

Chapter 18 The Six Types of Suffering

Introduction

Chapter 18 of Tsongkhapa's *Lamrim* discusses suffering in six categories in cyclic existence (samsara) and the meditations designed to help practitioners develop a deep sense of disenchantment with worldly life. The chapter is divided into sections, each exploring different aspects of suffering and their implications for spiritual practice.

1. The Suffering of Uncertainty

The first type of suffering, the suffering of uncertainty, highlights the unpredictable nature of relationships and circumstances in samsara. Relationships change unpredictably due to karma, making it impossible to find lasting stability or reliability. Nāgārjuna's "*Friendly Letter*" illustrates this by showing how family members can become enemies and vice versa across different lifetimes. This uncertainty stems from ignorance and leads to actions driven by hatred and attachment, perpetuating the cycle of suffering.

2. The Suffering of Insatiability

The second type of suffering is insatiability, where no amount of worldly pleasure can bring lasting satisfaction. Nāgārjuna compares this to a leper who burns himself for temporary relief, only to suffer more in the long run. The endless craving for sensory pleasures and the pursuit of desires never lead to true fulfillment but instead result in more dissatisfaction and suffering. The only cure for this perpetual dissatisfaction is the practice of the path leading to enlightenment.

3. The Suffering of Repeatedly Losing One's Life

The third type of suffering involves repeatedly losing one's life. In samsara, beings are attached to their bodies and go to great lengths to protect and nourish them. However, these bodies are impermanent and must be cast off repeatedly through the cycle of birth and death. Nāgārjuna explains that if all the bones from all previous lifetimes were piled up, they would surpass Mount Meru in size. This constant cycle of losing one's life highlights the impermanence and futility of attachment to the physical body.

4. The Suffering of Having to Take Rebirth Repeatedly

The fourth type of suffering is the necessity of taking rebirth repeatedly. Despite a desire for a final life, the cycle of samsara continues due to karma created by attachment, hostility, and ignorance. This karma compels beings to be reborn in various forms and states, perpetuating the cycle of suffering. The lineage of mothers, as explained by Mahāmati, signifies the innumerable rebirths one undergoes, with all sentient beings having been one's mother in past lives. And you their's.

5. The Suffering of Constantly Fluctuating from High to Low States

The fifth type of suffering involves the constant fluctuation between high and low states. In samsara, beings experience drastic changes in their conditions, usually beyond their control. Nāgārjuna describes how one can be a revered deity or a wealthy individual in one life, only to fall to a lower state in the next. This instability underscores the unreliability and transient nature of worldly achievements and pleasures. The chapter uses vivid examples from Buddhist cosmology to illustrate these fluctuations.

6. The Suffering of Having No Companions

The sixth type of suffering is the absence of true companionship. At birth and death, one is alone, with no companions to share the misery. Nāgārjuna advises seizing the "threefold lamp of merits" (ethical conduct, meditative stabilisation, and wisdom) to light the way out of the darkness of samsara. This section emphasises that attachment to friends and loved ones, based on the false belief that they provide stable happiness, is a hindrance. Your only true friends in samsara are virtuous qualities and actions that lead to liberation.

Meditations Recommended in Chapter 18: "The Six Types of Suffering"

Chapter 18 provides meditations to help develop a deep sense of disenchantment with samsara.

1. The Suffering of Uncertainty

Meditation Process:

- Reflect on the impermanence and unpredictability of relationships in samsara. Contemplate how close relationships, such as those with family members, can change unpredictably across lifetimes.
- Consider Nāgārjuna's verses: "The father becomes the son, the mother becomes the wife, the enemy becomes a friend. Since everything turns around, there is nothing certain in cyclic existence." Parents becoming enemies and subject to hatred and enemies becoming parents who nurture and love.

Objective:

- Understand that there is no certainty or reliability in any relationship within samsara, as all relationships are subject to the fluctuations of karma. This meditation aims to reduce attachment and hostility by recognising the transient nature of these bonds.

