations and leads to the perception of the external world.

4. Name and Form (Nāmarūpa):
- This refers to the mind and body, or the psycho-physical organism that arises from consciousness.

5. Six Sense Bases (Ṣaḍāyatana):
- The development of the six senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and mind) that allow interaction with the external world.

6. Contact (Sparśa):
- The coming together of the sense organs, the sense objects, and the consciousness, leading to sensory experiences.

7. Feeling (Vedanā):
- Sensations that arise from contact, which can be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.

8. Craving (Tṛṣṇā):
- The desire or attachment to pleasant feelings, aversion to unpleasant feelings, and ignorance of neutral feelings.

9. Clinging (Upādāna):
- Intensified craving leading to attachment and clinging to desires, possessions, and false views.

10. Becoming (Bhava):
- The process of becoming, which involves karmic activities that create future existence or rebirth.

11. Birth (Jāti):
- The result of becoming, leading to rebirth in a new life, with all its potential for suffering.

12. Aging and Death (Jarāmaraṇa):
- The inevitable aging and death that follows birth, bringing the cycle full circle and leading to further suffering and rebirth.

Breaking the Cycle
- **Understanding**: Realising the nature of these links and how they perpetuate suffering is crucial for breaking the cycle.
- **Practice**: Through ethical conduct, meditation, and wisdom, one can weaken and ultimately sever these links, leading to liberation (nirvāṇa).