2. The Suffering of Insatiability

Meditation Process:

- Reflect on how no amount of sensory pleasure or material gain can bring lasting satisfaction. Contemplate the endless cycle of craving and the temporary nature of all worldly pleasures.
- Think about Nāgārjuna's analogy of a leper who burns himself for temporary relief, only to suffer more in the long run.

Objective:

- Develop a sense of disenchantment with the pursuit of sensory pleasures and material gains. Understand that true satisfaction cannot be found in samsara, motivating a determination to seek liberation.

3. The Suffering of Repeatedly Losing One's Life

Meditation Process:

- Reflect on the impermanence of the body and the inevitability of death. Contemplate Nāgārjuna's teaching that if all the bones from all previous lifetimes were piled up, they would surpass Mount Meru.
- Consider the countless times you have been born and have died, and how each time you have to abandon your beloved body; the number of lives you have had and will have unless you escape. Ditto for all sentient beings.

Objective:

- Understand the futility of attachment to the physical body and develop a sense of renunciation. Recognise that the cycle of birth and death is endless without the practice of the path to liberation.

4. The Suffering of Having to Take Rebirth Repeatedly**Meditation Process:**

- Reflect on the endless cycle of rebirths driven by karma and afflictions. Contemplate how, despite the desire for a final life, one is compelled to be reborn again and again due to accumulated karma.
- Think about the lineage of mothers described by Mahāmati, where each being has had countless mothers throughout countless lifetimes.

Objective:

- Develop a strong motivation to break free from the cycle of rebirths. Understand that liberation from samsara requires eliminating the causes of rebirth: ignorance, attachment and hostility.

5. The Suffering of Constantly Fluctuating from High to Low States**Meditation Process:**

- Reflect on the instability and unpredictability of life's conditions in samsara. Contemplate Nāgārjuna's teaching that one can be a revered deity or a wealthy individual in one life, only to fall to a lower state in the next.
- Think about the examples from Buddhist cosmology, where beings experience drastic changes in their conditions based on their karma.

Objective:

- Recognise the unreliability and transient nature of worldly achievements and pleasures. Develop a sense of detachment and a motivation to seek stable and lasting happiness through liberation.

6. The Suffering of Having No Companions**Meditation Process:**

- Reflect on the inherent loneliness of birth and death. Contemplate Nāgārjuna's advice to seize the "threefold lamp of merits" (ethical conduct, meditative stabilisation, and wisdom) to light the way out of the darkness of samsara.
- Think about Śāntideva's verses on how, at birth and death, one is alone, and how attachment to friends and loved ones is a hindrance to liberation.

Objective:

- Understand that true companionship in samsara is found in virtuous qualities and actions. Develop a sense of reliance on ethical conduct, meditation, and wisdom, and reduce attachment to worldly relationships.

These meditations on the six types of suffering aim to generate a strong sense of disenchantment with samsara and motivate practitioners to seek liberation through the cultivation of wisdom and virtuous actions. By understanding and internalising the nature of these sufferings, practitioners can develop the determination to transcend cyclic existence and achieve genuine, lasting happiness.

Conclusion

The chapter categorises these six types of suffering into three overarching themes:

1. Unreliability in Cyclic Existence:

- No security in obtaining a body.
- Relationships are unstable.
- High positions must eventually decline.
- Companions cannot be relied upon.

2. Insatiability:

- Worldly pleasures never bring lasting satisfaction.

3. Endless Cycle:

- Repeatedly losing one's life.
- Continuous rebirth.

Reflection

Chapter 18 offers a profound insight into the transient and unsatisfactory nature of worldly life. It encourages practitioners to reflect deeply on their experiences and develop a mindset of renunciation and compassion. By recognising the pervasive suffering inherent in samsara, individuals are inspired to follow the path of enlightenment, seeking liberation for themselves and all sentient beings.

Summary of Chapter 19: Further Meditations on Suffering

After stepping through eight and six types of suffering, Chapter 19 of Tsongkhapa's *Lamrim* provides several meditations focused on three types of suffering. These meditations are designed to deepen the practitioner's understanding of suffering and cultivate the motivation to seek liberation from cyclic existence.

The Three Types of Suffering

The chapter categorises all sufferings in cyclic existence into three types:

1. The Suffering of Change:

This type of suffering is associated with the impermanence of what we consider pleasurable experiences. Tsongkhapa illustrates this by comparing it to the relief felt when applying cool water to a painful wound. This temporary relief is perceived as pleasure, but it is fleeting, and the pain returns once the water dries. This analogy extends to everyday experiences such as eating when hungry or resting when tired, where the pleasure derived is merely the temporary cessation of discomfort. True and lasting pleasure is unattainable as all pleasant experiences inevitably change and lead to suffering again.

2. The Suffering of Suffering:

This is the direct experience of pain and anguish. Tsongkhapa explains this through the analogy of a wound being irritated by salt. The sharp increase in pain exemplifies this type of suffering. It includes the main mind and mental factors that arise with painful feelings, and the objects that produce such feelings. The suffering of suffering encompasses the physical and mental pain that beings ordinarily recognise as suffering.

3. The Suffering of Conditionality:

Also known as **pervasive suffering**, this type of suffering is rooted in the very nature of cyclic existence. It includes neutral feelings, which, although not strongly unpleasant or pleasant, are tied to negative tendencies and the potential for future suffering. This suffering is pervasive because all experiences within cyclic existence are ultimately conditioned by karma and afflictions, carrying the seeds for future suffering. The analogy used is an open wound that persists in its painful condition regardless of temporary relief or aggravation. This type of suffering underscores the inherent dissatisfaction embedded in all samsaric experiences.

Meditation on the Three Types of Suffering

1. Meditation on the Suffering of Change

- **Process:** Reflect on experiences that are ordinarily considered pleasurable, such as eating, drinking, or resting. Understand that these feelings of pleasure are not inherent but are temporary reliefs from discomforts. For example, when feeling hungry, eating provides temporary pleasure that quickly fades, and the discomfort returns.
- **Objective:** Realise that true and lasting pleasure is unattainable in samsara because all pleasurable experiences eventually change into suffering. This understanding helps diminish attachment to sensory pleasures.

2. Meditation on the Suffering of Suffering

- **Process:** Contemplate situations where pain and anguish are directly experienced, such as illness, injury, or emotional distress. Reflect on personal experiences of pain and observe how these sufferings are an inherent part of samsaric existence.
 - **Objective:** Recognise the pervasive nature of suffering in samsara, reinforcing the desire to seek liberation. This meditation aims to deepen the understanding that suffering is an unavoidable aspect of cyclic existence.
- 3. Meditation on the Suffering of Conditionality**
- **Process:** Reflect on the inherent suffering embedded in all conditioned phenomena, even those that seem neutral. Understand that these experiences are linked to latent tendencies and the potential for future suffering. Consider how neutral feelings, while not immediately unpleasant, still carry the seeds of future suffering due to their conditioned nature.
 - **Objective:** Develop a profound understanding of the pervasive suffering that pervades all samsaric experiences, fostering a sense of disenchantment with samsara and a stronger motivation to achieve liberation.

Contemplation of Specific Sufferings

1. The Suffering of Human Beings

- **Process:** Reflect on the various sufferings experienced by humans, such as hunger, thirst, heat, cold, exhaustion from pursuing goals, and the eight types of suffering (birth, aging, sickness, death, encountering the unpleasant, separation from the pleasant, not getting what you want, and the appropriating aggregates). Contemplate personal experiences and extend this understanding to the lives of others, recognising that all humans, regardless of their status, endure these sufferings.
- **Objective:** Deepen the understanding of the human condition and develop compassion for oneself and others. This meditation helps practitioners see the universal nature of human suffering and the importance of seeking liberation.

2. The Suffering of Demigods

- **Process:** Reflect on the intense envy and jealousy that demigods experience towards the devas (gods) due to their superior wealth, power, and luxury. Contemplate the constant battles and mental anguish demigods face, driven by their jealousy and desire to surpass the devas.
- **Objective:** Recognise that even beings in higher realms are not free from suffering, reinforcing the idea that samsaric existence is fundamentally flawed and unsatisfactory.

3. The Suffering of Devas (Gods)

- **Desire Realm Devas:**
 - **Process:** Contemplate the three main types of suffering for desire realm devas: the suffering of dying and falling, the suffering of being frightened, and the sufferings of being cut, gashed, killed, and banished. Reflect on their intense mental anguish as they experience the five signs of death and their realisation of imminent rebirth into lower realms.
 - **Objective:** Understand that even the highest pleasures of the desire realm are impermanent and lead to intense suffering, reinforcing the need for liberation from all samsaric realms.
- **Form and Formless Realm Devas:**
 - **Process:** Reflect on the peaceful and blissful states of devas in the form and formless realms, acknowledging that they do not experience gross physical or

mental suffering. However, recognise that they still possess subtle afflictions and karmic propensities that will lead to future suffering and rebirth in lower realms.

- **Objective:** Realise that even the most subtle and tranquil states in samsara are conditioned and impermanent, leading to future suffering. This meditation helps to develop renunciation of all samsaric realms, including the most desirable ones.

Breaking Free of Samsara

1. Understanding the Causes of Suffering:

- **Process:** Meditate on the four noble truths, particularly focusing on the truth of suffering and the truth of the cause of suffering. Contemplate how ignorance, attachment, and aversion perpetuate the cycle of samsara through the twelve links of dependent origination.
- **Objective:** Develop a clear understanding of the causes of suffering and the mechanisms that sustain samsara, fostering the determination to eliminate these causes through practice.

2. Cultivating Renunciation:

- **Process:** Continuously reflect on the pervasive nature of suffering in all realms of samsara, from the lowest hells to the highest heavens. Contemplate the unsatisfactory nature of all samsaric experiences and the importance of achieving liberation.
- **Objective:** Generate a genuine and stable sense of renunciation, a deep-seated determination to break free from samsara and achieve liberation for oneself and all sentient beings.

3. Developing Wisdom and Compassion:

- **Process:** Engage in analytical meditation on emptiness and dependent origination to develop wisdom. Simultaneously, cultivate compassion by reflecting on the suffering of all sentient beings trapped in samsara.
- **Objective:** Balance the development of wisdom and compassion, essential qualities for achieving Buddhahood and effectively helping others achieve liberation.

Conclusion

Chapter 19 of Tsongkhapa's *Lamrim* provides a profound exploration of suffering through various meditations. By understanding and contemplating the three types of suffering and the specific sufferings of different beings, practitioners can develop a deep sense of disenchantment with samsara and a strong motivation to seek liberation. The meditations on the causes of suffering, renunciation, and the development of wisdom and compassion are essential steps on the path to achieving enlightenment.

Chapter 20 The Origin of Suffering

Chapter 20 provides an in-depth exploration of the origins of suffering within the context of cyclic existence, highlighting the critical role of obscuring afflictions and karma. The chapter is structured to offer a comprehensive understanding of how these elements arise, their nature, their effects, and ultimately how to counteract them to achieve liberation from suffering.

Identifying and Understanding Obscuring Afflictions

The chapter begins by explaining the importance of identifying the obscuring afflictions. These afflictions are internal mental events that disturb the mind and lead to various forms of suffering. They include **attachment, hostility, pride, ignorance, doubt, and several specific wrong views such as the view of the transitory collections and holding to extremes**. Each of these afflictions disrupts mental tranquility and promotes actions that perpetuate suffering.

Geshe Gonpawa, a Kadampa master, emphasised the necessity of recognising the **faults, nature, and antidotes of these afflictions**. Understanding their disadvantages is crucial in viewing them as enemies that need to be eradicated. To combat these afflictions effectively, one must study texts like Vasubandhu's "*Explanation of the Five Aggregates*" and Asanga's "*Compendium of Knowledge*", which detail the characteristics of the afflictions and how they operate.

The Production and Causes of Afflictions

The chapter then delves into how these afflictions arise and their causes. The primary root of all afflictions is ignorance, which pervades all other afflictions and is the foundation of cyclic existence. Aryadeva, in his "*Four Hundred Stanzas*," notes that just as the tactile faculty pervades the body, ignorance pervades all afflictions. Recognising and addressing this ignorance is key to eliminating all other afflictions.

Six Fundamental Causes of Afflictions

Basis:

- The latent propensities for afflictions that remain even when not actively present. These subtle predispositions need to be recognised and addressed through continuous mindfulness and vigilance.

Object:

- External objects that trigger afflictions when perceived incorrectly. Practitioners should avoid or reframe their understanding of these objects to prevent afflictions from arising.

Social Distraction:

- Interactions and influences that reinforce afflictions. Maintaining a supportive and virtuous social environment can mitigate this cause.

Explanation:

- Misunderstandings and misinterpretations that perpetuate afflictions. Engaging with correct teachings and avoiding misleading information is essential.

Becoming Accustomed:

- Habituation to afflictions through repeated engagement. Breaking these habits requires intentional effort to develop new, positive habits through practice.

Attention:

- The focus or attention that nurtures afflictions when directed improperly. Practicing right mindfulness and proper attention can redirect the mind towards virtuous objects and thoughts.

Meditations on the Nature of Afflictions

To meditate effectively on the nature of afflictions, you should follow these steps:

4. **Identification:** Recognise and clearly identify the specific affliction. For example, if one is meditating on anger, identify the moments when anger arises and how it manifests in thoughts and actions.
5. **Contemplation:** Reflect on the characteristics of the affliction. Understand that afflictions like anger disturb mental peace, lead to harmful actions, and perpetuate suffering.
6. **Mindfulness:** Maintain awareness of how this affliction arises in daily life. Observe the triggers and the habitual patterns associated with the affliction.
7. **Counteracting:** Apply the antidotes to the affliction during meditation. For anger, cultivate patience and compassion. Reflect on the impermanence of the anger-inducing situations and the suffering that anger causes.

Meditations on the Origins of Suffering

1. **Understanding Karma and Afflictions:** Meditate on the relationship between karma and afflictions. Contemplate how afflictions lead to the creation of karma and how this karma results in rebirth and suffering.
2. **Reflecting on Ignorance:** Focus on the root of all afflictions; ignorance. Reflect on how ignorance leads to a mistaken understanding of the self and the world, creating a foundation for other afflictions to arise.

Meditations on Emptiness

1. **Direct Realisation of Emptiness:** Engage in analytical meditation to understand the concept of emptiness. Reflect on the lack of inherent existence in all phenomena and the self.
2. **Dependent Origination:** Contemplate the principle of dependent origination, understanding how all phenomena arise dependently and are therefore empty of intrinsic existence.

Antidotes to Afflictions

1. Attachment:

- **Meditation on Impermanence:** Reflect on the transient nature of objects of attachment. Understand that attachment to impermanent objects leads to suffering.
- **Cultivation of Renunciation:** Develop a mindset of letting go of attachments, focusing on the higher goal of liberation.

2. Hostility:

- **Cultivation of Patience:** Practice patience by reflecting on the drawbacks of anger and the benefits of a calm and compassionate mind.
- **Meditation on Compassion:** Develop compassion towards those who trigger hostility, understanding their suffering and cultivating a desire to help them.

3. Pride:

- **Meditation on Equality:** Reflect on the equality of all beings, understanding that everyone has the same desire for happiness and aversion to suffering.

- **Cultivation of Humility:** Practice humility by recognising one's own faults and the virtues of others.
- 4. Ignorance:**
- **Study and Reflection:** Engage in the study of Buddhist teachings on emptiness and dependent origination.
 - **Analytical Meditation:** Use analytical meditation to deconstruct the false notions of a permanent, independent self.
- 5. Doubt:**
- **Cultivation of Faith:** Develop faith in the teachings and the path by reflecting on the lives and practices of realised beings.
 - **Study and Inquiry:** Resolve doubts through study, discussion, and inquiry into the teachings.

The Faults of Afflictions

Afflictions are inherently harmful, leading to immediate and long-term suffering. They disturb the mind, reinforce negative propensities, and result in harmful actions that create negative karma. This karma, in turn, perpetuates the cycle of rebirth and suffering in samsara. Afflictions prevent the attainment of nirvana by continuously pushing the individual away from liberation and causing degeneration of virtues and loss of mental peace.

Elimination of Afflictions

1. Understanding and Identification:

- First, deeply understand and identify the afflictions. Knowing their nature, how they arise, and their impact is crucial.

2. Applying Antidotes:

- Use specific antidotes for each affliction as described above. Consistent application of these antidotes weakens the afflictions over time.

3. Cultivating Virtuous Qualities:

- Replace afflictions with their opposites. For instance, cultivate compassion to counteract hostility, and contentment to counteract attachment.

4. Meditative Stabilisation:

- Develop strong meditative focus to suppress afflictions temporarily. This helps in creating a mental space where deeper understanding and realisation can take place.

5. Direct Realisation of Emptiness:

- Ultimately, the direct realisation of the emptiness of self and phenomena is the key to uprooting afflictions completely. This realisation dismantles the fundamental ignorance that underpins all afflictions.

Karma and Its Role

The chapter explains how afflictions lead to the accumulation of karma, which is divided into two types:

1. **Intention Karma:** The mental intention that motivates physical or verbal actions.
2. **Intended Action Karma:** The mental action accompanying the physical or verbal act initiated by the intention.

The Mahayana Abhidharma system, particularly Asanga's "*Compendium of Knowledge*," views karma primarily as a mental action, differing from the Vaibhashika school's

interpretation, which considers karma as physical action. Understanding these aspects of karma is crucial for identifying and addressing the afflictions that lead to its accumulation.

The Process of Death and Rebirth

The chapter also discusses the conditions of death, the state of mind at the time of death, and the intermediate state that follows. The mind's state during death, whether virtuous, non-virtuous, or neutral, significantly influences the process of rebirth. The intermediate state is described as a transitional phase where the qualities of one's karma and afflictions determine the next rebirth.

Path to Liberation

To achieve liberation, it is essential to develop a profound understanding of the nature and operation of afflictions and karma. The ultimate antidote to these afflictions is the direct realisation of the emptiness of self, which eradicates the root cause of all afflictions. Until such realisation is achieved, various methods can be employed to temporarily block, suppress, or mitigate the influence of afflictions, such as recognising and avoiding conditions that give rise to afflictions and cultivating meditative stabilisation.

The chapter underscores the importance of wisdom in watching and guarding the mind against afflictions, as emphasised by Kadampa Geshe Ben Kungyal, who metaphorically described standing at the door of afflictions, ready with the spear of antidotes. By understanding and combating these internal enemies, practitioners can progressively control the outer sufferings and move closer to enlightenment.

Conclusion

In summary, Chapter 20 of "Steps on the Path to Enlightenment" provides a detailed framework for understanding and addressing the origins of suffering through the identification and elimination of obscuring afflictions. By engaging in specific meditations and applying the appropriate antidotes, practitioners can progressively diminish the influence of afflictions, thereby moving closer to the goal of liberation from cyclic existence. Understanding the six fundamental causes and applying consistent effort in meditation and daily practice are essential steps on this path.

Chapter 21 The Twelve Factors of Dependent Origination

Chapter 21 delves into the intricate Buddhist teaching of the twelve links of dependent origination. These links elucidate the causal chain that perpetuates cyclic existence (samsara) and offers insights on how to break free from this cycle. Understanding these links is crucial for practitioners aiming to achieve liberation.

The Twelve Links of Dependent Origination

The twelve links, also known as the twelve *nidanas*, describe the process by which sentient beings are trapped in samsara. The twelve links are:

1. **Ignorance (Avidya):** Ignorance is the root cause of *samsara*. It refers to a fundamental misunderstanding of the true nature of reality, particularly the ignorance of the self's non-existence.
2. **Formative Actions (Samskara):** Ignorance leads to actions that accumulate *karma*: virtuous, non-virtuous & neutral actions. These actions shape future existences.
3. **Consciousness (Vijnana):** The karmic actions give rise to consciousness, which is the awareness that results from and which carries karmic imprints.
4. **Name and Form (Nama-rupa):** Consciousness gives rise to name (mental factors) and form (physical existence), representing the psycho-physical aggregates.
5. **Six Sense Bases (Shadayatana):** From name and form arise the six sense bases (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind) that enable perception.
6. **Contact (Sparsha):** Interaction between the sense bases and their objects leads to contact: the meeting of the sensory organs, their objects, and consciousness.
7. **Feeling (Vedana):** Contact gives rise to feelings, which can be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.
8. **Craving (Trishna):** Feelings lead to craving, a deep-seated desire for pleasure and aversion to pain, further binding beings to samsara.
9. **Grasping (Upadana):** Craving intensifies into grasping, a stronger attachment to objects of desire and hostility to others.
10. **Existence (Bhava):** Grasping conditions becoming, the process of generating the karma that leads to future existence.
11. **Birth (Jati):** Becoming leads to birth, the arising of a new life.
12. **Aging & Death (Jara-marana):** Birth leads immediately to aging & death, accompanied by sorrow, lamentation, pain, and despair.

Categorising the Twelve Links

The twelve links can be categorised into three groups:

1. Afflictions:

- Ignorance (1st)
- Craving (8th)
- Grasping (9th)

2. Karma:

- Formative Actions (2nd)
- Existence (10th)

3. Sufferings:

- Consciousness (3rd)
- Name and Form (4th)
- Six Sense Bases (5th)

- Contact (6th)
- Feeling (7th)
- Birth (11th)
- Aging & Death (12th)

Projecting and Actualising Causes and Effects

The twelve links are categorised into two main types: projecting causes and actualising causes, and their corresponding effects.

1. **Projecting Causes:**① Ignorance, formative actions, and causal consciousness. These causes project the potential for future experiences.
 - **Ignorance:** The misunderstanding of reality of self and phenomena initiates the cycle.
 - **Formative Actions:** Actions influenced by ignorance create karmic imprints.
 - **Causal Consciousness:** The consciousness that carries the karmic seeds forward.
2. **Projected Effects:**② The results of the projecting causes: resultant consciousness, name and form, the six sense bases, contact, and feeling. These effects manifest the conditions of samsaric existence.
3. **Actualising Causes:**③ craving, grasping, and existence. These causes actualise (cause to occur) the potential projected by the projecting causes.
 - **Craving:** The desire that leads to attachment and hostility.
 - **Grasping:** The intensified form of craving that solidifies attachment and hostility.
 - **Existence:** The karma that leads to rebirth, influenced by craving and grasping.
4. **Actualised Effects:**④ birth and aging & death: the final manifestations of the cycle of samsara.

The Twelve Links

- ① **Projecting causes:** ignorance, formative activity, and causal consciousness.
- ② **Projected factors:** resultant consciousness, name & form, the six sense bases, contact, and feeling
- ③ **Actualising causes:** craving, grasping, and existence
- ④ **Actualised effects:** birth and aging & death.

Interaction of Causes and Effects

- a) Every life requires all six causes and includes all six results. Whatever is projected by a projecting cause has to be completed by an actualising cause.
- b) In any life,
 - at some time in the past the ① three projecting causes were initiated: ignorance, karma, & causal consciousness.
 - In order to yield any result, those projecting causes must be activated by the three ③ actualising causes: craving, grasping, and existence.
- c) Nothing will be brought into existence without all six of these causes operating together.
 - ② Name and form, the six sense bases, contact, and feeling were projected by the ① projecting causes of ignorance, karma, and causal consciousness.

- They were then brought to fruition by the ③ actualising causes: craving, grasping, and existence.
- Thus actualised, those very same projected factors are designated as the two ④ actualised effects: birth, and aging & death.

Note: Karma will not be activated if it is not nourished. You may have planted the seed of karma at some time in the past (projected it) ① but if you have destroyed the actualising causes ③ of craving and grasping, that karma can never actualise. This is a very fruitful line of attack for antidotes.

Number of Lives Required to Complete the Cycle

The twelve links can be completed in a minimum of two lifetimes and a maximum of three:

1. Minimum of Two Lifetimes:

- In the first life, the projecting causes (ignorance, formative actions, and causal consciousness) ① plant the karmic seeds. Later, in that same life, the actualising causes (craving, grasping, and existence) ③ nourish these seeds. In the next life, the projected factors (resultant consciousness, name & form, the six sense bases, contact, and feeling) ② and actualised effects (birth, aging, & death) arise together.

2. Maximum of Three Lifetimes:

- The first life involves planting the projecting karma. ① The second life has the actualising causes ③. The third life manifests projected ② and actualised effects ④.

The Significance of the Twelve Links

The twelve links of dependent origination illustrate the interconnected nature of samsaric existence. They show how each moment and action is dependent on previous causes and conditions, creating a continuous cycle of suffering. By understanding these links, practitioners gain insight into the nature of suffering and the path to liberation.

- 1. Interdependent Arising:** The principle of dependent origination highlights that all phenomena arise in dependence on causes and conditions. Nothing exists independently, and understanding this interdependence is key to realising emptiness.
- 2. Emptiness and Selflessness:** The realisation of dependent origination leads to the understanding of emptiness (shunyata), the absence of inherent existence. This insight directly counters ignorance, the root cause of samsara.
- 3. Practical Application:** The knowledge of the twelve links is not merely theoretical. It must be applied in daily practice. Through meditation, ethical conduct, and the cultivation of wisdom and compassion, practitioners can transform their lives and progress towards liberation.
- 4. Mahayana Perspective:** For Mahayana practitioners, understanding the twelve links is essential for developing great compassion for all sentient beings. Seeing how others are trapped in samsara inspires the practitioner to strive for Buddhahood to help all beings attain liberation.

Breaking Free from Samsara

Breaking the cycle of samsara involves understanding and interrupting the twelve links. By recognising the interplay between these links and applying appropriate practices, practitioners can break free from this cycle.

1. **Meditation on the Twelve Links:** Reflecting on the nature of each link and its role in perpetuating samsara is crucial. This meditation involves contemplating the serial and reverse order of the links to understand how they give rise to each other and how their cessation can be achieved.
2. **Applying Antidotes:** Ignorance is the root cause of samsara, and wisdom is its antidote. Developing wisdom through the realisation of the emptiness of the self and phenomena is essential. Other afflictions such as craving and grasping can be countered by cultivating detachment and mindfulness.
3. **Ethical Conduct and Karma:** Maintaining ethical conduct helps in accumulating virtuous karma, which aids in purifying the mind and reducing afflictions. The practice of the four opponent powers (remorse, applying antidotes, turning away from faults, and reliance) is crucial for purifying negative karma.
4. **Developing Bodhicitta:** For Mahayana practitioners, cultivating the altruistic intention to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings (bodhicitta) is vital. This practice enhances compassion and wisdom, helping to dismantle the self-centred view that underlies ignorance.

Renunciation

Renunciation is the foundation of all further progress on the path. It arises from a deep realisation of the faults of cyclic existence and a sincere desire to achieve liberation from it. Without renunciation, one's practice remains oriented towards worldly concerns, and true liberation is unattainable. Understanding dependent origination is key to developing renunciation, as it reveals the interconnected nature of samsaric suffering and the means to transcend it.

1. Understanding the Faults of Cyclic Existence:

- Reflect on how all experiences within samsara are ultimately unsatisfactory and lead to suffering.

2. Developing the Wish for Liberation:

- The realisation of samsara's faults naturally leads to a strong desire to escape it and attain liberation. When this realisation is extended to all beings, bodhicitta strongly arises.

In summary, Chapter 21 provides a detailed framework for understanding and addressing the origins of suffering through the twelve links of dependent origination. By engaging in specific meditations, applying appropriate antidotes, and cultivating renunciation, practitioners can progressively diminish the influence of afflictions and karma, thereby moving closer to the goal of liberation from cyclic existence. Understanding the interconnected nature of these links and consistently applying this knowledge in daily practice are essential steps on the path to enlightenment.